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Foreword by Robert A.F. Thurman, Ph.D.



# *Living* **DEEPLY**

**The Art & Science of  
Transformation in Everyday Life**

*Based on a decadelong research  
program at the*  
**INSTITUTE of NOETIC SCIENCES**

*with wisdom from:* Angeles Arrien • Sylvia Boorstein  
• Ram Dass • Stanislav Grof • Gerald Jampolsky •  
Jon Kabat-Zinn • George Leonard • Noah Levine  
• Rachel Naomi Remen • Huston Smith • Starhawk

*Living Deeply is the accumulated wisdom of many of our greatest living teachers, all adepts in the goal of personal transformation. This is one of the finest collections of gentle, penetrating insights available. Highly recommended.*

—Larry Dossey, MD, author of *The Extraordinary  
Healing Power of Ordinary Things*

*Living Deeply provides us with some of the most significant insights into spiritual transformation that I have ever read. Based on interviews with spiritual teachers, leading scientific researchers, religion scholars, important public intellectuals, and major writers, this volume is a remarkable example of an integrative approach to a topic of immense importance. It is marvelous to look through the different windows of transformation that are so richly described and interpreted both spiritually and scientifically. Living Deeply is a major accomplishment that will hopefully become a classic in an emerging field. It is truly a brilliant synthesis. I think Living Deeply will change lives and change the world for the better.*

—Stephen G. Post, Ph.D., professor of  
bioethics at Case Western Reserve  
University School of Medicine



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New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

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# Living Deeply: The Fate of the Earth

—*Robert Thurman, Ph.D.*

As you savor the thoughtful messages in *Living Deeply*, consider this simple meditation. You are in a space capsule with Edgar Mitchell, the Apollo 14 astronaut. You're there in the vastness of outer space. You see all the stars shining majestically, unobscured by lights from any cities. You look down and see something that looks like a round, opalescent, glistening, shining jewel. You can see the blue of the oceans, the white of the clouds, the brown streaks of the deserts, the gray mountaintops, and the green of the jungles and forests. And of course, you're with Edgar, so you're hoping you're going to get back safely to this jewel called Earth.

You're having a vision of the unity of life on this planet. You may also be aware simultaneously that there are infinite numbers of such jewels in

the universe. But this is yours—your home. It is also the home of six billion other human beings and many trillions of other life forms. As you look, you feel a wonderful sense of oneness and togetherness with all of those beings living on this thin, delicate film on the surface of molten rock under a thin layer of air—like the fuzz on a peach.

As you look down at this jewel, you have a little tinge of sorrow about the foolish people who are destroying the basis of life on this planet. It doesn't frighten you too much, though, for you realize that there must be some degree of wisdom, generosity, love, and compassion to match the beauty of Mother Earth, Mother Gaia.

From this perspective of deep space, you may then do what the Tibetans call *offering the mandala*. By *mandala* they mean the whole of the protected zone wherein life, mind, and spirit can thrive. You notice that there is an element in you that is possessive about this planet. In a way, even your own mind has a little element of what those foolish people who try to conquer and exploit life have in them. You may become aware that sometimes you, too, feel like you own the place. And yet you realize, from that capsule in deep space, that no one owns it. You can then imagine that you pick up the entire planet very gently in your hands—and you give it away. If you believe in angels, you give it to them. If you believe in deities, you give it to them. If you don't believe in all of that, you just give it to the enlightened beings. You give it away to wisdom. You detach yourself from a sense of ownership, and as you do this, you realize that you are a guest. And you realize that this ultimate generosity is the basis of true happiness.

This subtle shift in awareness is what *Living Deeply* is all about. By transforming our consciousness, we participate in the transformation of the world. Each of us has the capacity to shift from a dominator world-view to one in which we realize life is a precious gift; we understand what a privilege it is to be alive. Through hours of research and deep inquiry with masters from many world traditions, and surveys with everyday folks like you and me, Marilyn Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, and Tina Amorok offer us a map to an expanded model of reality. As these noetic scientists explore the interface of Western science and Eastern “inner science,” they offer insights essential to meeting the challenges of a twenty-first-century planet

that out-of-control humans are pushing toward destruction. Through their findings based on a decade of serious research, heard through the voices of many wisdom teachers, the authors help us recognize more fully that our life is totally interwoven with every other person and with all other species on our beloved planet.

