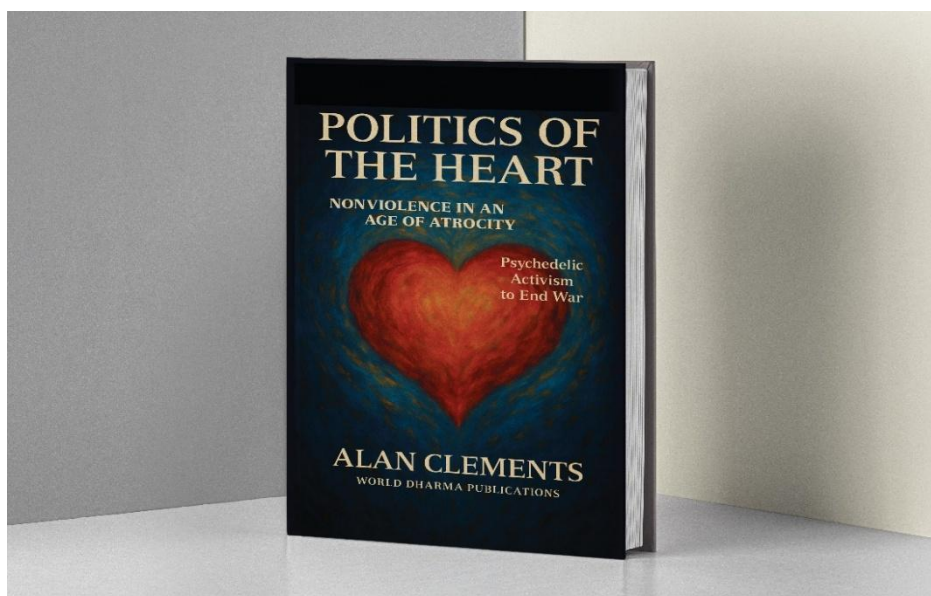


# A Q&A with Alan Clements

## Politics of the Heart

### Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity — Psychedelic Activism to End War

*On consciousness warfare, nonviolence, and the revolution of perception*



### Introduction

Alan Clements has spent his life inhabiting that dangerous in-between — the frontier where inner awakening and outer resistance mirror each other, and where the courage to speak becomes its own form of liberation. One of the earliest Westerners ordained under the great Burmese Buddhist meditation masters Mahāsi Sayadaw and Sayadaw U Pandita in Rangoon, he learned that awakening was not escape but exposure to one's own delusion, to the raw ache of the world, to the vulnerability that comes from seeing clearly.

Later, as a journalist, he was expelled from Burma for bearing witness rather than turning away—documenting not only the brutality of military dictatorship, but the revolutionary courage of those who refused to turn hatred into doctrine.

Over the decades, as an author and performer, Clements has come to see that conscience itself is a form of art—fragile, improvised, and perpetually at risk. This artistic evolution did not remain on the page. It spilled onto stages across the world, most notably through

his irreverent psychedelic–satirical performance work *Spiritually Incorrect*, a global one-man show that fused *Dharma*, stand-up, and wild-hearted theatre.

In it, he dared to expose the pitfalls, shadowlands, double lives, and comic delusions of being both spiritually driven and unmistakably human—all while skewering the commodification of consciousness with a Wildean wit and theatrical defiance. That lineage—that courage to misbehave spiritually—quietly infuses *Politics of the Heart*, not as shtick but as a tonal undercurrent: humor as de-programming, satire as revelation, theatre as a truth-serum for our shared delirium.

His trilogy—*Conversation with a Dictator: A Challenge to the Authoritarian Assault*, *Unsilenced: Aung San Suu Kyi—Conversations from a Myanmar Prison*, and now *Politics of the Heart: Nonviolence in an Age of Atrocity—Psychedelic Activism to End War*—traces an artistic evolution of freedom. It forms a single moral continuum—from the anatomy of oppression, to the resurrection of conscience, to the humble practice of inner freedom amid outer collapse and unraveling.

If *Conversation with a Dictator* exposed the anatomy of authoritarianism, and *Unsilenced* gave voice to the undying courage that opposed it, then *Politics of the Heart* enters like a quiet insurgent—not to proclaim, but to overhear what history tries to whisper. It becomes a contemplative manual for remaining awake, permeable, and exquisitely human in an age where tyranny has abandoned uniforms and now hides in code, in scrolls, in reflex and rhetoric—a ghost architecture shaping the way we think, feel, and breathe.

In that sense, *Politics of the Heart* did not begin as an idea but as a rupture. Clements wrote his first notes in late October 2023, just weeks after the October 7th horror in Israel, when the world cracked open once again and a truth he had long known—yet allowed to drift to the margins—surged back with a renewed *Dhamma* clarity: that suffering is not an aberration or a distant catastrophe, but the recurring pulse of *saṃsāra's merciless churn*.

Part memoir, part story, part political-cultural analysis—and part sacred satire—it unfolds as a *Dhamma-infused*, existential mandala, with fifteen interwoven sections forming the symbolic spokes of a modern *Wheel of Life*. A *literary saṃsāra*—cyclical, raw, and redemptive—where art, activism, and awareness turn as one. At its radiant center—*nirvana-like*—is freedom: not as concept but as communion—the lived rhythm of conscience itself, reborn through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the *intelligence of interbeing* as a luminous new form of politics: *the Politics of the Heart*.

