### **COMMON SENTIENCE**

# MEDITATION

Intimate Experiences with the Divine through Contemplative Practices

### Featuring SISTER DR. JENNA

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Editor: Gina Mazza

Meditation: Intimate Experiences with the Divine Through Contemplative Practices Sister Dr. Jenna

> Tradepaper ISBN: 978-1-945026-91-1 EBook ISBN: 978-1-945026-92-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2021950601

Published by Sacred Stories Publishing, Fort Lauderdale, FL USA

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### **PART ONE** Understanding Meditation

### THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD INSIDE YOU

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n some level, everybody meditates. To say that you have never meditated or don't know how to do it simply isn't true. Every one of us is naturally wired to have private, quiet, mindful moments in which we spontaneously review our lives to see if there is something better we can reach for.

Similarly, we've all had mystical moments that enable us to transcend the ego, greed, lust, the need for security, and other limitations, and experience the Divinity within.

So, the first question I ask anyone who is beginning a contemplative practice is, "Do you know that you *already* meditate?" Can you remember a moment when you were going through a hard time and turned inward to find the solution? Chances are, you have, and this ability to self-reflect becomes more of a practice once you awaken to it and want to sustain it.

As I've gone deeper into what meditation has meant for my own life, it's definitely a coming home to the real essence of who I am. I can only be who I am if I'm honest with myself. That is all that any of us can do. Meditation opens that window of self-honesty, which is the virtue we all need in order to navigate through the interweaving of experiences that are carried inside the soul.

#### WHAT IS MEDITATION?

Meditation, therefore, is this intimate journey of coming home to the essential part of you that is beyond your titles, labels, and roles, and what society and your environment distracts you from. It gives you a chance to listen to those deeper, innermost thoughts that are directly connected to the purity and presence of the Divine.

Just imagine how your existence would change if your thoughts were connected not to the mundane aspects of life, but to the sacredness of Source. Everything elevates to a higher level: the sparkle of your personality, the words you speak, the way your eyes reflect peace, the choices you make, even the way you dress, the way you take care of yourself, how you are present in your relationships. It all refines and uplifts.

Putting meditation into practice is when this private, intimate relationship with the Divine becomes the catalyst to bring forth, through your singular personality, what the world is inherently yearning for—one of simplicity, laughter, abundance, and vibrancy. These traits emerge because the soul receives energy from its intimate connection with Source.

The highest role of meditation is not only a return to love, but more specifically, a return to a sacred quality of Love. Sometimes we take for granted the power of these four letters. With a place in your life for contemplation, you begin to ponder, *Well, I know what human love feels like, but what about sacred Love, which has an energy that is far greater?* When two human beings become intimate, they tend to feel alive in their moments together, but later on, it dies down. When your heart and soul merge with Source, there is no

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dying down; there's only a climbing up and an expansion of the energy of sublimeness that begins to surround you.

So, meditation is really about building and forming a deeper experience of sacred Love, which melts away all that is impure. What is not sacred is hidden in the dark. Meditation illuminates Love through you, and when anyone comes into your presence, they feel this sacredness and feel safe.

This is what our world needs now, the kind of Love that has the capacity to send good wishes, share pure feelings, think kind thoughts, and do things without asking for anything in return. It's the kind of Love that can see in advance what your needs are and fulfill them before you even ask. Cultivating this expression of Love is perhaps the greatest benefit of meditation, both personally and collectively.

Before we go any further, I'd like to clear up a few misconceptions. First, it's important for us to now understand the interpretation of God in a more refined way. You will notice that I use the words God, the Divine, Source, and other terms interchangeably. I am not referring to a religious God, as in one that belongs to Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or others. We cannot squeeze God into a religion. He is much too big for that.

I have dear friends who are high up in the Islamic tradition, the Christian tradition, the Judaic tradition, and we regularly come together and talk. I find that many are attached to the language that's connected to their particular tradition. The most important question is, "How do we bypass all of that?" Yes, you have your deep wisdom traditions and religious beliefs, but *are you feeling God*? What's your practical, daily experience? What do you carry with you as a result of them?

Each of us has the freedom to consider God in a personal and unique way, or refute the existence of a supreme being altogether. Those who do may still have supernatural and coincidental experiences in their lives. Even atheists can meditate because I believe they take issue more with the concept of an organized structure that claims to *know* God and have power *over* 

God. This leads to confusion and disappointment because if God exists, we wonder, shouldn't everything be grand? There shouldn't be war, genocide, hatred, or the suffering of millions of people around the world, but there is.

