

A Future to Believe In

107 Reflections on Transforming the Maddening Miracle of Life

“The only real prison is fear, and the only real freedom is freedom from fear.”
~ Aung San Suu Kyi - leader of Burma’s
nonviolent struggle for freedom.

Alan Clements

Author of *Instinct for Freedom* and *The Voice of Hope* – Conversations
with Burma’s Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Aung San Suu Kyi

A Note to Readers

Thank you for reading the first ten reflections of my new book. This is also the first book that I intend to independently publish. Funds from pre-orders will assist me in that important endeavor. And If I may, would you please tell your friends about the book. Thank you for believing in me, supporting my life, work, and art.

**With love and gratitude,
Alan Clements**

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World Dharma Publications

1. **A Future to Believe In**

“We are star stuff which has taken its destiny into its own hands.”

Carl Sagan

Life as we know it appears to be an isolated phenomenon confined to the surface of Earth, where we thrive within only a tiny bandwidth of refracted light. Alpha Centauri—the next nearest source of luminosity to our sun—is a star system twenty-five trillion miles away. This is but one of the four-hundred billion stars in our Milky Way Galaxy. And this is but one of the millions of billions of other galaxies in just our region of the cosmos, each containing countless stars. Reason dictates that the conditions for life exist elsewhere, but contacting that life, if it does exist, seems to be outside our current sphere of possibility. For all practical purposes we are an isolated colony spinning through eternity at six-thousand miles per hour.

“We don’t want to know what the word *life* means to us,” states Carol Cleland, philosopher in residence with NASA’s National Astrobiology Institute. “We want to know what life *is*.”

Max Planck, Nobel Prize-winning father of Quantum Theory, states: “All matter...exists only by virtue of a force. We must assume behind this force the existence of a conscious and intelligent Mind... [And this] Mind is the matrix of all matter.”

Life is a precious opportunity.

But it is not enough to stand in awe of totality.

We must participate in the evolution of the intelligence
in which we are embedded.

The time for hope is over.

We are in an era of actualization creating a future to believe in.
There is knowledge and there is application of that knowledge.
We all have a good sense of what we must do.

“The future of mankind lies waiting for those who will come to understand their lives and take up their responsibility to all living things.”

~ Vine Deloria Jr. (American Indian author and activist)

The point now is to embody this realization and act on behalf of the greater good —the interrelated whole, everybody, ourselves, one and the same.

Buckminster Fuller, the legendary architect, philosopher, and visionary, once said, “People say to me, I wonder what it would be like to be on a spaceship. And I [always respond in the same way]: you don’t really realize what you are asking, because everybody is an Astronaut. We all live aboard a beautiful little spaceship called Earth. And if the success or failure of this planet and of human beings depended on how I am and what I do: How would I be? What would I do?”

“I always tell people to have the highest aspirations. Have the highest aspirations.”

~ Aung San Suu Kyi

Okay.

How would I be?

What will I do?

2.

To Dream

“We only become what we are by the radical and deep-seated refusal of that which others have made of us.”

~Jean-Paul Sartre

A political prisoner once described his jail cell to me. It had no windows. No bed. No toilet. No light. He lived for six months, naked, in a black box with the keyhole as the only ventilation. He told me that he survived by using his imagination — his ability to dream and think out of the box — the box of his own mind as much as the prison walls surrounding him.

He said he started by thinking out beyond his anger, his outrage, and fear.

He began to think about the nature of the human psyche, which he saw as a complex network of conditioned imprints.

He began to think about the nature of those imprints and as he did he reflected on the nature of propaganda, mind control and indoctrination.

He began to think about how nothing stands on its own — how everything is interdependent, arising from conditions. He also thought about how conditions are preceded by other conditions, and so on, ad infinitum.

Life was, he concluded, a beginningless, immeasurable inheritance of interrelated constituents, where everything is related in everyway.

It was here—with a deeper, more nuanced appreciation for mutual-causality — that he felt forgiveness for his captors. They were, he reasoned, tragic victims of a particular programming. They were largely puppets, unaware, indoctrinated in denigrating structures inherited from a primordial legacy. This insight, he said, brought him some degree of compassion and joy and allowed him to dream more fully, with greater daring.