Clements dares to write at the edge of his own self-censorship and re-wilded sanity—a fearless descent into moral imagination where philosophy meets performance art and awareness becomes theatre. Written with a wink, a prayer, and radical sincerity, it stands

as a manifesto for the risk-takers in us all—those audacious enough to live truthfully, lucidly, in an age addicted to compromise and illusion.

Part Oscar Wilde, part Ginsberg, and part a truth-seer with a rebel's grin, the book dances between sermon, spoken word, and revelation. It's a serious comedy of awakening from the algorithmic hypnosis of self-looping and distraction—and a hymn to the erotic, creative intelligence within us—what Clements calls *eroticized ubuntu*: the art of liberating entanglement, where shared humanness becomes the highest act of creation.

The chapter *The Therapy of Truth and the Politics of Imagination aka Deprogramming the Dominator Gene—Psychedelic Activism and The Six Planetary Pestilences* is both prophetic and absurd, a *dhamma-oriented exorcism* for the collective and elite imagination—a kind of *existential trauma therapy* disguised as satire. With irreverent precision and luminous compassion, Clements exposes the six forces eroding human sanity: greed, militarism, surveillance, propaganda, amnesia, and despair. Through this fusion of *psychedelic activism* and moral psychology, each symbolically presented pestilence becomes a mirror—not to condemn, but to awaken. It is both diagnosis and initiation, where laughter and lucidity dissolve delusion, and *psychedelic-awakening* itself emerges as the most subversive act of global resistance.

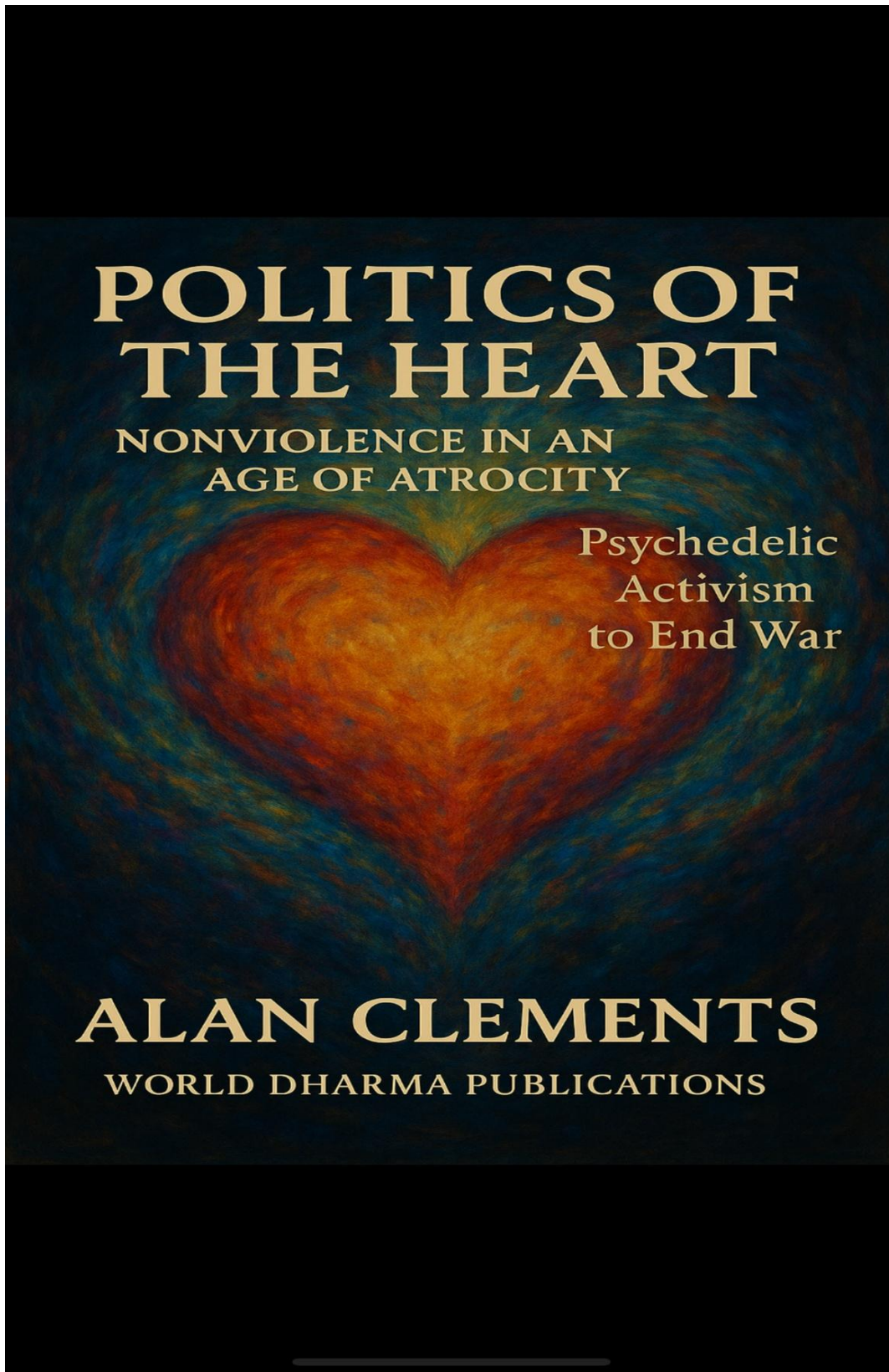
Rooted in the timeless *Dhamma*, *Politics of the Heart* invites us to break with conditioned fears and biases and to discover freedom not only in imaging nonviolence but in the poetics and practice of perception itself—the *beautification of consciousness*, the revolution of the heart, and the reverence for all life that is the very oxygen of our being.