This book reveals that a sense of unity and connection is part of most world traditions. It certainly is very much a part of Buddhist philosophy, which I describe as “engaged realism.” Buddha’s discovery, so long ago, was that suffering comes out of ignorance of the true nature of reality, and from this ignorance arises an attachment to the control and domination of the Earth and the life that inhabits it. While we may be drawn to worldly delights, the Buddha observed that people’s core needs are more basic, dealing with the meaning of life, sickness, old age, death, and suffering.

Buddha was not a religious prophet, but he was not an atheist either. He actually was said to have met the Hindu god Brahma during his transformative experience. In a state of meditation, he traveled with his subtle body-mind into the heavens. He came into the throne room, and Brahma was there with all the other little godlings. And Buddha said, “Oh great Brahma, I hear you are the world creator. Since you created it, you must know how it works. I am determined to discover how the world works, so please tell me.” At first dismissive of Buddha, Brahma later called to him on his way out of heaven. “I can’t let you leave without giving you a proper answer,” he said. “You see, the thing is, I didn’t really create it, and therefore I don’t know how it works. I’m just the biggest shot around here. But these godlings think I did create it and they think I know how it works and they feel secure in my protection. If I had said to you in front of them, ‘I don’t know what’s going on,’ they would have had an identity crisis, and we’re a little short of shrinks here in heaven. But you’re going to be a Buddha in a future life, and you will know how it works and in that time you have to do two things. One, come and tell me. I’m a quick study; I am “God,” after all. And two, tell the human beings that when things go terribly wrong for them—when their children die, they have a terrible accident, there’s a disaster or a catastrophe—tell them it’s not my fault. I’m not in total control. I do my best for them. But it’s

all our mutual karma. It's our entire mutual collective situation that draws these difficulties down upon us."

So Buddha did meet God, but he didn't get a "message from God" like the ones that lead many religious founders to rush out and say "Believe in this or that or the other and then we'll save you from suffering." Buddha did not say that to people. In fact, he did not say that believing in anything would save you. He said, "Eureka! There's a way you can be saved from suffering, but that way is that you have to understand yourself and you have to understand your reality."

Now just the fact that he had a vision of life doesn't prove he was right. Even though hundreds of millions of people over the millennia have thought he was right, he may have been wrong. So the Buddha founded an educational movement rather than a religion. His vision was to bring out our own wisdom rather than to assert the truth. He taught in dialogic form, like Socrates and Confucius. He talked with people, questioning them, getting them to think critically, helping them to see through their own delusions, and encouraging them to come up with a deeper insight into the nature of things.

In that sense, Buddha was a scientist—a noetic scientist. He understood that the most important factor in the quality of life for a human being is how the person's mind is managed. From this perspective, transforming our consciousness is the most important work we can ever do. And today, as I travel with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, he always tells us that we should not think that the solution is to all become Buddhists, but rather that we should explore for ourselves ways of training and educating the mind, developing the emotions, becoming aware of ourselves, managing our negative habits, and detoxifying ourselves from our mental toxins.

This can be done, he tells us, if you are a Christian or a Jew or a Muslim or a Hindu or a secular humanist or something else. The goal is to free our minds from suffering by understanding who we really are. What the Buddha discovered is that the nature of reality is bliss. Of course, he didn't say we have to believe that, but he encouraged us to investigate for ourselves, and he reported that this is what he himself discovered. Not from a place of fanatic, fundamentalist spirituality, but from a place grounded in a deep

respect for the mystery of life and a consciousness that sees the connections rather than the appearance of separation.

