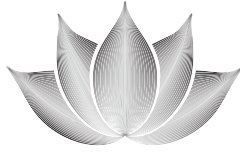


SAMPLE CHAPTER



ENLIGHTEN UP!

*FINDING CLARITY
CONTENTMENT AND RESILIENCE
IN A COMPLICATED WORLD*

BY BETH GIBBS



EMERALD LAKE
BOOKS
Sherman, Connecticut

Enlighten Up!

Finding Clarity, Contentment and Resilience in a Complicated World

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INTRODUCTION

*The path of understanding follows
an ascending spiral rather than
a straight line.*

— Joanna Field

What Is Self-Awareness?

Self-awareness is the ability to see, understand and accept our beliefs, habits and behavior without judgment. Then we can consciously choose to make changes, remain unchanged with full awareness of the consequences, or find acceptance and peace of mind if change is not possible. Cultivating self-awareness is a life-long journey that can be started at any age.

Self-awareness is a state, not a trait. We don't find and keep our self-awareness. It will ebb and flow, shift and change depending on our situation and state of mind. Science now recognizes that our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes and how we handle stress can positively or negatively affect our mental and physical health.

Modern research on the psychological aspects of self-awareness can be traced back to 1972 when psychologists Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund developed their theory of self-awareness.

When attention is directed inward and the individual's consciousness is focused on himself, he is the object of his own consciousness—hence "objective" self-awareness.¹

However, this concept is not new. For centuries, philosophers have pondered the connection between self-awareness and health. The first known mention of the five layers of self-awareness (the *koshas*) comes from the Taittiriya Upanishad, a 3,000-year-old philosophical text from India.²

The Upanishads were written in India during a time when people began to shift the focus of religious life from external rites and sacrifices to internal spiritual quests. Each of the thirteen texts share stories, ideas, instructions and insights into the meaning of consciousness and self-awareness that are as relevant today as they were 3,000 years ago.

The five-layer model offers an ideal framework for the theory and practice of self-awareness. The model proposes that we are much more than a mind interacting with a body. Understanding ourselves through the five layers of being provides a 360-degree view of what it means to be human and gives us a broad foundation for self-exploration. Along with that foundation comes a wide variety of practices to foster self-awareness.

The five layers are:

1. **Physical** (*annamaya kosha*) – This includes your body and your environment. This is you: your size, shape, gender

1 T. S. Duval and R. A. Wicklund. *A Theory of Objective Self Awareness*. January 1, 1972, Oxford Press.

2 *The Upanishads*. Translated by Eknath Easwaran. Nilgiri Press, June 1, 2009.

identification, race, ethnicity, anatomy, physiology, your home and the planet we all share.

2. **Energetic** (*pranamaya kosha*) – This includes your breath and energy levels. The oxygen you breathe nourishes your body and brain and sustains life. Your energy is the invisible *life force* that animates you at all levels and enables you to think, create, move, love, work and navigate all that life brings.
3. **Mental** (*manomaya kosha*) – Your thoughts, beliefs and emotions. This is how you think, what you think about, what you believe, and how you experience and express your emotions.
4. **Intuitive wisdom** (*vijnanamaya kosha*) – This is the witness, the ability to observe all of your layers and your life with compassion and without judgment to consciously make (or not) more informed choices.
5. **Bliss** (*anandamaya kosha*) – This is your connection to something larger than yourself. This can be spiritual, religious or a deep connection to a healthy passion or the natural world.

How Do We Become Self-Aware?

IN ADDITION TO VIEWING THE FIVE layers as important aspects of ourselves, we can also view them as a framework for developing self-awareness in all aspects of our lives. Taking the Nine Steps to Self-Awareness is one way to do that. The nine steps are:

1. Become aware of your body and environment.
2. Become aware of your breath and energy states.
3. Identify your thoughts and feelings.
4. Explore your beliefs.
5. Turn the mind back on itself.
6. Take skillful action.

7. Find your bliss.
8. Connect to your bliss.
9. Bring bliss into your daily life.

The sections that follow in this book describe the five layers and present the recommended steps to take in relation to that layer. The chapters in each section then offer specific practices to work with these steps.

I have adapted *The Nine Steps to Self-Awareness* from the original *Ten Steps to Freedom*³ for simplicity and practicality.

Why Is Self-Awareness Important?

NO MATTER YOUR SIZE, SHAPE, COLOR, condition or position in life, when you were born, your five layers came into this world with you. They are accessible to you twenty-four hours a day, every day of the year.

Each layer operates moment to moment in our daily lives. If we move through our lives on autopilot with no awareness of our body, how we're breathing, or our habits, routines, beliefs, emotions, impulses and reactions, we lose power. When we succeed in understanding how our layers work and how they are connected, we will gain a better understanding of how and why we react the way we do to what life presents. Then the choices we make are conscious. Our responses are healthier, balanced and more productive. This requires attention and effort. It will take time, but the result will be more clarity, contentment and resilience.

