



# Aware Awake Alive



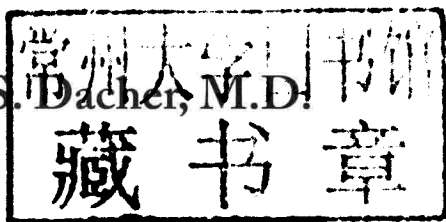
*A Contemporary Guide to the Ancient Science  
of Integral Health and Human Flourishing*

Elliott S. Dacher, M.D.

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PARAGON HOUSE  
St. Paul, Minnesota

First Edition 2011

Published in the United States by

*Paragon House*

1925 Oakcrest Ave, Suite 7

St. Paul, MN 55113

www.paragonhouse.com

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Cover design by Jessica Dacher

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Dacher, Elliott S., 1944-

Aware, awake, alive : a contemporary guide to the ancient science of integral health and human flourishing / by Elliott S. Dacher. -- 1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: "Presents a physician's program of self-study and practices to guide the reader towards a life of happiness and well-being. Topics include: meditation, mindfulness, overcoming afflictive emotions, integral health, and human flourishing. Applies this knowledge and these practices to common disorders such as stress, heart disease, addictions, and attention deficit disorder (ADD)"-- Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-55778-895-5 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Health--Philosophy. 2. Mind and body. 3. Self-care, Health. I.

Title.

RA776.5.D333 2011

613--dc23

2011020678

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI standard Z39.48-1992.

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

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## Advance Praise

*Aware, Awake, Alive* reflects Dr. Elliott Dacher's expertise in Western scientific medicine and his life-changing journey to the East. It is the result of the legendary hero's journey, in which a courageous individual travels to distant lands and returns with profound wisdom to share with the rest of us. Health is more than the absence of disease, and it is more than normal physical function. It is also about joy, fulfillment, inspiration, and contribution. If you are tired of merely going through the motions of life and aspire to the upper echelons of health, *Aware, Awake, Alive* is for you.

—Larry Dossey, MD, Author of *Healing Words* and *The Power of Premonitions*

*Aware, Awake, Alive* details the essential needs of our inner spirit. The author's personal wisdom, professional knowledge, and mastery of sacred teachings ensure that this book fulfills its promise to lead the reader into a deep and profound inner journey of self-awakening. *Aware, Awake, Alive* is absolutely stunning. I hope millions of people will read this book.

—Caroline Myss, Author of *Anatomy of the Spirit* and *Defy Gravity*

Elliott Dacher has the heart of a sage, the voice of a muse, and the skill of a trained physician. His writing offers an approach to healthcare that blends contemplative practice and optimal health practices. As we embody the wisdom of *Aware, Awake, Alive*, we find a roadmap that can lead each of us to healthier and happier lives. I strongly recommend this book.

—Marilyn Schlitz, President/CEO, Institute of Noetic Sciences

We can all use guides and coaches on our journey through life. *Aware, Awake, Alive* contains practical wisdom and resources which can assist you in developing your mind, opening your heart, and living your greatest potential.

—Bernie Siegel, MD, Author of *365 Prescriptions for The Soul* and  
*Faith, Hope & Healing*

Elliott is a wise, gentle, and deeply reassuring teacher and companion on the journey toward a more joyful, peaceful life. Read this book and weave timeless wisdom into the fabric of your daily life.

—James Gordon, M.D., Founder and Director  
The Center for Mind-Body Medicine

## What Students Say

This has opened my hands, my eyes and my heart. It has shown me a path I can walk, through any tangle of thorns, to a place of stillness and merciful acceptance. It has sweetened my perception of beauty and delicacy, and has deepened my love. This is a teaching on how to be and let be.

Elliott's straightforward, no-nonsense approach demystifies the subject and brings you to a place where you can clearly understand and experience the benefits of this inner work.