Understanding the energy of God as an unlimited consciousness of love, peace, purity, and wisdom doesn't require a religious context, or even a belief system. It requires only an open mind and the bravery to allow your mind to sift through concepts that may seem ineffable. This deeper and more accepting experience of the Divine would eradicate much of the infighting amongst even people of faith.

If your connection to your Creator is a personal and intimate one, then it doesn't belong to any religion. Maybe an organization, church, synagogue, or mosque doesn't own your contemplative moments for you. For this same reason, I think it's important to break the myth that you need to join a meditation group or study with a particular lineage in order to meditate.

There is value in doing so, if this is your desire or calling, and having a structure can help to discipline the mind, but it's not required to define yourself as someone who meditates. Now let's dive deeper into the purpose of integrating this into your life, and what results when you live from this more refined place.

#### END OF PART ONE EXCERPT

# PART TWO

Intimate Experiences with the Divine through Contemplative Practices

### THE MONKEY WITH THE GOLDEN KEY

efreshing, salty air filled my lungs as I inhaled several satisfying, deep breaths. My tension melted away with every exhale, relieving my exhausted body. Gently opening my eyes, I admired the unoccupied Malibu Beach surrounding me and the serenity of the majestic Pacific Ocean. Supported by my favorite blue beach chair and shaded with a multicolored umbrella, I surrendered my toes into the sand and welcomed the invigorating, foamy waves as they swept over my feet.

On this day, I had driven an hour from my Los Feliz home on the east side of Los Angeles to find clarity, centeredness, and a sense of direction after a devastating life crisis. Frustration, confusion, and sadness filled me all at once. I had been feeling unsupported by loved ones and furious at my spiritual mentors.

Lonesomeness and abandonment had seeped deeply into my consciousness, causing me to question my life choices, including leaving my secure Canadian lifestyle two years prior. Bridging the contemporary with the spiritual was a trek that I had signed up for, but I did not realize how difficult the journey would be. My daily ritual upon waking—a combination of pranayama, japa, journaling, and a silent meditation—often offered me a boost and brought coherence to my heart and mind. I could not detach, however, from the tyranny of my monkey mind. My thoughts would continuously walk a line of victimhood rather than victory.

Earlier that morning, sitting in front of my deity-heavy altar hadn't produced favorable results, as it often does. The piercing silence to my request for direction and reprieve infuriated me. So, I charged off to the consecrated land of Malibu, which has an ambiance that is perfect for rejuvenation. I often wondered, looking into the ocean, if history and science were accurate in that all life started in the cavernous sea, and that perhaps deep within our subconscious, we can feel the pull of our distant ancestors. The waters always pulled me in with great awe and wonder.

Indigenous Californians known as the Chumash Indians had lived in the region for centuries, performing many sacred rituals and ceremonies. The Self Realization Fellowship Lake Shrine, founded by my great-granduncle, Paramahansa Yogananda, was housed only a few miles from this spot, off the Pacific Coast Highway. This peaceful area felt like my home, a safe haven, having discovered this benevolent portal to clarity and healing only a year earlier.

As I continued to take in the magnificence of the swaying ocean, my heart softened to the harmonies of the incoming waves. Soon I closed my eyes again, focusing on my third eye. Within a minute, my physical senses shut down and I entered into a portal of Divine light.

Dropping into a mysterious and timeless domain, I survey the inner terrain and realize that I'm in an eclectic, dim-lit chamber. The walls are made of stone and white-washed wood with many tapestries hanging from metal posts. A flaming fireplace illuminates two high-backed oak thrones encircled by beeswax candles in the center of the room. The air carries a sweet, woody, citric scent, like that in an ashram, temple, or church.

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Unexpectedly, a soft yet authoritative voice shouts from the direction of the oak chairs.

#### Rajprem! Shah! Sujon! Come! she exclaims.

Taking several cautious steps toward the throne, I am stunned by the presence of a beautiful woman sitting delicately on the throne. The fire's glow highlights her porcelain skin, large crystal-green eyes, flowing chestnut hair, and alluring smile. Her silky white robe covers her dainty yet elegant structure. She's wearing a daisy-flowered crown, and purple-blue gems dance around her wrists and neck, accented with *rudhraksha* seeds.

