

DANCE  
OF A  
RICH YOGI

Liberation  
Through Loss

Ed Beckley

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# Dedication

*This book is dedicated to all those passionate seekers of truth who have had the courage to burn in the fire of loss and the discernment to emerge out of the other side dancing to the silent tune of freedom.*



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## Chapter One

# A Long Journey to Nowhere

*“It takes time to make a soul pregnant with God!”—Bhai Sahib*

It is January, 1999, and I am sitting in the passenger seat of a cab as we drive through the early-morning streets of Las Vegas. I am on my way to a Federal Prison located near Nellis Airforce Base, about twenty miles out of the city. As the sun peeks over the desert mountains, I stare blankly at the bleary-eyed people wandering out of the casinos, and at the frenetic commuter traffic. Where do they think they’re going with such desperation? I think.

Although I am at peace with myself, thoughts of what the coming fifteen months will be like buzz around in my head. This latest episode in my bizarre but interesting life began in 1996, when my multi-million dollar business was raided by the FBI and I was criminally indicted. The following two years were tough. I lost most of my money. As a result of two national appearances on NBC’s “Dateline,” I lost my reputation. I also lost my effort to clear myself, pleading guilty to one count of wire fraud.

Now I am to lose my freedom too. And although I do not know it at the moment, more losses will come. There will also be gains of a less tangible kind, and I will come to understand that my time in prison is just another stepping stone on a path of spiritual growth that I have been pursuing virtually all my life. I am to learn that all roads lead eventually to inner freedom—even roads to federal prisons.

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But all that is in the future as we get nearer and nearer to the prison.

In the gaps in my conversation with the cab driver, a warm and friendly guy with a Middle Eastern accent, I think back over my life. How did it come to this? How did I really get here? Images from my childhood loom up in my mind. One incident in particular seems to grip me for a few moments. It seems to say so much about how my attitudes about money, love and happiness have been formed, and how they have affected my whole life.

I close my eyes and a series of images come to me: a young boy is huddling away safely in the corner, afraid of being hit. The battle he's been witnessing had been going on for over an hour. The noise is deafening and he covers his ears with his hands. His heart is pounding and he feels sick to his stomach. There is a loud noise, like an explosion, and something is hurled in his direction. After that there is silence.

On the floor next to his quivering, frightened body is a tattered, crinkled twenty-dollar bill. His Mom breaks the silence with tears as she sobs, "There just isn't enough! There just isn't enough money!"

As his Dad stares blankly out the window, fighting back his own sadness, the boy sees his chance to get away. He scrambles for his room, fighting back tears. As he enters his refuge he dives to the bed and buries his head safely beneath his pillow.

It hurts! It hurts so much! He cannot stand it anymore. His parents' rage claws at his stomach. The fighting is always about money. "No!" his clenched body responds. "I don't want to feel this! Dad works so hard and still there isn't enough. It isn't fair!" He clenches his jaw, repeating to himself, "I won't hurt like that, I won't, I won't," as he drifts off into a restless sleep.

The images fade, but as I sit in the cab, those early years come back to me with a peculiar clarity. I remember that I decided even then, as a young boy, that in order to survive I had to achieve. The more achievements that I attained the happier I would be and the more money there would be. I wanted to be rich—then there would always be enough. I would come for some years to see money and happiness as inseparable partners in this life.

In the belief structure that I began to form as a child, I saw the world as a place to conquer—a place to achieve and to be special. I had to be somebody, distinct and unique! Never again did I want to feel out of control as I had when my parents argued. Never again did I want to feel that rage and those knife-like emotions tearing up my clenched stomach.

My parents encouraged this belief structure and were proud of my later achievements. However, they were also threatened by them. Great achievements and dreams of wealth fell outside their comfort zone. But I very much wanted my Dad's approval. I felt that I always had to prove to him that I was enough. I desperately wanted to be. My very existence seemed to depend on it. I had to prove something. I had to prove that I was enough in his eyes, and I would do it no matter what. The seeds of my compulsive need to be rich were sown.

So as I grew up, I learned to be an achiever. Achieving was an incessant activity for me. And as I achieved success in various endeavors at school and on the sports field, I became strongly attached to this image of myself. I acquired all kinds of labels that I believed applied to me. I had an entire basketful of them: I was a good speller, a good baseball player, a fast runner. I was also a brother, I talked too much, and I wasn't good at math. There were many more.