Here, harmlessness is not a tactic but an atmosphere. Consciousness becomes resistance, tenderness its uprising, empathy the most radical intelligence of all.

Blending the moral lucidity of Hannah Arendt, the existential depth of Václav Havel, and the contemplative precision of a former Buddhist monk who could never quite leave monasticism behind—with just enough George Carlin to keep enlightenment from getting pretentious—Clements forges a genre entirely his own: *lyrical journalism as spiritual insurrection*. He writes like a truth-addict in recovery, armed with a conscience and a punchline, reminding us that awakening isn't sterile—it's rebellious, inconvenient, and sometimes hysterically human. Yet do not be mistaken—this book is lethally nonviolent, deadly serious: a mad, beautiful attempt to save our species from its addiction to conquest, its romance with domination, and its recurring flirtation with genocide.

To read it is to enter a theatre of conscience—a dialogue with the future—and to remember that awakening, once begun, is contagious.

*“It is better to be hated for what you are than to be loved for what you are not.”*  
André Gide, *Les Nouvelles Nourritures* (1935)



## A Q&A with Alan Clements

**INTERVIEWER:** Alan, *Politics of the Heart* feels like an uprising disguised as meditation—quieter than your earlier work, yet somehow more explosive. What ignited this book, and why now?

**ALAN CLEMENTS:** Because something in the world — and in me — reached its saturation point. Not in a catastrophic way, but in a lucid one. I began to see, with painful clarity, that the chaos around us isn't just the noise of modern life; it's an architecture. A system designed to keep us outraged, exhausted, addicted to distraction, and strangely obedient to forces we never voted for: the media's hysteria loops, the binary political cartoon, the global arms industry masquerading as "security," and the high priests of profit quietly celebrating our despair from their portfolios.

I felt an inner refusal rise — not anger, but a kind of moral sobriety. A recognition that sanity, meaning, and hope needed to be reclaimed, not as mantras but as lived experiences. That we must decathect from the spectacle, step out of the algorithmic trance, and return to the original pulse of being human: conscience, curiosity, tenderness, the courage to feel again.

So, I wrote *Politics of the Heart* as an act of restoration — a way to remind myself, and maybe others, that even in a fractured world, there is a deeper intelligence we can still trust. A quieter revolution. One that begins in the mind, moves through the heart, and eventually refuses to cooperate with the machinery that profits from our despair.

**INTERVIEWER:** You've spoken of a moment when the world pressed in on you with unusual force — when global events felt suddenly intimate. What was happening then that moved you to begin writing?

**CLEMENTS:** More specifically, the ignition point was visceral. I wrote the first notes for this book in late October 2023—just weeks after the October 7th horror in Israel—when the world cracked open once again and I found myself absorbing the enormity of pain flooding Israel and then Gaza and, by extension, everywhere: Russia and Ukraine, Sudan, and my beloved Myanmar—and, most hauntingly, in those unlit interior corridors of denial within my own mind.

What unfolded in Gaza in the months that followed was an altogether new level of unthinkable atrocity—a devastation so stark that even naming it felt like stepping into forbidden moral territory. Something in me refused to look away—refused the seduction of self-censorship.

**INTERVIEWER:** You've said a single film helped crystallize the emotional and philosophical architecture of the book. What happened?

**CLEMENTS:** Around that time, I watched *The Zone of Interest*—Jonathan Glazer’s harrowing meditation on Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz, living with his wife and children in a beautiful home beside the extermination camp. Hedwig tending her flowers. Children laughing by the river. Guests arriving for picnics. Life proceeding with the serene banality of evil while mass murder unfolded a few feet beyond their wall.

And it struck me that the “zone” is not a historical anomaly; it is the architecture of the modern mind—the human capacity to live adjacent to atrocity and call it normal life. The film wasn’t a document of the past; it was a diagnostic scan of the present. It revealed how easily we adapt to the unbearable until the unbearable becomes ambient—a kind of psychic wallpaper—the background noise of our days. A quiet apocalypse we’ve learned to schedule around.

**INTERVIEWER:** Your work often returns to Myanmar. How did this moment intersect with your long relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi and the Burmese struggle for freedom?

