

LEAP BEFORE YOU LOOK

72 Shortcuts for Getting
Out of Your Mind and
Into the Moment

Arjuna Ardagh

Paperback

5 ¼" x 8" / 208 Pages

ISBN 978-1-59179-636-7

U.S. \$14.95 / APRIL 2008

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Introduction: Meet Fred

Meet Fred.

From a very early age, Fred had felt that something was missing in his life. Quite early on, after reading the right books and listening to the right teachers, he came to understand what was wrong: he had lost his cello. So, as a young man, Fred became a cello seeker.

Every now and then he'd hear cello music—far off, just a hint, but enough to remember: the purpose of his life was to find his missing cello. He toured the world, and wherever he heard cello music, or even just the word “cello” whispered on the wind, he would follow. Fred climbed the highest mountains, dove into the deepest oceans, trudged across the farthest deserts, all in search of his cello. He met many great teachers and tutors, visited countless concert halls and music schools, and sought out the finest quartets, quintets, and orchestras. He joined support groups, where people would gather together in circles to rediscover their inner cello. He bought books and videos with titles like *Ten Steps to Cello Discovery*. Over and over he asked, “Can you help me find my very own cello?” He was passionate, dedicated, and intense. Fred was a full-time professional cello seeker.

One day, after many decades of living a life where everything else had become secondary to his quest, he was rushing down the street to a cello seekers' support group meeting. He was looking only at the pavement, focused on where he needed to go, when he collided with an old friend.

“Fred, where are you going in such a hurry?” asked the friend.

“I don't have time to talk to you now,” Fred retorted. “I'm on my way to my cello finders' support group meeting. I can't stop.”

But Fred's friend caught his arm, and held him there, right on the street. “Just wait a minute, Fred. Hold on. What is that thing on your back?”

“What's what on my back?” asked Fred.

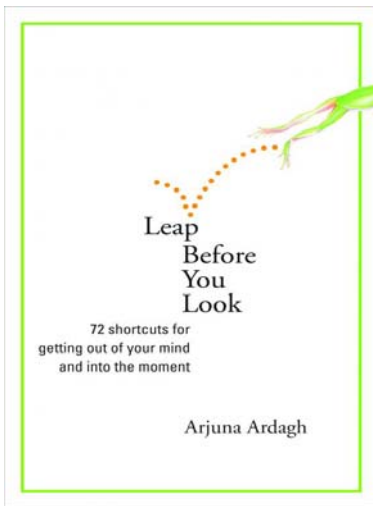
“That big wooden curvy stringy hollow strange-shaped thing?”

Fred glanced impatiently over his shoulder. “I don't have time to bother with unidentified wooden curvy stringy things. Time is short, I have to find my cello.”

“But that thing on your back, that ain't no trombone, fella. And that sure ain't no violin or saxophone either. You'd better take a look.”

Finally, just to get rid of this interference so he could carry on with his search, Fred agreed to look over his shoulder, to stop, to pay attention. To his shock and amazement, Fred discovered that strapped onto his back was a large cello. He was flabbergasted. He didn't know what to say. He sat down right there on the sidewalk. He took the cello onto his lap, tears streaming down his face. Fred laughed and laughed and laughed. He had finally found what he had always been looking for.

With trembling hands, he took the bow and rosined it. Holding the bow in one hand and the cello in the other, he fell absolutely silent and still. His eyes glazed over, as though he were staring at an object on the other side of the universe. He rested deeply in a state of absolute cello reunion, of oneness with the cello.



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“What’s with you, Fred?” his friends and family asked.

“The search is over, that’s what’s with me. I’ve found my cello. I am free of my search. I have realized my essential cello-carrying nature.” Fred looked at people with long and meaningful stares. Children would run away. But Fred just went on sitting there, cello in one hand, bow in the other, staring and silent. And that, dear friends, is the end of the story.

Or is it? From the perspective of being a cello seeker, of having always been a cello seeker, that’s it. Within the story of Fred’s whole life being about rediscovering something lost, that could be the end of the story. We leave Fred sitting silently and contentedly with his cello, and nothing ever happens again.

From another point of view, however, much more is possible for Fred, now that he is reunited with his cello. His story could have many more chapters—chapters about *music*. Fred could bring the bow to the cello and begin to play; he could find out what is possible when he not only enjoys his discovery but lives it, makes it into art, and gives it as a gift to all of humanity.

Now, if Fred begins to play the cello, it may not be so beautiful right away. I happen to know this from first hand experience, because my wife has been learning the cello. When someone first starts to play the cello, it can sound a little like a cat being skinned alive. But the more you play the cello, the more beautiful it becomes. With regular practice, your playing becomes the expression of a great beauty that until that point was latent. Transforming the discovery of a cello into the gift of bringing music to the world requires regular practice.