I would later come to think of these labels as mere accessories or ornaments to another understanding of myself altogether, but at the time they completely filled the "Ed basket." Along with my beliefs, they formed an identity called "me." Whoever Ed was had been compressed into a collection of labels, narrow values, and reactive beliefs.

I should add here that although my parents did argue, I grew up in a very loving family. Dad had a harsh critical tongue, but he was always there for us. He coached Little League, wrestled with us, took us fishing, and was a hard-working father. My mother was hard-working too. She was Den mother for the cub scouts; president of the PTA; scorekeeper for my baseball team. She was very attentive to all our needs, even though she could sometimes be very volatile and emotional. I desperately wanted to avoid her outbursts and at the same time felt very protective of her from my father's critical tongue. This interaction would lay the crazy pattern by which I would engage in all my future relationships.

As I sit in the cab nervously contemplating what may await me in prison, another dramatic incident from my childhood comes to mind. It has always been vivid in my memory because it is the first time I ever thought much about spiritual matters—something that was to become a raging passion in my life.

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During the summers of my first ten years, my family would make the thousand-mile road trip from our home in San Rafael, California, to Spokane, Washington, to visit my Mom's family. Frequently, Mom and Dad would take turns driving all night. Since Dad could only take limited vacation time, they really pushed to get to my Mom's family as quickly as possible.

On this particular trip, I was seven years old. Dad was driving the old Plymouth station wagon deep into the night. My brother and sister and I were asleep in the back, where Mom had made a makeshift bed out of blankets and pillows. It was very comforting to feel safe and secure with my family as we drove silently into the night through the forests of Oregon. With Dad around I always felt safe. He had been in World War II and drove a landing boat into Iwo Jima and Guadalcanal. He was a strong man, a John Wayne-type of guy.

Suddenly, I was awakened by a jolt. I heard the tires squeal and felt the car lurching out of control. Just as I looked up I saw the windshield shatter, and I could hear Mom screaming. "Oh, my God! We're going to die!" I thought. I fell forward from the back of the station wagon into the back seat. A box and other loose articles spilled over the back seat and hit me. My brother came tumbling on top of me, muttering some blurry-eyed groans. The car violently swerved, there was a loud thud, the hood popped up, and the car finally came to a stop.

My heart was beating out of my chest. I was scared to death. My first thought was that I was alive. Dad spoke first. "We hit a deer. It was a big buck," he said quietly, his hands still gripping the steering wheel as he stared straight ahead. The car's front grill was smashed, the hood was up and our windshield was cracked into the shape of a road map. I had been feeling so safe, so secure, and now, even though it was over, I was gripped by an overwhelming fear. Somehow, the world didn't seem safe anymore. I had always heard of others getting into accidents and getting hurt or killed, but somehow it didn't seem real. These cataclysms seemed more like something you would see on a TV show, until now. Mom quickly looked back, surveyed the mess in the back seat, and asked, "Is everybody all right?" We were all stunned, but nodded our heads in a daze indicating that we weren't hurt.

I had not had a lot of religious training, but somehow I reasoned that when unpredictable things like this happened, God had something to do with it. This accident was clearly out of my control and that was scary. The religious training I did have told me that God was vengeful. If you were bad

then unfortunate things would happen to you. If you were good you would be rewarded in this life or in heaven. The only explanation for this accident that made sense to me was that God must be angry with our family.

I was convinced that God was angry about my father's swearing. My Dad continued to use God's name in vain for even the most mundane references. He referred to neutral objects such as our Plymouth as the g—damn car. His boat was the g—damn boat. Even our dog was affectionately referred to as the g—damn dog. And, he really liked our dog. My Dad really didn't mean anything by this. It was just the way he talked. For a while, I tried to convince my father that he shouldn't use God's name in vain because bad things would happen. He told me that he would do what he g—damn pleased. Obviously, my seven-year-old logic was not very convincing.

