

Below are comments on "[Life Beyond Belief, Everyday Living as Spiritual Practice](#)" from pre-publication readers:



“I love this book. It is down to earth and essential-- where heaven and earth meet!”

Gangaji, spiritual teacher and author of many books including *The Diamond in Your Pocket*, *Discovering your True Radiance*, *You are That* and *Freedom and Resolve*.

"*Life Beyond Belief*" is a well-written and accessible guide to awakening from the dominion of the ego to the Heart of Life. Alice Gardner writes in a personal, honest and sometimes humorous manner that reflects the joy of living in the present moment.”

Katie Davis, spiritual teacher and author of *Awake Living Joy*.

“Alice welcomes us to the simple wonder of what is, to the effortless Self that is always present behind every thought, every action. This is a journey from mind to heart, from separation to oneness. Follow its thread, because these are words that can open what is closed, free what is imprisoned, and help you to live awake.”

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee Ph.D., Sufi teacher and author of *Working with Oneness*.

“Alice Gardner has succeeded brilliantly in breathing her humanity into the story of awakening to “what is.” Throughout the book, she points out the universality of the cross-cultural perennial Truth that everything is, quintessentially, only One. By directly encouraging us to actively use whatever experiences show up as an occasion to deepen our awareness, she short-circuits the mind’s proclivity to separate itself from the heartbeat of Life. Clear, personal and very readable. Highly recommended.”

Chuck Hillig

Author of: *Enlightenment for Beginners*, *Looking for God: Seeing the Whole in One*, *Seeds for the Soul*, *The Way IT Is*, and *The Magic King*.

www.chuckhillig.com

“This book offers important guidance for people who want to realize their true spiritual nature while living active, productive lives. Gardner’s down-to-earth voice and her honesty about her own challenges and limitations make it enjoyable, accessible reading.”

Judith Blackstone Ph.D., author of *The Empathic Ground*, *The Enlightenment Process* and *Living Intimately*.

"In this wide-ranging account rooted in profound personal experience, Alice Gardner takes the reader on a journey of penetrating significance. It ends up where all such journeys inevitably invite us to travel - deep into the lived experience of love. Thus, she provides a wonderful guidebook for your own such journey."

Mark Brady, Ph.D. author, *A Little Book of Parenting Skills and The Wisdom of Listening*.

"Alice Gardner brings exquisite awareness of the opportunities life provides for self-examination. In this lucid book she takes us to the edge of our own traditions so that we may glimpse a universal question for those of us attempting to hold a spiritual path: How are we to practice during the daily activities of life? Gardner offers, gently, an answer: Take those activities as the kindling for the fire of personal transformation. Wonderfully written, biographical of the human condition, I highly recommend this book!"

Ryan Rominger Ph.D. in Transpersonal Psychology, Spiritual Director and expressive artist.

Alice Gardner points to a spirituality that does not depend on belief or dogma. It bridges all barriers in an age where spirituality is divided according to beliefs that only create more separation. She brings it back home to the moment to moment experience of our daily lives and the centrality of our own direct experience beyond all beliefs.

Spirituality has historically been about getting away from or transcending our daily life experience. Alice Gardner's practical offering of life beyond our beliefs puts spirituality back into its rightful place, at the center of what is happening each moment in our day to day life.

Lynn Marie Lumiere MFT, Psychotherapist, co-author of *The Awakening West* and contributing author to *The Sacred Mirror*

"Excellent book, beautifully structured, written, and edited.

"Alice Gardner's personal touch creates a bond with the reader. She leads you from exactly where you are - physically, emotionally, spiritually -- through layers of beliefs, programming, and conditioning, to a place of greater freedom.

"Gardner says you find the truth of your existence regardless of the context in which your life is currently being live or what your mental conditioning is. You don't have to go to a monastery. You don't have to get divorced. You don't have to go on a diet. You don't have to do anything other than look where Alice Gardner points you.

"Gardner talks about marriage, eating for emotional reasons, family, relationships, body image, self-esteem, deep listening, layers of emotionality, love. The writing style is breezy and calm, organized and focused, and at the same time revelatory and demanding. Don't expect your life to become perfect, it won't, but what seem like problems will ease. You'll have a whole new view of your world.

"Pretty" spirituality has had its day. So has "comforting" spirituality. We're all getting on in years, and we need to face the truth of our lives and the truth of who we are, even if some of our emotional reactions may never change. Alice Gardner is an excellent person to take you into the world of radically honest

spirituality. Go with her.”