Throughout the years I've tried meditation, but not with any consistency. I feel now that I am more prepared to make the necessary changes. The changes within me are subtle but with patience and persistence my life will be made different. I no longer ignore the urgency of now.

I can't imagine not having these insights as an integral part of my life. I am no longer sweating the small stuff and it is so much easier for me to keep things in perspective.

Now I realize that our thoughts are as fleeting as the spring flowers. Through meditation I have gained control over my busy mind and I'm more mindful and compassionate. Life is less stressful.

There is a profound and rare generosity of spirit that shines through Elliott Dacher's teachings. These teachings are intellectually and spiritually rich and practically helpful.

I see everything differently now and in a much more positive light. My interactions with others are more relaxed, more connected, more fulfilling.

When I began Dr. Dacher's program I was recovering from a serious brain injury. With his unique guidance and support, my ability to focus, concentrate, and remember has increased dramatically. Stable daily practice has brought me deep peace and enjoyment of everyday life and I have never been happier.

Aware  
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Alive

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of Integral Health and Human Flourishing

**Previous Books by the Author**

Integral Health

Intentional Healing

Whole Healing

For the many current and past participants in this course who have shown the courage and persistence to fully engage the path to a larger life and health. They have inspired me with their efforts and taught me how to teach this program. They have truly partnered with me in the writing of this book.



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Tell me, what you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

—Mary Oliver, *The Summer Day*

## **List of Practices**

1. Mindfulness Breathing Practice
2. Mindfulness in Daily Life
3. Taking an Inventory
4. Mindful Listening
5. Turning Afflictive Emotions Into Practice
6. Observing The Moving Mind
7. Giving and Taking
8. The Daily Practice of Loving-Kindness
9. Becoming a Healer at Work
10. Turning Adversity into Practice

## A Letter to the Reader

In the pages that follow, you and I will join together in a profound journey of learning and transformation that can take us toward an extraordinary state of well-being, one largely unknown in modern times. This extraordinary state of well-being goes far beyond anything that we would call “normal,” yet the potential for it exists within each and every one of us. In modern times we call this optimal well-being by its traditional term, human flourishing. It is the crowning achievement of human development. It is a deeply satisfying way to live. It is a state of peace, wisdom, happiness, freedom, and love as we have never known them.

To our customary way of thinking such well-being is inconceivable. Yet there are wise men and women from across various cultures and times whose lives give evidence to this possibility. Using a consistent set of practices as their vehicle, they have journeyed to the center of their being and brought forth the full flowering of their own human potential. They prospered in the full sense of that word—body, mind, and spirit. They found this state of optimal well-being to be steadfast and enduring, even in the face of illness, aging, or death.

For most of us this experience is far from the norm. Fortunately, the wise women and men of times past who awakened this within themselves have carefully articulated the universal science of integral health and human flourishing so that we may follow in their footsteps. They have provided us with a time-honored and reliable path that leads to the alleviation of all forms of mental distress and suffering and the attainment of an unsurpassable quality of life.

Fortunately for us, their attainments and methods are no longer a mystery. They were caring enough to leave a roadmap that details the precise steps that will also take each one of us from an ordinary life to an extraordinary life, from ordinary health to extraordinary health, from a limited life to profound prosperity. This universal roadmap to human flourishing is the basis for our work together.

That is why we are meeting here, and it is a fortunate connection of potentially great magnitude.

This book represents my best attempt to share with you what I have learned from individuals that have fully awakened to life. It is my intention that this knowledge will help guide you in this journey. I have presented it in a format that is personal, practical, and accessible.

Before you accept me as a guide and spiritual friend on this very important journey, however, it is important that you know something about my life and work. You must be careful about choosing your guides. I have learned that from personal experience. You must be willing to examine their lives, motivations, and capacities. If you are certain that you have chosen the correct guide, you will find it easier to make the level of commitment that will assure more rapid progress.

