



Meditation: Waking Up to Life

By Americ Azevedo

Included in this preview:

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Sneak Preview

COMMENTS FROM READERS

“*Meditation: Waking Up to Life* draws from a lifetime of reflection and practice, and it shows. In page after page of thought-provoking observations and lyrical passages, Americo Azevedo invites the reader to set out upon, or perhaps re-discover, the journey toward profound understanding and peace—in oneself and with the world.”

—Jerry Sanders, Chair, Peace and Conflict Studies
University of California, Berkeley

“The tone of the book is so inviting, and I think it will be of great value to people who have a meditation practice, and to those who have never meditated. The book collects stories, aphorisms, poems, reflections, and presents them unpretentiously, so that the reader can open to any page and just sit and reflect on Azevedo’s words, inviting a deep look into our own beings and our lives. The book distills the wisdom of a lifetime as a teacher, a meditator, and a person of deep spirit. It is a call to waking up, to being fully present in each moment.”

—Charles Halpern, Chair and Co-Founder,
Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
Author of *Making Waves and Riding the Currents:
Activism and the Practice of Wisdom*

“On the first day of class Professor Azevedo said that ‘meditation is nothing’ and that ‘meditation cannot be taught.’ The simplicity of his introduction seemed only to verify the rumors that PACS 94: Theory and Practice of Meditation would be ‘the easiest class you’ll ever take.’ I soon came to realize that my quest to understand reality would be the most difficult and important journey that I would ever make in my lifetime.

“Upon learning that ‘meditation is nothing,’ the human mind rushes to make sense of something which makes no sense whatsoever. It subconsciously constructs its own definition of ‘the nothingness which is meditation.’

“Concept by concept, Professor Azevedo’s book teaches us to let go of bits and pieces of this construct so that we can move closer to accepting the simple and pure ‘nothingness which is meditation.’

“The book, therefore, does not claim to teach meditation, but serves as an invaluable, life-long reminder of my commitment to being aware (HERE, NOW) and to understanding absolute reality. It comes directly from the heart. The book is not a continuous manual, but a collection of improvised passages, thereby leaving room for contemplation and experimentation.”

—Aria Pakatchi, First Year,
Intended Molecular Cell Biology major
University of California, Berkeley

“*Waking Up to Life* is a rare opening to user-friendly *Meditation*—as amiable and accessible as its author. This gentle genre of meditation seems especially designed for widening populations who sorely need to settle their minds—at least as rapidly as the world unsettles before us all. Yes, *Waking Up to Life* could hardly be more timely.”

—Eugene Haggerty, Founder,
World Public Forum

“I think anyone who reads *Meditation: Waking Up to Life* will actually experience moments of meditation...and the still point of ‘here-ness.’ I felt more centered just reading the table of contents! I found inspiration, reassurance, and support throughout the book. It seems a wonderful manual of simply-expressed gentle reminders which provide a quality of consciousness conducive to our ‘awakening to life.’”

—Linda Tudor, M.A., Licensed Professional Counselor
Colorado Springs, Colorado

“Americo Azevedo’s deceptively simple reflections offer a gentle invitation to include meditation in our daily lives.”

—N. Johnson
Berkeley, California

“As a student of the University of California, Berkeley, I can honestly say that Americ Azevedo’s *Meditation: Waking up to Life* has impacted the way I choose to live my every day life. Azevedo creates passages that enlighten those who read them about concepts of the self, awakening, and ways to train the mind. From reading these short, yet insightful teachings, one will learn to create a world of peace and understanding, and hone the skills to observe life in a more conscious way. You are already here, but hardly even know it.”

—Dave Abrams, Second Year,
Psychology, and Theater & Performance Studies Major
University of California, Berkeley

“Needless to say, our modern times have become a continual source of confusion that tramples our sense of personal well-being and familial serenity on a daily basis. Yet, amid all this chaos, Americ Azevedo, playing the role of our modern day philosopher, reminds us of the simplicity of meditation and how close we are to attaining “peace of mind” if we would merely turn our thoughts and values toward the right intention. Galvanizing historical works with his personal and poetic view of living the dream of peaceful meditation, Americ zaps us with the infamous Zen Stick of Truth and eloquently prompts us to remember that reality ideally consists of peaceful and introspective concerns for the moment in which we are living ... if we only take the time.”

