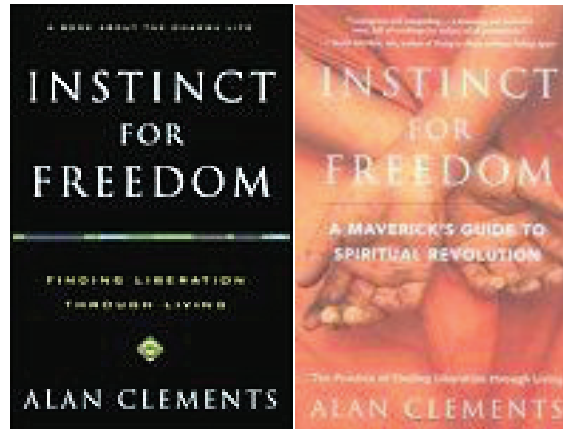


# Instinct *for* Freedom

A Book About Everyday Revolution —  
Finding Liberation Through Living

by Alan Clements



[An Excerpt]

## THE MYSTERIOUS TOTALITY THAT WE ARE

Outer life — as seen through the senses and the circuitry of consciousness — is a hyper spatial vibrancy of complex 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 particles, and humans are holographic excitations consisting of those very same particles. Universal intelligence may be so multidimensional that life as we know it — every aspect of the cosmos — may be the inside of a single molecule of DNA. We may be a molecule of God among hundreds of trillions of other God molecules within a being — an entity, a person, a form of life — we have no idea about. Or maybe we are so microscopic that our infinity is a single cell in the cerebral cortex of a creature crawling along a corridor somewhere in some world — a creature imprinted with the memory of the evolutionary code of consciousness, while oblivious to the greater context of its life, the infinite cosmos. It's possible. That's life — an unfathomable sea of potentialities: a magnificent and maddening blend of organic 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 order to try to make some sense of it all, to bring it under control. We are in an awesome situation.

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

Life is a polarity of opposites, a simultaneous heaven and hell, a yin-yang of torture and ecstasy, not

easily reconciled this or that way. It is our instinct for freedom that compels us to push the boundaries of our confinement, seeking to transform chaos and confusion with intuition and reason, dancing at the edge, where knowledge and love emerge from mystery.

On my final day in Burma back in 1996 I met with U Kyi Maung, my eighty-year-old Burmese friend and mentor. As a freedom fighter within Burma's nonviolent revolution he has been imprisoned twice, spending eleven years in solitary confinement. I feared he would be rearrested at any moment. Soldiers loyal to the dictatorship were on the road outside the compound. I asked him, "Sir, if you are rearrested, what words would you like to leave for others to carry on the struggle for freedom?"

In a slow and reflective tone he replied, "For the coming generations I would emphasize two most important things: education and a deep sense of history. Knowledge is essential. They should learn about the world at large. This will assist them in shaping their own lives, freely.

"To grasp history is to grasp the importance of interrelatedness — the causes, conditions, and consequences of thought and action and how they affect the development or demise of civilization — human existence at large. Everyone plays a part. The gift of life is to play that part with profound responsibility. The twentieth century has taught us great lessons in all aspects of human involvement. There have been some advances humankind could never have imagined. In this century we have seen the folly of ideologies, such as Fascism and Communism, which are inconsistent with creativity and the flourishing of the spirit. From the nineteenth century came the rise of the British Empire that sent a plague of exploitation around the world. Yet it too was humbled. We have witnessed all types of conflict, from urban violence to global wars, from bolt-action rifles to the nuclear bomb, typewriters to computers, a revolution in music and dance. There's just so much, and within it all have come a few good men and women with vision, that remarkable gift to see our tomorrow today. Their gifts are renewing our hopes for the future of the planet, and our survival as a species. It's all about interrelatedness. From its full exploration I believe will come the flourishing of civilization, and not its untimely demise."

He paused briefly. "As for me, don't worry. What I care about the most, and practice off and on throughout the day, is to be aware. That's all. To be aware. See, I have pieces of paper in my pockets that I carry with me: quotes, inspiring reminders. They refocus my mind on the here and now. That is the most important thing to me. To be present. Awake. Aware. My eleven years in prison were severe, but I used the time to my advantage. I never forget that what I am seeing now — that pale green line streaking across the pond, or the shadow of the tree across your leg — disappears the moment I turn my face. This is life's simplicity. Just the here and now. Aware that nothing is permanent.

"That barbed-wire fence across the back of Aung San Suu Kyi's compound over there — why worry about the presence of such an irritant? It's insignificant. Now if I worry about anything, it's that I might lose this sense of awareness. So I guard it as something precious. Things pass . . . that I have seen. Life is what you make it, now. So let us put our energies into life. Into understanding our interrelatedness. In this way I try not to lose my perspective."

I spent six months meeting with this wise statesman. I had bonded deeply with all he stood for, with Burma's struggle for freedom, and how their struggle "over there" is connected with our struggle for freedom "right here."

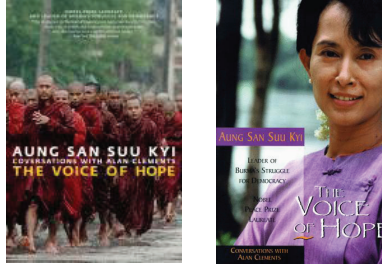
I had a tear in my eye as he walked me to the door. With characteristic warmth U Kyi Muang said, "Don't worry. When death comes, let it come. What I do fear, however, is that I would be so weak that I would choose the easiest way out, to lie around in bed all day and read some book on the collapse of yet another totalitarian regime." We both laughed and said goodbye.

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