

“Lively and genuinely illuminating.”

—Jack Kornfield, author of *A Path with Heart*

B O D H I P A K S A

LIVING AS
A R I V E R

Finding Fearlessness
in the Face of
Change

LIVING AS
A RIVER

BODHIPAKSA

LIVING AS
A RIVER

**Finding Fearlessness
in the Face of
Change**



Boulder, Colorado 80306

Sounds True, Inc.
Boulder, CO 80306

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*“Go into yourself and see how deep the place is
from which your life flows.”*

— RAINER MARIA RILKE

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Introduction: Fear and Clinging in the River of Life

“I spent the afternoon musing on Life. If you come to think of it, what a queer thing Life is! So unlike anything else, don’t you know, if you see what I mean.”

—P. G. WODEHOUSE¹

Here’s a very “queer thing” about life: sometimes the things we think will make us miserable actually make us happier. When Professor Eric D. Miller of Kent State University’s Department of Psychology asked people to imagine the death of their partner, they reported feeling more positive about their relationships and less troubled by their significant others’ annoying quirks.² We live in a world marked by constant change and impermanence. The things we love decay and perish. The people we love will pass away, or we ourselves will pass away, leaving them behind. Wary that thinking about impermanence will be too much of a “downer,” we try not to think about these things too much. And yet, ironically, when we do happen to experience the fragility of existence, we often find our appreciation of life enhanced rather than diminished.

Often the things we *think* will make us happier—like impressing the boss or getting that raise—ultimately deprive us of happiness. As a well-known saying goes, “Few people on their deathbed think, ‘I wish I’d spent more time in the office.’” And yet that’s so often how we live our lives. Life has the potential to be glorious. There’s the joy of witnessing birth and growth. The joy of loving. The joy of learning. The joy of deepening relationships. Sometimes there’s the sheer joy of simply being alive. But those moments can be rare and, again rather ironically, we’re often too focused on things that don’t give us lasting joy to pay attention to those that do.

Our existential situation is such that it’s hard to have anything but a sporadic experience of security and well-being. After all, the world is inherently insecure. There’s nothing in the world upon which we can absolutely rely. True, it’s pretty certain the sun will rise tomorrow morning, but then again, there’s no guarantee we’ll be around to enjoy it. Sometimes we forget this, and it’s been argued that in fact we try very hard to forget it. An entire movement in psychology is predicated on the hypothesis that we have strategies for dealing with the painful reality of uncertainty and loss. Studies have shown that we frequently try to find something unchanging and reliable with which to identify, something that acts like a secure island amidst a river of change. Often what we cling to is an ideology, or a religious identity, or a sense of belonging to a group or nation. This response is one of fear and clinging. We see change around us and we’re afraid. And so we try to find something to cling to—something more permanent and stable than ourselves.

Another strategy we all employ is to imagine that we *ourselves* are small islands of stability in the river of life. We cling to the idea that we have this “thing” called a self. And we imagine this self to be

separate and permanent. We become the thing we cling to. But as Sylvia Plath once wrote, although with a rather different intent, “I am myself. That is not enough.” Our selves are not enough. We find ourselves incomplete, lacking happiness and—despite all our clinging—security. And so we grasp for those things we think will bring us happiness and security, while trying to keep at bay those things we think threaten our happiness and security.

Fundamentally, we all just want to be happy, secure, and at peace. The problem is that as strategies for finding happiness, clinging and aversion just don’t work very well. They don’t deliver the goods. It turns out that thoughts of impermanence often enrich our lives and make us happier. We cling to status, material possessions, approval, and pleasure, and yet the pursuit of these things often turns out to have been a misuse of our time. We think that focusing on our own needs will maximize our happiness and well-being, but this often merely impoverishes us, while including others in our sphere of concern brings us greater satisfaction.

We can swap our ineffective strategies for others that work better, but this requires that we change the way we see ourselves. We imagine the self to be separate and unchanging, but it is not that way at all. The self is, in a simile I’ll return to frequently, like an eddy in a stream. It has the appearance of being a separate thing and of having permanence, but in what sense can an eddy be separate? There’s no borderline we can say for sure marks where the eddy stops and the river begins. The eddy cannot exist without the stream, and the stream itself is nothing more than a mass of eddies and other currents. I suggest that the self is like that too. We are not separate from the world around us; we instead exist as the sum total of our relationships with a vast web of interconnected processes. We are not physically

separate, and we are not mentally separate, and realizing these facts is infinitely enriching.

