

Dear Reader:

This is the original version of the final chapter of The Not So Big Life. As I discovered with some feedback from a number of early readers who read the manuscript before it was finalized, for those who are new to inner work this chapter proved to be too challenging. For those who have been working on themselves for years however, it provided a powerful ending that tied all the loose ends together.

So if you have read the book and feel you are ready for this final piece in the puzzle, please read on. If, however, you have stumbled upon this chapter without first reading and engaging the book, please wait. Come back after you've read The Not So Big Life completely, worked with the exercises for a time, and know you are ready.

With great love,

Sarah Susanka

Chapter 13: The Key to Being the Change

Dissolver of sugar, dissolve me, if this is the time.

–Jelaluddin Rumi

and

Beat. Beat. Beat. The power of my Self is moving. My heart. My birth. My coming into existence. My passions. My indifference. The sun within warms me, the heart enlightens the intellect. I am my Self coming forth, a creature bearing light.

–Normandi Ellis, from *The Speeches, Awakening Osiris*.

Lucid Dreaming

As you may have noticed while reading *The Not So Big Life*, I've been methodically and steadily calling into question all the things that you have previously taken yourself to be. By this point you are probably recognizing that this is the only way to even begin to taste who and what we really are, and even those of us who have been working on ourselves for decades often find the full magnitude of our attachments to the small self a challenge to release.

The content of this final chapter goes further yet, uncovering the source of our longings for home. All it requires is the simplest of steps—but one that will seriously challenge the dominance of that small self, and so may cause some internal chafing if you are not prepared. If you feel overwhelmed or unmoored, know that this is your self-image trying to reorient itself. You may even want to

put this thirteenth chapter aside for a while, and come back to it after you've been working with the exercises in *The Not So Big Life* for a while longer.

Keep in mind that as your personality is removed from the driver's seat, what you'll experience is more vivid and more alive than "it" (that personality) could ever imagine. In fact, it is exactly what the personality has been trying to make happen for you. The trouble is that *it* wants to experience that fulfillment while remaining a separate and isolated individual, in charge of *its* own destiny. But it is only through the widening aperture of a more expansive identity that Reality can reveal itself, and of course, that precludes separateness.

Your Owner's Manual (see pp. 259 – 266) contains all the tools you'll need to keep expanding the aperture through which you are viewing your movie, and as you refer to it each year, you'll find, over time, an amazing richness evolves. You'll be living in the content of the everyday movie plot of your waking dream, but you'll be experiencing it from multiple perspectives: on one level engaged in the story; on another metabolizing the food beneath the surface of every event; and on another yet, watching yourself grow and mature into a more complete, more mature human being. You'll find those characteristics of inner peace becoming more and more the norm rather than the exception, and you'll find yourself vastly more contented in your waking dream, no matter the content that each day presents. Simply being alive will provide you with a constant font of creativity, and after a while, you'll wonder how you ever lived any other way.

Questions about life's meaning or purpose will no longer plague you, and you won't be wondering all the time if you are fulfilling your true potential. When

you are in harmony with the unfolding moment—that experience we call being fully alive—all questions disappear, and you know meaning because you are *living* it. There's no separation. All there is, is Now. All there is, is You. It's all one thing, and really not any "thing" at all. It is the experience of Being, and as you grow to experience everything you engage in from this perspective you'll find yourself becoming completely at home in your life.

I've quoted A.H. Almaas several times in previous chapters. He's the author of an enormously powerful and transformative series of books to guide students of life through the process of unraveling who they've previously thought themselves to be, so that they can open gradually to their true nature. My own teacher often assigns Almaas's Diamond Heart Series, Books 1 through 4, to start people on the journey to that inner truth that so many of us today know is there, but cannot find. If, after reading *The Not So Big Life*, you find yourself wanting more, this series is an excellent next step. But the reason I mention Almaas's work now is because of some words I read recently in one of his latest publications, *The Inner Journey Home*, from a section entitled "Home," where he says this:

To know is to move nearer to our home and to behold the mystery is to be at home.... We finally feel completely at home; we understand why we love to feel at home, and why it is so difficult to feel at home.... When we know only the manifest world we are estranged from our true home, living in exile, and always waiting, whether consciously or unconsciously, to return home at last, to finally rest and forget all our woes and worries.... Our minds have told us various stories about where home is, where rest is, where contentment is, but now we know with certainty that we are home at last, and wonder how we came to be lost.

