

I AM FREEDOM

LIVE LIFE WITH AWARENESS

ASHU KHANNA

FOREWORD BY **RUSKIN BOND**



INDIA • SINGAPORE • MALAYSIA



Copyright © Ashu Khanna 2023
All Rights Reserved.

ISBN 978-1-63745-354-4

This book has been published with all efforts taken to make the material error-free after the consent of the author. However, the author and the publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

While every effort has been made to avoid any mistake or omission, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that neither the author nor the publishers or printers would be liable in any manner to any person by reason of any mistake or omission in this publication or for any action taken or omitted to be taken or advice rendered or accepted on the basis of this work. For any defect in printing or binding the publishers will be liable only to replace the defective copy by another copy of this work then available.

Other Titles by Ashu Khanna

I Am Abundance, Live a Life of Possibilities

I Am Love, Live Life with Gratitude

I Am Perfection, Live Life Joyfully

*Om bhūr bhuvah svaḥ
tat savitur vareṇyam
bhargo devasya dhīmahi
dhiyo yo nah pracodayāt*

O Thou Absolute
Our hearts are filled with darkness
Please make this darkness distant from us
And promote illumination within us.

– *Gayatri Mantra*
Rigveda 3.62.10

To my family, who have
filled my life with
beauty and love.



Contents



<i>Foreword</i>	11
<i>Preface</i>	13
<i>Prologue</i>	16
1. You are Born Free	23
2. You are Born Perfect	27
3. You Have Freedom Of Choice	31
4. You Have Freedom Of Thought	35
5. Are You Expressing Freely	39
6. Are You In Control Of Your Life	43
7. Do Your Desires Control You	47
8. Is Your Ego Obstructing You	51
9. Are You Caught Between Success And Failure	54
10. Discover The Purpose Of Your Life	58
11. You Can Recreate Your Life	62
12. Be Courageous	66
13. Let Go Of Your Past	70
14. Build Resilience	74
15. Understand Yourself	78
16. Life Is A Mirror	82
17. Forgiveness	87

CONTENTS

18. Surrender	91
19. Free Yourself	94
20. Does God Exist	98
21. Trust Yourself	102
22. Silence Your Thoughts	106
23. Realize Your Self Worth	109
24. Discover Your Talent	113
25. Be Patient	118
26. Be Dignified	121
27. Be A Leader	125
28. Be Peaceful	129
29. Grow To Contribute	133
30. Celebrate Life	136

Foreword



‘Simply, simplify!’ wrote Thoreau from the isolation at Walden pond, far from the stress and strain of living in the growing cities of America.

Today, Walden ponds are hard to find; and in a country such as India, teeming with millions of people, there are no uninhabited regions where we might go in search of peace and tranquility. Even the sadhus and babas who seek *sanyas* find themselves living in communities, surrounded by their disciple and followers. You must live in the midst of a desert if you long for solitude.

The author of this book is obviously someone who has spent most of her life in cities, in a modern, competitive world, no place for sensitive souls such as hers. She has had to look for her ‘Walden’, her spiritual retreat, within herself. This journey of the spirit is described honestly and in some detail – her struggle to overcome a feeling of inadequacy, a tendency to feel hurt at any harsh word, frustration in trying to please everyone and not being understood or appreciated.

A traumatic experience she went through – being stung by nearly a hundred bees – made her realize in her struggle for survival that she valued her life immensely. She learnt to accept that the reasons for our dissatisfaction and discontent are founded in ego, fear, attachment and desire.

This is the story of how the author recovers her poise and inner freedom, it is also a guide to those who have had similar problems in coming to terms with life. Most of us spend our lives surviving rather than living. This is the pattern imposed on us when we are forced to earn a living in a large,

FOREWORD

often hostile environment. She shows us how to meet this challenge – and come out smiling!

Ruskin Bond

Author and Awardee of Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan

Preface



The ancient scriptures have been my guiding light through the years of my search for freedom and perfection. The wisdom of the scriptures respond to the eternal quest of mankind of, ‘who am I’, ‘what is life’ and ‘how to live life’. Life force or Prana or Qi is the pure energy that exists in all living things and keeps them alive. The Higher Self, our core, is a manifestation of the Life Force. I have chosen to address the Life Force as Universal Love because in my experience the energy has always been loving and expansive.

According to Science, energy can neither be created nor destroyed but it can be transformed from one form to another. This pure energy, Universal Love is eternal, universal and changeless. Human beings are the most evolved manifestation as we have been gifted with the consciousness to live with awareness and transform. When we awaken to our truth as a manifestation of Universal Love, we can consciously transform and unleash our potential, to live a life of success and happiness.