I'll be suggesting that we embrace the fact that nothing permanent constitutes us. Each of us is an ever-moving flow of matter and consciousness. Just as an eddy can exist only because it's continually changing, so too do our selves exist only because they are a process, and hence impermanent and contingent upon things that we take to be non-self. For example, we think of our bodies as being an important part of our identity, but 90 percent of the body's cells are bacterial rather than human. Ninety percent of you is not you. In fact, when you look more closely you can see that your entire physical being is made of material that was, sometimes not long ago, not you. Every atom comprising your body is borrowed, and will be returned to the outside world. Some of it is returning this very moment. Physically, in fact, much of the external world around us is actually "us"—plants, animals, and even soil and rocks made from material that was formerly part of our bodies. Mentally, we are each "networked" to other minds through the action of mirror neurons, which allow us to share other people's experiences. You could not in fact have a conscious self, in the sense that you have one now, without having encountered other conscious selves. Consciousness is something "caught." In fact, there's no such "thing" as consciousness. Consciousness is not an entity that sits within us, awaiting contact with the outside world; rather it's a series of activities that arise in dependence upon contact with the world. The ultimate act of letting go is to abandon the delusion that consciousness and the world are separate things. The more we reflect, the more we can recognize that there is nothing permanent or separate in the body or mind that can constitute the very limited and limiting kind of self we commonly assume we have.

But is it possible to live without clinging to the idea of a self? Yes, it is.

Over the course of our explorations, we'll peel away, layer after layer, the assumptions that we exist separately and that there is some kind of permanence to our existence. I will not be suggesting that you do not have a self. I will simply try to demonstrate that the self is not what you take it to be, and that it's *our idea of having a definable self* we must let go of. I'll suggest that we need to stop clinging to an idea of who and what we are, in order to start living more spontaneously and unselfconsciously. I'll suggest that we let go of our self-definitions—of thinking of ourselves as being essentially static—so that we can become freer of the constraints that limited self-definitions impose. By doing so, our experience can become increasingly vibrant, rich, compassionate, and free from anxiety.

I'll suggest that we cease clinging to the idea of having a self so we can embrace a life that is spontaneous and flowing, like an athlete in “the zone,” with a mind clear, focused, and non-grasping. I'll suggest that, rather than managing our terror through clinging, we do just the opposite: that we learn to let go and move beyond our fear of change. I'll suggest that the best kind of life is a joyful and fearless life—one in which we have looked impermanence in the face and seen it not as an enemy or even simply as how things are, but as an opportunity for growth. I'll suggest, mainly, that we let go of the idea of our own specialness—our separateness and permanence. This does not mean we diminish ourselves. In fact, paradoxically, in letting go of the idea of our specialness we open ourselves up to recognizing we're more special than we ever could have imagined.

This is very much a book exploring the overlap of science and spirituality—two fields of exploration that fascinate me. I became

fascinated by science in my early teens, and by philosophy and religion a few years later. It was in fact science that led me to explore spirituality, because the biology of perception led me to reflect on how we construct our experience. In this book, lots of compelling science will help keep us grounded and will help us understand how it is that nothing that constitutes us is static or separate. We'll look at what we're made of, physically and mentally, and how our bodies and minds connect us to the wider world, and how an awareness of this connectedness can lead to a more expansive sense of our selves. We'll look at the ways that the bodies and minds constituting our selves are not static things but are ever-changing processes. We'll look at how those same bodies and minds (and the selves they constitute) are not in any way separate from the world or from other selves. We'll use science to help us let go of the counterproductive strategy of trying to grasp the ungraspable, of trying to find permanence in a world of change.

On the spiritual side, I'll borrow heavily from a reflective meditation practice from the Buddhist tradition: the Six Element Practice. In this practice, we reflect on what constitutes the body and the mind. We call to mind the solid matter (Earth), liquid (Water), energy (Fire), and gases (Air) that make up the body—as well as the form they comprise (Space), and notice how none of these is a static thing onto which we can hold, but instead is a process. We also notice that each element is “borrowed” from the outside world. With the sixth element, Consciousness, we note how our experiences—our sensations, feelings, emotions, and thoughts—continually arise and pass away, once again leaving us nothing we can identify as the basis of a permanent and separate self.

