

Natural Freedom



An Interview with Alan Clements

By Sounds True Publishing

During his formal training as a Buddhist monk in Burma, Alan Clements had the good fortune to study with two of the most respected meditation masters of our time, the late Mahasi Sayadaw and his successor Sayadaw U Pandita. Since then, Clements' experiences in the genocidal conflicts in both Burma and the former-Yugoslavia have led him to expand his teaching outside the realm of classical Buddhism, into an area he calls "World Dharma." His efforts on behalf of oppressed peoples worldwide have led Jack Healy, former Amnesty International director, to call Alan "one of the most important voices of our time." Alan is author of *The Voice of Hope: Conversations with Burma's (imprisoned) Noble Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi*, and *Instinct for Freedom—Finding Liberation Through Living*.

Sounds True: Please explain what you mean by "Natural Freedom."

Alan Clements: As fragrance is innate to a flower, so too is freedom innate to the heart. Freedom is our essence. This is as obvious as standing out in nature and asking, "Where is nature found?" It's all around us, and in us. When we know "true nature" as such, we wake up, we begin living again, and in some way, we stop dying inside. The Buddha called this realization Nirvana, or the "deathless." This is something we don't actually learn, so much as "feel into" as a progressive set of realizations. It comes from the inside out, and flows through the pores of our entire being. Herein lies natural freedom. Remembering we have nothing to fear when we are true to ourselves. The authentic spiritual life is not about fitting in, or transcending some imaginary self. It's about being a person, challenging fear, and doing something remarkable with our lives.

ST: How does this relate to classical Buddhism?

AC: To me the Buddha is a metaphor for radical courage and self-honesty. Blazing your own trail, following your most natural calling: the instinct for freedom. Furthermore, these teachings are rooted in a concept the Buddha explained as his basic attitude as he pursued liberation. He said he made each and every person he met his ultimate object of reverence. In other words, we cannot become free in isolation. Thus we must become devoted to life and not to dogmatic theories or teachings. We no longer need to be confined by the motifs of spiritual vs. non-spiritual, dharma vs. adharma, American vs. Tibetan, Vipassana vs. Dzogchen. We are so much bigger than that. It's time we evolved a new language of world truths, World Dharma, that transcends culture and nationalism, politics and religion, and all forms of tribalism. Natural Freedom is my attempt to open a door to a truly universal dharma — one that is transcultural, nonsectarian and utterly human. So, from the standpoint of my classical Buddhist training, Natural Freedom is both a distillation or essence of the past, as well as evolutionary, an expansion beyond it.

ST: What are the critical things we will learn on Natural Freedom?

AC: You may have had the experience of certain music that can elevate you effortlessly beyond yourself,

beyond identity, and other limiting filters. That is what I've tried to do with Natural Freedom: create good, "intuitive music" that is deeper than your mind, your thoughts, and all constructs. It consists of seven guiding principles (like songs on a CD), each with its own ambience and texture to be felt and absorbed over a lifetime — not a doctrine to remember. Simply, what I'm sharing is a radical transformative spirituality, with one overarching message: empower your entire being, live fully and in the broadest embrace of the present, make yourself irresistible, honor the innate beauty of being, and, most of all, make every aspect of your life a dance, an opportunity to liberate yourself and others from fear, narrow-mindedness, and ignorance, as well as expanding into compassion, open-mindedness and understanding. Ultimately, from taking that risk to be true to yourself, to risk it all for freedom, you will, doubtlessly, live into true love.

ST: Given the world today, where can we start as spiritual activists?

AC: As Dostoevsky once said, "The battlefield is the heart of man." The activist knows this and enters the battle where it really happens, inside the heart. Activism, like meditation, is an inner dance, the outside is merely a personification of one's own ignorance or wisdom. So firstly, you must celebrate your own dignity and innate beauty. If we cannot rejoice in our own freedom, we cannot understand and creatively support the aspirations of others, which is the basis of authentic activism. Secondly, we must be present, right here and now, with whomever we are engaging. Activism means the ability to show up with your heart, purpose, and passion, ready to serve, to help, to touch and be touched. Thirdly, you must try to communicate the preciousness of all life. Do not be fooled that enlightenment is a state beyond the person right in front of you. That is where activism becomes human: finding our liberation through living, right now.

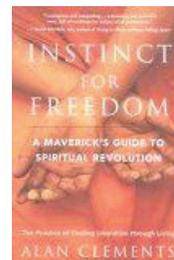
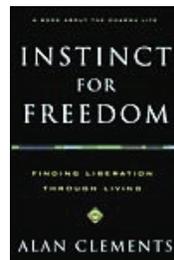
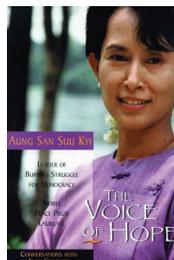
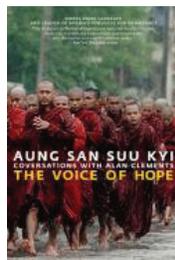
To excerpt "Instinct for Freedom" or "The Voice of Hope"
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Additional books by Alan Clements



The Voice of Hope - Conversations with Aung San Suu Kyi,
Burma's imprisoned Nobel peace laureate (Seven Stories, NY).