

**The Freedom of Being at Ease with What Is** by Jan Frazier  
Weiser Books, 2012

Review by Teresa McGlashan, MFT

Jan Frazier, who wrote the bestselling *When Fear Falls Away: The Story of a Sudden Awakening* (2007), has come out with a new book of true genius and transforming capacity. *The Freedom of Being at Ease with What Is* (2012) combines an awakened perspective with a life-long professional writer's acumen in written expression with a decade of spiritual teaching. The result is a work of such grace and clarity that I find myself wanting to shout "read it" to everyone I know.

This is a work that spends no time on Jan's personal awakening (that was covered thoroughly in her earlier book) but instead offers some of the clearest teaching I've come across, untethered to the language of any particular philosophical or spiritual framework. Even when going over familiar ground, *The Freedom of Being* does so in a fresh and unusually precise way. Jan also introduces ideas that I, at least, had never seen before in a spiritual context. As a psychotherapist, I found the nuanced attention to the causes of suffering helpful in expressing what I do in my work with clients and it even suggested new territories that I might fruitfully explore with them (and of course with myself).

My personal favorite is her clarity at expressing the difference between the "real"—what is actually here right now, and the realm of thought which is a step away from that. Rather than getting caught in whether a thought is true, Jan suggests an approach that bypasses thought altogether: "We have more to say in the matter of mental noise than we half dream. Not by going at it in a full frontal assault, but by a little sneak around to the back side, where the plug is. It can be slipped from the power supply—just by flooding the present moment with attention. Simply by *attending* to what's here and now. Don't mind whatever the here-and-now happens to be. Don't make up a story about it. Just *be* with it. The plug slips out all by itself."

Jan does not shy away from stating, repeatedly and descriptively, that the awakened state is really wonderful, hard to describe perhaps, but wonderful. Again and again she calls us home. "All wanting, all fear, had stopped. There was—there is—a steady stream of joy without cause. No reason, nothing driving it, nothing able to interfere with it. Did I know why this happened? I knew only that I had come home. I knew too, with certainty, that this radical equanimity had been there right along. That it is the nature of us all."

When I interviewed Jan Frazier about her book, she explained that she wanted to speak to both those intent on awakening as well as those who simply want to suffer less. She tells us that whether you want to suffer less or awaken, what you do is the same thing—she calls it preparing the ground. As she puts it, "There *is* something you can do, but it isn't a doing so much as a being. The thing you want, which is to be awake, is to be gotten to by being awake to this moment. The longed-for thing is attained by doing—by *being*—the longed-for thing. A person might want it to be more complicated than that. It isn't."

There are three parts to *The Freedom of Being*. In the first called “The Lay of the Land,” we read through a series of chapters that lay out in detail the human condition and what it is to be free. As she puts it, “The news that it’s as close as the taste of the inside of your own mouth is supposed to be encouraging. Stop expecting to find it out there. Elsewhere, later. It *is* the looker. It *is* the looking.”

Jan explains that she will be referring to two selves—the familiar or egoic self that is apparent and conditioned and the other she calls the higher or real self or the deep truth of human nature. She explains that of course these are not literally distinct entities but that it is convenient to talk about them as though they were. “In a given episode, the difference between the vantage point of the familiar self and that of the higher self is so dramatic that it can seem as though there are, in fact, two distinct people here.”

A lot of the book is devoted to exploring our allegiance to the familiar self and becoming aware that we all have access to a depersonalized awareness. “This self does not mind a single thing. Imagine. But it’s alive. Exquisitely attuned to the real. It doesn’t experience itself as separate from anything. It doesn’t age. It does not fear death. This self is spaciousness. When it notices itself there’s an experience of barely discernible sweetness, like watery maple sap right out of the tree. Not the concentrated sweetness of the boiled-down version, like mystical bliss or physical orgasm. It’s subtle. This self is so all-pervasive, so yielding and tender, that it’s able to contain the misery and variety of the whole world, all the while sensing its own presence everywhere.”

She offers this when explaining why so few awaken even those who devote abundant attention to the task: “It’s because even those individuals almost always go about it incorrectly. They think the task is to change themselves (about which more will be said). And very likely, they have not seen (probably are not willing to see) the depth of their attachment to ideas of who they are, and the extent to which they hold on to beliefs because of thinking their thoughts are “true.” They simply have not gone deep enough, far enough, into what they identify with. They have no idea to what extent they collude in their own imprisonment.”

The second section of the book, “Choice Hiding in Plain Sight,” guides the reader through the task of learning to see how we imprison ourselves. “What’s truly transformative is to see yourself clearly, permitting nothing to interfere with the seeing. To learn all you can about your familiar self, as it’s showing up in this moment.... Learning how to do this neutral seeing, free of judgment, without any plan to improve, is for most people a novel experience.”

In this section, we discover our role in determining what life feels like. Every chapter is about bringing attention to our interiors whether in the grip of fear or doing an exercise Jan suggests which is spending a day lightheartedly, with the eye of a curious scientist, noticing whenever something gives you a good feeling. She also asks us to examine the unquestioned assumption that there is a necessary relationship between one’s inner state and what is happening in one’s life. Through attention we can become aware of choice. “We choose every moment we live to identify with something limited and in constant flux—with our narrowly defined selves. We can opt not to. It may not look as though we have option. That doesn’t mean we don’t.”

The final section, “The Solitary Traveler, with No Place to Go” addresses those who are clear they want to awaken. But as Jan explains, “the difference between trying to awaken and preparing the ground is the difference between strained mental/emotional effort and steady, unflinching presence. Trying to wake up is hard work. Wheel spinning, mostly...Preparing the ground conjures a delightful calm, an alert receptivity, which is very different from a determined mission to transform yourself, to reach a goal. Let go of all of that in favor of the simple, radical gesture of being *here*. Keep awareness on your interior. Feel what you feel, that original response to a thing. Feel life living itself through you. The gong reverberating deep in, each moment. Be *that*. Yield to the force of that, to whatever life delivers. Be conscious, unresisting, in devoted attendance on what’s here, within you and without.”

I asked Jan whether she would attribute her own awakening to the kind of present moment awareness and self study that she calls preparing the ground. “We just don’t know anything” she replied, “I don’t know anything.” But she’s noticed that when somebody is ready and they stay open there will be a catalyst somewhere. “Each person has their own mysterious, profoundly benign process going on.” “One of the things about awakening is that a lot becomes clear.” It is from that clarity that she now teaches and writes.

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn’t tell you that Jan Frazier published an ebook in 2012 entitled *Opening the Door: Jan Frazier Teachings on Awakening*. A book of essays originally published on her website, *Opening the Door* dishes up dozens of jewels with names like “The Full Luscious Truth, Unplugging the Mind, Bad Days, Bad Years, Breaking the Rules, God as Wafer, as Mother Rabbit, The Choice to Carry a Thing, When Resistance Forgets to Start Up. Highly recommended as well.

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