The Six Element Practice is a reflection specifically designed to undermine our delusions of separateness and of having an unchanging

self. It's a practice of letting go. This book isn't a meditation manual, and I won't be giving you a step-by-step guide on how to sit down and meditate. Instead I'll be borrowing from the analytical method of the practice; the book itself is intended to be a meditation practice. Although one would normally do the Six Element Practice seated and with closed eyes, I hope that your reading will be an extended form of the practice—perhaps less intense than if you were in fact meditating, but perhaps more far-reaching given that we have plenty of time and space for exploration.

Most of the spirituality in this book draws from the Buddhist tradition, which is the one I practice within and with which I'm most familiar. I've tried, however, not to make this a "Buddhist book." I'm not assuming you're a Buddhist. I'm not trying to convert you. It's my intention to engage you and to encourage you to reflect, not to get you to adopt a particular religious identity (which would be a peculiar aim, anyway, in a book that purports to be examining and deconstructing identity).

I consider myself a skeptical Buddhist, even an agnostic one. While I believe that the Buddha's core teachings are admirably free from superstition, I do see in Buddhist scripture a considerable amount of legendary material and "popular" teachings that I believe were meant to be helpful for uneducated people rather than taken as serious philosophy. I'm also aware of the difficulties that arise when we pick and choose from canonical scriptures, as I do. After all, where do we draw the line? Are we at risk of paying attention only to those teachings that are compatible with our prejudices? In doing so might we perhaps ignore teachings that challenge us more deeply? There are also teachings I just have to set to one side: scientifically, I can't see any way rebirth could work, for example, but since it's a teaching I

can neither verify nor disprove (and that doesn't affect my day-to-day life), I simply don't devote much thought to it.

I hope that you'll get to know and appreciate the Buddha as a philosopher and as a teacher through our explorations of his thought and the practices he recommended. I think he was a remarkable person for his time, and would have been held as a remarkable individual in any era, including our own. I want to share my enthusiasm for his insightful perspectives on life. He pointed to an alternative way of living, which is that we radically embrace impermanence. In his path of training, we systematically notice all acts of holding on, all acts of trying to resist impermanence, and learn to let go. In doing so repeatedly, we start to see the disadvantages of clinging and the advantages of non-clinging. Training the mind in this way, we cling less, we experience more freedom and expansiveness, and we find we can face impermanence with less fear.

Managing Terror in a World of Change

The movement in psychology that I referred to earlier—the one based on the premise that we employ strategies to defend ourselves from the fear of death—is called terror management theory (TMT).³ It's an outlook that has a lot to teach us about the relationship between fear and clinging. In an intriguing experiment in Magdeburg, Germany, TMT researchers investigated how reminders of impermanence affected people's attitudes toward their own nation. Posing as marketers, the researchers said they were investigating behaviors related to consumption and television. In addition to filler questions meant to obscure the real purpose of the experiment, the researchers posed questions such as these:

Imagine you've won a contest and can buy a car. How likely is it that you would buy an Audi, Toyota, Volkswagen, or Renault?

How much do you like traveling within Germany?
How much do you like traveling to foreign countries?

How likely is it that Germany will win the soccer World Cup and become the world champion?

The study's unwitting participants were questioned in two different locations—outside a shopping mall or within sight of the gates of a cemetery. Those subjects questioned near the graveyard, rather than at the more prosaic location, were far more likely to have a favorable attitude toward things German. They were more likely to want to vacation in Germany and to eat German foods. They preferred German television. They were more optimistic about Germany's chances in the World Cup. In short, they were more nationalistic. The mere sight of a cemetery gate is enough to cause people to cling to something—in this case nationality—that offers a sense of immortality or a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself.⁴

A reminder of death is something we used to call a *memento mori*—a Latin phrase meaning “remember you will die.” Old gravestones commonly bore *memento mori* in the form of winged skulls, hourglasses, or grim reapers to remind us of our mortality—as if the gravestone itself were not reminder enough. Modern-day psychologists use the more colorless term, “mortality salience condition” for something that reminds us of death. In a U.S. study involving mortality salience, judges were asked to estimate what bail they'd set in cases

of alleged prostitution. But before being presented with the fictional (although realistic) cases, they were given questionnaires to complete. For half the judges, there was a mortality salience condition—a question that directly prompted thoughts of their own deaths by asking about their belief in the afterlife—while the remainder completed questionnaires lacking that question. Judges who’d been reminded of their own impermanence went on to set bail at levels *eight times* that of the other jurists. The judges’ sense of morality tightened up considerably as a result of the mere reminder of death. One researcher noted, “Moral principles are part of the cultural anxiety-buffer that protects individuals from anxiety concerning their vulnerability and mortality.”⁵ Here, merely mentioning death in a questionnaire can cause people to cling to what they perceive as God’s will, or to what they see as timeless moral values, or to the notion of preserving a stable and moral society.⁶