The process of paying attention is often influenced by the past; how we think about it, how often we misremember it, and how it affects our feelings about ourselves in the present. It's important

3 “Ten Steps to Freedom,” student handout by Joseph Le Page. *Integrative Yoga Therapy*, 1998.

to understand that the road to self-awareness is not a sprint; it's a lifelong marathon requiring intention, skill and practice.

Developing self-awareness can help you:

- find better solutions for your problems.
- make better lifestyle choices.
- manage stress.⁴
- enhance relationships that can be improved.
- end toxic relationships that cannot be improved.
- reduce worry, fear and anger.
- lessen the tendency to judge yourself and others.
- understand what you can and cannot control.
- learn how to relax.

Research shows that people with self-awareness skills tend to have better psychological health, a positive outlook on life, and are likely to be more compassionate to themselves and others. This larger sense of self results in the ability to navigate life from a calm center no matter the swirls, whirls and storms that will inevitably surround us.

Most of us choose to begin this journey with the body and the environment because they are readily observable through our five senses. Although body and environment may be the first focus, it's important to know that all five layers are inseparable, interrelated and will be affected as well.

Having a mental picture of the five layers is a helpful tool. Some writers describe them as a set of Russian dolls, with one layer nesting inside the other. Others use the analogy of an onion, presenting the

4 The American Psychological Association says most Americans suffer from moderate to high stress, with 44 percent reporting an increase in stress levels over the past five years (apa.org/helpcenter/stress.aspx), and a 2013 *JAMA Internal Medicine* paper states that 70 to 90 percent of primary care doctor visits are attributed to stress.

journey to self-awareness as peeling away the layers one by one. The traditional depiction is of five concentric circles.

In the yoga wisdom tradition, each circle represents a layer of being, beginning with bliss as the largest outermost circle and devolving inward from intuitive wisdom to mental and then energetic, with the physical as a small circle in the center.

It's at that center where we move through our life in Earth School. It's where we experience all that makes us happy, excited, upbeat and feeling good—the ups. Here, we also find ourselves dealing with all that leaves us feeling scared, empty, sad and suffering—the downs. If we stay on autopilot, we go around and around the rim of our small circle, experiencing the ups and downs of our life over and over with no awareness of what we can do to either make things better, keep them as-is with an awareness of the consequences, or find peace of mind if no change is possible.

Autopilot dissolves as we evolve beyond the rim of our small circle. As we go, we begin to recognize our layers as a unified whole, even though we work with them separately. We can view the ups and downs of our life with awareness. The ups are still wonderful, but now we know they are temporary. The downs are still painful, but now we know they too are temporary. We acknowledge what we experience and respond with a greater measure of clarity, contentment and resilience to whatever life brings our way.

Clarity means seeing things as they are and not how we want them to be. When we bring clarity to our life, we will have a better understanding of our thoughts, beliefs, habits and behavior patterns. Clarity is a wonderful side effect of self-awareness that allows us to see ourselves and our everyday reality as it is, not hidden behind a veil of wishful thinking or denial.

Contentment is a state of sustained calm that permeates all five layers of self-awareness no matter what happens in our life. It is different than happiness. Happiness comes in waves and is temporary. It's

similar to excitement. Both depend on external sources to keep those feelings of arousal, elation and exhilaration going. Contentment does not depend on externals, like finding your soul mate, landing a dream job, or finding that perfect little black dress that makes you look ten pounds thinner. Contentment is a state of accepting what is. It's a quiet, deep sense of acceptance, calm and gratitude.

Resilience is the ability to rebound quickly from a crisis, tragedy, trauma or a serious case of "stress mess." Highly resilient people won't fall apart easily, and when we do ('cause we will), it won't be for long.

Resilient people:

- know how to handle their emotions.
- keep calm in stressful situations.
- are empathetic.
- cultivate self-awareness.
- practice acceptance.
- engage in self-care.

This book will help you build your self-awareness skills and find clarity, contentment and resilience in our complicated world.

How to Use this Book: A Suggestion

THIS BOOK IS DIVIDED INTO FIVE sections, one for each layer of self-awareness. Following a description of each layer, narrative chapters trace the self-awareness process through personal stories and examples of familiar experiences, like marriage, parenting, divorce, death, widowhood, living single, racism, sexism, rejection, emotional funks, family relationships (both functional and dysfunctional), body image issues, medical emergencies and financial insecurity. At the end of each chapter is a quality to embody, like perseverance, reflection and commitment, along with techniques

my friends, colleagues and I have practiced. Consider them to be suggestions. Pick the ones you want to use or are drawn to, not the ones you feel you should do. We spend way too much time “shoulding” on ourselves!

Some of the recommended techniques are called “mudras.” The common English meaning of the word *mudra* is “gesture” or “seal.” Mudras are thought to have arisen spontaneously from the meditative states experienced by the ancient Indian sages. Mudras can be used to recognize a quality, attitude or energetic state that is already present and waiting to be awakened. You can think of mudras as a global positioning system (GPS) directing your energy to help you tune into the specific quality, attitude or energetic state you are working with.

Start your reading with the layer you are most comfortable with. Try one or more of the practices. How you choose to understand, personalize and apply any of the techniques to your life will be your choice alone. There is no single right way to do this. Your choices will not look, sound or feel like anyone else’s because you are unique, just like a snowflake or a fingerprint.