As a physicist he had some training in ‘out of the box’ thinking.

He began to contemplate beyond this world, imagining the greater context—a universe without circumference.

Further, he began to imagine other life forms and other dimensions in this vastness. He explained that he became so enraptured using his imagination that after a while it turned to bliss. “I know it sounds strange,” he concluded with an ironic grin. “I learned how to be happy, not through meditation or day-to-day life, but from my ability to dream within the confinement of my black box.”

I ask myself, can I dream like this today?

Everyday?

Right now?

“Think of all the beauty still left around you and be happy.”

~ Anne Frank

3.

Enter the Adventure

“Consciousness is the phenomenon whereby the universe’s
very existence is made known.”

~ Roger Penrose

Outer life — as seen through the senses and the circuitry of perception — is a hyperspatial vibrancy of interlocking energy patterns. A human face is one such pattern, as is making love. But whose face is it, and who’s making love with whom? Physicists tell us that beneath visual life, beneath how we ordinarily perceive things, lies a shimmering sea of subatomic waves and particles and humans are holographic-like excitations consisting of those very same energies.

Universal intelligence may be so multidimensional that life as we know it may be the cinematic-like expression of a single molecule of DNA, a God molecule of infinite complexity among countless other such molecules within a Being—an entity, a form of life we have no knowledge of.

“Science is not a formal logic,” states Max Born, Nobel laureate in Physics, “it needs the free play of the mind in as great a degree as any other creative art.”

Or maybe we’re so microscopic that our infinity is a single cell in the cerebral cortex of a creature crawling along a galactic corridor in some world system—an organism imprinted with the memory of the evolutionary code of consciousness, while cognitively blind to the greater context of its existence, the infinite universe.

It’s possible. Of course, anything is.

We don’t know the final story, and perhaps, never will.

That’s Life — an unfathomable sea of potentialities: a magnificent and maddening blend of intelligence that bleeds, weeps, and makes love with itself.

Thus, we know ourselves to be —
Conscious Life.

It's no wonder humankind concocts creation myths and spins
spiritual strategies in an attempt to make some sense of
it all and bring it under control.

We are in an awesome situation, and one that so often seems
overwhelming in its enormity and complexity. So many of our maps, too,
must be changed as the terrain they try to describe shifts beneath our feet.

Yet we are cognizant creatures — aware that we are conscious — and in
that awareness lies our most valued guide—not to the environment alone,
but to the very nature of how we live and interrelate within it.

“The supreme insistence of life is that you enter
the adventure of creating yourself.”

~ Brian Swimme

“As a boy studying Buddhism in Tibet,” explains His Holiness the 14th
Dalai Lama, “I was taught the importance of a caring attitude towards
others. Such a practice of non-violence applies to all sentient beings — any
living thing that has a mind. No sentient beings want pain, instead all want
happiness and we all share these feelings at some basic level. Therefore,
because of our interdependence, the more we care for others' well-being,
whether we are concerned with human beings, animals or the
environment itself, the deeper will be our own fulfillment.”

4.

The Imperfect Present

“The essence of any religion lies solely in the answer to the question: What is my relationship to the infinite universe that surrounds me?”

~ Leo Tolstoy

Whatever life is we are microcosms of a mysterious totality. We are paradoxically bound within a membrane that allows for our own uniqueness while being inseparable from the whole. The confluence of opposite, yet simultaneous, worlds — that of self with other, mortality with eternity, birth with death, creativity with determinism, certainty with ambiguity, and freedom with bondage — creates in us a yearning for some kind of reconciliation that seems forever out of reach.

“Beauty is mysterious as well as terrible,” Dostoevsky once said. “God and devil are fighting there, and the battlefield is the heart of man.”

It is our *instinct for freedom* —the natural urge of the heart to liberate itself from all limitations, real or imagined—that compels us to engage life as a journey of awakening—a liberating dance with the imperfect present.