Her grace and beauty mesmerize me. I have never felt the quality of love she is emanating. My entire being wants to dance to her rhythms, embrace her with the deepest adoration, and dive passionately into her soul. She beams reverence from every pore of her body. There is an undeniable familiarity that I cannot decipher. Is this my mother, sister, or lover? Is she a goddess, priestess, or simply a messenger of God?

This beatific being directs me to sit in the opposite throne, speaking in a tongue that I understand yet sounds so foreign.

I am Sophia, she says, and proceeds to give me mind-blowing messages.

I gape at her presence, blown away by her celestial magnetism, and I hang on every word she utters. After some time, Sophia reveals herself to be one of my guardian angels.

We've had many lifetimes together not only on this planet, but worlds beyond this Milky Way, she imparts.

For the duration of our short-lived conversation, Sophia offers revitalizing grace and wise words. Her exquisite visage shifts every now and then. Her eyes change colors, shapes, and sizes while describing our various past interactions.

Eventually, in my mind's eye, Sophia magically produces a cherry-red wooden box with two swans carved on the top. Her ethereal hands open the regal box in front of me, exposing a shiny golden skeleton key with a crowned bow handle. Sophia unravels the significance of the specially encased gift she is passing onto me.

Allow this key to melt into your hand. The keyhole sits in your heart. It will unlock the messages encoded in your soul to guide you on your earth-born path. When you need guidance, place your palm over your heart. Remember, you are never alone on your journey.

I retrieve the special endowment from the box and place it in my right palm. Within seconds, the heavy key melts into my hand, sending shivers up my spine. The form becomes formless. As the key disappears, so does Sophia.

After what seemed like eternity, I found myself in my beach chair again. Opening my eyes, I realized that I was once again in front of the greyblue waters. It took me a couple of minutes to retrieve my senses and fall completely back into my physical body.

My being felt effervescent and light as I recalled my trek to the cosmic world. This auspicious meditation catapulted my energies to new heights. Allowing myself to visit the silence brought about a miraculous reward. Though I didn't have specific answers to my queries, I possessed hope, optimism, and grand support. I realized that my destiny was sitting in my hands and in my heart.

After settling back into reality, I decided to walk the beach to ground into my body. Everything looked crystal clear and breathtaking as I rose from my chair. My fresh eyes took in the majestic Santa Monica mountains, white seagulls squawking, sunbathers on the beach, and the inviting Malibu Pier ahead. I walked along the shore's edge, touching the water to clean off my sandy feet.

As I sauntered closer to the pier, I noticed two young men walking towards me having an animated conversation. As they drew near, I couldn't believe my eyes. One of the guys was wearing a white T-shirt with a cartoon monkey holding a key in the very same shape as the one I had just seen in my meditative vision.

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To me, it was Sophia sending me a confirmation of our conversation and Divine attunement. I shook my head and felt a colossal grin form on my face as I passed the two unassuming individuals.

"Sophia!" I screamed out, as my heart exploded with sheer joy.

Sujon Datta

#### END OF PART TWO EXCERPT

## PART THREE

Deepening Your Connection to the Divine through Meditation

### THE WORLD BEHIND YOUR EYES

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ositioned in front of our booth at an exhibition that my organization sponsored in Washington, D.C., was a large banner that posed a simple yet profound question: Who am I?

During the first day of the exhibition, a particular attendee breezed past our booth, then stopped in her tracks as she caught sight of the banner.

"I know who I am," she said with an attitude. "Do you?"

Slightly perplexed, our entire crew quietly pondered how to respond to her remark from their private, interior worlds. As the woman walked away, they noticed her flamboyant style of dress, carefully coiffed hair, and perfectly drawn makeup, and could have made a quick judgment. They found themselves curious to explore why she had made this remark, and if there was something they could learn from it for themselves.

The next day, the woman returned to our booth after attending my presentation that morning about the importance of meditation.

"Hearing you speak and feeling your energy, I realized that you definitely know yourself," she shared with me, as I observed that her countenance had softened. "Maybe I *don't* know myself. I want to explore this further. Can you help me?" Meditation has various ways of being interpreted. A simple exploration of an encounter like the one with this woman at the exhibition can be coined as a meditation moment, an opportunity to discover more of yourself. So, when someone tells me they can't meditate, I tend to not believe them. As I mentioned earlier, everybody has quiet moments in the shower or at night before drifting off to sleep.