**CLEMENTS:** My heart turned, as it always does, to my long-time friends—Burma’s elected leader and Nobel Peace Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and her chief advisor, Win Htein—both held in solitary confinement by Myanmar’s dictatorship, entombed in silence, denied the right to light, to care, to the simple presence of those who love them. I thought of the more than twenty-two thousand political hostages disappeared across Myanmar’s prisons.

Seen through the lens of Glazer’s film, their suffering revealed something even more terrifying: Myanmar has engineered its own contemporary “zone of interest.” Aung San Suu Kyi’s disappearance is not secrecy; it is strategy—a deliberate erasure so profound that the most basic question is now unanswerable: *Is she alive?*

For nearly five years she has been sealed away—no lawyers, no doctors, no diplomats, no family, no proof of life. This is enforced disappearance—a crime against humanity—and the world’s failure to insist on verification mirrors the same psychological architecture: horror normalized, cruelty bureaucratized, compassion outsourced to ritual. Her vanishing—and the vanishing of tens of thousands beside her—is not just a Myanmar crisis; it is a global test of conscience. And so far, the world is failing it—failing in ways that reveal the moral numbness of our age and the frailty of our global ethical imagination.

**INTERVIEWER:** Where did this rupture lead you as a writer?

**CLEMENTS:** For a moment, I tried to place myself inside their bodies, their breath, their darkness—a trembling exchange of self for other. I couldn’t stay long. Something in me faltered. Something in me opened. Something in me remembered.

I went to my notepad and sketched a raw outline for a talk I felt compelled to deliver: “*Dictatorship, Democracy, Dharma, and the Insanity of War.*” That outline eventually became a live presentation at Tom and Michelle Sewell’s Performance Studio One in

Ha‘ikū, Maui, in the summer of 2025—my first public statement pointing toward this book. That talk became the pulse, the quiet seed from which *Politics of the Heart* began to grow—the first articulation of a truth that refused to wait.

**INTERVIEWER:** Your earlier work focused intensely on Myanmar. This book feels wider—almost cosmological. Why widen the frame?

**CLEMENTS:** Because Burma is no longer an isolated tragedy. It is an x-ray of the human condition. And I realized that if I kept writing only from the heartbreak of Burma’s dictatorship, I’d be documenting the symptoms while ignoring the disease.

This time, I wanted to widen the circle—to speak to the planetary psyche itself—and to write as if clarity were oxygen. The wars around us were multiplying; the wars within us were metastasizing. I needed a language capacious enough to hold it all.

What we still call “politics”—red vs. blue, right vs. left—is no longer a sufficient map for the magnitude of our predicament. The violence of our era isn’t merely partisan; it’s psychic, spiritual, perceptual. We are living inside *a war on consciousness*—a quietly escalating war that masquerades as ideology while feeding on dehumanization, numbness, algorithmic hysteria, and the subtle permission to treat the “other” as expendable.

The old frameworks were collapsing. I needed a new language—a *Dharma-centric, trans-political language for an age of atrocity*, capable of holding the sacred and the profane, the psychedelic and the political, the grief of the world and the erotic intelligence of the heart. This book is my attempt at that language—a cartography of conscience for a collapsing world and a prayer smuggled into the future.

**INTERVIEWER:** You’ve described *Politics of the Heart* as “*existential punk Dharma*.” What does that mean to you?

**CLEMENTS:** When I say “*existential punk Dharma*,” I’m naming the collision point between awakening and irreverence—the *Dharma* stripped of its polite perfume, standing barefoot in the mud, refusing to become domesticated or ornamental. It’s awakening without anesthesia: consciousness unfiltered, unperformed, unwilling to pretend that spiritual life exempts us from the mess of being human. It’s the *Dharma* with a backbone and a sense of humor—fierce, tender, and radically allergic to bullshit.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, there’s a kind of moral voltage to it—a reclamation, not just a concept?

**CLEMENTS:** Punk wasn’t just a genre of aggressive rock in the 1970s; it was an uprising of anti-authoritarianism, a DIY ethic, a full-throated rejection of the sanitized mainstream. Even the word punk began as a slur—“hoodlum,” “nuisance,” “nobody”—which the movement reclaimed as a badge of rebellion. That’s the voltage I mean: taking

what was meant to diminish you and using it as ignition for truth. *Existential punk Dharma* carries that same refusal—a refusal to conform, to be spiritually cosmetic, to domesticate consciousness.

**INTERVIEWER:** And for you, this isn't abstract—it's lived?

**CLEMENTS:** And I didn't arrive at this through theory; I arrived there through confession. I've lived under my own dictatorship—the tyranny of being right, the propaganda of self. Every tyrant outside mirrors the tyrant within: our addiction to control, our fear of surrender, our worship of certainty. This book is my amnesty, my repentance, my declaration of inner independence.

**INTERVIEWER:** What does that inner independence demand on the page?

**CLEMENTS:** Part of that inner independence is a vow I carry into every page: above all, refuse disappearance. Refuse the vanishing of nuance, contradiction, inconvenient truth. Existential punk Dharma insists on showing the psyche in its raw, unretouched state—the sacred and profane sharing the same breath. To write without armor. To breathe without disguise. To let the heart speak before the ego edits—to let honesty interrupt performance.