The Higher Self is the Observer that is a witness to our experiences. It also manifests as the Ego and the Inner Voice. Our ego is a persona of separateness that develops as a veil to protect us from feeling pain, our sense of identity and from our fears. Our inner voice is the voice of awareness that guides us through unknowns and shines light on what is the right thing to do in different situations and roles. When we direct our senses, thoughts, emotions and energy, i.e. live in alignment with the inner voice, we can anchor, heal and expand awareness to identify opportunities to grow and live masterfully.

The play of life is a perfect matrix, designed for us to seek our truth, as a manifestation of Universal Love and transform to unleash our potential. When we get tired of living through our ego and pierce through the veil to question our existence and happiness, in that moment we can awaken and reconnect with voice of truth.

I am blessed with abundance in life. Like many, I lost my way, I lost my ability to express my truth, and I was filled with anger and anxiety. A face off with death in December of 2001, shook me out of my helplessness. I decided to value my life and live with peace of mind. To discover my purpose, I experimented relentlessly with different careers and explored relentlessly till I was desperate for peace of mind. My search for freedom took me to a small town in UK, where I met my mentor coach in April 2006. She helped me realise that I was trapped in a vicious cycle of acceptance and expectations. While, I had taken some significant decisions by trusting my intuition, at that time, I did not know the power and role of my inner voice. Some months later, I awakened to the truth, that our inner voice is the guide to happiness and success. This life altering realisation ignited me commit to a journey of living true.

We are all inherently talented. I am gifted with the ability to distil the wisdom of ancient scriptures in a contemporary manner. Over the last few years, I have questioned myself in every situation. I have slowed down to listen and understand myself. The more I have trusted myself, the easier it became to let go of pain and loosen the hold of the ego. Each experience and inquiry has helped me discover insights and unleash my potential.

We are gifted with curiosity and creativity to discover our inner light and shine. As we live true, we can learn to discern between the noise of ego and inner voice to live authentically. In my books, I have shared my journey of search for answers, and living authentically to own my power as a perfect manifestation of the Universal Love.

The book, *I Am Freedom* captures my journey of understanding myself and letting go of perceptions that clouded my truth. Letting go helped to expand the observer and unfold possibilities to express fearlessly. I have presented the wisdom of the ancient scriptures in a simple manner through my life journey to inspire others to live free. I urge the reader to pause and contemplate to embrace the leader within to design a life of success and happiness.

Prologue



*I was free, I am free, I will always be free.
I was Love, I am Love, I will always be Love.*

I was unaware of this fundamental truth of life. My life was dominated by my fears till I awakened to my reality as a manifestation of Universal Love. This book shares my story of moving from fear to freedom by living life with awareness.

I was born with a twinkle in my eyes and a smile on my lips. I would skip my way into the hearts of people with my chatter. I enjoyed the simple pleasures of life like singing in the school bus, playing with friends, reading jokes, and laughing with my family. Life was simple and beautiful. I wanted for nothing.

Here is where the twist comes in. I am very sensitive and feel very deeply. Also, my need for love was so high, to the point of it being debilitating. As a little child, of course I did not know that everyone's language of love is different. So, I would react to the slightest feedback as judgment and would turn ashen white at the slightest reprimand. My parents would often get concerned about my ability to cope in the world. Their advice that I needed to be strong became my mantra of life. I formed a perception of not being good enough, so to feel loved, I would often hesitate to express myself for fear of feeling rejected. To feel safe, I built a wall around me and told myself, 'it doesn't matter'. Of course, it mattered. Little did I know that by suppressing my feelings, I was rejecting and taking myself for granted.

The self imposed pressure of expectations and disappointments made my smile hesitant, and my eyes lost their spark. I lost my spontaneity and the feeling of contentment. A bundle of anger, anxiety and pain, I would often feel helpless and bounced around by the challenges and outcomes of life. While life was very good, my perceptions became my reality. Believe me, I was fed up of this version of me but, I did not know how to live differently.

In December 2001, life decided to throw a loop. In a totally bizarre accident, I got stung by nearly a hundred poisonous bees outside our condominium in Singapore. This near fatal accident acted as a big wake up call. Incidentally, about 4 years earlier, I had experienced a severe allergic reaction that had caused my breathing to slur, I had pushed it aside as an accident. This time around, being I was granted the gift of life yet again, made me confront myself at the deepest level.

I asked myself, *‘What do I want most from life?’*

“I wanted to feel valued and in control of my life.”

I have always been focused and ambitious. Somewhere, with all the transitions of getting married, moving countries, working in a new environment and having children, I lost sight of myself. I decided to explore my passions to figure out how to have a career again that would help me live a balanced life.