After the accident, I decided that I had to take the family's overall welfare into my own hands by praying to God. I needed to place this part of my life in control. I felt pretty sure that God was also mad at our family because nobody ever talked to him. I knew that I got angry if I was ignored, so I figured God would get angry too. He would get especially angry since he was used to a lot of attention. I certainly didn't want some irate old man with a beard and wild eyes that looked like one of my favorite marbles angry with our family. On that fateful night of the accident, I decided that it was up to me to pray for our family. I would save us! After that night, I did not miss a day of prayer for over twenty years.

The God with whom I spoke was the personification of a wish fulfiller, protector, advisor, and counselor. I would negotiate with my God. When I was in a jam, he was expected to help. One time my sister was choking on some ice while we were all in the car with my Mom. My Mom had stopped and was frantically pounding my sister's back. My sister was turning blue fast so something had to be done. Now, my little sister had been quite a pest, but I didn't want her to die. I decided to pray: "Please God, don't let Kathy die. If you let her live I'll quit slugging her in the back when she pesters me." Just as I finished my prayer, Kathy coughed violently and a chunk of ice shot out her mouth like she had just hacked up a "lung biscuit." This ice hit me in the forehead and landed on the floor of the car. For a moment I stared at that ice chunk covered in bubbling saliva, as my sister continued coughing and breathing deeply. I figured that God had his ways of reminding me of the agreement that I had just made with him.

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This was the first serious thinking I ever did about God and spirituality. I was to do much, much more in later years, of quite a different kind.

And so I grew up. In addition to my naïve religious beliefs, I succeeded in conditioning myself to believe that happiness comes from doing and achieving something that would make me complete. I was always striving and looking to some future time in which life would become better. I desperately thought that I needed the future to complete myself—to find fulfillment. I was confident that all my doing would get me to a place where I would be happy and complete. When I graduate from college and get a good job, then I'll be happy. Later it became, when the kids get older then I can live the life I want, or when I make a million dollars then everything will be all right. I never enjoyed the moment, "as it is." Instead, I learned to manipulate the world for my benefit in relationships, business, sports, and school. People became currencies with whom I engaged to become complete—to get what I wanted. This ego known as Ed learned a host of strategies, techniques, and ploys to serve its own interests. I needed to control my world, and this was my constant subconscious and conscious affirmation.

It would be a long time before I would start to question these beliefs and attitudes, and even longer before they would finally shatter in a blaze of spiritual understanding.

But as I think back now, as I face my fifteen-month ordeal in a federal prison, I recall one incident in particular that indirectly started me on the path. I was a young man in graduate school, and I was about to have my first encounter with death.

It was a rainy and windy night in the San Francisco Bay area. My friend Wally and I had been sitting around all day trying to find some excitement.

I had known Wally since high school. He stood over six feet, six inches tall, yet he never weighed over 150 pounds. His ears were too big for his head, and he had toes long enough to grab a baseball and throw it. I and my friends used to refer to him as the scarecrow. Whenever we wanted adventure, creative fun or just wanted to get crazy, we knew Wally would come up with some great imaginative diversion. He had a rare gusto for life and always said, "while we're here let's live life to the max." And, he certainly did. We would surf in the roughest and most dangerous seas after a storm. Wally would lead us on the craziest motorcycle romps through hills, moun-



tains and bad parts of the city. And we even jumped into the nets of the San Francisco Golden Gate bridge. We would climb dangerously high cliffs without the use of repelling gear. Very early in life I found breaking conventional boundaries brought on an enormous rush of energy that was both exhilarating and allowed me to feel truly alive—I resolved that this is how I would live my life.

On this particular night, Wally suggested that we go out to the boat harbor where a neighbor of his kept a Columbian twenty-four-foot sailboat in which Wally had crewed on weekends, and “borrow” a smaller boat and take it for a spin in the storm. “Now, that would be a sailing challenge,” he said.

“Are you crazy? The water is way too rough!” I countered. “And you want to do this at night?”

Wally stood up and said, “Come on! It’ll be great. Maybe we can just stay in the harbor?”

“No way,” I protested. “There is no way I’m going to do that!”

Wally slumped back down, his enthusiasm dampened. He was silent for a few minutes, vigorously chewing at a pesky little hang nail, as we both stared at a meaningless TV show. He then jumped up with renewed vigor and said, “I’m going to call Frank and see if he’ll go.” Now that is the ultimate put down—when you won’t do something with a friend and he calls another friend to do the very activity that you refused.