The more work we do to understand ourselves and to metabolize the food put before us, the closer we come to being at home in our lives. Obviously this process is not something that can be entered into lightly, and not something you engage today, and forget about tomorrow. It is the journey of a lifetime, and the list of travel supplies you'll find in the Owner's Manual for your Not So Big Life is only the beginning—only a reminder of what really matters along the way. Your devotion to the journeying and your desire to find home will do the rest.

The twelve chapters included in the print and audio versions of the book have described a method for integrating our everyday world of constant doing with the stillness of being that underlies it. We have the capability of experiencing both, and we don't need to choose one over the other, or to relegate each to a separate compartment of our lives. In fact, when we do so, we are not really receiving the gifts of either. As we become more present in our experiencing of whatever it is we are doing, what's really happening is that we are waking up within the dream. It's not that the dream goes away. We are simply in it differently, so that the real nutrients of being alive can feed us and allow us to flourish.

This situation is very similar to what happens when you become conscious in your dreams at night, an experience known as lucid dreaming. If you've ever had this experience, you'll know that although you recognize that what's happening to you is not real—you know you are dreaming—you are very much aware, and you are also able to make choices. You become the director of the dream, determining what you want to do next. So you are in the dream, but you are not of it. You know, while you are in the dream, that you have an identity

that extends beyond its limited boundaries; and you know that this is only a tiny part of who you really are. It's an amazing experience.

My first foray into lucid dreaming occurred shortly after I'd taken a workshop on the subject. That brief experience of being wide-awake in my dream world was electrifying. The feeling of sheer joy was identical to that Olivetti moment back at the exhibit I visited with my father as a child. I was vibrantly alive in both situations: in one I was lucid in the nighttime dream, and in the other I was lucid in the waking dream. But the experience of both was the same.

Until we are lucid, although we may *think* we are selecting what we engage in our waking dream, the perception of choice is an illusion. As we've seen, when we are not present we are just as asleep as we are in our typical nighttime dreams. Most of the content of our waking dream is actually keeping us asleep. The new content and the new rituals presented in *The Not So Big Life* are ways of sowing the seeds of our own lucidity within our normal everyday life. It is with their help that we'll find the *real* opportunity to become director of our movie, not by taking actions on our own behalf, but by being completely present in everything we do, our identity extending far beyond the small self that is playing the character we each of us call "me" within the boundaries of our collective waking dream. Engaging in this way, we'll be functioning in the world, but we won't be *of* it.

Like lucid dreaming, it's only when we wake up and recognize that we are in the waking dream, but not asleep, that we can begin to direct events; the identity of that director is not the small self, not the personality, but the one who sees things as they really are. Once you experience this lucidity within the waking dream

even for just a moment or two, you'll never again wonder whether or not you've experienced it because you will know it with absolute certainty. That's what all those epiphanies and significant moments are about. They're moments of lucidity, when you *know* the intrinsic meaningfulness of existence.

Knowing Now

When I first began writing this book, I was well aware that though in the story line of my waking dream I was being asked by Random House to assemble a manuscript for publication, for me personally this exercise would amount to something very different. This is not just a book for me. It is a flower of sorts, a flow-er, each day presenting what is arising in my awareness. You may experience the contents of the book as something with the power to reveal you to you, but in exactly the same way, the process of engaging it, of writing it, has done this for me also. I am not the same as when I began this process. I have grown through engaging it.

In a way, I am reading a book to you, but I am not the writer. I am writing what I am experiencing and understanding in each day's unfolding, but paradoxically I am not planning it. It arrives out of my fingertips onto the keyboard and screen like a constantly opening birthday present. I never know what will be written, yet what's there to be said is absolutely clear in this moment. I'm simply listening with that inner ear to the promptings of the higher self.