It’s not just TMT psychologists who remind us of death. Real life provides its own mortality salience conditions. The attacks on September 11, 2001, functioned as a mortality salience condition on a massive scale. Any one of us could have been on those planes. Any of us could have been in Manhattan that day. We inevitably found ourselves thinking, What would I do if I were on a hijacked plane or in a burning building? Perhaps the most unsettling scenes were those of people jumping to certain death from the Twin Towers. To jump or not to jump? There’s no good answer to a question like that, and we all live with the deeply troubling feelings it evokes.

One person’s response is described in a much-cited article on fear and political affiliation, published in *Psychology Today*. The article, “The Ideological Animal,” opens with the case of Cinnamon Stillwell, a lifelong liberal whose political views were flipped 180 degrees by the

tragedies of 9/11.⁷ Convinced that the victims were getting less sympathy than the terrorists, she started to feel that liberals sided with the attackers and were consumed with hatred for the United States. She started a group called “9/11 Neocons”—soon inundated with members—for former liberals who found themselves catapulted into the conservative camp by the tragedy. As the article recounts,

“At first, she felt resonance with the right [only] about the war on terror. But soon she found herself concurring about ‘smaller government, traditional societal structures, respect and reverence for life, the importance of family, personal responsibility, national unity over identity politics.’ She embraced gun rights for the first time, drawn to ‘the idea of self-preservation in perilous times.’ Her marriage broke up due in part to political differences. In the lead-up to the invasion of Iraq, she began going to pro-war rallies.”

This desire for stability and social coherence is all too understandable as a response to a fearful situation. Researcher Tom Pyszczynski, one of the originators of TMT, suggests that the cultural worldviews people cling to when confronted by a reminder of their own impermanence represent a “conception of reality that imbues life with order, permanence, and stability . . . through which individuals can attain a sense of personal value.”⁸

There are “liberal” forms of clinging as well, incidentally. A paper in the *Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin*⁹ reported that the notion of “progress” could play the same role as religion or nationalism in providing a buffer against our fear of impermanence. People asked to think about their own deaths were subsequently less likely to agree

with an essay claiming that progress is a myth. Thinking about death promotes faith in the idea of progress—a concept that gives people a sense their lives have a meaning beyond their own fleeting existence. As further confirmation of this pattern, people who read an essay claiming that progress is a myth were subsequently more likely to think about their own deaths. Take away the comforting notion that we're part of a larger plan, and we're made aware of the brevity and fragility of our lives.

Stillwell may have had a point in thinking that at least some liberals were sympathetic to the terrorists. Studies have found that liberals who embrace tolerance tend to become more tolerant when reminded of mortality. They even become more tolerant when they evaluate a person who criticizes his or her own country.¹⁰ Tolerance may strike many as self-evidently a good thing, but of course whether tolerance is good or not depends on what it is you tolerate; should we tolerate racism or sexism, for example? Some liberals, as a result of 9/11, were indeed busy trying to understand and sympathize with the motivations of those antagonistic to the United States at a time when the wounds of the attacks were still wide open. In effect, these liberals clung to their notions of tolerance as a supreme value and gave the *impression* that they were unconcerned about the victims of the attacks, even if that wasn't actually the case.

But such is how we deal with fear: we cling, sometimes blindly. Clinging to cultural worldviews, in the way that these examples suggest, illustrates the way in which we create an *identity* in order to shelter ourselves from the fear of change and the inherent insecurity of life. We take something larger than ourselves—nation, religion, race, politics, the idea of progress—and to make life seem more secure than it actually is, we identify with that larger something,

making ourselves in effect a part of it, and it a part of us. By aligning the self—the ephemeral, relatively inconsequential self—with forces greater than ourselves, we ride on the coat-tails of the immortal, at least insofar as we believe such things as nations and religions and progress to be permanent.