A couple of minutes later, Wally returned with a big smile on his face. “Frank wants to go! What do you say, Ed? Let’s do it!”

After a moment’s hesitation, I did what any red-blooded twenty-two-year-old man would do. I decided to go for the fun. I agreed to drive so that if the bay was too rough we would turn around and go home.

We picked up Frank and headed out to Paradise Cay Marina. On the way, the rain stopped, the clouds parted and I saw a sliver of a new moon peaking through the mist. Maybe it won’t be so bad after all, I thought. As we pulled up to the far end of the marina where the landfill had ended and the bay washed up against the rocks, Wally grinned and with his unique brand of positivity said, “This is going to be great! The clouds seemed to be parting more rapidly now and the glimmer of a few distant stars could be seen blinking through the remaining haze. The sea looked rough and choppy, but I thought, with the weather clearing, maybe this little joyride will be all right, after all.

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We each zipped up our jackets, as we could hear the wind howling outside. I remember taking a deep breath, as if I was about to enter a doorway from which there would be no return.

Wally opened the car door to get out when he suddenly stopped and said, "Wait! You've got to hear this new Elton John song." He leaned over and turned up the radio:

Sat on the roof, kicked off the moss.

A few of the verses they got me quite cross...

But anyway, what I really mean...

My gift is my song and this one's for you!

"Wow," I said. "Great song." Wally looked at me with his inimitable smile and bounced out of the car. He yelled back at Frank and me, "See you in a few minutes."

Frank and I looked nervously at each other as we eyed the tumultuous bay and the ominous blanket of darkness before us.

Wally bounded down the road heading for the docks about two hundred yards away. He was going to untie a small eight-foot sailboat and row it out of the harbor around to the point where our car was parked. He would pick us up if everything seemed okay. Frank and I climbed back in the car to keep ourselves out of the cold wind and quietly listened to more songs. Cautiously, I said, "It looks pretty rough out there, Frank!" He agreed and it appeared that some of his initial enthusiasm for the adventure had waned. "I'm not sure that I want to go out there," I said, nervously.

Frank responded quickly, "I know that I don't want to go out there tonight."

I breathed a sigh of relief. "Finally, somebody is making sense." We could only hope that Wally would get through the harbor safely.

We sat in the car for about fifteen minutes huddled away from the cold damp wind. "Let's get out and try and spot Wally," I said. We figured that he should have gotten to our rendezvous point by that time. We got out of the car, walked to the end of the land "spit" and began yelling for him. It was dark and cold and visibility was getting worse. During this time, a fine mist of clouds removed the glimmering stars and a little rain began to fall again. Conditions were getting worse. We yelled for about fifteen minutes, without hearing anything but the sound of bay water slapping up against the rocks and the whistling wind.

Frank and I looked at each other, both understanding the seriousness of the situation. We ran in opposite directions yelling and trying to locate our friend, but the misty rain and clouds curtained our view with deeper darkness. The howling wind and the crashing surf made it more difficult for our voices to travel or to hear Wally. Oh my God, I thought. Wally's in real trouble! I knew it! I knew we shouldn't have done this! It was stupid!

Then Frank yelled, "I hear him!"

I ran toward Frank. "Where?" I shouted.

"Over there!" he yelled, pointing out to the bay into the thick misty darkness. Then, just as the wind shifted, I heard him too. I breathed a sigh of relief. "That turkey!" I said with cautious glee. But what was he saying? Through the wind and beating surf we could make out a distant cry of "HELP!" His voice was broken up; it was like we were listening to a CB radio. We stood there helplessly, hearing our friend yelling for help, wondering if he was in the boat or in the water. "Are you okay?" we both shouted back.

Finally, the wind shifted again and we heard him say, "I'm okay. The tide is taking me out—get the Reeds' boat."

Frank and I looked at each other wide-eyed. We knew there was no time for hesitation. We turned and ran for the docks.

Wally had left the key to the Reeds' Columbian sailboat with me just in case of such an emergency. I had never taken this boat out during the day without Wally being totally in charge. I had just taken orders. And yet I was about to embark on a rescue mission in what was now a full-fledged rainstorm, in rough seas, in the middle of the night. Frank had even less knowledge than I did about boating so he could only assist me. There was no time to think about this. We simply had to act.