That strange, contextual tapestry of life with everything, everywhere, called *this moment now*— a place pregnant with totality, endlessly conceiving and dying with both the basic and metaphysical forces of the universe. It is a sacred space, as terrifying and maddening as it is awe-inspiring and miraculous.

Ironically, it’s all we have: LIFE.

“A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity.”

~ Kierkegaard

“Most important for grasping the nature of the present moment,” explains philosopher Marilyn Nissim-Sabat, “is understanding that present moments have a temporal structure ...they bear within them the immediate past and the foreshadowed future. In that sense there is no *standing now*. The ‘now’ moment, is a process with retentive (immediate past) and protentive (anticipated future) horizons. The present moment is infused with and structured by these flowing temporal horizons, as well as with their experiential content [qualia]. This flowing process is what Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, referred to as ‘lived experience.’”

And if we so choose to consciously enter this ‘lived experience’ with radical honesty we can Awaken here, evoking clarity and balance from confusion and chaos, allowing love and compassion to emerge from the mysterious web of life.

“There are beautiful and wild forces within us,” said St Francis of Assisi.

Let us find our own. Learn to love them, trust them.

Acting from our own beautiful wildness, be guided by these liberating forces and compose new-life rhythms, manifesting your finest visions and dreams.

“From the living fountain of instinct flows everything that is creative,” Carl Jung once said. “Hence the unconscious is not merely conditioned by history, but is the very source of the creative impulse. It is like nature herself — prodigiously conservative, and yet transcending her own historical conditions in her Acts of Creation.”

“The ideas that have lighted my way have been kindness, beauty, and truth.”

~ Albert Einstein

What are the ideas illuminating your way of living?

What are the beautiful wild forces within you?

5.

Our Dharma

“He lives the poetry that he cannot write.
The others write the poetry that they dare not realize.”
~ Oscar Wilde

Express your life as vividly as you can and give yourself
over to the person that you most want to be.

The *dharma*, our own unique dance with all forms of freedom and despair,
serves to transform the suffering within the imperfect present,
and evolves our ability to liberate our dreams.

There is nowhere better to enact the metamorphosis —but here.

I see no higher *dharma* outside of this.

“*Dharma* — is an ancient Sanskrit word meaning: the inmost constitution of a thing, the law of its inner being, which hastens its growth and without which it ceases to exist,” states Nikhilananda, the Indian author and philosopher. “In order to be true to oneself one must act according to one’s *dharma*. To mold one’s actions according to the law of one’s own being is therefore the *dharma*, the way to liberation, of every individual.”

It is up to each of us to find our own unique way—our own *Dharma*—and to be as courageous and experimental in its expression as we can.

The most daring realization is to live as an authentic human being,
bringing our most intelligent, uncensored aliveness
into all aspects of our life.

Mahatma Gandhi declared “I want freedom
for the full expression of my personality.”

Pema Chödrön, the American Buddhist nun, elaborates the *Dharma* this way: “The fixed idea that we have about ourselves [can be] painfully limiting. ...To train to stay open and curious...in dissolving the barriers that we erect between ourselves and the world—is [to] train in awakening...[the] nurturing [of] the fundamental flexibility of our being... It manifests as inquisitiveness, as adaptability, as humor, as playfulness. It is [also] our capacity to relax with not knowing, not figuring everything out, with not being at all sure about who we are—or who anyone else is either.”

“Follow your inner moonlight; don’t hide the madness.”
~ Allen Ginsberg

6. **Betray the Age**

We are the matter of the universe — a Cosmos that made us and will take us. We are genetically encoded to seek and create life, genetically encoded to disintegrate and die. Although we appear to be different, we're all kin beneath the skin, sharing the same ancient ancestry.

From a molecule of DNA — origin unknown — life emerged on Earth. Over the next ten billion years we crawled out of the oceans, formed hands and lungs, and walked upright for the first time a mere three hundred thousand years ago. Only one hundred thousand years ago the planet's population was 60,000. Anthropologists tell us that about 10,000 or so people from the original tribe migrated north from central Africa and from there, spread throughout the world.