There are of course more subtle and omnipresent reminders of impermanence than terrorists who fly airplanes into buildings. We look in the mirror and see signs of aging. We're surprised by how quickly our children grow up. We're saddened and disoriented to see the obituaries of the icons of our youth appearing at an ever-increasing rate. Our possessions wear out. Our livelihoods are often insecure. The policemen start to look impossibly young. On some level, the fact of our lives' impermanence is visible in every moment, even if we choose not to dwell upon it. Clinging is our defense mechanism against the fear of death.

The Vicious Cycle of Fear and Clinging

Clinging is a strategy for dealing with change, but it's also a strategy that is woven through with denial, and that isn't very effective. Even though we may think of religion, nation, and progress as immortal, they're of course not immortal at all. While the world we live on is 4.5 billion years old, few nations have endured for more than a few centuries. Entire civilizations flourish, then collapse into barbarism. The gods we presently worship are, on cosmological timescales, newborns, and the majority of gods from the past are as dead as their erstwhile followers. The religions practiced by the vast majority of humankind did not exist three or four millennia ago. Our political philosophies are even younger.

We may deny the impermanence of the things we cling to in order to avoid thoughts of our own mortality, but such denial never provides a watertight barrier against reality. Many people who see a religion as an important part of their identity do indeed get reassurance from those affiliations, but they're also aware that not all share their convictions, and they may in fact feel besieged by heretical or secular values. It's as if all religions seem to think they live in especially degenerate times, and that the world is going to hell in a handbasket, their faith under threat. It's simply not possible to escape fear by clinging to religious or nationalistic viewpoints—and in fact they may worsen things. In a controversial study, John Hibbing of the Department of Political Science, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, along with a number of colleagues, identified individuals who took either conservative or liberal positions on issues such as gun control, defense spending, immigration, and patriotism. When these people were taken into the lab and exposed to unpleasant imagery (such as maggots in a wound or a large spider crawling over a terrified face) or to loud and unexpected sounds, the conservatives were found to exhibit much stronger startle responses than the liberals.¹¹ There's no value judgment placed on this, incidentally. Fear may be a good thing, alerting us to dangers that are very real, and a lack of fear may be a sign of recklessness or naiveté. The lesson I'd like to draw from this study is not essentially a political one. It is simply that if clinging to nationalism and other protective responses is meant to guard against fear, it evidently doesn't work very well.

There are no ultimate refuges in a temporal world. All attempts to use impermanent phenomena to shelter from change are doomed to fail. Clinging may *seem* to imbue life with a sense of stability and

permanence, but those feelings are based on illusions and lead ultimately to more fear. Fear leads us to clinging through identification, and identification leads back to fear as we observe the objects of our identification under threat. It's a vicious circle.

We cling to many things as ways of finding security. We cling to sources of pleasure and try to avoid sources of pain. We cling to material goods and fear their loss. We cling to familiar habits that reinforce our sense of who we are, and feel strangely disordered when forced out of habitual patterns of action, even if it's just that our preferred blend of coffee isn't available or a favorite website's layout has changed. We cling to beliefs and views, and we can become irate with people who are inconsiderate enough to disagree with us. We cling to emotional states. We cling to status. Sometimes we'll defend almost to the death a belief we know to be wrong, simply because we don't want to concede an argument. Sometimes we cling to a negative status, comfortable in seeing ourselves as the victim and having someone to blame. We cling to approval, sometimes assenting to absurdities in order to fit in with a peer group. All these forms of clinging become parts of our identity. Clinging can even become compounded. Clinging is a habit we find hard to give up, and so we cling to clinging itself.

At the core of our sense of identity is our sense of self. That we have a sense of self is so obvious it almost seems absurd to point out. It seems, well, *self*-evident that we have a self—a source of separateness, permanence, and autonomy. You probably have a sense that something about you is distinct and separate from the world around you. You may well feel that something permanent and unchanging defines you. You may think that you, in some sense, existed before your conception and will continue to exist in some form after the death of your body. (Even committed atheists often fall into this kind

of thinking, as we'll see later.) You probably think of yourself as an agent endowed with free will, freely and consciously making choices that steer you through life. That's how we like to think of ourselves. Our ultimate layer of security comes from holding on to a view of ourselves: separate, enduring, self-owning.

This sense of a permanent self is deeply paradoxical. After all, if we truly believe our selves are permanent, why should we fear death? Why should the mere sight of a cemetery gate have us running for the foxhole of national identity, or a question about the afterlife make us more moralistic and judgmental? The paradox is precisely this: because we fear our own eventual extinction, we construct the idea of a permanent self. (There are other reasons too, I believe, but we'll go into those later.) We are uncertain about our own nature. We're not sure how to think of our selves.