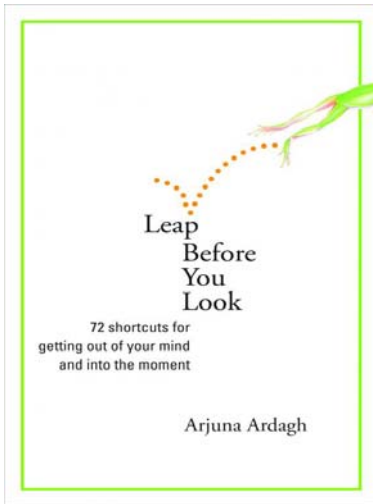
Anyone who plays a musical instrument knows the importance of practice. I heard a story once of a man who, upon arriving at New York’s Grand Central Station, stopped a passer by and asked “Excuse me, how do I get to Carnegie Hall?” “Practice, practice, practice,” was the reply.

This is a book about practice.

Practice is the bridge between your un-manifest potential and your manifest capacity to give. You practice not to reach a goal, but to create beauty. You practice not for the future, but for a more ecstatic now. If you play music, if you paint, if you write poetry, you know that there is no end to the expression of that beauty. It would be absurd to suggest so, wouldn’t it? Can you imagine that you might play an instrument for decades, and then one day come to a point where you just played the perfect note? “Good, well that’s done. Now I can give up the cello and take up golf instead.” That would be ridiculous, wouldn’t it? We all know that whatever our art form, whether it be building houses or gardening or writing or raising children, the possibility of gifting is endless.

In recent years, many people just like you have fallen into a realization even more pivotal than Fred’s. They have fallen into the realization of who they are deeper than the mind, a realization of *being* silence, of being peace, of being infinity. Such a realization may come in short snapshots or in more abiding, resting, but either way it changes everything. People from all different walks of life are coming to the discovery that what they have been seeking for outside themselves is actually who they are, and who they were all along. What they have been seeking is in fact the medium, the stillness, in which everything else arises. They see that who they are is the silence in which sounds is happening, the spaciousness in which movement occurs. This kind of recognition, whether fleeting or abiding, is called an awakening.

It might happen when you are out hiking and you notice the expansiveness of the



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view, reminding you in that moment of the expansiveness of your own true nature. It could happen after many years of meditation and watching the activity of mind, when suddenly in an “ah-ha!” moment there is the recognition of that which is watching the mind—silence itself—and that it is beyond and untouched by the mind. It might happen while dancing, or playing a musical instrument, or making love. Suddenly, you find that there is only the love making—no commentary, no evaluation, no thought at all. In such moments, everything resolves itself. You are completely now, completely here. The activity of mind may continue, but it recedes, becoming as remote as the TV from a neighbor’s apartment, leaving just the perfection of this moment.

Many of us carry elaborate theories about spiritual states, concepts we have read or heard and borrowed which we tend to put above our own experience. As a result, we often overlook the simplicity of what is already here. Since 1991, I have been teaching weekend seminars all over the world that point people back to the simple mystery of who they are, in this moment, deeper than the activity of the mind. Many of them come these seminars with ideas about being incomplete, of something missing. In paying attention to what is already here, in this moment, it’s not that what was missing is given to them, but that what was already there is recognized.

Just like for Fred, when he discovered that his cello was on his back all along, a moment of awakening, or even a more abiding realization, may seem to be the end. “For years and years and years I’ve been seeking. My whole identity has been that of a spiritual seeker. And now in this recognition, there’s nothing to do. All is perfect. I’m just going to sit here under this tree and watch the grass grow by itself.” But this is only the end of a story relative to being a seeker.

Relative to the ungiven gifts in your heart, relative to why your body took birth at all, it is the beginning; the beginning of a life of meaning, of purpose, of integrity, of music. We discover that who you are, who I am, who everyone is, is less of an entity and more of a presence. Not even *a* presence, but *presence itself*, with no boundaries, no beginning or end in time. That living presence is empty of form and content, but full of love, full of creative intelligence. Presence is that which is aware of all that is changing. In order for the recognition of that latent presence, that silence beneath the noise, to be transformed into a gift and a blessing, practice is needed.

By some estimates, millions of people are coming into this kind of realization today, perhaps just in glimpses, but enough to radically change their relationship to themselves, to reality, and to spiritual life and practice. They are no longer seeking, exactly, because the secret has been revealed. Their interest shifts to the deepening and embodiment of the realization.

There are multiple theories available about why this is happening today to so many people, which I have explored in great depth in my previous books. But this book is not about why, it is about *how*. This book will offer you a variety of simple tools, most of which just take a few minutes, to both precipitate the shift out of the mind and into awakening, as well as to deepen and embody that awakening in ordinary day to day life.

This book explores the possibility of spiritual practice not as a means to a goal, but as an endlessly unfolding exploration of a life of beauty—a life worth living.

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