And not surprisingly, wherever modern Homo Sapiens migrated he and she drove the indigenous peoples into extinction, either by out-producing them or exterminating them through murderous acts of conquest.

“No cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history, has determined the very existence of politics, the cause of freedom versus tyranny.”

~Hannah Arendt

Move forward 2,000 years past countless wars, and the arising and passing of civilizations, into a 20th century fraught with obscene brutality: Stalin; Mao; The Holocaust; Hiroshima; genocide in Armenia, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Sudan; Pinochet's terror in Chile; Pol Pot's Cambodia; Apartheid; The crushing of human rights in Burma, Tiananmen Square and Tibet.

All in the name of what?

Freedom? Democracy? Christ? Capitalism? Allah? Oil? God?

Bono, the singer for the rock group U2, gives us his take on the story and moreover, how to turn it around: “There’s a truly great Irish poet, Brendan Kennelly,” he tells us. “And he has this epic poem called *The Book of Judas*, and there’s a line in [it] that says: ‘If you want to serve the age, betray it.’”

What does that mean, to betray the age?

“Well to me betraying the Age means exposing its conceits, its foibles, its phony moral certitudes. It means telling the secrets of the age and facing harsher truths.”

What are the ideas worth betraying?
What are the secrets you wish to tell?
And when will you tell them?

“One of the greatest gifts we can give to another generation is our experience, our wisdom.”

~ Desmond Tutu

7.

Compassionate Awareness

“Most of the things we do, we do for no better reason than that our fathers have done them or that our neighbors do them, and the same is true of a larger part than we suspect of what we think.”

~Oliver Wendell Holmes

We are in the opening years of a new millennium. Thousands of generations have brought us to the era of the post-modern human—a complex circuitry of (techno-) biological contingency that in order to survive urgently needs to learn how to more intelligently inhabit a compassionate awareness. Because, at the moment, our species is on a trajectory of deep misguidedness and social injustice that might well have a terminal end: thousands of people are dying every day in Africa, needlessly, from the pandemic of AIDS; all major ecosystems are degrading as a result of long-term aggressive exploitation; species are becoming extinct; our pollutants are turning the atmosphere into toxic gas; the oceans are projected to lose all commercial fish stocks by 2048 and many millions of dollars will be spent today (everyday) on war, on maiming, on killing.

“Nothing determines who we will become so much as those things we choose to ignore.”

~ Sandor Minab

Why are we acting like those we put on death row?

“When speaking in various countries, one of the questions I am frequently asked,” explains Lester Brown, President of Earth Policy Institute, “is given the environmental problems that the world is facing, can we make it? That is, can we avoid the collapse of civilization? My answer is always the same: It depends on you and me. It means becoming politically active. Saving our civilization is not a spectator sport.”

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

8.

Holy Curiosity

“Human life is a journey whose end is not in sight. Searching, longing and questioning is in our DNA. Who we are and what we will become is determined by the questions that animate us, and by those we refuse to ask. Your questions are your quest. As you ask, so shall you be.”

~ Sam Keen

We must remain open and inquisitive, but ultimately, acknowledge the essential mystery of it all. Clearly, we are only in the earliest stages of answering the big questions: knowing what life is, and how it all started.

Are we alone in the universe? What’s on the other side of death? Is immortality possible? How much of what we perceive is brain-generated projection and how much of it actually exists separate from our minds?

What is the “really real,” the “wholly other”?

It was Socrates who, when asked for his definition of wisdom, gave as his conclusion, “knowing that you don’t know.”

“Favor the Question, always question,” stated Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace laureate Elie Wiesel, in reminding us of the gift we can give each other. “Do not accept answers as definitive. Answers change. Questions don’t. Always question those who are certain of what they are saying. Always favor the person who is tolerant enough to understand that there are no absolute answers, but there are absolute questions.”

In other words: don’t stop asking.

We have just begun to probe the galaxies. We are mere infants in a universe governed by a cosmological clock tuned to infinity. Our scientific discoveries are constantly improving descriptions, but they are not explanations.

