

# ENDING THE SEARCH

*From Spiritual Ambition  
to the Heart of Awareness*

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**sounds true**  
BOULDER, COLORADO

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# WHAT ENDS THE SEARCH BEGINS THE SEARCH

*Seeker, do you remember?  
Listen in the silence . . .  
Your own heart is calling you back home.*

**T**he spiritual search is a call to remember who or what you essentially are. What ends the search is actually present from the very beginning, beckoning you to come home. In truth, you are what you seek, yet you must make that discovery for yourself.

However your spiritual search begins, you undoubtedly imagine you are taking a journey in time—a journey from wherever you find yourself now to where you hope to arrive in the future. You believe time will take you to the timeless. You want your search to lead you from *here* to a desired *there*, but you do not know the way. And even if you are following a path, you may encounter obstacles that seem insurmountable. Though you are being called to remember the essence of what you are, fear arises when you think about stepping out of your time-bound idea of yourself into the freedom of what is timelessly present here and now. You want to remain in the known, even as you are invited into the Unknown. A tale told in the Sufi tradition beautifully illustrates some of your challenges.

## THE STORY OF A STREAM

A stream traveled from a distant mountain to find itself at the edge of a desert. He had crossed many other barriers on his journey, but when he arrived at the desert, his water kept disappearing, no matter how fast he rushed into the sand. He was certain that his destiny was to cross the desert to the mountains on the other side, but he did not know how. A voice from the desert whispered softly that the wind crosses and therefore so could the stream. When the stream argued that the wind could fly but he could not, he was told that he would first need to be absorbed by the wind. But the stream did not want to lose his individuality, fearing he would never regain it. The desert voice, attempting to ease the stream's concerns, put it another way, explaining that the wind takes up the water, carries it across, and lets it fall again as rain, the same rain that becomes a river.

The stream wanted reassurance that this was true; he wanted to remain the same stream. But he was told he could not, in any case, remain the same. He either would be carried by the wind or would eventually become a quagmire dashing against the desert for years. Even his name, Stream, was due to the fact that he did not know what part of him was the essential one.

On hearing a reference to essence, the stream seemed to remember—or did he?—that once he had been held in the arms of the wind. And though he was frightened, he eventually raised his vapor into her arms and was gently carried across, where rain fell as it reached the top of the mountain far away. The stream was learning his true identity, and yet the vast desert sands, quiet and still, simply watched life happen this way every single day.<sup>1</sup>

What do you imagine has begun your search, carried you this far, moved you to pick up this book? Life, in its wholeness, shows itself as stream, desert, wind, rain, and river—movement, stillness, spirit, and form. It moves as your longing, your search, your confusions, and your fears. It even manifests as your ideas about a self that seems distant from its source, distant from its desired destination.

The stream is the stream of life, your life, or the mindstream of Consciousness, your consciousness. It is continually flowing,

beginning and ending in its source, coming upon moments of joy, moments of ease, moments of challenge, and moments of crisis, when nothing you have used in the past seems to aid you in crossing a seemingly impossible barrier. And yet if you are a spiritual seeker, somewhere you have a sense that your destiny is to cross the desert, that you will find your home ground on the other side. But you are told you must let go of your habitual ways, step out of your definition of yourself, and allow the wind to take you across.

Like the stream, you do not want to lose your individuality. You are afraid of the unknown; you want reassurance. How can I know whether what the wise one says is true? Do I take the risk and allow myself to be carried without knowing what is on the other side? Or do I stay safe in my identity as a particular stream? But you are told you cannot remain the same in any event. Life is continually moving. In the midst of a crisis, when you do not know the way out, something may open enough for you to hear the One who whispers: *You do not yet know what is most essential about you.*

There is a desert in each of us—not the dryness of our intellect, but a desert called Silence. Eventually we come upon this Silence, and perhaps we fear that we will keep getting absorbed, and lose something important. But it is from the Silence we may hear the whispers of our own knowing, even if that knowing appears to come from someone or someplace “else,” inviting us to remember and return to what is most essential.

Hearing the whisper, there is a vague memory of your life as Spirit—or was there? Is it all a lie? To take the next step means trusting, surrendering. It is not necessarily the obvious step from the perspective of your rational mind, and yet something moves in you. There is an impulse deep within that draws your attention toward what lies beyond the known. Something in you says, “I have to find out. I have to know for myself what is true.” And perhaps, if you are ready, you let the wind take you, not knowing she has always carried you. You will open to the unknown. Will you learn your true identity?

Before we begin to contemplate the story of a journey—whether it is the stream of birth, life, and death, the mindstream that has been moving from beginningless time, or the story of an individual’s

spiritual journey—notice something important. Where is it taking place? In the words on this page? On a mountain far away? In the birth of an infant, or in a memory of beginning your spiritual search? It is all occurring in awareness, is it not? Something so simple as being aware we take for granted. We are fascinated by stories—the ones we read, the ones we tell ourselves, the ones we believe about who we are. But none of them would be knowable if you were not aware. Yet do you know who it is who is aware? “I am!” you reply. And I would ask, “Who is that?”