How does one expand these contemplative moments into a deeper experience? This is a journey of acclimating thoughts, words, and actions from a deeply awakened state of being. By "awakened", I mean to see more than what your two eyes see. It means to interpret the moment from a place where silence meets wisdom, and to value the purpose of your existence.

I would say to you, as I did to the conference goers that day, to consider the world behind your eyes—the inner space where the experience occurs. Understand that you are an immortal, eternal, imperishable being of light, a soul that's been on a long journey. Now place your consciousness on that inner pull of the eternal, which is like an ocean of peace, truth, and power. See if you have the openness and the patience to just allow the energy of that connection to somehow influence you for a little bit. Invite it in and allow it to pour into you . . . gently, subtly, deeply.

#### OVERCOMING BLOCKS TO THE PROCESS

Mental blocks to this fluid, love-filled process arise from having an expectation or certain interpretation of meditation. If your mind is scattered when you sit down to meditate, this could be a sign that you're not paying attention to yourself. If when you want to have a quiet moment with yourself, and find that you can't be still or comfortable, this is your cue that you're not taking care of yourself. Step back and tend to what you need based on what your intuition is telling you.

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Another thing I notice with many well-intentioned meditators is that there is a limitation in how they are perceiving what they're going through in their lives. For example, people who are in a particular situation, whether it's their marriage or their career or a health issue, tend to focus their energy only on what's not working. It turns into a vicious cycle and then, unbeknownst to them, they become stuck in this web for a month, a year, 10 years, 30 years.

If you can relate to this, I encourage you to try your best to not pull your energy from other people or things that might make you believe those interpretations. Turn ever inward when seeking your answers, and embrace the process of self-discovery. Just being in self-inquiry, nothing more, can be exuberant and edifying.

In overcoming blocks to a full meditation experience, it is important to understand that truly mystical experiences do not come through the egomind. The ego can never explain what a Divine experience is like. It's not supposed to, because it doesn't speak the language. Mystical moments are often so profound, in fact, that they mostly defy words. For this reason, don't fall into the mind trap of overanalyzing or trying to define your mystical moments, especially to others. Keep them unto yourself, with no words necessary.

If you feel resistance to the process of meditation and can't seem to overcome it, please know that this, too, has its benefit. You see, oftentimes, the blockages are a way for us to not feel the hurt, pain, or trauma that may be a part of our soul's journey. It's like your soul intuitively knows that it's not yet time for you to move back into soul awareness. It knows that you're not quite ready to see how beautiful and powerful you are, or to comprehend the ways in which God's beauty can work through you.

When you reach a point where you say, "Okay, I don't think I want to keep feeling this pain or acting out in anger, insecurity, or fear just because I'm bruised inside," this is when the blocks to meditation will begin to subside and release. When you are truly ready, after building the courage and

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strength, you will see that time was kind to you, and now your meditative journey can begin. You will ask the right internal questions, signaling to the soul that you are poised to finally be free of the bondage.

Little by little, it will bring you back into a comfortable space of introspection, and you will open so beautifully to your soul's remembrance of who you are. This is why mystical encounters come through being humble and surrendered to the soul's consciousness, which is an element of awareness in your personality based in self-respect. Don't be surprised if this process makes you quieter, kinder, and more contemplative, because now you are aware that you are carrying something so sacred.

#### HOW MEDITATION CHANGES YOU

Meditation allows us to come back to a place of inner balance, where our thoughts, feelings, energy, and time are used in a way that has value and is worthwhile. Everything depends on our stage of awareness and an understanding of our true identity. As we deepen into our practice, we start to open the door to more positive experiences in life. We begin to value things of a spiritual rather than a material nature. We desire to create a values-based life, where we can afford to be generous and loving. Our thinking becomes clearer and our decision-making power increases.

Embracing contemplation and meditation will reveal healthier, more joyful ways to live. For example, you may be inspired to change your diet to a more vegetarian-based one, or your lifestyle to one that is simpler and more focused on your virtues. You will eventually begin to understand that your life can be used for a higher purpose, which we will elaborate on in an upcoming chapter.