This book is about our selves and how we think of them. It's about the identities we construct and the problems caused by clinging to a sense of a fixed and separate self in a world marked by constant change. And it's about how living with a sense of self may not be the ideal way to approach life. I'm going to argue that our sense of separateness is an illusion; that our sense of having a permanent identity is an illusion; and even that the sense of the conscious mind—the conscious “I”—being in charge of ourselves, owning our selves, and directing operations, is flawed. This all may sound rather abstract and even like a bit of a downer, but we've already seen that the things we think will bring us down can often be uplifting. It's my aim to uplift. Denial's not a good basis for a life, and as a famous teacher once said, “The truth will set you free.”

The very idea of abandoning our belief in a fixed and separate self may well strike you as quixotic. In fact, I'm often struck by the

passionate intensity with which people cling to the idea that they have a separate self, usually with an unchanging core, with conscious decision-making at the helm of their actions. For most people, it's simply inconceivable that there could be any other way of seeing things. I obviously have my work cut out for me if I'm to make a dent in such strong convictions, and I ask you to bear with me as I lead you through a traditional method for deconstructing our sense of self, using illustrations from science to highlight what the Buddha was trying to get us to recognize.

Do I think that, having read this book, you'll have lost your sense of self? No, I'm not that naive. I lost my own sense of having a self some time ago, and while I may be a slow learner (or perhaps unlearner, since I was learning to let go of a belief in a self that I now see as false), it took many years of reflection, observation, discussion, and meditation to make a breakthrough into a more self-less way of seeing myself and the world.

Can we face the truth of impermanence and the terror it brings without the self tightening up around an ideology, without submerging ourselves in a group, or without naively clinging to vague promises such as progress? Can we fully embrace the flow of our being and accept the flow of the river of life? Is it possible to find security in the midst of life's torrent? Is it possible to *be* the river rather than fight its flow?

I hope that as a result of engaging with this book you *will* start to see yourself differently—start to see yourself, even if just for brief periods, as more fluid and dynamic than you normally think you are. I hope you will start to appreciate yourself as more expansive—as part of an interconnected whole. I hope you will start to see yourself as being both *less* than you normally do (less static, less separate) and

as *more* than you normally do (more connected, more significant). And although the glimpses you may have of a different way of being may be fleeting, something once glimpsed may be remembered for a long time and, perhaps, dwelt upon as the basis for future insights.

We'll be opening the door to a different way of seeing and being. With that door opened, perhaps even only momentarily, I hope you're tempted to explore further what you've glimpsed on the other side.

“At a time when it’s increasingly challenging to find clear and honest direction on the spiritual path, *Living as a River* offers contemporary insight into an ancient practice and wise counsel we can trust. This book is both beautifully written and useful to all serious seekers.”

— Mariana Caplan, PhD

Author of *Eyes Wide Open: Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path* and *Halfway Up the Mountain: The Error of Premature Claims to Enlightenment*

To face reality is to embrace change; to resist change is to suffer. This is the liberating truth that unfolds with *Living as a River*. A masterful investigation of the nature of self, this eloquent blend of current science and time-honored spiritual insight is meant to free us from the fear of impermanence in a world defined by change.

The primary vehicle for this journey is Buddhism’s traditional Six Element Practice, a deconstructive process of deep reflection that helps us let go of the belief in a separate, static self—the root of unhappiness. Bodhipaksa takes readers through a systematic yet poetic analysis of the self that supports the realization of:

- A sense of spaciousness and expansiveness that transcends the limitations of the physical body
- Profound gratitude, awe, and a feeling of belonging as we witness the extent of our connectedness with the universe
- Freedom from the psychological burden caused by clinging to a false identity
- The relaxed experience of “consciousness, pure and bright”

Engrossing and incisive, *Living as a River* is at once an empowering guide and a meditative practice we can turn to again and again to overcome our fear of change and align joyfully with the natural unfolding of creation.

BODHIPAKSA was born Graeme Stephen in Scotland and currently lives and teaches in New Hampshire. He is a Buddhist teacher and author who has been practicing within the Triratna Buddhist Community since 1982, and he has been a member of the Triratna Buddhist Order since 1993. Bodhipaksa runs the online meditation center Wildmind to increase awareness of the positive effects of meditation. His published works include the audios *The Wisdom of the Breath* and *Still the Mind* and the book *Wildmind*.



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