After a few years, I was so tired and desperate to get rid of the noise in the head, that I was yearning for peace of mind and wanted to live a life without regrets. I wanted to reconnect with the innocent and mischievous child in me who would chatter and sing freely. I wanted to live with happiness, wonderment, and laughter. I wanted to bring back my ability to smile at the simple things in life and live life to my fullest potential.

Fortunately, in January 2006, I noticed a gap in leadership development in India and quit my job immediately to become an entrepreneur. Soon thereafter in April 2006, I went to Henley-on-Thames, a quaint and beautiful town near London, to attend a course in image-management. Passionate and excited, I wanted to soak in as much as I could. I would ask many questions and interrupt, rather unaware that I came across as aggressive and competitive. One evening, whilst we were at dinner, one of the participants remarked that I was like a split personality – fun in the evening and judgmental in the classroom. And then, our instructor, Lynne Marks, who later became my mentor coach, asked me if I was coachable. While the comment hurt deeply, it also made me curious to understand.

Till then, I had never heard of coaching, so I asked tentatively, if I was coachable what would she say. She seized the opportunity and asked — *‘Whose acceptance are you waiting for?’* The enormity and depth of this question pierced through my wall and helped me realize that I had been waiting for the acceptance of many. Phew! I did know how much this subconscious thought had shaped my life and was reflected in my behaviour.

To understand how to live free and be happy, I reflected deeply. I remembered instances when I had trusted my intuition fearlessly. Those decisions have served me well and filled my life with abundance and love. I pursued various self transformation courses to understand how to live with trusting myself. I discovered that I am born to be a coach, an observer. Also, I realized that it is possible for us to be happy by living in alignment with our inner voice. Feeling relieved and motivated, I made a commitment to live true to myself and help others as well.

I spent hours in contemplation to understand how to be happy. Peace of mind and joy is possible when we are willing to sacrifice our ego. While it has not been easy to face up to my falsehoods, it has been worth the effort

because it has alleviated my suffering. Living with awareness has helped me change my perspectives to courageously pursue my truth. I have inquired into the authenticity of my life, my relationships, aspirations, desires, and, above all, my attitude towards my life and myself. I have reflected on questions like,

“Why was I born?”

“Why was I born as a human?”

“How am I different from other forms of creation?”

“How do I use my ability to think?”

“Why was I born into this family?”

“Why do certain experiences occur in my life?”

“How do I make the most of my life?”

“How can I be loving?”

We have the power within to live freely. Shedding the baggage of the past has given me the lightness to soar high like a bird. Do I regress? Of course, I am human after all, and life continues to be a journey of new experiences. The biggest difference is that now I know the power to recreating is within me, my inner voice. Also, I I am never alone since we are same at the core. So, each time I fall, I pick myself up, smile at myself and move forward to fulfill my purpose.

“When you cease to make a contribution, you begin to die.”

— Eleanor Roosevelt

The realization that it is possible for all to live with success and happiness inspired me to look for ways to awaken people to their truth. After practicing as a leadership coach, my journey of search for answers lead me to writing books to stimulate people to inquire within and live true.

Many mentors have held my hand, embraced me with love and guided me with words of wisdom. I am grateful to my parents, who showered me with love, gave me the values that are the bedrock of my life and always encouraged me to grow; my husband, who is my inspiration, has protected and supported me to follow my dreams; my sons are my bundles of joy and love; my friends are my circle of fun and sharing; my mentors who have shined their light in moments of darkness; and above all, The Universal Love, God for showering me with a beautiful life filled with abundance.

The poem below aptly summarizes my journey of self realization.

God Said 'No'

I asked God to take away my pain

God said, No

It is not for Me to take away, but for you to give it up.

I asked God to make my handicapped child okay

God said, No

His spirit is okay, his body is only temporary.

I asked God to give me patience

God said, No

*Patience is a by-product of tribulations,
it isn't granted, it is learnt.*

I asked God to give me happiness

God said, No

I give you blessings, happiness is up to you.

I asked God to spare me pain

God said, No

*You must grow on your own, but I will prune you to make
you fruitful.*

I asked God for all things that I might enjoy life

God said, No

I will give you life, so that you may enjoy all things.

I asked God to help me love others, as much as He loves me

God said... Aah finally you have an idea!

— Speaking Tree, Times of India,
August 21, 2011

You are Born Free



My relationship with the word freedom was limited to the history of nations and their fight for freedom. My world opened when I realized that *freedom is the power to express our truth fearlessly*. We are gifted with different talents and the power to express through different mediums and serve the world. Our freedom empowers and helps us grow to our potential.