—Michael Scott, Fellow Philosopher and Entrepreneur,
ThoughtAudio.com
Pleasanton, California

“Americ Azevedo is ‘not your average academic philosopher’. He has spent years in the gritty end of business: working in the IT operation of a big oil company, for example. He has been entrepreneurial all his life, with his own Goldwarp consulting operation. He pioneered early distance learning concepts for an important business-oriented university. It has been a pleasure to be with him on collaborative calls at giants of industry such as Hewlett Packard. Most recently he has provided unique leadership in learning, and life, to students across three diverse disciplines at UC Berkeley. In *Meditation, Waking Up to Life*, Americ once again provides us with a perspective which is both spiritual and uplifting, and grounded as a good business plan.”

—Terry Pettengill, President,
OCULUS Management Process, Inc.,
Business Consultants in Strategy,
Innovation and Communication
Mill Valley, California

“I tried meditation many years ago, and got little out of it. While I do not endorse meditation, if you must try it out for yourself, your best help will be this little booklet.”

—Mark Rubinstein, Finance Professor
University of California, Berkeley

MEDITATION



Waking Up to Life

Americ Azevedo

University of California, Berkeley



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To Glenn Matson

*For years of daily focus
on meditation and peace of mind.*

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Also, I must honor my father, Frank Azevedo. He taught me the value of a personal spiritual connection while I was still a little child. Those seeds planted, have grown into a garden.

Finally, of course, my great appreciation to Diane Shavelson, my life partner, for content improvements, editing, and her overall encouragement and support, without which this work would not have been possible.

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Preface



Reflecting back, I realize that I have been meditating as long as I can remember. As a young child, I would sit and stare at the clock, still enough to see the hands move. As I walked home from school, I would see, if for a whole block, I could concentrate on the sidewalk without a distracting thought. At sunset I loved to sit and focus 100 percent of my attention on watching the changing light.

Perhaps my formal meditation practice began in 1971, while teaching my first course, “Mysticism and Science,” at San Francisco State University. As I talked of mysticism, a student challenged me to explore meditation. I began by exploring the practices and philosophies of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Chögyam Trungpa. Over the years I encountered many other teachers, and, as always, continued as a student of everyday life; all of this informing my practice and my investigation of mind,

as I evolved into a practice and philosophy that is uniquely my own.

When I teach meditation, I make the point that no particular religion or metaphysics is needed for meditation—just moving the mind state from distraction to attention. Doing this, for even just a short time, improves life in unexpected ways.

This book is made up of 108 teachings—the number of beads in Buddhist and Hindu meditation beads; which are divided into nine sections. The “beads” are in no special order. They are intended to inspire meditation practice; not necessarily theorize. There is plenty of empty page space. Write notes in it. Make it your own.

May these small nuggets support your meditation practice, whether beginner, intermediate, or advanced. We are all beginners on many paths of meditation—be it our first day or our fortieth year of practice. May our practice inform all of life. May we awaken to life here-and-now.

One



*All this is full. All that is full.
From fullness, fullness comes.
When fullness is taken from fullness,
Fullness still remains.*

—THE UPANISHADS

Invitation to Meditation



Every time, every moment is a good time to meditate. Why wait for a retreat or some special time or place? Why not just take a minute right now. Yes, it's always time to meditate. The ultimate root of procrastination is the tendency to postpone the encounter with this present moment. Actually, to avoid meditation is to avoid life. To meditate is to face life, to awaken to life. Life can only be lived here-and-now, not there-and-then.

Beyond Philosophy



A lover of wisdom may speak of wisdom all day long, yet not live that wisdom. Someone who possesses wisdom may say nothing wise at all.

As a graduate student in philosophy, I became frustrated with philosophy itself. I saw academic philosophy as a craft without real answers to my deepest concerns. T. S. Elliot's lines from "The Rock" moved my soul:

The endless cycle of idea and action,
Endless invention, endless experiment,
Brings knowledge of motion, but not stillness;
Knowledge of speech, but not of silence;
Knowledge of words and ignorance of the Word.
.....

Where is the Life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost information?

Shortly thereafter, Chögyam Trungpa showed up as a classroom guest speaker. He wore a blazer and turtle neck shirt,

holding a can of Coca-Cola in his hand—not my image of an Eastern guru or yogi. He spoke directly and spontaneously. It took many years to realize that his presence was the teaching more than his words. Now, I don't remember the words, but the presence remains. I look, and feel, for that same presence in others and within myself.

Our Work Is to Awaken



Our work, our labor, is to awaken to our true nature, which was forgotten due to false identification with the content of consciousness.

The theory and practice of meditation help us realize (make real) our true nature. When I speak, write or listen to these words, I am often in the realm of theory. When I take in the meaning of these words, I inform and transform myself along the path of self realization.