Creating a space for the Divine will enable profound insights to be revealed to you, as they have for the individuals whose stories you've just

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read. Feelings of belonging, seeing the Divinity in others, gentle urgings to follow your soul's path, and even feeling yourself *as* a soul are all ways that you will begin to feel a stronger sense of spiritual empowerment. You will begin to respond to situations, rather than reacting to them.

This creates harmony in all things, happier and healthier relationships, and can change your life in the most positive ways, because it encourages you to stay authentic and simple in a natural way that is not forced.

#### TYPES OF MEDITATION

So, how to begin? There are probably as many ways to meditate as there are souls on earth. The type of meditation that attracts you will depend on what you are looking for. Are you seeking a tool for stress reduction? Improved concentration? Getting to know yourself better? Or, simply connecting with the Divine?

Some commonly known practices offer a more structured approach that can give you a foundation for how and where to start. Here are a handful of the most widely used types of meditation, beginning with my personal favorite.

**RAJA YOGA:** This ancient form of meditation is practiced with the eyes open, which makes it versatile and easy to incorporate into your daily activities. Raja Yoga trains the mind to be your friend and gives you the inclination to choose loving, positive thoughts over those which are negative and wasteful. I like to say that Raja Yoga sets you free because it releases the power to respond with love.

We all make mistakes. We all waste our words, energy, and time until we pause and think deeply about what matters in our lives. When we hold on tightly to our views, the mind shrinks and smothers any power to love. In

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that state, the soul can't breathe new energy into a situation, and everyone loses. But when we sit quietly, canceling all mindsets, and allow ourselves to know the deep peace of the soul, miraculous changes can happen for the better. People will understand you more clearly, new doors will open, and you will feel more relaxed overall.

This is the power of Raja Yoga. It teaches you to step back and observe life, take a calm breath, cool your reactions, and go forward in a manner that is independent of others urging you to think or act as they wish.

**GUIDED MEDITATION**: Before awakening our consciousness to the broadest, highest perspective, we may see the world around us from a very average point of view. These thoughts are connected to a more limited sense of purpose. I'm not saying that purpose is not important, but our thoughts that are joined to that interpretation and intent are typically based on a smaller sense of identity.

As we awaken and open to another version of ourselves, we sometimes need a little bit of guidance and support until we acclimate to this new way of being. Awakening means that we're willing to transform the way we see ourselves. This is where guided meditation can be very useful. It helps you to connect with what your awakening feels like for you. You can begin to have an intimate, ongoing conversation with yourself in your guided meditations.

There are many varieties of guided meditations to choose from by wellknown meditation experts, and based on what your soul needs, you will resonate with a particular person's approach. At some point in time, when you are rooted comfortably in your awakened self, you may find that your guided meditations become just one sentence, and that will be all you need ... until they become just one word, and that will be all you need.

Eventually, you won't even need one word. You will be in the embodiment of what has been created as a result of your process so far.

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**MANTRA MEDITATION**: It is helpful, at times, to meditate on a mantra, which creates a calming in your personality when used consistently over a period of time. It is a tool to direct you to, ultimately, where the soul wants to go.

Mantra meditation can be practiced by selecting a word, phrase, or prayer that resonates with you on the deepest level. You should be able to repeat it easily and naturally, so that you don't have to think about it. Quietly repeat the mantra for a set of recitations, about 10 or 20, then begin to recite it silently. As thoughts arise, return to the mantra. This practice will help you experience the present moment more fully and, therefore, make more conscious choices.

**WALKING MEDITATION**: This form of meditation is perfect for individuals who don't necessarily feel comfortable sitting and contemplating the thoughts emerging in their minds. It can be done by mostly anyone, and doesn't require any special equipment or resources.

I recommend going for a walk in the morning hours, either in silence or accompanied by a guided meditation of your choosing. Doing this outdoors in nature is ideal, though it can be done in a large, quiet interior space, as well. As you begin, walk at a natural pace with your hands placed wherever comfortable.

To add a mantra-type experience, count your steps up to 10 or 20, then pause and begin again. With every step, be mindful of your body moving in cadence with your mantra or thoughts as they arise.

**SOUND MEDITATION**: Sound meditation connects us to vibrational frequencies that reside inside of the soul. It is an ancient practice that has been used by many cultures and wisdom traditions to restore a state of balance. You may find that music, chanting, toning, or immersing in a sound bath helps to shift you into a calmer, clearer perspective. It can incorporate

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the use of sacred instruments—such as the gong, didgeridoo, singing bowls, cymbals, and bells—to release energetic blockages and ease you into a more harmonic frequency.