Humor and hurt drink from the same river. The laugh that erupts in grief and the tear that escapes in joy are not opposites but twins—born from the same trembling source. In that seam where hilarity reveals its wound and sorrow reveals its wild sense of humor, I discovered something essential: the unguarded line—the place where writing risks too much, tells too much, and therefore liberates. It's where art stops performing and starts breathing—where language remembers it has a pulse.

**INTERVIEWER:** You speak about sincerity, asymmetry, and the unrelatable with almost devotional clarity. What draws you to those qualities now, at this stage of your life and work?

**CLEMENTS:** I don't trust purity anymore. Purity is too fragile. I trust sincerity—the willingness to be lost and still keep loving anyway. I trust asymmetry. I trust the weirdness that can't be branded. I trust the messy, awake, unmistakably alive gesture—the kind that refuses to hide behind the algorithmic aesthetic of “relatable.” Keep the unrelatable—it's atmosphere. It's oxygen. It's proof you're still here. The unrelatable is where the soul takes off its mask and dares to be luminous.

**INTERVIEWER:** So, what is *Politics of the Heart*, in its essence?

**CLEMENTS:** It isn't a counter-attack. It's a manual for lucid defiance—for remembering that awareness itself is rebellion, and tenderness the bravest form of dissent.



At its core, the book is an invitation to reclaim your inner sovereignty—the quiet, original dignity that society tries to edit out of you. It’s about recovering the capacity to actually feel again: to hurt, to cry, to love without permission, to laugh until the body remembers itself, to dance barefoot in your kitchen, to feed a stray bird, to get a dog or a cat and remember what uncomplicated devotion feels like.

It’s a call to walk in nature until the mind softens, to drive less and breathe more, to spend less and notice more, to soak your bones in the warm bathwater of divinity until self-compassion stops feeling like a luxury and becomes your baseline. It’s a reminder to keep your fingers and thumbs off your phone long enough to hear your own heartbeat, your own humor returning—the humor you thought you’d lost under the weight of manufactured outrage. It is a rebellion measured in breaths, not slogans—a revolution paced by intimacy rather than ideology.

In that sense, *Politics of the Heart* is about restoring the freedom of perception in an age designed to colonize it—restoring conscience as an art form, re-wilding the human spirit, and remembering that the heart, when unafraid, is the most subversive intelligence in the world. A heart that refuses fear becomes a revolution in slow motion—a quiet insurrection of presence.

**INTERVIEWER:** The subtitle includes “*psychedelic activism*.” But in your tone, it feels more like spiritual rebellion than political branding. What do you mean by “psychedelic” here?

**CLEMENTS:** Psychedelic doesn’t mean drugs or plant medicines, per se—though I do advocate for their responsible experimentation when they can interrupt, even briefly, the genocidal coma of state-sanctioned mass murder. Substances can be catalysts, yes—but catalysts for what? Not for spectacle, not for spiritual entertainment. For consciousness. For courage. For the willingness to finally face the deeper architecture of suffering: the programming itself.

*Psychedelic activism*, as I use the phrase, has nothing to do with chasing visions; it has everything to do with waking up from the hallucinations we inhabit daily—the trance of obedience, the trance of identity, the trance of being small, numb, predictable, programmable. It’s a mind revealed, a conscience felt again, perception unshackled, *Dharma intelligence activated*. A return to feeling in a world terrified of feeling. A return to conscience in a culture that treats conscience as an inconvenience. Psychedelic as in: the mind turned luminous enough to see its own bars and to stop mistaking them for personality.

Truth be, I’m not interested in hallucinations—the carnival of images on the cave wall of one’s own psyche. I’m interested in *de-hallucination*: the disciplined willingness to dissolve the stories we mistake for truth. Because the real hallucination isn’t the jaguar in your vision; it’s the unquestioned narrative you recite every morning about who you are

and what reality is. The real hallucination is both cognitive and cultural: the indoctrinated loops, the predictable reflexes, the inherited obedience. We hallucinate normalcy while calling it maturity—a tragic misidentification.

**INTERVIEWER:** You’ve coined the term psychedelic intelligence in your work. When you use that phrase, what are you actually describing?

**CLEMENTS:** Psychedelic intelligence, in its deepest form, is the moment awareness stops collaborating with its own confinement. It’s not an altered state; it’s a clarified one—the instant you catch yourself repeating your life too obediently, too neatly, too politely, and something in you finally steps outside the frame. That step is everything. It’s the doorway out of self-slavery and into liberating mutuality—what I call the cathedral of us, or what I have called over the years, “sacred reciprocity,” the field of dynamic awakening where separateness collapses and interbeing becomes self-evident, complex as it can be.

From a *Dharma* perspective, that step is the direct recognition of *paṭicca-samuppāda*—dependent origination—not as metaphysics but as lived immediacy: seeing that every thought, emotion, and identity arises in relational conditions, not in isolation. Psychedelic intelligence is the moment the mind catches itself tightening around a “self” that isn’t actually there, and releases its grip. That release is not mystical; it’s *anattā in action*—the self dissolving into a field of causes and conditions. It’s the *Satipaṭṭhāna* mind waking up inside the moment, observing phenomena without ownership, intimacy without possession.