## WHAT ARE YOU SEARCHING FOR?

If you consider yourself a spiritual seeker, what are you searching for? What is the deepest longing of your heart? You may have many desires, but what is the most profound one, the one your heart knows is true, even if your mind does not?

You may believe that you are seeking awakening, enlightenment, Self-realization, or God realization. Perhaps you are seeking freedom, peace, love, happiness, truth, or an end to suffering. You may imagine that you know who is searching, who will be the “finder,” who will achieve the end goal, and who will be the primary beneficiary. But do you *truly* know what you are seeking, what is motivating the search, or who it is who is seeking and wants the search to end? Learning your true identity is what awakening is about. The identity we have with name and form is not our true Self; it is a costume, a mask we are wearing. What is looking out from behind your mask?

We seek for what we believe is not here now. But perhaps we are searching in the wrong place. Perhaps we are searching in our time-bound mind for the timeless. Perhaps we imagine that the “narrator” of our thoughts is who will be able to end the search through its own efforts and ambition. We may have many ideas about what awakening looks like, who awakens and who does not, what the “end” of the search will bring. But can you open to the possibility that what you are seeking is what you truly *are*? It may seem impossible, but only because you are looking for something “out there” to complete you

or love you, rather than looking within for your true Self, that which is already whole and loves its own expression as you and this world more deeply than your mind can imagine. It may seem impossible, because you have never questioned your ideas about the “self” whose identity you think you know.

## IMPULSE TO BEGIN THE SEARCH

We may appear to become spiritual seekers in different ways, for different reasons, but at some point, something calls us toward something beyond who or what we imagine we are. Something moves to awaken itself from slumber; an impulse arises from beyond the mind to “know” what cannot be known by thought but can be sensed, felt, intuited, revealed, in the Heart of Silence. Something unknown, yet vaguely remembered, seems to beckon us toward its mystery. Like the stream, we imagine we begin a journey that will lead us from “here” to “there.” We begin to want to know God, Truth, peace, or this thing called “enlightenment.” The desire to “know” can even begin in anger.

When I was twelve, my mother died suddenly on the day after Christmas. I had asked for a robe that Christmas, my first Christmas that I considered myself too old for a doll, but at the last minute, I had changed my mind and decided I wanted a doll. When Christmas morning came, there was a robe and no doll. Little did I know that within a day, my childhood would come to an abrupt halt. The next April, Easter fell on the day that would have been my mother’s birthday. I was raised in a Christian family and was told the biblical story that if one had faith the size of a mustard seed, one could move mountains. I was quite certain I had faith bigger than a mustard seed, and I prayed fervently that she would be resurrected on Easter, the same as Jesus. That Easter morning I set a place for her at the breakfast table. I waited all day for her to come back.

I had been told that it was God who gave life and took it away, and so I became very angry with God. This was a God whom I felt had betrayed my faith. I wanted to know who this was who had the power of life and death. In retrospect, this was the moment that began the

search—not for myself, not for my true identity, but for God. As time went by, my anger subsided, but my desire to know God grew, as did my desire to know the truth about life and death.

How did your search begin? And isn't it always about being happier, being someplace else besides here and now? It may seem strange, but the very thing we are searching for both begins and ends our search. It is moving to know itself, to love itself, to wake itself up from its false identification with a supposedly separate body-mind. Whether we call spirit Truth, Consciousness, or God, it has always been “landlady and tenant / windows and walls / the fire in your hearth / and the cold wind blowing at your door.”

Just as in the moment of birth, death is already present, and in this moment that we call “time,” the timeless is present, so it is that what ends the spiritual search is present in its inception. We may have had a vague interest in spirituality, or perhaps experiences in childhood or beyond that have given us intimations of something transcendent or mysterious. However, a true spiritual impulse begins to draw our attention toward it, with varying levels of intensity, anticipation, curiosity, and/or fear.

Throughout history sages have spoken and written eloquently from the deepest understanding about ultimate Truth. While that Truth can neither be known nor understood through words, masters from every spiritual tradition have provided abundant, profound, and beautiful pointers. One has only to taste the words of the ancient Indian *rishis*, the Taoist sage known as Lao-tzu, the Buddha, Jesus, or countless others to begin to resonate somewhere to that unspoken truth that touches the heart and speaks in the silence between words.

## MIND WANTS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THE HEART INTUITS

The mind, however, wants to *understand* what touches the heart and to achieve a desired goal. It sends us on a journey. The goal may be to “know” what others seem to know or to have a desired experience that matches what others have described. The seeker's mind wants to discover,

label, and define the truth to which the sage's words or life actions point. The mind seeks to know with its intellect what the heart intuitively. The seeker or the disciple studies, underlines, memorizes words, and sets up practices and prescriptions based on his or her understanding of the sage's life or the description of the sage's experience.

