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BE *Consciously*
HEALTHY

AWAKEN TO YOUR BEST LIFE

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Section I

Awaken

Chapter One: Awaken to the Reality

Without change, something sleeps inside us, and seldom awakens. The sleeper must awaken. --Frank Herbert

It was three in the morning and I was asleep, curled onto my side of the bed. I heard my name being called. I tried to stay asleep, tried to ignore the sound, but I couldn't. My mother lay beside me in an agonizing pain she described as a burning fire in her feet, a pain that inched its way through every cell in her body. I rubbed the sleep from my eyes, trying to hide my exhaustion and frustration when I rolled over to ask her what she needed.

I was nine years old and my mother's primary caregiver.

She'd been diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis shortly after she and my father were divorced. I was an only child and she relied on me more and more for everything as the disease progressed. Her pain was mine. Her suffering was mine. Her life was mine.

Here I was, a kid in fourth grade, fully aware of what it meant to live with a devastating illness. My mother suffered in pain all day, sometimes unable to care for herself, unable to even get out of bed. At the same time, her illness took over my life. Every morning, I tried to figure out how to balance school, meals, bills, and everything comprising day-to-day existence—with only the two of us to make it work. My mother did what she could, but the primary responsibility fell on my young shoulders. We were stuck in a role reversal that ultimately defined my childhood and part of my adult life.

I had no choice at that age but to wake up, both literally and figuratively, and realize my situation was, in fact, my new normal and life would never be the same. If I had ignored my mother's cries or ignored the chores that needed to be done, we would have both suffered. I had to be awake and aware—it didn't matter that I was hardly old enough to do multiplication tables.

In my role as a physician, my first job is to give my patients an awareness—a knowing and a strength— about the realities of their health and the power that resides inside them to change that reality. This was the call I heard in my childhood, and it has guided my entire medical practice. I want to help and enlighten people who are facing pain and disease, in all its many facets. **The first step in that is choosing to wake up, acknowledge one's reality, and take appropriate action.**

Awaken to the True Reality

The English word ‘awake’ or ‘awaken’ originates from the 14th-century Old English word *awæcnan*, meaning to arise, originate or spring from. In modern times, this word is generally associated with the undoing of the process of sleep—a state of reversible unconsciousness. To be ‘awakened’ to a deeper awareness, however, has its genesis in the Eastern teachings of the Buddha, a master sage regarded as the most influential teacher of true enlightenment. In both Eastern and Western cultures, the concept of awakening has been widely used to denote other meanings such as a state of being in enlightenment, having elevated consciousness, or ultimate attainment of complete oneness with divinity.

This makes sense. In life, we are connected—to each other, to the earth, and to the powers that work within the world. When we think of ourselves as separate and divided by skin or turf, we lose the essence of the synergy of togetherness. These interactive fields of energies remain in a dynamic harmony naturally and will continue as such even when disturbed by the wayward tendencies of the human mind. Our global community continuously reminds us that there is resiliency and a holding power to this universe.

To be awakened, we first have to acknowledge and accept this connected synergy. **Life is made up of dominos, and as one falls others fall after it . . . sometimes in good ways, sometimes in bad.** The way you treat your body today sets up the dominos of the future. So does the way you think, the emotions you feel, and the beliefs you hold.

In ancient times, when people questioned life and death, suffering and pain, religion, God, and the afterlife, a man named Gautama Siddhartha emerged. He would later become known as “Buddha” or the “enlightened one” of his time. According to historians, he was born into royalty and was shielded as a young boy from human suffering by his family. He eventually chose to liberate himself from this “perfect world” and chose instead to live as an ascetic, meaning one who exists on the bare minimum of creature comforts. He wanted to open his mind to seek greater awareness and meaning in life so he traveled throughout India, studied, meditated, and became highly enlightened.

In his journeys, he witnessed human decadence, decay, and death. At the same time, he also saw great beauty, joy and contentment juxtaposed with those darker elements. It would be through experiencing these realities, and stepping back to literally remove himself from “himself”, that he would conceive what has been referred to as the four noble truths, the fundamental teachings of Buddhism:

1. **Dukkha**: all that is life as we know it is impermanent and will change, and there is suffering in life for all beings
2. **Samudaya**: the cause of suffering—attachment and desire
3. **Nirhodha**: the way out of suffering—eliminating attachment and desire

4. **Magga**: the path that frees us from suffering; reaching a state of nirvana

Dukkha, the first truth, that all beings suffer, comes from birth, aging, sickness, death, and the recycling of such through continuous lifetimes. It is about pain and grief, but also about joy and beauty, excitement and the stimulation of the senses. Most importantly it is about the transient nature of life itself.

Samudaya, the second truth, reminds us that the causes of suffering are greed and desire, ignorance or delusion, and hatred and destructive urges. “I want”, “I need”, “I must have”, are the foundations behind all suffering. The minds of humans are fraught with painful thought processes, hatred, anger, suppression, and selfish habits. *Nirhodha* states one can go beyond the self and reach nirvana, a spiritual joy in which one no longer bows to negative emotions and fears. We can stop wanting, craving, and desiring, but this requires dropping one’s ego and connecting with true reality to seek oneness with life.

Finally, *Magga* sets us on the path and attainment of nirvana, a state of total bliss and unification in divine love. To achieve *Magga*, Buddha prescribes the Eightfold Path consisting of the right understanding, intention, speech, conduct, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

So, what does all this have to do with awakening? In light of spiritual awakening, we may first look at the body as it emerges from the sleep state—a time we generally designate as becoming awake. **There are profound changes that occur during slumber that prepare the physical body for its next experience or adventure in wakefulness.** These are made possible through the myriad forms of energy the body experiences throughout the day and into the night hours leading up to waking.