It is very, very important to remember that words are not what they refer to. “The map is not the territory.” Speaking or writing about meditation is not meditation. Meditation is in the gaps between the words, between the thoughts. But the word “gap” is not the same as a gap itself, as it is. Get past the words—allow the great silence to come. At the point of great silence is the great labor of liberation.

Unrealized True Wealth



We are born with true wealth, but constantly forget to realize the wealth we already have. Failing to acknowledge our true wealth we keep grasping for more, like hungry ghosts who are never satisfied while constantly eating! Thus, we go about despoiling the earth, corrupting relationships, and twisting societies into grotesque forms that promote needless suffering for ourselves, others, and the earth as a whole. Realizing true wealth leads to personal, interpersonal, and transpersonal fulfillment. Furthermore, the long-term survival of life on earth depends upon true wealth realization.

We need deep psychological and spiritual healing of individuals, groups, communities, nations, and the earth. The bedrock of this healing is a return to this present moment, not in a selfish, narrow way, but in a way that includes the totality of what is here–there as well as what is in the past–present–future. It is nothing less than the ancient ideal of enlightenment of all sentient beings.

Beyond Objects



The purpose of true meditation is to break the mind's identification with objects, so that the mind simply turns toward the source—light of awareness without object. This is the spacious, sky-like, radiant quality of mind that we glimpse and sustain as we awaken; like “being in love” when the whole world seems brighter, more real, more filled with love all around. The difference is that this awakened condition is not dependent upon any object or specific person. It just IS.

Beyond Death



Is death real?

We don't die, we transform. The ego is the space-time point where future and past meet. At death or unconsciousness, that space-time point that we call "I" disappears. But, the real Self which sustained us all along does not die, it continues as the rest of all-that-is.

This great "secret" resides in the depths explored through meditation.

Gaps Are Openings to Deep Reality



Meditation creates “gaps” in our mental reality. These gaps are gifts.

When an important part of life falls apart, a gap is created. That gap is the opportunity to allow in deep reality. If we close that gap too quickly, old familiar patterns snap back into place. Stay with a gap just long enough to realize that it's a gift, an opportunity for awakening.

We don't need to have our lives fall apart to experience the benefits of gaps—in meditation we sit and allow ourselves to be aware of gaps as they come. This is deliberate and less dramatic but the results can be more dramatic in the fullness of time.

Each Thought Dies Peacefully Away



When successive thoughts do not await one another, and each thought dies peacefully away, this is called absorption in the oceanic reflection.

—Zen Master Mazu

During meditation, notice that thoughts breed thoughts. One thought follows another for a while in a chain of free association. There will be days when only a few related thoughts come. On other days, hundreds of related thoughts march on, one after the other, building up entire stories of their own making—so it seems. With vigilance, we can release these thoughts from the quality of “awaiting one another.” They, die peacefully away. The sense of open, oceanic stillness suddenly arrives.

Drop by Drop



Don't worry about "getting there" immediately. Quick fixes don't work. Patience is a critical part of "progress." So, relax, and enjoy the journey.

Water erodes mountains,
bit by bit, drop by drop,
carving out whole valleys.

"No such thing as an overnight success";
Behind every successful
performer, writer, businessman,
there are years of hard work, practice,
and failure.

Life is practice; practice is life.
Practice receiving; practice letting go.
Practice deciding when to do something
Rather than letting circumstances decide.

Don't think all or nothing;
do something anyway.
Small daily investments in practice
grow "spiritual principle" over a lifetime.

Mind Waves



Mind freely associates from thought to thought; without discipline, constantly surfing the edge of reality.

Waves of thoughts keep coming, an endless stream of mental associations. We learn from some texts and living teachers that the mind must be disciplined or controlled in some way; but, this is not quite it. If a controlled mind is all we are seeking, then meditation becomes an isolated act divorced from life; a way of escape.

It's not the thoughts themselves that must go, but the ego that uses this ocean of thoughts to create separation from reality.

Effortless Desires



A radio receiver tunes into a frequency in the air; in that sense, something in the radio matches what is out there.

We effortlessly desire
truth, beauty, and wisdom
because our souls are made of
truth, beauty, and wisdom.
The deep charm of meditation
is that it opens
doors to the soul.

Everyone Is “Me”



Everyone else is “me.” That’s the basis of the “Golden Rule.”

Everywhere we go we
run up against *others*.
Everyone of them is “me” or
“I.”
Clearly,
“we” are all one.
By cultivating spiritual eyes we
see this.