As for myself, I don't claim to be a master or sage, but I have been fortunate. I have been able to travel down this road for a period of time. I have had wonderful teachers to guide me, two excellent educations that together fully embrace the inner and outer aspects of healing, the opportunity to learn from teaching others, and the experience gained from continuously integrating what I have learned into my day-to-day life. I have had a taste of human flourishing, a taste I would very much like to share with you.

Let us start with my education, both my educations. My first education culminated in medical school, internship, and residency training. After this formal education, I practiced full time internal medicine for 21 years and participated in over 50,000 patient visits. Over the years, I learned to cherish my medical education and the opportunity it gave me to assist individuals suffering from disease and seeking health.

However, it was not long before I discovered that my medical education did not fully prepare me to care for all of the needs of my patients. I was extensively and well-trained in matters of the body—physical diagnosis and therapy—and this was certainly of great value when considering issues of health and disease. But I learned little about the mind, and nothing at all about the spirit. I often

felt helpless and powerless when faced with the day-to-day complexities of life that unquestionably had a powerful impact on my patient's well-being; factors such as stressful lifestyles, disheartening and painful relationships, unsatisfying work, deeply ingrained high-risk behaviors and subtle discontent, and not-so subtle unhappiness.

Even when I succeeded in helping a patient alleviate the immediate signs and symptoms of disease, I realized that only half the job was done. In a conventional sense, one could say that patient was once again healthy. But at a deeper level, that was far from the actual truth. Why? Because the underlying disturbances of lifestyle, mental distress, and spiritual darkness persisted. The fundamental causes of ill health were unchanged.

There were many times when I would look into the eyes of my patients and feel their longing for something more. It would trigger the same feeling and longing within me. At that time I knew nothing about the mind or subtle mind/body interactions. And I certainly knew little about human flourishing. I did not know how to respond to their inarticulate yearning for a more substantial and far-reaching health or that indefinable "something more," a yearning we each revisit in our quietest moments. I could not understand the deeper meaning and hidden potential of their disorder. I had arrived at the limits of my knowledge and capacities. I could not meet the longing of my patient's soul. I was not trained to be an authentic healer of body, mind, and spirit; a healer of the whole person.

Here it is important for you to understand my attitude toward biomedicine so that you will not misunderstand me. Medical science has been a remarkable achievement. I am grateful for its brilliance. We can count on it for an accurate understanding and diagnosis of disease, a host of targeted therapies, risk factor reduction, safe surgery, and efforts aimed at health promotion and wellness that include physical exercise and proper nutrition. Our health and lives are far better—more comfortable, more productive, and longer lasting—because of it.

Those strengths aside, it has its shortcomings. Its current understanding, tools, and practices are insufficient to address today's challenges to health, healing, and human flourishing.

Why? Because we now face very different and subtler challenges. New epidemics have replaced old ones. We suffer from high and persistent levels of stress, anxiety, and non-stop mind chatter. Mood disturbances, addictive behavior and attention disorders have become increasingly common. Our relationships are often troubled, and a source of ongoing mental distress. In addition, many of us suffer from feelings of discontent, and dissatisfaction. At times these are so subtle we hardly recognize their presence and at other times they are quite overt and troubling. At all times these modern day epidemics are real and significant threats to the health of body, mind and spirit. We know that something is amiss, but we don't know what it is or how to fix it.

The failure to understand and address the causes of these symptoms, and their practical interference in our lives, denies us the full richness of human life. It's ironic—while our superb medical science is capable of extending life, it *cannot* guarantee that life is happy, peaceful, meaningful, or prosperous.

Because my traditional medical education did not teach me how to address these modern threats to the quality of human life, I began to study psychology, wellness, holism, mind/body interactions and the dynamics of stress. I learned many things that enabled me to expand my knowledge and skills. Over time, my studies resulted in two books, many speaking engagements, and a more satisfying medical practice. I thought I had found the answers I was seeking, and I did, in part. I practiced medicine in this expanded way for many years. Those were satisfying years, and I thought I had touched as deeply as possible what was known about health and healing. But I soon discovered that I had barely scratched the surface. I had not yet touched below the surface to the core of health and healing. At that time, like most of you, I was unaware of the capacity for human flourishing. I was similarly unaware of the unexpected turn my life and work were about to take.