What is needed today is an expansion of the noetic sciences—the kind of sciences that allow us to understand our inner being. As we explore the nature of consciousness, we can see that the root cause of the destruction of this planet is the toxins of our mind, especially delusion, hatred, and greed. Hatred produces war, greed produces industrial overproduction and pollution, and delusion makes us want to do all of that but keeps us miserable anyway. Noetic sciences should be a national and even international priority, allowing each of us to be the scientist of our own experience, our own way of knowing and being in the world.

As we turn our attention inward, we begin to discover, just as the many people interviewed for this book express so elegantly, that we are not the center of the universe and that we do not control the nature of reality. Contrary to what we hear from the materialist domains of science, which emphasize reductionism and an objective detachment from the world outside ourselves, we are not really separate from each other or from the world in which we live. Through a process of consciousness transformation, whether sudden or gradual, you can become more and more aware of the ways in which you are interconnected with all other beings. When you realize this, the struggle is over. The joy of others becomes your joy. You become compassionate about the suffering of others because it's your suffering. Realizing your interconnectedness is like going into a cold stream on a warm summer day. You put that toe in and you say, "Oh, I didn't need to come swimming here. I think I'll go back. I'll go back into my air conditioning. I don't need to jump in there. I might have a heart attack!" But then you jump in anyway, and it changes your whole day, your whole life, and you love it. As each of us jumps into this stream, we are contributing to the healing of ourselves, our fellow humans, and all the living beings that make up this precious planet we call home. As a kind British lady I know once said, "Think globally. Act joyfully." This is indeed the art and science of living deeply.

Enjoy this book, so wisely and lovingly put together by its authors, which provides you with an inspiring vision of what you will find, to your lasting

delight, when you use your chosen method to take a really good look into your mind, your world, and your interconnectedness with all life. It is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate the authors for their accomplishment, and to welcome you to the real world to which this book is an open door.

—Robert A. F. Thurman

Jey Tsong Khapa Professor of Indo-Tibetan

Buddhist Studies, Columbia University

President, Tibet House US

Author of *Inner Revolution*, *Infinite Life*, and

*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*

September 18, 2007

# Preface

—*Richard Gunther*

I was in a Gestalt session at the Esalen Institute, sitting in a circle with other seekers, when I suddenly felt an urge to leave the group and walk onto the adjoining balcony of Fritz Perls's house, a circular dwelling that overlooks the dramatic Big Sur coastline. As I left the group and stepped onto this balcony, I walked into a world of unbelievable beauty. It was a brilliant day, the sun reflecting off the surf that broke on the rocks below. The shoreline extended south for miles, rock, sand, and waves, with the occasional seal. It was a breathtaking vista, completed by mountains just beyond the coast. I felt like the whole scene was smiling at me, awaiting my arrival, and I was flooded with contentment and the joy of feeling whole, of *being blessed*. It was as though I had walked through a sci-fi energy screen into a new world. The sun, the sea, and the mountains had always been external objects that I could describe by intensity (the sun), by scale (the mountains), and by color (the sea), but on that magic day these descriptions were merely linear, not

true reflections of all I was experiencing. For the first time ever, external physical elements had become a part of my internal world.

I am not a religious person, I am a very successful, highly rational businessman, but at that moment I experienced a profound spiritual awakening, an awareness that I was in a markedly altered state of being, a different reality. My awakening was this: *we are all part of a single entity*. I was part of all others and all others were part of me. I soared into this new awareness, losing all sense of myself as an individual. *There is no me alone, only a universal us*. Is this what it means to be truly human? I wondered. To feel—to know—that all reality is totally connected? Since all matter is a form of energy in motion, could there be a collective consciousness at the molecular level that stems from some sort of subatomic connection? I only knew that I had never felt this breadth and depth in my life before. I was certain, with no question in my mind, that I had had a fleeting glimpse of a new, wonderful level of existence.