In the search for what will satisfy the heart's longing, the seeker imagines that it will be his or her own efforts—prayers or practices, sacrifices or service, behavior or beliefs, worthiness or faithfulness—that will ultimately bring about the desired goal. Even if the seeker pays lip service to the mystery of grace, he or she will still imagine that those who appear to have received such grace from God, guru, or life must really be more worthy, loving, earnest, disciplined, knowledgeable, or connected than the seeker.

Seekers are totally convinced that those considered “enlightened” beings are beings very unlike themselves. However, no one truly awake will tell you that awakeness is anywhere else than here and now or that it is not available to all. The Truth you may be searching for is present in you now. What we most deeply are is seeking *itself* in the seeker, seeing *itself* in awakening, and being *itself* in all of Being.

## WE ONLY LONG FOR SOMETHING WE HAVE KNOWN

Because we feel the impulse to awaken, we imagine awakeness is not present. Because we feel deep longing in our heart for Truth, love, the Divine, we imagine longing means lack. But we do not long for something we have never known. We might be curious, as for a food we have never tasted, but we only *long* for what we have known. When a deep spiritual longing is present, it is always for what is somewhere known but perhaps forgotten. We long for our home ground, where all is well, even when the surface of our life may not seem to be.

Rather than believing that a longing means a lack, try following your longing back to its source. Our true heart casts out a fishing line from itself in order to catch the elusive ego, darting to and fro in the Ocean of Awareness like a fish looking everywhere for water when all

about there is nothing but ocean. When the ego fish takes the bait, the Fisherman of the Heart begins to reel it back in to itself. Longing is a powerful motivator to begin the search. Our longing is what calls us back home through what T. S. Eliot referred to as the “unknown, remembered gate.”<sup>2</sup> We begin the search from the end and end the search where it begins.

The irony is that we have always been what we have been searching for. The truth of YOU is ever present. But like the stream in the Sufi story, we believe we began in one place and need to end up in another, and so we miss what is the most essential. It is in discovering the essential that we taste our freedom.

# SPIRITUAL IMPULSE AND SPIRITUAL AMBITION

*There is a jewel hidden in each heart,  
shining from emptiness.  
Treasure even the smallest glimpse.*

## THE JEWEL

Whoever you are, you would not be reading a book such as this if you had not had a glimpse of the jewel. Perhaps as a child you sensed a world that touched a deep and mysterious wonder. You may have had an experience you felt certain no one would understand and so you never shared it, but it has stayed in your heart—some kind of knowing that seemed at once completely true and yet confusing to your mind. Perhaps there was a moment in a temple of trees when a shaft of light from the rising or setting sun struck the jewel of your heart. You may have been hiking on a mountain when you suddenly were stopped by joy, wonder, or a sense of awe. It was not just the view, the misty colors of the many ridges you could see in the distance. Your senses touched the Infinite, and you experienced beauty; something vast touched the vastness within you. Its radiance may have come as moonlight playing on the ocean's waves. It may have shone through a piece of art, a poem, or a dream that touched what connects us.

You may have had a glimpse while sitting in a church or a temple, when the silence and reverence of place seemed to invite you to the silence within your Self. Perhaps you felt it when a baby gazed into

your eyes from the eyes of such innocence that all of your defenses melted in such sweetness. The jewel may have shone through the stories you have read, heard, or experienced from great spiritual masters in various traditions. What sparkles is not the stories or words; it is something deeper that touches your heart.

The jewel seems to shine most brightly when we experience love—love for a person, a pet, a moment. When my young grandson lovingly traces with his finger the prominent veins that stand out on the back of my aging hands and tells me they remind him of rivers, we both experience the jewel, though we do not call it by any name.

## SPIRITUAL IMPULSE

It is the jewel that gives rise to our impulse to know it more deeply and to want it to be revealed more consciously. Bubbling from the hidden depths of our Being arises an impulse to know what seems to lie beyond our limited ideas of who we are. There arises a sense of mystery, an impulse to know God, Truth, Self, enlightenment, love, or peace. This is spiritual impulse. Infinite Truth or Spirit has placed a longing in our heart, in the heart of our awareness, to know itself, to awaken itself beyond egoic consciousness. This impulse transcends both ego and self. We could call this impulse “the seed of enlightenment,” a seed that has been planted deep within and perhaps has lain fallow in the rich soil and silent ground of our Being.

However, at some point, it begins to grow itself, a tiny shoot at first, trying to move toward the light. It begins to be nurtured in the experience of the seeker as it moves toward fruition. But its growth and blossoming are not for the benefit of a single individual but for the benefit of the whole. Awakening is not a feather in the cap of the spiritual ego. The desire to claim it for the “me” is the ego’s spiritual ambition, and this ambition can actually hinder the growth of the seed and limit the fullness of its blooming. Spiritual impulse is a gift from our infinite ground; spiritual ambition is the desire to *possess* knowledge rather than to receive it.