And here’s the key: the process can’t be forced. Find your own way to ease into it. Be patient. Trust in yourself and the process. Reading about the enlightening up process of others will save you time, effort, money and tears.

For serious concerns or in an emergency, please seek professional help.

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Enlighten Up!

“how to do it” exercises for acknowledging difficulty, practicing authenticity, paying attention, and embodying perseverance.

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To continue reading, purchase a copy at
emeraldlakebooks.com/amzenlightenup.



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PRAISE FOR *ENLIGHTEN UP!*

I have just read the final lines of Beth Gibbs's book *Enlighten Up!* Like the finish of any worthwhile journey, I am both enriched and sad to see it end. The author's sharp and clever sense of humor, her real-life revelations, and her fascinating perspectives bring to life the 5-layered "kosha" model from the yoga tradition as a map to better living that would otherwise seem inaccessible and strange. Whether you are new to yoga-based lifestyle "medicine" or a long-time practitioner, through Beth's perceptive eyes and words, you will be engaged, entertained and, dare I say it, enlightened up! I'm already looking forward to diving back in for a second go around and putting all the practical tools for a more satisfying life into daily use. Won't you join me on the adventure?

— **Baxter Bell, MD**

co-author of *Yoga for Healthy Aging*

Ms. Gibbs seeks to help the reader understand oneself as opposed to fixing oneself. She has clearly spelled out the layers of awareness and shares her journey to enlightenment through her many stories. This book is enriched with yoga exercises that a beginner like myself was able to appreciate.

— **Marilyn Martin, MD**

The Resource Group

Love, peace and happiness are not external goals; they dwell within us. *Enlighten Up!* shines light on the koshas, or five layers of self-awareness, to arouse self-inquiry and observation of the multiple levels of being beyond blood, bone and tissue. Gibbs's essays on each of the five layers are expressed in down-to-earth and honest language, written from her personal and professional perspective and experience as a yoga therapist, teacher and long-time practitioner. She has seen and digested much along her journey and generously shares her insights. Yoga philosophy and Sanskrit terminology can be difficult to explain. However, the stories in *Enlighten Up!* demystify the metaphysical interplay between body, mind and spirit that impact the choices we make in life and inform how we feel about ourselves and others. When we understand the energies of the koshas, we possess the keys to self-mastery to fulfill our greatest potential and cultivate inner peace. This book is an invitation to "know thyself." Best of all, *Enlighten Up!* has stories for everyone regardless of age or ability. It can be enjoyed by the yoga neophyte, seasoned practitioner, and the skilled teacher. It is a valuable tool for living yoga off the mat.

— **Jana Long**

Executive Director, Black Yoga Teachers Alliance

Enlighten Up! is a book of hard-earned wisdom that will make a difference in your life. It's already made a difference in mine, especially the chapter called "Bitchcraft," which not only outlines Gibbs's evolution in turning fear and anger into assertiveness but outlines protocols, self-inquiry and practices for us to do the same. In fact, every chapter has guidance for us to rise through those layers of self-awareness. Don't be fooled by the title into thinking this is just another spiritual book. As a Black woman just past a tormented menopause, Gibbs's story is her own, yet she uses it to shine light on our own blind spots. *Enlighten Up!* is deeply and profoundly spiritual and oh so human, written with compassion and ever-expanding

self-awareness. As you read, you are nodding, saying “yes” to the truth of being a woman in a “complicated world.” As you read, you say “yes” to the author as a guide through the deepest wisdom of yoga as a lived experience. As you read, you are saying “yes” to Beth Gibbs, because she feels like your new best friend. *Enlighten Up!* will be one of those books I will turn to again and again for inspiration.

— **Amy Weintraub**

Founder, LifeForce Yoga Healing Institute and
author of *Temple Dancer*

I can't imagine a better person to take us on a journey through the koshas. Beth Gibbs has fifty years of yoga practice under her belt plus hard-won wisdom from life lived in the real world. Add in her teaching experience, her easy-to-understand and accessible writing style, and her awesome sense of humor and what you get is an entertaining read that provides you with deep understanding of how you can use the koshas to better make sense of your everyday life in the modern world and to navigate through its inevitable ups and downs with greater ease and contentment.

— **Nina Zolotow**

Editor-in-Chief, Yoga for Healthy Aging blog and
co-author of *Yoga for Healthy Aging*

Unabashedly frank, Beth Gibbs shares personal stories with humor and intimacy. Weaving together wisdom she gleaned from experience, concrete practices she engaged to transform her life, and knowledge of the yogic kosha model, the author delivers a book of counsel and direction that supports wholeness and integration.

— **Deborah Adele**

author of *The Yamas & Niyamas*

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In *Enlighten Up!*, Beth Gibbs manages to condense years of practice and teaching into a book that can uplift yoga practitioners and teachers alike. She uses humor, storytelling, science and yoga wisdom to enlighten us and help us navigate our lives using the ancient tools of yoga.

— **Jivana Heyman**

Director, Accessible Yoga and
author of *Accessible Yoga*