I now understand many of the things that have been sitting in my mind as mysteries yet to be revealed. Today the key is completely clear within my heart,

and so I write because it is the thing that is unfolding in this moment...fresh and new as a chick peering out of its broken shell, blinking at the first experience of light and air, and fluffing its feathers dry. This is Now for me. Can you see that it's only in the Now that Knowledge reveals itself? It's no accident that the word Know contains Now within it. Any attempt to understand with the blunt instrument of intellect only gets in the way. There's a delicacy to the inquiry, a holding rather than a searching. You have to be here so that the revelations can express themselves.

I said at the very beginning of this book that I wanted to write from the point of my own unfolding, my own self-discovery, and I've been sharing revelations along the way as they arise. Now I want to let you in on a few other secrets of the journey which intuition told me were coming, but which I hadn't understood completely when I wrote them. Back in Chapter One I stated that at the end of the book I would reveal a deeper meaning behind Gandhi's famous quote that "We must be the change we wish to see in the world". In case you've forgotten it, here again is the story:

A woman came to Gandhi, imploring him to help her with her overweight child, who was constantly eating sweets, pastries and candies. She wanted Gandhi to tell her son to stop eating anything containing sugar. Gandhi told her to go away and return in a week. The woman was confused, but did as she was bidden. On the appointed day, she and the son returned, and Gandhi sternly and firmly told the child to cease and desist the ingestion of sugar-rich foods and treats. The woman asked, "Why did you not ask this of my son a week ago?" "Because, dear madam", replied Gandhi, "I did not know if I myself could accomplish that which you asked me to ask of your son. If I could not do it

myself, how could I ask him to do it? We must BE the change we wish to see in the world."

As I wrote that section, I didn't know the deeper meaning myself. I sensed that it was there, but I still couldn't yet articulate it. I knew absolutely that it was coming, though, and that when I needed to know it, it would be clear. I was holding in inquiry the question as to its greater meaning. I knew there was more. This whole book has been an exploration of the deeper message.

Then one day, perhaps three months ago, I was speaking with a wonderful woman, Wanda Urbanska, who had come to visit me to talk about an upcoming season of her PBS series, *Simple Living*. We sat in my inner office—the place I do all my writing—and I told her a little about this evolving book, and the process I had developed to write it. We were both completely engaged in the conversation, completely present with one another. I told her about the Gandhi quote, and about the deeper meaning yet to be understood. And then as I was explaining that I didn't yet understand it, I understood. The insight came from wherever insights come, and both of us received it simultaneously, recognizing its truth immediately. There was palpable electricity in the air.

Here's what I said to her:

"Gandhi was telling the woman that he could not tell her son to stop eating sugar until he was able to do the same. He understood that change happens not from thoughts and ideas about right and wrong, but from living that which you want to see in yourself. His waking dream could only shift if he shifted. If he couldn't do a thing himself, he couldn't influence anyone else to do that something either. He had to embody it.

Today, in our culture, we are doing the equivalent of eating too much sugar, but our sweets are stuff and speed. We are consuming at an incredible pace, simply because it's there and we can, and because we believe it will somehow fill our inner emptiness if we can just consume enough. Your television series and my books are offering a different way of being with material possessions and with time, and the reason they are powerful is because we are embodying what we are speaking. We are being the change, but not because we are trying to fix the world. We are simply living what we are learning as we learn it.

You aren't trying to convert people. You are living in your life differently and you are using the avenue of a TV program to explore your own understandings, and to grow more yourself. I am engaging time differently and I am using the avenue of writing a book to explore my own unfolding and evolution, understanding that as I change, so will my waking dream. This is why books and films like ours move people, and not because of any marketing plan, or positioning of message, though it may appear that way on the surface. The people who are ready to stop eating today's equivalent of sugar—those who recognize that the consuming only makes them hungry for more—are affected this way because the message is embodied. They in turn are inspired to shift their own world, knowing now that it is indeed possible. That's how the world is changed, but paradoxically it's not because you want to change the world that it happens, but because you want to change yourself."

A little while later I had another insight. Gandhi was not teaching others because he'd decided to teach. He was simply living what he knew, and the teaching happened as a result of his direct experience. A true teacher doesn't

decide to become a teacher. He or she simply lives what he knows in the moment, and those moments *are* the teaching.