When my youngest daughter completed college, I finally had time to sit back and reflect. Busyness and constant doing does not leave much time for self-reflection, and my day-to-day life was as busy as anyone else's. I had spent years developing myself

professionally, running my medical practice, writing, teaching, and raising my daughters. And now, finally, I had the luxury of some time to myself.

And that's how I came to hear the insistent longings of my soul. It did not "speak" to me directly, but through a nagging insistence that there was more to life, more to be experienced and enjoyed than what I had tasted in my personal and professional life. In its quiet and persistent way, it "spoke" to me about all that was not yet resolved in my life and heart. It insisted that there was more to life.

I would have preferred that this voice just disappear, but I knew it spoke truth. It told me that there was a deeper and more enduring happiness than I had yet experienced, a peace that surpasses brief moments of relaxation, a profound love that inspires authentic connection and intimacy, and a greater purpose in life that transcends ordinary doing and achieving.

It would have been a lot more convenient if these nagging doubts and questions had just disappeared, allowing me to continue with my life as I always had. Why push my good fortune? I had a satisfying practice, a good and stable income, and the respect customarily offered to physicians. I also had the opportunity to continue writing books, speaking, and teaching. Those were clearly not things to turn away from. I had spent many years cultivating them. But the insistent voice in my head just kept repeating: *there is more, there is more*. I did not know the precise way forward. But I did know that I did not want to look back later in life with regrets that I had failed to heed this inner call. If there was more, I needed to discover it, and if not now, when?

A month after my daughter's graduation, I left my medical practice, sold my house, gave my furniture to my children, packed my bags and headed north by car to a secluded island home that I had used infrequently over the years. I did not have a set agenda. However, what I did know, for the first time in my life, was that I needed to learn how to "be" rather than "do." And I knew that would be the hardest thing I had ever done!

I knew the great stories of transition and transformation. I had read them many times, old and new, traditional and non-traditional.



They spoke with a singular voice: “If you want to turn a corner in your life,” they said, “you must first be willing to let go of your comfortable anchors and move into the unknown. Rearranging furniture in the same room just won’t work.”

Unwinding a carefully cultivated and “successful” life was difficult at first, but once I got in the car with my bare belongings, I knew something was right, very right. I had begun the long awaited journey of awakening.

My plan was to just sit still for an indefinite period of time and see what it was like to just “be” with nothing to do and no place to go. That is exactly what I did except for a brief winter sojourn each of the first two winters to serve as a fellow at the *Institute of Noetic Sciences*. Slowly I could feel the natural rhythms of life returning to body, mind, and spirit. I could feel the layers of years of accumulated stress and strain slowly dissipate. They were slowly and tentatively replaced by a newfound lightness of being. I could sense something was happening, and it was good.

And then it happened. An unexpected meeting occurred during my second winter at the institute. At the time, I was sharing a house with an Indian physicist from Eugene, Oregon, Amit Goswami. He was a visiting scholar at the same institute. You might recall him from the movie *What the Bleep*. For several months, we shared dinner each evening and talked for hours about physics, consciousness, and health. Towards the end of our time together, he asked me if I wanted to join him on a forthcoming trip to Asia. “I’ll give you a soft landing,” he said. So I thought, why not?

Three months later, I was on an airplane to Chennai. I could not have possibly known what lay ahead. I could not have known that I had just embarked on a journey that was to last for more than a decade and define the next phase of my life and work. After all my previous efforts to organize life and career, it was now about to naturally unfold in ways I could never have imagined. It was happening without any intervention from my “doing” mode.

There are times and places where you feel at home. One does not know the why and how of it. You just feel at home. For me, India was like that. It was an immediate hit. There was something special