For decades I’ve explored this territory on stage, and now in the book, through a satirical chapter on plant-medicine culture among the global elites. I’ve spent years parodying the commodification of consciousness—the boardrooms and breakfast buffets where trauma becomes a networking asset, where microdosing is sold as moral evolution, where “shamanic disruption” is floated as a portfolio strategy. That satire is there not as mockery but as medicine. Sometimes a single laugh reveals the shadow faster than any sacrament—humor as an accelerant for insight.

In classic *Dharma* terms, humor becomes a form of *vipassanā*—a piercing of illusion. The laugh exposes the cracked architecture of craving and aversion, the ego’s inflation and collapse, the whole carnival of becoming. Psychedelic intelligence includes this capacity: to witness the psyche’s theater without being cast in the starring role, to let experience arise and pass in the open field of mindfulness. It’s *paññā*—wisdom—grinning at its own former delusions.

And ultimately, this intelligence is devotional: a return to the raw data of experience—body, feeling, mind, and *Dhammas*—unfiltered by ideology or performance. It’s the *Satipaṭṭhāna* path lived with the courage of a punk and the tenderness of a monk. A way of seeing that dismantles the fiction of separateness and reveals interbeing as not poetic, but structural, inevitable, unmistakably true.

**INTERVIEWER:** You once described “consciousness warfare” as the defining conflict of our era. How do you see it now?

**CLEMENTS:** Less as a war, more as weather—something we all breathe. It’s not armies and guns anymore; it’s attention, harvested and sold. Exhaustion is the new occupation. Our nervous systems are the terrain; our scrolling is the surrender.

Our awareness—the capacity to feel, discern, imagine, love—has been captured, colonized, commodified. Our attention has been nationalized and sold back to us as entertainment. Until we reclaim the sovereignty of the heart, there can be no politics of freedom.

Yet awareness doesn’t need to fight back with violence; it simply needs to see through the trance. Awareness isn’t a sword—it’s a tuning fork. It doesn’t cut; it resonates. It invites truth to sing itself awake—to recognize itself in us.

**INTERVIEWER:** Your earlier books roared with ferocity. This one feels more intimate—as if the revolution has moved inward.

**CLEMENTS:** Ferocity still matters, but it has to evolve into precision, patience, and tenderness—or it curdles into ideology. The older I get, the less I trust outrage. I trust presence—the breath as moral compass.

*Bhāvanā*, the cultivation of awareness, isn’t mystical; it’s training the heart to stay open in the blast radius of reality. I wanted the book to feel like walking the beach after the storm—salt still in the air, footprints half-erased, the sky torn open to a sudden rainbow. That fragile spectrum between despair and renewal is where conscience lives—where resilience becomes a form of grace.

**INTERVIEWER:** If you could distill *Politics of the Heart* into a single purpose?

**CLEMENTS:** To make awareness dangerous again—beautifully, nonviolently dangerous. To re-humanize perception. To remind us that sanity isn’t compliance; it’s compassion armed with clarity.

This book doesn’t want to persuade anyone. It wants to awaken conscience, not comfort it. It just wants to whisper: You’re not crazy for caring. You’re alive. Stay awake. Stay human.

It’s a book for those who dare to feel in a time designed to make us numb; for those who sense that nonviolence is not passive but revolutionary; for anyone exhausted by the binary cages of modern politics and longing for a trans-political horizon where conscience is the compass, not ideology—a horizon lit by the fierce subtlety of the awakened heart — a horizon wide enough for all of us.

**INTERVIEWER:** And your final word, Alan?

**CLEMENTS:** Stay awake. Stay tender. Stay precise. And when you fail—as I do, daily begin again, barefoot. That’s the real revolution. Not to conquer, but to remember what it feels like to belong to life.

To meet reality without armor and still say, “I love you.”

That, to me, is the *politics of the heart*—not a doctrine, but a devotion. A wild vow whispered in the ruins: *love anyway*.

And because a *politics of the heart* must begin with the heart itself, I would add this: to those I have faltered with or caused pain—a bow from the deepest quiet I know. We are human. We bruise one another with our fears and heal one another with our light. Somewhere between the two, the *Dharma* keeps teaching us. Beneath the sorrow, we are kin—bound not by blood but by the trembling truth of *anicca*, this radical impermanence in which all things rise and fall.

If we never meet again, know this: you are loved. Everything I would care to say to myself, to the world, and to the future of life—I have said, as honestly as I can, in this work. Take the dying out of your living—the small betrayals of your own radiance—and offer instead the raw, uncensored gratitude of being alive at all in this trembling world.

From my heart to yours—may we have the spiritual courage to refuse the internalization of the oppressor’s hatred and violence, and to foster a *politics of the heart*—radical resilience, compassion, wonderment, love, patience, and tolerance—the *hallmarks of an intelligence of interbeing*, a nonviolence that begins with you and me, here and now, in the fragile honesty of our own *politics of the heart*—a revolution woven from tenderness itself.