I spent almost twenty minutes trying to get the engine started. It seems in my haste and anxiety to retrieve Wally I flooded it several times. Finally, the hum of the engines broke loudly into the stormy night air. Frank untied us and we were off to rescue our buddy. The wind was blowing violently and the rain was whipping into our faces as we chugged out of the harbor into the open bay. We were hoping to spot Wally just outside the harbor where we thought we had last heard him. We were both yelling as we left the harbor. Frank was on the bow of the boat. He was yelling for Wally with his hands cupped around his mouth and then he would quickly turn away, grimacing from the pelting raindrops.

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The bay was rougher than I had anticipated. We were moving up and down eight-foot swells. It was like being on a roller coaster. I was scared to death. I felt as if the boat would flip “ass over tea kettle” any moment. I wanted to rescue Wally and get back to land fast! But my inexperience and fear were overridden by my sense of loyalty to Wally. I knew that we had to save our friend.

Through the sheets of rain, I could see the dim gossamer lights of the Richmond Bay Bridge in the distance. Up and down we were riding the swells. I decided to head in that direction, since there seemed to be a strong current heading that way and I figured that was the direction that Wally would get swept. Frank and I both expected to spot him any moment. Our constant yelling would occasionally have been choked by the marauding sheets of rain.

We had been out of the docks over an hour and a half and still no Wally. A deeper concern was now setting in. It was well past midnight and I began to shiver from rain and the biting wind. I could see Frank on the bow completely soaked with both arms folded, rocking back and forth trying to stay warm. We were both yelling for Wally. We hadn't heard a sound from him since he told us that he was okay. A deepening sense of doom was growing inside me as the weather conditions were worsening. We had a twenty-four-foot boat and we were getting tossed around like a small cork in a whirlpool. Wally was in an eight-foot boat. I wouldn't let myself think about what chance he had. We had to find him and we had to find him quickly.

When we were about a quarter mile from the bridge, the wind started gusting violently. The boat got sideways to the waves and started to take on water. Apparently, we had hit a corridor of gale force wind out in the bay. I had heard about this wind from my Dad, but had never experienced it. I could see Frank holding onto the chrome around the bow as he almost slid off into the churning water. I yelled to Frank to bail the water, as I struggled to hold on to the rudder. I was desperately trying to get us pointed away from the wave, not sideways to it. Frank was having a hard time holding on to the boat; I could see him getting whipped around on the bow. We were in trouble! Bailing the water was the last thing on his mind. We were tipping fast and it looked like another big wave was about to hit us. Just then, the engine cut out with a sputter and gurgle and another gust of wind turned us around so that the wave picked us up and we rolled forward down the other side.

Whew, I thought. That was a close one. My heart was beating fast and I knew that I had to get us out of these rough seas and wind corridor. But first, I had to restart the engine.

Frank finally crawled back to where I was and started to bail the water, which was almost a foot deep. He didn't know the engine had stalled and with the roar of the wind and the rain beating down upon us we couldn't communicate very easily. This situation was turning chaotic and life threatening. Our boat was being tossed about like a rubber toy trying to stay afloat in a flushing toilet. We could not set a direction. We were out of control, at the mercy of Mother Nature. More water was coming into the boat and our concern for saving Wally's life was temporarily subsumed by the immediate need to save ourselves.

I was trying desperately to restart the engine to get out of this vortex of currents and winds. "I flooded it again!" I screamed to Frank in frustration. He looked at me and was somber and silent. There was no blame. He knew we were in big trouble and conversation was unnecessary. I began to pray. I thought that we were "goners" so I decided ask God for help. I prayed, "Please God! Help us out of this. Please, let the engine start." Just then, we were hit broadside by another wave. The sheet of water hit me with a powerful whoosh and further soaked an already rain-drenched body. I could hear Frank choking under the dark sheet of water and I thought, this is it. It's over!

And yet at the same time I also felt this sense of peace underlying what was happening. Amidst the panic I had the feeling that everything was all right. As soon as I thought that we were going to capsize, we popped back up to the sound of Frank and me spitting and choking on bay water. I started to pray again. "God, please help us. I won't ever do anything foolish like this again. I'll do anything... just let us live." I looked over and asked Frank how he was. "I'm praying!" he said. "Yeah, me too," I answered. It seemed hopeless. Without an engine, we were dead in the water and would be brutally beaten by the waves. This churning, boiling bay had us in its clutches and would not let go. I was remembering stories my father told us about how that g---damn bay was so unpredictable. He had lost two of his best friends in bad weather in this unpredictable body of water.