If you can't do, or are not doing, what you are speaking, it will not change anything. The "world" is only the content of our collective dream. What really matters lies beneath the surface. That's what we really want, and the only way to reach it is to engage life as it comes to you, day by day, moment by moment, and with obedience to what is being asked of you. Gandhi was asked to give up sugar, under the guise of an innocent request from a distraught mother. He was obedient to what was asked of him, and so his world changed. And so, too, our world changes as we see, finally, what he really meant.

A decade ago, I recognized that there was something that I was missing in my life that I knew could fill me, but I didn't know where it was, so I went on a search. I began to see that our homes could provide the first step in creating a stage for self-exploration. They could become places of sanctuary, calm, and beauty—places vibrant with the potential for experiencing the moreness that beauty reveals. So I wrote about how to make a house express that moreness, as I myself made my own house do so for me. I could clearly state "Less is More" and have it mean something to others because I was living it myself.

That first book allowed me to understand myself better. That's why I wrote it. Had it never been published I would still have grown, because the gift was in the engagement with self-exploration, and not in what happened afterwards. I've learned from that too, of course, but the writing—my exploration vehicle of choice—was what created the conditions for further unfolding.

This year, I recognized that my “too busyness” was keeping me from being fully alive. So I started to reconstruct the way I engaged time, and wrote down what I was doing as I did it. Again I am saying, “Less is More”, though this time related to qualities of time rather than space. I am writing this book in order to evolve. I am loving every single moment of it, and throughout its construction I’ve felt more tuned in to the unfolding of the universe, and the part I play in that unfolding, than ever in my life before. Whether it becomes a best seller, or sits on bookstore shelves unopened and unappreciated is simply not the point of its writing. It has given me the gift of experiencing the meaning intrinsic to life that I knew was possible. I simply had to start living completely what I knew.

I can’t know how my life will change from this point forward. It may be that the outer manifestation of my waking dream will stay very much as it is now, or it could be that it will change dramatically. In either case the experiencer—the one I call “me” — continues to be transformed by the engagement with the material, and for that gift I feel infinite gratitude.

What has come into your awareness as all these moments of presence have been experienced? That’s what you know now that you didn’t know before. What is different in your life now than when you first began this book? The things you’ve come to know and your ability to live that knowing has come into being through your being present, and through your being open to change. What’s going to happen next? That’s what you are experiencing now, and now, and now. It’s always here, always unfolding, and always informing you. That’s why this work on yourself is so important, because it’s allowing the bud that you are to flower. It’s the only way it happens.

So Who Are You Really?

Throughout this book I've liberally quoted another great artist of living—Jelaluddin Rumi. Although he lived over eight hundred years ago, his words are as alive today as they were at the moment his heart spoke them. That's because their aliveness transcends time. They were spoken by a voice entirely in the present moment. The consciousness that poured forth this poetry was all encompassing—including all manifestation and all time. He was in fact speaking outside of linear time and physical space because he was absolutely present in the only real time and space that exists—Now. And so as we read those words we are one with Rumi, who brings to our own awareness of the same unfolding Now that birthed them.

As I was in the process of writing this book—perhaps two thirds of the way through—I suddenly understood Rumi's name in an entirely different way. It presented itself as a question. Say these letters aloud: R-U-M-I. Are You? Am I? I laughed out loud in sheer delight. We think of Rumi as someone who lived long ago, we think of Gandhi as someone else who lived a little more recently, and we think of both of these men as not here today. But in fact their voices live more powerfully today, and in this moment, than do those of many of us who are alive in this period of linear time. Through their actions in the moment, through their direct experience, they show us how to engage our own lives.

This is the real message behind all the prophets through the ages. They are shouting with one unified voice, Wake Up, Wake Up, Wake Up. I'm not who you think I am. You are not who you think you are. Are You? Am I? No,

indeed not. We are much, much more. We are one magnificent unfolding, and no words can ever fully encompass the wonder of it all.

Our confusion is one of identity. We are so used to thinking of ourselves as just our small selves, as just this tapestry of conditioned patterns that color our life experience, that we don't appreciate the potential of this human experience. We don't see that we've identified with our individual physical body, and have been taught to believe that once we hit about twenty five or thirty years of age, we've lived the best part of life, and from that point on it's all just slowly winding down until we reach the end of the road.