What had caused this awareness, this opening, to suddenly explode in me? Would this enhanced level of being become permanent, or would it disappear as soon as I left the balcony? And if it did fade, what could I do to revive the profundity? That experience was almost forty years ago, and while the dramatic peak of those moments has dimmed, the life-changing insight has remained. I realized then that I had been living my life in a narrow arc of reality. I was worker, husband, father, and citizen, and that was the circle of my days. I learned from those moments of insight that I was, in my soul, a highly spiritual person—I needed the shock of this opening to accept that truth.

This great realization has vitally affected my life. Today, some forty years later, I am open to thoughts and moments of beauty and love in ways that I wasn't in my early life. I joyfully participate in the world of service. I speculate on spiritual questions and the mysteries of God and the universe. I am amazed by the majesty of the heavens at night and wonder at the magic of existence. I still live a full life as husband, father (and now grandfather), businessman, and social entrepreneur, but now I am also often awed by the marvel of being alive.

Why did this awakening happen at this particular time, and were there unique conditions that precipitated the event? The environment at Esalen was certainly wonderfully supportive, and the setting full of physical

beauty. However, is it possible that what I experienced was a glimpse of the next natural maturational stage of a self-reflective person? A person whose vision has broadened and deepened to include a sense of wonder, awe, and mystery buried during an earlier, more combative stage of life?

Psychologist Erik Erikson (1982) describes the individual's growth process as comprised of eight stages. Stage eight, the final stage, he describes as "elder adulthood," a stage marked by a tension between integrity and despair. But is there perhaps a ninth stage? A stage in which an individual sees himself as part of a greater whole? A stage in which an individual outgrows the sole focus on self? With the enhanced vision of this stage could come the opportunity to explore a different path in life, to see yourself as a citizen in a wondrous new world, to become an active participant in this broader scene and invest yourself in the effort to create a more aware and compassionate world. In this stage, our expanded consciousness can lead us into the world of service as our next work in the world.

In my Jewish tradition there is a Hebrew phrase *Tikkun Olam*, which translates into English as "the repair of the world." It is to this path—to the work of repairing the world—that my Esalen enlightenment has led me. I offer this question: is transformation a necessary part of the human process for those who move along this path, either through choice or through some mystery of creation?

You may be wondering if this new insight has helped me through rough times. My wonderful twelve-year-old granddaughter Eva, a black belt in taekwon do, was representing California in the Junior Olympics when she stepped out to cross a public street and was hit and killed by a drunk driver. This most remarkable young woman was lost forever. I was crushed, devastated. How could this have happened? She had so much to offer—why her? I have never known such pain, for Eva and the life she will never have, for our children whose lives are shattered, for my wife and me.

Over the years since that tragedy I have gradually climbed out of the deep blackness of despair, still with no answer for my "why?" questions. But just as my joyous experience at Esalen opened my eyes to a broader awareness of reality, so, too, did this tragedy broaden my understanding of the complexities, anguishes, and unknowns in life. This broadened understanding has given me more compassion for the pain I see everywhere—for friends who are sick, some dying; for the millions of people starving around

the world; for the one-third of the world's population that suffers from crushing poverty. As I have seen our children, Eva's parents, battle back to life, I have been filled with admiration and gratitude for the strength of the human spirit. This insight has not only deepened my sensitivity and compassion, it has led me into my principal public service activity. I serve in the field of microenterprise, helping where I can to fight the battle against worldwide poverty.

I still cry when I think of Eva. Some nights I still try to reach my heart out to her heart. Is her energy out there somewhere for me to contact? Who knows what the next step will be when I move beyond this life. Maybe my spirit will contact her spirit, somewhere, someday. I believe that the transformations that I have experienced, both joyous and tragic, have awakened me to the great mysteries that exist—and for this awakening I am most grateful.