We also have the power to breakthrough our perceivable limitations and express freely. The story of Helen Keller, the first blind and deaf person to graduate from Radcliffe College, USA, is truly remarkable. She lost her sight and hearing at a very young age. Helen communicated with rough signs till she was seven years old. Then, with the support and patience of her teacher, Anne Sullivan, Helen was able to unlock the world of language. In due course, Helen went to graduate, write books and give speeches and became an advocate for people with disabilities.

Children have an amazing level of energy because they are curious and free from fears. Their curiosity helps them observe and learn rapidly. They repeat an act to master it while making a game out of it. When I was little, I would run and play, carefree and happy in my world. I loved the simple things of life and was full of energy.

Our fears and beliefs prevent us from living our life to the fullest. As I started growing up, I became fearful and hesitant since my definition of love was limited to my relationships with others. I assumed that to feel loved, I had to gain the acceptance and acknowledgement of others. My thinking was highly influenced by cultural and social norms and beliefs.

Lack of awareness is one of the biggest reasons that holds us from discovering our true expression, our purpose, our potential, and above all, our happiness. We allow ourselves to be burdened by the expectations and live a life driven by demands of society, family, culture or religion. I was very fortunate to be supported by my parents to follow my heart. I loved numbers and decided to become a chartered accountant, even though the field of science were the preferred subject of the family. I did not appreciate this freedom, till I met others whose families imposed an expectation on their children to pursue a profession or join the business.

We have the power to inquire and be curious to make our choices mindfully. As Victor Frankl said, *“Everything can be taken from a man but the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”*

Our life is an outcome of our choices. We have an abundance of resources to explore and discover our talents. Also, we can choose what we want or not. Ultimately, it is for us to decide what do we want, how much do we want and for how long. My life was driven by goals, rather than a vision till I had not asked myself, ‘what do I truly want?’ I would jump from one goal to the next as I did not have a north star to anchor me.

We often forget that it is we who lived and survived this life; it is we who made our choices that make us who we are today. We spend so much effort in trying to prove ourselves or justify our actions. I am the youngest in the family, and would often hesitate to speak up because I assumed that no one would listen to me. Also, I mistakenly thought that I could have peace by avoiding conflict or confrontation. Well, neither habit helped because I would throw out with the suppressed emotions as anger or tears and my silence was often taken as consent or indifference. It took me time to recognize that I was mistakenly wasting my energy to suppress my fears rather than harnessing it to conquer them.

We use only ten percent of our energy, and the remaining ninety percent gets blocked and buried by our fears. I was no different. Like a simmering volcano that erupts after years of turbulence and pressure, causing havoc and damage, I too had wasted my energy with complaints and fears since I did not know how to manage or understand my feelings. When I discovered that it was possible to be happy and feel free by questioning my emotions, each time I felt hurt or angry or frustrated, I would ask myself, ‘why am I angry, why am I feeling anxious, how can I be happy?’ This was a completely new way of living. Of course, it was not easy to take the responsibility of my emotional turbulence, question myself and control my frustration.

“The secret of happiness is freedom. The secret of freedom is courage.”

— Greek Historian

Self-expression is expressing ourselves freely in alignment with the inner self. We have a multitude of talents and have the power to express our talent fearlessly. When we identify and live in harmony with that gift, life becomes effortless and beautiful. Fearful of rejection, I had to muster courage to look within, confront my mask and share my feelings. I developed many relationships where I felt understood to safely shed my emotions. Also, when I would feel stuck, I would ask myself – ‘*do I want to be fearful or free?*’ ‘*am I making excuses for my fear?*’ Inculcating this habit of self inquiry nudged me to be authentic and let go of my assumptions. The realization that the world had not rejected me, I had closed of and squashed my voice, encouraged me to take risks and speak up. At times, I found to easier to write emails, rather than speak directly, because it gave me the space to calm my emotions and be articulate. Those emails also became my mirror to sift through my thoughts and discover insights. This habit helped me progress into writing articles.

Life is a gift and each breath of life is the best payment we receive in return. Let us cherish the gift of life, and not wake up to express gratitude only when we are close to losing it. Let us express freely to experience the true joy of life.

Albert Einstein said, “*Everything that is really great and inspiring is created by the individual who can labour in freedom.*”

Points to reflect

- ▲ *Freedom is your ability to express our truth fearlessly*
- ▲ *Lack of awareness prevents us from knowing our true expression*
- ▲ *Our life is an outcome of our choices*
- ▲ *Confront the persona that you have created for survival*
- ▲ *Let us cherish the gift of life*