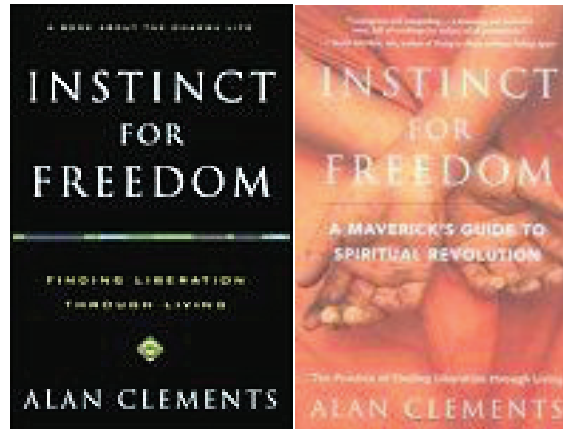


Instinct *for* Freedom

A Book About Everyday Revolution —
Finding Liberation Through Living

by Alan Clements



[An Excerpt]

I AM THE FREEDOM THAT I SEEK

I want to make clear that freedom is not some indestructible realization — the emancipation of consciousness from all forms of self-generated conflict. I am not talking about the absolute end of human suffering or a transcendental experience of unshakeable stillness and joy.

What I mean by natural freedom is just that. We are free when attuned to the rhythm of our own uniqueness — an ease of being that allows us to dance to the music we hear in our own hearts.

Natural freedom arises out of an abiding respect for our imperfect wholeness. Who needs to be perfect when you can be human? Natural freedom precedes everything. It precedes ideas of liberation; it undermines dogmas, doctrines, mythologies, self-images, attainments, contracts with perfection, and all other inherited forms of self-protection and self-enhancement. Natural freedom is the ability to live and die right now with a shameless sense of goodness and beauty.

We must elevate authenticity to the highest status. This process requires a radical acceptance of who we are and feel ourselves to be. From this juncture we express our creative passion — inhabiting every dimension of our being as natural to our whole — the good, the bad, and the ugly.

What else do we have but our humanness, our naturalness, our unique selves?

No two of us are alike. No two of us have the same fingerprints. No two minds are the same, no matter how much we have in common. No two people love in the same way. The idea seems strange, doesn't it? Imagine a training on the "right way" to kiss? Or the right way to smile? Or the right way to dance? So too with the way we each make love. It is so individual. Dance embodies our most natural freedom and our most authentic beauty. That's why it's sacred. Imagine imposing strict rules on the right way to make love? The religiously

correct way to be free?

At one point, as a monk, I began to obsess about getting my meditation posture ‘perfectly right’ — back straight, legs down, head titled slightly, poised, balanced, with long, slow, deep breaths. The more I tried, the more detailed I became. I often compared myself to the five-hundred other monks in the meditation hall. This went on until I had actually ‘perfected’ it. Now, I said to myself, ‘I can get on with business of achieving ‘perfect realization.’ The only problem was that my perfect posture was much more painful than my most natural one. So what did I spend all that time for — it was a form of ‘perfect’ that didn’t shine through its practical realization. Once I dropped the picture I was able to return to the greater issue, understanding the difference between natural freedom and perfect posturing.

As fragrance is innate to a flower, so too is freedom inherent to the heart. Standing out in the wild we ask, “Where is nature found?” It’s all around us, and in us. When we know nature as such, we wake up, and stop dying inside. It is my sense that natural freedom is not something you actually learn, so much as “feel into” and intuit as a progressive set of realizations over an entire lifetime. The authentic spiritual life is not about fitting in or transcending some imaginary self. It’s about being a person, challenging fear, and doing something remarkable with our lives.

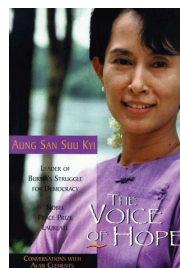
There is no Mecca outside the Mystery itself. I would rather focus on lived experience. How can one attain anything in an unstable and passing world? Is there anything that isn’t propped up by conditions? Isn’t the universe a house of sub-molecular cards — an immeasurably complex field of interlocking waves and particles where nothing exists apart from everything else? Is there anything that exists outside or inside of our interrelated infinity? I acknowledge the essential mystery of it all, and go from there. But I don’t think of the mystery as “out there.” It’s internal to myself, too. My brain, for instance, is a mystery. And the idea that the finite brain can actually know the infinite cosmos, with infinite realities is preposterous. No one knows what happens after death anymore than we know where life originates. No one understands how it works.

For the Dharma to have worldly relevance and practical meaning we must foster a love affair with freedom itself. Not a transcendent freedom, but the natural freedom you feel in yourself at this very moment — as you are. To this end I often remind myself: I am the freedom that I seek. Live outward from there.

To excerpt “Instinct for Freedom” interview the author, or foreign rights contact:

Alan Clements
 Telephone: 1-604-251-1781
www.everydayrevolution.org
 Email: contact@worldddharma.com

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