Jerry Katz, Nonduality.com. Editor, *One: Essential Writings on Nonduality*

“What a refreshing book *Life Beyond Belief* is! It is accessible. It is written in simple English, free from jargon. It is written from experience and the author seeks to speak to the experience of the reader. Its subtitle “everyday living as spiritual practice” accurately describes the experience out of which the author writes and which she seeks to equip the reader to receive.

But this is not a memoir that is seeking imitators. Gardner is very specific about the processes through which she went in her spiritual growth. But her descriptions are devoid of those specific details of personal struggle that would distract the reader and hinder his or her discovering whether the processes Gardner describes are adaptable for use in their own situation. She puts them forward modestly as possibilities or inspirations, not as recipes or models for imitation.

While Gardner clearly draws on Eastern traditions in her exposition, she writes as a child of the West (not as an imitator of the East). Her writing is about the exotic but the everyday. As I read the book there were many points where I felt the resonances of biblical tradition and could insert my own Christian terminology for the reality she was describing. I suspect people from still other religious traditions could do the same. Gardner is writing in the mystical tradition which historically has crossed the boundaries of various faith communities.

Her description of the “mind-made” version of ourselves and the difficulties it causes us functions in her analysis much like the notion of “original sin” does in the Christian tradition. Our minds create such personas in response to familial and social influences—for survival’s sake. While such personas are useful in negotiating this world, they tend to usurp the place of the authentic self and thus contribute to “humanity’s perpetual propensity to screw itself up” (a functional description of “original sin”).

Awakening to our authentic selves puts the mind-made persona in its proper place—as the servant of the self rather than its master. This same transformation is called for in the Gospel tradition where Jesus says, “Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.” (Matthews 10:39) In another way of putting it, we lose our egos when find ourselves.

Love is the ultimate nature of reality for Gardner, and therefore the actuality of our authentic self—even when we do not realize it. All the processes and disciplines Gardner describes are designed to open us to awakening to this fact so that it becomes reality not only in fact but in function. But notice I said “open us to not “achieve.” Again in the mystical tradition Gardner is clear that “awakening” is given, not achieved. She clearly, without ever using the word, describes the operation of grace in human maturation (or sanctification, as some would call it). Our efforts can open us to the possibility of awakening, but they cannot command it or deserve it. Coercion has no place in this mysticism of freedom—on the part of either the divine or the human.

This leads me to the ethical dimension of Gardner’s work. She is clear that awakening takes us to a place of radical freedom—where we are not bound by external (heteronomous) laws and principles. It is

the same place where St. Paul found himself after he has described salvation by grace alone. He knew the logical conclusion some would draw as he asked “What then are we to say? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?” His answer is terse and clear: “By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” (Romans 6:1-2) Gardner struggles with the same question, and I must say I think does at least as good a job as Paul in dealing with it. The life of freedom is not a life of license; but it is nevertheless a life of freedom. St. Augustine summed this up in a memorable slogan, “Love God and do as you please.”

Finally, a word about the structure of the book. The first half of the book may appear to go a little slowly, and be filled with repetition. It is slow and repetitive. But this is a virtue, for what she does for the reader is give him or her a chance to practice recognizing where one is on a spiritual journey, and to deal with letting go of the impediments to awakening. The tempo picks up around Chapter 11 and elicits deeper commitment and growth now that much of needed “clearing out” of impediments to awakening has been accomplished. For me, this is where the book evoked intense excitement about the journey.

A most important part of this section of the book has to do with avoiding hubris, or what Carl Jung calls “inflation” as one develops spiritual maturity. Garner makes quite clear that the journey is never over! One never “arrives”; rather we can truthfully say that the journey is the arrival. This truth needs to be acknowledged and internalized by anyone who engages in spiritual practice—but especially those who seek to help others along the way. Thus clergy and mentors in any tradition need to be especially aware of the dangers attending any sense of completion or superiority. Witness what has happened to gurus of various sorts, including televangelists, who fall prey to human weakness at the height of their “accomplishments.”

Gardner’s very title, “Life Beyond Belief” indicates a salutary attitude towards belief in a time of fundamentalisms and ideologies which function as idols in human life. Belief is authentic only when it points beyond itself to the divine which it purports to serve. When it calls attention to itself and demands allegiance and service it is nothing more than a contemporary “golden calf.”

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