I scooted over to the engine again with a new burst of energy. I was a fighter and I wasn't going down easy. Besides, I really felt deep inside that God would help. At least, this thought gave me energy and I hoped we would

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be saved. Nothing was very certain at that point. I pulled the cord that was supposed to start the engine and it almost started before sputtering to a stop.

We could see the biggest wave yet coming from a distance. I had to turn us around fast. If this wave hits us, we've had it, I thought. I pulled the cord again and this time the engine sputtered and spit and smoke started to come out of it. I thought it was stalling again. In a panic, I turned the throttle up and the Columbian scooted out of the way of this oncoming mini-tidal wave. Drenched but ecstatic by this reprieve, Frank and I whooped. We had been on death's doorstep and we had survived, at least for now. But, we still had to make it back to the marina through this storm, which was growing more violent by the minute. With our engines running we had a great chance of making it back. We were exhausted, sopping wet, and chilled to the bone, but we were alive. It was after 2:00 a.m. and we just wanted to get back to dry land.

We made some weak attempts to yell for Wally on our way back to the dock. Somehow, we knew that this night would change our lives forever. There was a sense of silence and doom as we made our way back to the marina. We docked the boat about 4:00 a.m., bedraggled and in a stupor. I think that it must have been shock. After tying down the Columbian, I looked out to the dark expanse of water and wondered what had happened to our friend Wally.

They found his body two weeks later on a beach just west of Oakland. He was fully clothed, coat and all. His boat had been found the day after our misadventure, still right side up. He must have tried to swim for it or maybe he just fell off the boat in the rough seas.

We were all devastated. Wally had been more than our dearest friend. He had been the light and energy that had animated our lives, giving us meaning. He had taught us to live each moment as if it was our last. Wally only had one kidney so he always said that he would not live very long. But he said, "As long as I'm alive, I'm really going to live." And he did!

After Wally's death, I cried for days and became depressed for months. It changed me forever. I had lived under the youthful spell that life would go on forever. I had never lost anyone close to me, and Wally had been intimately woven into what I saw as my life and my identity. We all had dreams together. Wally, Frank, my other friend Ron and I would one day buy a sailboat and sail the Caribbean, to Hawaii, and, of course, Monte Carlo, the scene of many James Bond movies, which were Wally's favorite. Wally had

taught all of us to go beyond what we thought possible, and he had paid for it with his life.

With Wally's death, I lost the meaning of life. I forgot how to have fun. I felt dead inside. And I no longer knew who or what I was. I would later discover that a crisis such as this offers great opportunities for transformation. However, then I was unconscious and hurting. Using Wally's demise as a positive tool for growth was the furthest thing from my mind.

Angry at my beloved God about the injustice of life, I lost faith and fell into a void of despair and hopelessness. Why Wally? Why do only the good get taken? Why even do anything? We just grow up, work hard, and die anyway. Where was the meaning? I didn't care if I lived or died. I had no desires because I had no hope for the future. I just lived moment by moment in this state of despondency. I was also dimly aware of something that would later become extremely important to me. In this state of hopelessness I was in fact observing life from a deep silent state of consciousness that seemed to always be there—a core of stillness. But it seemed that I only noticed it when I was in this despondent state, a state devoid of desires. I had no future in those moments. I just was! No place to go, nothing to do, just living life out. Without a future and past the mind gets very quiet. This state of despondency seemed to precipitate a new depth of being in me, in which I experienced the present moment with much greater clarity. I was living not in the past or the future, but moment by moment.

I would discover later, after passionately seeking the truth for more than thirty years, that this witnessing or observing state of consciousness was the very Truth that I had been looking for. And, it would become an indispensable link in the final awakening of the Heart.

Of course, I didn't know this at the time. And it is not what is uppermost in my mind now, as I say farewell to the cab driver and walk up to the gates of the prison. It will just take a few steps before I surrender my freedom, but my journey to this point in my life has been traveled on a long and winding path . . .