It's really not that way at all. The physical body is just our launching pad. With the body we have been given a lens through which to experience. But the development of our spiritual selves can be a constant evolving, from birth to death and beyond. Our identity need not be limited by who we've been taught to think we are. If you identify with the whole of manifestation, as Rumi and Gandhi do, and as all the great mystics and teachers across the millennia have done, then you come home to the true self, and to your true nature.

But we're too busy striving for the next adrenalin rush, the next teaspoon of sugar, to recognize that it's our identification with our thoughts and our bodies that cuts us off from who and what we truly are. You can't just leap there, though. You can't just say, "OK. We're all One. I'm not who I think I am," and start living in an awakened state. You have to live into every experience that presents itself, to metabolize the food put before you, and in so doing, to grow into the potential that is your true nature. Every time we put off what we know is in front of us to do, whether that's a difficult exchange with a colleague, a

departure from a dysfunctional relationship, a trip to visit a dying friend, or the implementation of a new daily meditation practice, putting it off is depriving us of the food we are longing for.

Understanding comes not from thinking it through, but from engaging whatever is in front of you to do, living it completely. True nature is trying to express itself continually through you. There's no other way. The universe is a universe of love. It's trying to give to you constantly, because you are it. When we stay with the surface, the appearance of the waking dream, we get locked into the image of a self. We never hear what needs to be heard, never see what needs to be seen. But if we are able to hear and be with what arises, whatever it is, and inquire into it with our hearts, we'll start to understand what is being taught us with every breath. If we reject it right away, though, or if we don't even hear it, taste it, or otherwise engage it, it can't reveal itself. The teaching takes place constantly in whatever is happening in every moment. What have you learned about how knowledge reveals itself in your experiencing? Inquire into it when you have a moment.

Waiting for Godot

So what are we waiting for? People set goals for themselves all the time, telling themselves that they'll be able to really live once the goal is achieved, but of course the goal is rarely if ever achieved, so real living is forever put off. That's one way that we wait. Another is that we argue with what is placed in front of us to do. We don't want *that* food. We want something else instead. So we spend our time rejecting what comes to us, and striving for the things we think

we want. Again we are waiting—this time for things to go our way. Or we believe we're inadequate—that we can't do what we want to do because we're not good enough, not talented enough, not strong enough. So for all these reasons we shy away from that which is in front of us, and wait for the day when we are no longer inadequate. And then we wonder why life is passing us by—why we're always dissatisfied, always in a holding pattern.

The problem is that the self who is waiting for the goal to be accomplished, for the thing we prefer to show up, or for the inadequacy to go away, is only your self-image. It will never ever be satisfied because its very existence depends upon your NOT being present and NOT simply doing what's there to be done. We never question the prevailing paradigm; we believe unequivocally that if we stop doing all the striving and goal setting, we'll somehow get hammered, nailed—maybe even die. But it's all imagined. It's all part of the dream. Real, full octane living is happening right now. It's just that you aren't accepting delivery.

I remember vividly the time, in high school, when my sophomore English class was assigned to read Samuel Beckett's play *"Waiting for Godot"*. The play takes place over a two-day period, with the only characters, two tramps, waiting endlessly for someone by the name of M. Godot to arrive. But Godot never arrives, and all that the tramps can do is wait. They can't conceive of an alternative. So they wait, and wait some more. As one review put it, "The act of waiting is never over, and yet it mysteriously starts up again each day." Sound familiar? At the end of the play, one tramp asks to the other, "Well, shall we go?" But neither one moves, and the curtain descends on their interminable waiting.

There are, of course, myriad interpretations of the play, but the one that occurred to me at the time was intertwined with the name Godot. I suggested that the real, though hidden, title of the play was “Waiting for God to....” Waiting for God to intervene. Waiting for some omniscient force to step in and fulfill our expectations. Despite the fact that the play was written in French, and so this particular interpretation was not likely to have occurred to Mr. Beckett, for me at the time the implied meaning was perfect. I realized that any notion of waiting for someone else to show up and save me from my own frustration was patently absurd, and would do nothing other than ensure more waiting. So I decided to fully engage whatever came my way.