Even if you have never meditated, you can experience less tension and anxiety after just a single sound healing session. The frequencies aren't just heard; they are felt through tactile physical vibrations. Today, the use of binaural beats is more widespread, as studies advance in how the human brain works. Binaural beats help brainwave frequencies to synchronize, leading you into a state of deep relaxation associated with beta waves, or creative flow associated with meditative theta waves. It's a beautiful, melodic practice.

**CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER**: It's important for us to broaden our definition of contemplative prayer, especially if you are new to meditation. To me, it simply means that when you're having a thought, with alert awareness you pause at a particular point in the journey of that thought, and go into deeper introspection. The prayer aspect is simply the curiosity and questioning of, *What does that thought actually mean in terms of who I need to be or who I will become*? It is a practice of preparing yourself to ask the right questions for yourself in your future becoming.

Incorporating contemplative prayer into your life enables you to enjoy who you are becoming at every step of the way. It deepens your sense of self-trust, and you will come to understand yourself even more. You can ask the right questions, such as, *Can I trust the thoughts that I'm having? Can I trust the words I'm about to speak? Can I even trust my future?* Without contemplation, you are subject to everything that is happening in front of your eyes.

Mostly all of that is a manifestation of thoughts you've had in the past, or thoughts that others have had in the past. So, ask yourself, *Why would I want* 

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*my soul to be influenced by an orange that's already been squeezed? Why am I still trying to get juice from it?* 

**MEDITATIVE READING:** It is often helpful to take inspiration from sacred texts and authentic spiritual literature as part of your meditative practice. I enjoy reading timeless spiritual classics like the *Bhagavad Gita*, which I find to be very meditative. It is also useful to read about the experiences of others who have chosen to turn inward, such as the authors in this book.

In such stories and books, you can often find in one sentence something that can take you very deep inside and give you a realization about yourself. This phenomenon happens because enlightened masters throughout time have used meditation as an important tool for channeling their energy, as well as conserving their energy so that it had more impact. The intention coming through their words has had the power to be felt by the minds of millions, and thousands of years later, they are still having an impact.

When choosing meditative reading, it's important for you to intuitively feel if it's coming from an authenticated place. Can you feel the intention of the book when you hold it in your hands and gently turn the pages? Can you sense the life in it? It's also important to get an idea about the author's journey. Who is speaking? What is it about the person's journey that you feel deserves your time and energy to commit to dive into it?

All of these practices are a refueling of the energy that is needed to create new ideas with whatever is in front of you, or add onto it, or make more of it. With meditation, you're moving your attention away from feeding on something old, and toward living from something new that's been created inside of you.

It's quite fascinating, and it's why we're here—to be truly alive, and to feel something about this gift of Life.

#### END OF PART THREE EXCERPT

### **MEET OUR FEATURED AUTHOR**



SISTER DR. JENNA is an acclaimed, trusted spiritual mentor committed to bridging divides in societies and building relationships between global influencers. As the founder and director of the Brahma Kumaris Meditation Museum, located in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, she has impacted lives around the globe by inspiring change and finding solutions to current day crises.

Sister Dr. Jenna is the host of the popular America Meditating Radio Show and recipient of the President's Lifetime National Community Service Award. She is a member of the Evolutionary Leaders Circle, a group of thought leaders from diverse disciplines in service to conscious evolution and was selected by Empower A Billion Women 2020 as one of 100 most influential leaders of 2015. Sister Dr. Jenna served as a partner with the Oprah Winfrey Network, and Values Partnerships on the Belief Team, a community of individuals from diverse spiritual, cultural, and faith backgrounds. She was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree by St. Thomas Aquinas College in Sparkill, New York, for her many years of dedication to solving critical issues. Her mission is to continually build bridges, foster trust, decode critical current issues, and offer a perspective for folks to find clarity and inner power.

Sister Dr. Jenna has traveled to more than 93 countries offering tools and reflective methods for building community engagement and a more sustainable future. Her countless projects interconnect various sectors of society, leaving no life unmoved by her gentle and clear message for peace.

Learn more at americameditating.org and meditationmuseum.org.