Meals, mental and emotional exchanges, along with various other forms of sensory stimuli—e.g. visual, audio or tactile experiences—provide the entire body with the fuel important and essential for both physical and spiritual awakening and growth. Ideally, the body will experience the most balanced and purest forms of these various energies to attain its most awakened state. Periods of fasting (with guidance), practicing silence, exercising both the mind and body, reducing negative stressors in daily life, and maintaining positive energy charged relationships are essentially all required as one seeks a heightened spiritual path.

Physical awakening, which we commonly know as emergence from sleep, in itself is one of the steps or states of being that is part of the process of true spiritual awakening or growth. When the body is in the state of either sleep or non-sleep there are virtually countless changes occurring every second of the day, hence the impermanence of all that is part of the body (*dukkha*).

Regardless of the state of physical level of consciousness, the body and mind have tremendous capacity to hold onto the minutest of data from ages ago—we may hold onto memories from the beginning of time that can blur the virtual lines between past and present, conscious and unconscious. There are perceptible and seemingly countless layers that comprise the subconscious, that deep place within the human mind where we have stored all the pain in our lives. The subconscious holds the scars from emotional and/or bodily trauma, suppressed feelings, life-governing rules, action-defining laws, past failures, past successes, moments of excitement, realistic and unrealistic expectations of ourselves and others, healthy and unhealthy attachments, and all relationships. It is only through a conscious, balanced, self-generated process that one can begin to uncover all the layers and move to open the awareness fully. Once we physically awaken from sleep, we can purposefully move into a more in-depth process.

Awakening is done in stages. The Buddhists see it as happening in this order:

1. Physical awakening: a lightening of the heaviness the body experiences in the un-awakened state; a new energy or revitalization emerges
2. Mental awakening: a realization of a significant force or power generating all of life; there is no need for name or designation; there is a presence and it embraces you
3. Emotional awakening: a sensation of connectedness as the body attunes itself to its environment, in and out of the body
4. Spiritual or transcendental awakening: a coming out of self-interests and devotion to a greater cause
5. Mystical: a oneness that has no names, boundaries, or limitations; the infinite truth

When we realize what it means to be “awake”, the lines between those layers of the conscious and subconscious become blurred. As they drop away, you find a more intense internal determination to change. Those mental weights are lifted. **If you are prepared to let go of all that has been so heavy and detrimental to your soul, you will awaken to your true reality and self.** And therein lies the key to living a truly healthy life. It’s all related, just as all of life and nature are related, and when you grasp that concept and apply it fully, you change your health forever.

The Importance of Awakening

Spiritual awakening is not an easy process, nor is it particularly fun. When you let go of those past hurts and beliefs, you uncover things about yourself that you may not like or even want to revisit. Behaviors you need to change. Thoughts you need to corral. Wrongs you have committed. So why do it at all?

Because the true health of the body, mind, spirit, and the essence of being—the soul—is buried beneath all those layers. We suppress our feelings, feed them unhealthy food, let them sit on the couch for hours at a time, and wallow in the mire instead of awakening to them and being honest with ourselves.

You cannot face a problem if you don't first acknowledge its existence. Too many of us go along in blissful ignorance about our health—both mental and physical. The mind and body operate together, each influencing and/or impacting the other. We procrastinate and deny, generate one excuse after another, allow our lies to ourselves to become beliefs that remain steadfast, and then repeat this cycle over and over. All the body's cells absorb these beliefs with an indelible imprinting. The result? Awareness is buried under yet another thick layer and the “rock of inertia” within you becomes heavier and harder to move. The whole entity is virtually unmovable. The good news is this can be changed.

Letting go of impulsiveness and the drive for instant gratification is a good way to awaken yourself to a more fulfilling life. To do this, you have to start with your mind and your internal dialogue. Words of wisdom that have always been helpful in moments of uncertainty, confusion, or desperation are: *stop, look, listen, and feel*. To these I add: *control the breath*. When you take the time to stop and become aware of your posture, your breath, the air, temperature, sounds, and all that is within and outside of your being, there is a change—a change which happens instantaneously.

When this happens, you may experience wonder or awe, but whatever you are feeling, embrace this emotion. Becoming mindful is a simple step, and it can be very profound as it gives you time to reflect on who you are and what your presence means in the fabric of time and by virtue of that, also in life. You might feel joyful or maybe even giggle as you take a step back, open your eyes to everything around you, and then breathe in slowly and deeply, exhaling even more slowly. You should exhale for twice the amount of time you inhale. Repeat this five, ten, or twenty times to truly experience all that takes place. In doing so, your life has just opened up to something new and precious.

Don't wait another second to awaken. The time to be honest with yourself is long overdue. Then you can begin to truly take charge of your well-being and your future, rather than passively allowing someone or something else to dictate to you. Your health is yours and yours alone—own it and control it through your decisions and choices. Begin by facing life in its entirety and reality as it moves with you. Start by stopping and taking that first deep breath.

Awakening begins with your breath and becomes honesty, power, and peace.

Your Rx for Today

When you awaken to your reality,

life as you know it can change in these ways:

- You find more determination and motivation
- You take out the word “I” and replace it with “We” as you think outside yourself
- You gain respect for your soul, mind, and body
- You move through the different levels of consciousness and find truth
- You learn to stop, look, listen, feel, and breathe

When should you start awakening to your reality?

NOW.

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