The purpose of *Living Deeply* is to make these transformative shifts in awareness available to all who seek them. *Living Deeply* is written by three scholars who have reached out to the great transformative teachers of our time and collected their accumulated wisdom in this volume. The authors and I share the belief that all human beings are born with innate capacities for compassion, joy, and service; unfortunately, living in our complex, torn world frequently buries these birth gifts. It is my hope that *Living Deeply* will, for many, open the door to a life that is wider, deeper, and more fulfilling than they had ever imagined possible. May it be so.

—Richard Gunther

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# Introduction

If you're like most people, your life has become increasingly complex and fast paced. As you rush from one event or task to another, you're most likely being bombarded by "weapons of mass distraction" that tip you off course even as you dutifully struggle to maintain your balance. Between the ringing of your cell phone, e-mail, kids' soccer games, business trips, 514 television stations (not to mention the TiVo recordings waiting for you), and taking care of all the basics, you may find yourself just skimming the surface of your life. It's easy to end up zipping from one thing to another, replacing truly renewing activities with more numbing pleasures. These many demands on your time can force you to make tough choices. You may find yourself prioritizing obligations that cannot be avoided and relegating joyful, meaning-making pursuits to the end of your to-do list. As a result, much of the time you may feel stressed, depleted, or overwhelmed.

Alternatively, you may feel a sense of restlessness, boredom, or meaninglessness. You may be someone who's now living "under the radar," no longer engaged by the pursuits that once brought you a sense of meaning and joy. You may feel disconnected from the world or have trouble finding

your place in it. Perhaps you want to break out into a richer and fuller life, but you haven't yet figured out how.

Or, maybe you have reached a place of relative balance and abundance in your life, and now you want to integrate your insights and transformations more fully into your relationships, your work, and your creative pursuits. Perhaps you envision that when you live from a place of greater depth, the roots and fruits of your life will generate the kind of sustenance that touches others. You may want to create a life that will allow you to contribute to the well-being of your community in ways that are in line with your talents, affinities, inner resources, and most authentic nature.

Regardless of which of these drives you can relate to the most (it may be a little bit of each), you can probably identify a desire within yourself to live more deeply. If so, you are not alone. As psychologist and leader in mind/body medicine Jon Kabat-Zinn told us:

[There is] *a huge and rising hunger on the part of just about everybody for authentic experience and reconnecting with what's deepest and best in ourselves in an ever accelerating and complex world.* (2004)

The good news: opportunities to transform your life in ways both small and large are available to you in every moment of every day—there are an infinite number of doorways into living deeply. The possibly daunting news: living deeply may require nothing less than a complete transformation of the way you view the world and your place in it.

## LIVING DEEPLY

As you'll read, our decade of research on transformation has found that dramatic and lasting change for the better springs from *radically shifting your perspective of who you are*. Great external changes often come out of this shift in perspective. You may well find that as meaning and purpose become more clear to you, things that are out of alignment in your life gradually (and sometimes quickly) fall away. But the most fundamental change is

within you; it is a profound shift in your perspective, where you direct your attention and your intention.

This most essential change, the one from which all other changes spring, is a change in your worldview and your perception of what's possible. Transforming your consciousness may be the most important thing you can do for yourself and the world.

Ultimately, this book is a kind of map of the transformative terrain. While we aren't able to traverse the entire terrain by ourselves, we have been able to talk to the explorers who have been there, some of whom have traversed common pathways and some of whom have taken exotic journeys and are bringing back their travel journals to share what they found. We explore the mystery of consciousness with a Christian monk, a Lakota elder, a rabbi, and a Zen Buddhist roshi. We identify the common elements of transformation in the experiences of a Himalayan yoga swami, a transpersonal psychologist, a seasoned oncologist, and a Methodist minister. We found, amazingly, that an evangelical Christian, a successful businessman, a devout Sufi, a skilled athlete, a dedicated physician, a reluctant soldier, a Jewish mother, and an agnostic musician are all walking surprisingly similar paths. We share some of these overlapping cartographies with you in hopes that you will recognize some of the terrain yourself and begin to more consciously create your own path to transformation. *Living Deeply* will provide you with resources to help you maintain your balance while recruiting you to actively collaborate with the forces—both internal and external—that conspire to move you toward wholeness.