That doesn't mean I haven't done my share of waiting, but I only did so when I didn't realize that was what I was doing. I learned to question my own paradigm, to ask myself “Why am I always too busy?” for example. Too busy for what? What am I putting off by being too busy? What would I do if I were not too busy? Why would I put off the things I'd really prefer to be doing, but don't have time for? All these questions lead to the root of my too busyness. Your paradigm may be different, but the process of inquiry is the same. Question your basic assumptions, and look for the beliefs that are keeping you tightly bound into your own notion of who you are. That's the prison. That's the system of beliefs that's waiting for God to....

Up until this point I've avoided all references to both God as well as to ego because the words are so loaded that they've lost all real meaning. We have only the idea of God, only the idea of what ego means. I want you to experience the ineffable for yourself. I want you to experience your own limitations to full

flow—the idea you have of yourself—firsthand. You don't have to “believe” in either concept to recognize that both “moreness” and “less-ness” are possible in our experiencing of life. The moreness we usually term God. The less-ness we usually term ego. But neither concept matters. It's the experiencing that counts.

There's a term in Sanskrit that I've grown to love over the last few years. I learned of it first through Rumi's poems, and since that time, have simply held the word close to my heart, held it in intent, to see what comes into my waking dream as a result. The word is “hu”, and, I learned today, it is purported to be the root of the modern word God. Here's how Rumi describes it:

*When one is united to the core of another,
to speak of that is to breathe the name HU,
empty of self, filled with love.*

Until now, I've only “felt” the word, sensed that it is something beyond the beyond—a sound that vibrates almost before sound, like an owl calling deep in the black of night, from some empty place where there is no manifestation at all. That has been my sense of “hu”. This morning I found the following definition that seems to affirm what I sensed:

This sound Hu is the beginning and the end of all sounds, be they from man, bird, beast, or thing... The word Hu is the spirit of all sounds and of all words, and is hidden within them all, as the spirit in the body. It does not belong to any language, but no language can help belonging to it. This alone is the true name of God, a name that no people and no religion can claim as their own. -- from The Sufi Message, Volume II, Abstract Sound

A year or so ago, I also noticed that the word “human” is made up of both “hu” and “man”. Unmanifest and manifest. Spirit and matter. Lover and Beloved. We are both, brought together in some miraculous alchemy of time and space, and of no time and no space. When you speak in presence, you are “hu” revealing through you. You must listen to every word. You are speaking to yourself. There’s nothing but you.

This is the Time

So who are we really? Who? Hu? Man? Spirit? Matter? Both? Neither? No one can do the discovering of these truths for you. We must each explore our own personal experience, each live the truth of every moment that we can let go enough to be fully alive. And if we want to experience the vitality of that aliveness, we cannot keep waiting for things to change, for everything to be just right. The moment is Now. This is the doorway to ourselves, and when we step through it we discover the reason for our confusion and distress. Once again, Rumi finds the words:

*I have lived on the lip
of insanity, wanting to know reasons,
knocking on a door. It opens.
I've been knocking from the inside!*

We are already that which we are seeking. Like the fish in the ocean, not recognizing the water it swims in, we are immersed in, and completely permeated by the meaningfulness of being. Rumi speaks the words that contain

the intoxicating, indescribability--"hu". We are encompassed by the identity that speaks the words, and we meet all of consciousness in their speaking. We find ourselves completely intertwined, with all boundaries dissolved. We are the totality. And it's all right here. Are You? Am I? The answers cannot be spoken, only opened into with the widest identity conceivable—and then more.

Rumi is here now. Gandhi is here now. All those mystics who've been trying to wake us up to ourselves across the millennia are here now. They live through us and we through them. We are not separate. Today, I hear them resonating throughout my being, and understand completely that they never die. And in this moment, as we share this one vital Nowness we reveal Self to self, higher Self to lower self. We are both. There's no need to reject either. It is through our experiencing of the difference between the two that we discover for ourselves the luminous beauty of this life. This is what we are really longing for. This is the real way home.

Your life is the meditation and you are the pray-er. Now that you recognize the nature of the dream, you'll understand when I say that all you have read within these pages is you speaking to you. Wake Up! It's about Time.