The pre-eminent physicist Michio Kaku tells us, “We have come a long way intellectually from the time of Giordano Bruno...burned at the stake in 1600 by the church for saying that the sun was nothing but a star. But as a species we are in our infancy and just beginning to break free from the imprisonment of gravity.”

The wisdom of inquiry is that the more we question the nature of the world, the larger and more compelling our world becomes. It grows beyond us in its mystery, and encompasses those concerns of the self that so readily absorb us. On the other hand, the shadow of questioning is that it can work in reverse order as well: the wonder of the macrocosm can be reduced to the needs of convenient truths found only in what satisfies the hunger of ‘I, me, mine —the ego.’

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn writes: “It is not because the truth is too difficult to see that we make mistakes. We make mistakes because the easiest and most comfortable course for us is to seek insight where it accords with our emotions — especially selfish ones.”

Hence Einstein turned towards the
always expansive question in which we,
“Never lose a holy curiosity,”
whether human, global, or divine.

9.

An Open Space

We are in a circumstance where anything can happen, and does. Every second is a mysterious twist of infinite cosmic fate and our individual lives reflect only a microscopic unit of it. If I am not hiding in delusion, then I am standing in the naked nirvana of reverential uncertainty, occupying as many dimensions of being as my heart can bear and has the wisdom to embrace.

If I can stand here, I am standing in a pure awareness of life, without the distorting filters that distance me from that which

I am: an open space —
large and small, weak and strong, transparent and veiled,
vulnerable and powerful, unprotected, naked, mortal,
and utterly mysterious.

“Nobody can teach me who I Am.”
~ Chinua Achebe

Within this space, have only the faith in trusting
your deepest life experience.

Listen to the voice within. Listen to your heart.
Don't be afraid of the universe.

“Deserve your dream.”
~ Octavio Paz

10.

To Go Beyond

“The visible universe is but a storehouse of images and signs to which the imagination will give a relative place and value; it is a pasture which the imagination must digest and transform.”

~ Charles Baudelaire

Can we ignite an awe of existence — a wonderment that includes the complexities of our daily life, tender and fragile as we are? Is it possible, at this time, with all we know, to be that stirred by the everyday conditions of being? And where exactly is the wisdom that compels us to rethink our priorities, our attitudes — the entire way we view the world, ourselves, and our relationships?

“Time after time I have worked with actors,” explains Peter Brook, the innovative British theater and film director, “who are tragically incapable, however hard they try, of laying down for one brief instant, even in rehearsal, the image of themselves that has hardened around an inner emptiness.”

“The illiterate of the future are not those who cannot read or write,” states Alvin Toffler. “They are those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn.”

How do we learn to live in this entirely new way?

Is it something we can learn?

“The day came when the risk it took to remain tight in a bud became more painful than the risk it took to blossom.”

~ Anais Nin

Harley Swift Deer, a Native American teacher, explains that “each of us has a survival dance and a sacred dance...Our survival dance...is what we do for a living—our way of supporting ourselves physically and economically...Once you have your survival dance established, you can wander, inwardly and outwardly, searching for clues to your sacred dance, the work you were born to do.”

“Dream dreams and see visions welling up from the preconscious,” Rollo May encourages us, as a means to liberate our unrealized potentials. Allow for the “outreaching of the conscious mind to be flooded with ideas, impulses, images and every sort of psychic phenomena” he concludes.

Are you outreaching?

Aristotle defined “entelechy” as “the condition in which a potentiality has become an actuality.”

In other words, empower the most vital forces within you that motivate and guide you toward fullness and freedom.

“Let the beauty of what you love be what you do.”
~ Rumi

End Note by the Author

Thank you for taking the time to read the first ten reflections of my new book. The 107 Reflections in *A Future to Believe In* are progressive in their unfolding. Taken as a whole they communicate the distilled essence of my spiritual/political life. It took five years to create this volume and a lifetime of world adventure and experience. I hope that you are inspired to order the book at this time. I would be honored to have you bring it into your life, your home, read a page or two at a time, leave it open, feel it, take it into your daily life, be inspired, engage your own unique revolution of the spirit.

Thank you,
Alan Clements

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