## THE ART AND SCIENCE OF TRANSFORMATION

In this book, we share what we've learned about transformation through a decadelong program of research, and we explore how our research findings can help you live more fully and deeply. No matter who you are, where you come from, or what your current path is—whether you seek to transform your life completely or to simply make adjustments that will add a layer of richness and depth to your life—we hope that you'll find something valuable here.

## *The Institute of Noetic Sciences*

This focused inquiry builds on thirty-five years of consciousness research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). *Noetic* refers to knowledge that comes to us directly through our subjective experiences or inner authority. This type of knowledge might take the form of an intuition that helps guide your decisions, or an epiphany that leads you to a creative breakthrough. Moreover, noetic experiences often carry an unusual level of authority that can help guide you to new understandings and new ways of being. Noetic experiences thus differ from the kind of knowledge that comes through reason or the objective study of the external world. However, we argue that it is both possible and necessary to bring to this realm of intuitive knowledge a scientific perspective and method. Bringing a scientific approach to noetic phenomena has allowed IONS to delve deeply into the nature of human consciousness and its vast potentials.

Edgar Mitchell, an Apollo 14 astronaut, founded IONS in 1973. Having had the remarkable opportunity to walk on the moon, Mitchell then had the window seat on the way home. During the flight back, a moment of epiphany occurred in which his entire sense of meaning and purpose shifted. In that moment he understood that the major crises of our times are due not to aspects inherent to the external world, but to flawed and inadequate worldviews. The mission of IONS is to explore consciousness through both science and human experience in order to advance individual and collective transformation.

In the fall of 1997, our team of researchers initiated a study focused on the process of transformation. We collected narrative descriptions of transformations experienced by people representing many walks of life. From mundane to life-threatening, these experiences led our respondents to fundamental shifts in their sense of self and their way of being in the world. For one man it came during his time as a conscientious objector in Vietnam. Through a specific prayer, in an extraordinary moment, he found inner peace even as he saw his colleagues being shot down. For a mother and daughter, it came when the mother used energy healing to help her distraught daughter find balance during a life transition, leading to profound transformative shifts for both.

We were intrigued by the fact that while the experiences people shared with us differed widely, a golden thread of commonality shone through them all. Some experiences occurred in extraordinary situations; others in ordinary, everyday situations. Some were initiated by experiences of great suffering; others by experiences of awe and wonder. But in each, a radical broadening of worldview and redefinition of identity, meaning, and purpose took place.

Despite differences in content and context, the process of transformation was described very similarly—often even with the very same words. Whether told by a seasoned meditator or a mother of three who had never meditated at all, these stories hinted at a jewel-like tapestry of human experience that transcends cultural differences. As we analyzed the stories for patterns that would shed light on the inner workings of transformation, we found ourselves filled with more questions: What constitutes a transformation of consciousness? What triggers transformation? How can we sustain the moments that move us beyond ourselves? And what impact do transformational experiences have on how we live our lives?

Seeking answers, we took advantage of the wide range of teachers and leaders in the human potential movement living and working in the San Francisco Bay Area and convened three focus groups between September 1998 and May 1999. To our surprise and delight, teachers from different transformational programs came eagerly. They, too, were seeking answers to questions about the mystery of transformation. The discussions were poignant, honest, and often profoundly moving. Together we began to map deep inventories of life experience that led the participants to express gratitude, feelings of connectedness, and a strong sense of community. Often the transformational journey is lonely, even for the masters themselves.

Inspired—and still filled with more questions than answers—we decided to probe the topic of transformation more deeply, and with greater scientific rigor. Beginning in 2002, the three of us invited fifty world-renowned scholars, teachers, and practitioners to participate in detailed research interviews. These teachers were selected specifically to represent a diverse range of transformative practices and philosophies (see figure 1). They represent traditional religions, spiritual philosophies, and modern transformative movements with roots in Eastern, Western, and indigenous