“In the end, all I have is the willingness to meet this world without flinching—to let my heart break open and call that breaking wisdom. The more I age, the more I realize that love is not a feeling but a form of courage, a way of refusing to abandon ourselves or one another. If my work says anything, let it say this: stay tender in a time that punishes tenderness. Stay awake in a culture begging you to disappear. And if you can’t do anything else, just love what’s in front of you—fiercely, imperfectly, and without permission.” Alan Clements

## BOOK INFORMATION

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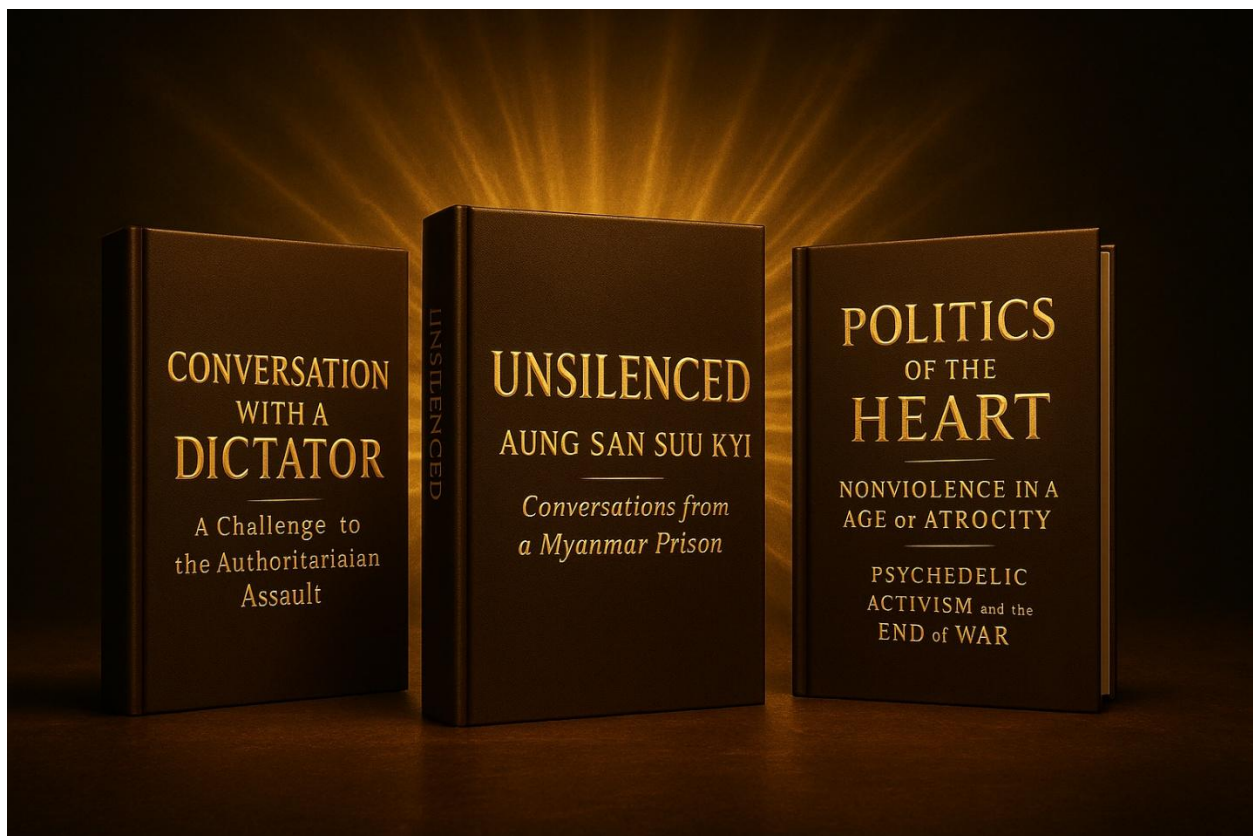
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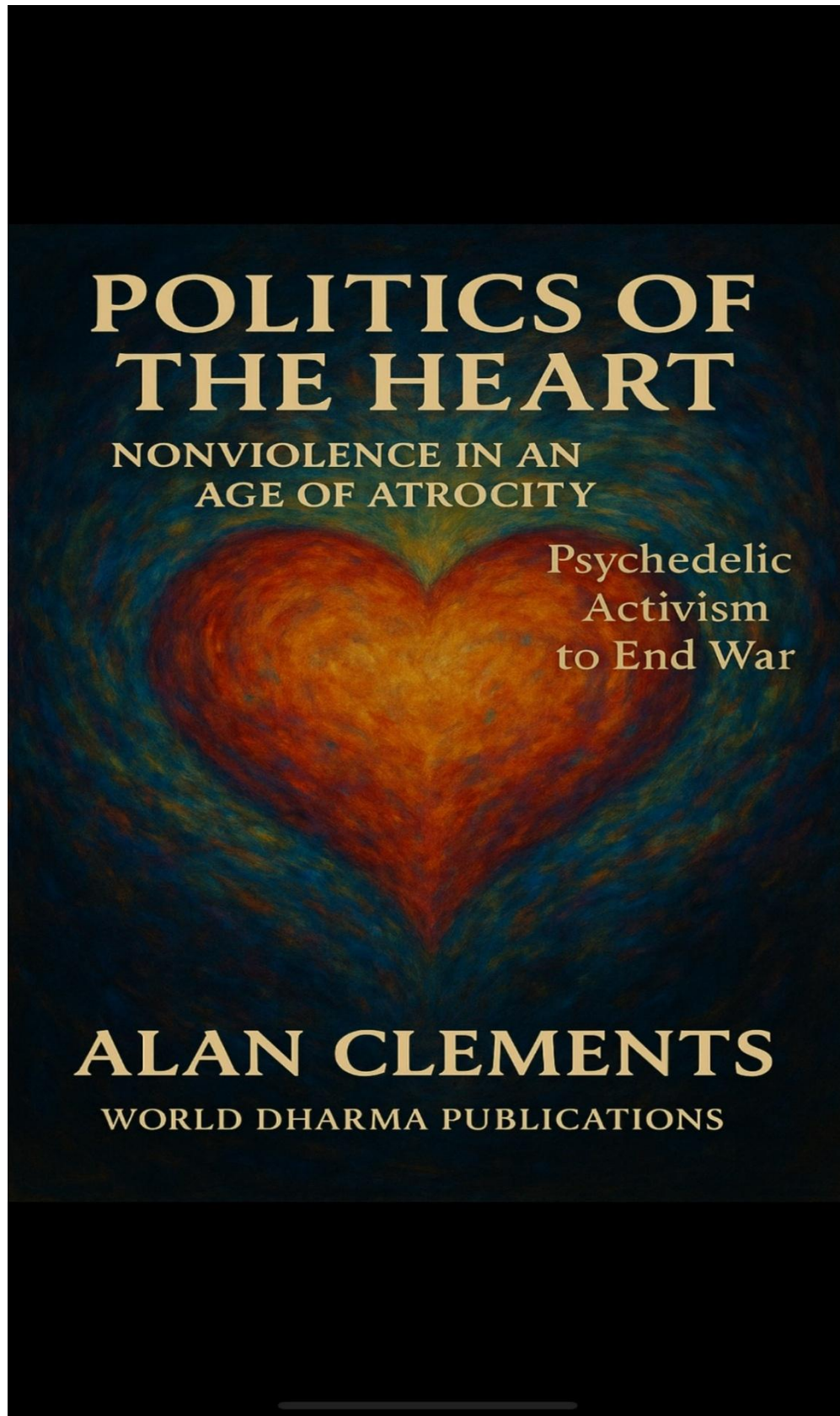
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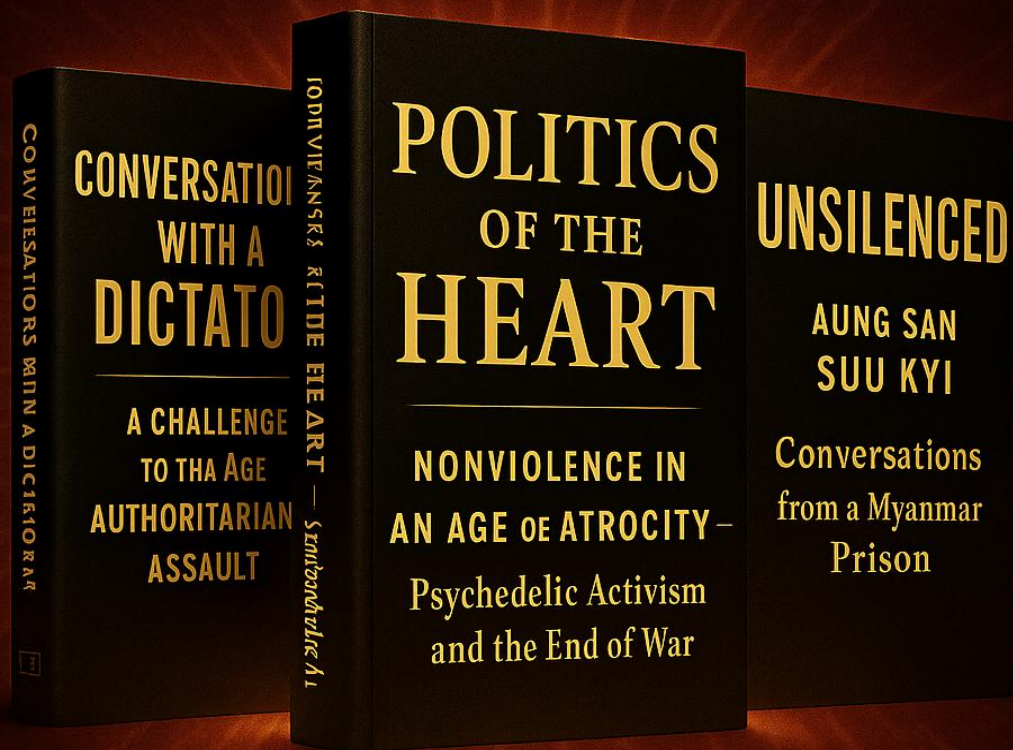
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