

Eyes Wide Open Cultivating Discernment on the Spiritual Path

Mariana Caplan
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Mariana Caplan, PhD
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Synopsis: A clear and refreshingly honest look at contemporary spirituality—exposing the myths, understanding its realities, and moving forward with discernment—by writer, psychologist, and lifetime spiritual practitioner Mariana Caplan.

How to Avoid Potholes and Detours of Spiritual Path

(September 2, 2009, Boulder, CO) — The spiritual path is like any other road—it's going to have its share of potholes and detours. Safe travel requires a quality rarely taught yet critically important in today's world: discernment. In *Eyes Wide Open*, Mariana Caplan supports us in cultivating the acute judgment and discrimination that will help us to live a spiritual life with intelligence, clarity, and authenticity.

Is enlightenment less about fireworks and bliss and more about dismantling illusions? How do we fully integrate our practice into daily living? What's the best way to work with the ego and the shadow? *Eyes Wide Open* (Sounds True, October 2009) explores these questions and more, offering practitioners from any tradition—or those just getting started—a traveler's guide through “the labyrinth of increasing subtlety” that defines a genuine spiritual life.

Building on the foundation she laid with her previous works *Halfway Up the Mountain* (Hohm, 1999) and *Do You Need a Guru?* (Thorsons, 2002), Caplan challenges us to take full responsibility for our lives, as we investigate:

- What is spirituality anyway? Feeding the hungry heart in contemporary Western culture
- “Spiritually transmitted diseases”—the common traps of modern spirituality, and how to avoid them
- The universal theme of the Healing Crisis—and how discernment provides a “life raft” for such times
- Fully integrated spirituality—balancing body, psyche, and spirit for potent transformation

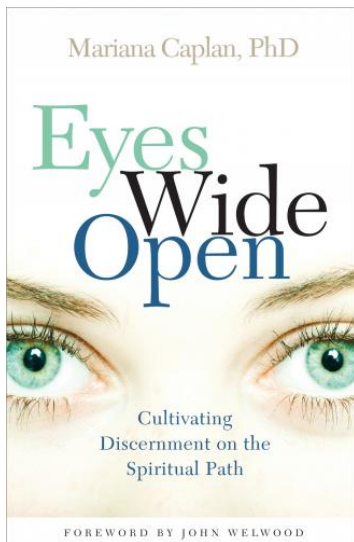
We evolve spiritually by cultivating discernment that is powerful enough to pierce through confusion on every level of our experience, explains Mariana Caplan. To help us along the way, this fellow traveler now offers *Eyes Wide Open*.

Mariana Caplan, PhD, has spent over two decades researching and practicing many of the world's great mystical traditions. She is a professor of yogic and transpersonal psychologies and has authored seven books in the fields of psychology and spirituality.

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CONTACT: Shelly Vickroy, publicity@soundstrue.com, 303-665-3151 ext 155
Sounds True, 413 S. Arthur Avenue, Louisville, CO 80027
Press Room: <http://stpresskit.wordpress.com> Twitter: @SoundsTrueBuzz

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About the Author, Mariana Caplan

Mariana Caplan, PhD, received degrees in cultural anthropology, counseling psychology, and contemporary spirituality. However, she attributes the majority of her education and inspiration to years of research and practice in the world's great mystical traditions, and to living in villages in India, Central and South America, and Europe. She is a counselor, professor of yogic and transpersonal psychologies, and the author of seven books in the fields of psychology and spirituality, including *Halfway Up the Mountain* and *To Touch is to Live* (Hohm, 2002). Mariana resides in the San Francisco Bay area and teaches at the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Advance Praise for *Eyes Wide Open*

“A daring, brilliant, ground-breaking look at spirituality in the modern world. With deft elegance, Caplan shows us that psychological transformation and spiritual awakening are inseparably one process. Detailing with brutal honesty the myriad spiritual pathologies we contemporary spiritual seekers engage in on a daily basis, she reveals the profound and life-changing awakenings that can occur when we expose and dismantle our neurotic, narcissistic exploitations of the great traditions.”

—Reginald A. Ray, author of *Touching Enlightenment* and *Indestructible Truth*

In *Eyes Wide Open* Mariana Caplan has given us a brilliant and clear understanding of the discernment needed for traversing the spiritual path. Spiritual seekers of all types will find this book immensely useful.

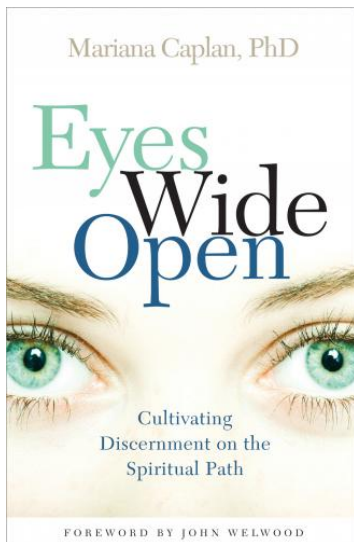
—Lama Palden, founder of Sukhasiddhi Foundation

“Discrimination is one of the most important qualities needed on the spiritual journey, and yet it is most difficult to develop. Here are simple, clear guidelines to help us separate truth from falsehood, and avoid many of the pitfalls that await the traveler. This is real, grounded wisdom needed by all contemporary seekers: a book to read and re-read.”

—Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee Ph.D., Sufi teacher and author

“Mariana Caplan is an authoritative pioneer in the study of “the pathologies of the path,” and this book will be of interest and benefit to seekers and teachers alike. The outcome of a combination of personal experience, sheer intelligence, honesty, long years of research, and contact with original and unconventional teachers, *Eyes Wide Open* is both well-written and entertaining.”

—Claudio Naranjo, MD and Ed.D, author of *Character and Neurosis*, *The Way of Silence and the Talking Cure*, *Healing Civilization* and many other books, is the director of the CN Foundation in Spain, dedicated to the promotion of a global transformation of education.



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Overview of Contents

Chapter 1, “What Is Spirituality Anyway?” begins with an overview of the contemporary Western spiritual supermarket and considers basic issues such as why there is such a prevalence of spiritual scandals today and whether enlightenment is really the point of the spiritual path at all.

Chapter 2, “Spiritually Transmitted Disease,” catalogs many of the common traps the contemporary spiritual seeker is likely to encounter along his or her journey, while Chapter 3, “The Posture of the Mind,” considers the attitudes we must cultivate in order to travel the spiritual path with discernment.

Chapters 4 and 5, “The Psychology of Ego” and “Spiritual Materialism and Spiritual Bypassing,” offer an inquiry into the relationship between ego, psychology, and karma—and the traps that arise when our development in these areas is uneven, confused, and out of balance.

The following chapters explore the value of discernment as a transformational tool that helps us turn crises, as well as all other aspects of life, into opportunities for spiritual development.

Chapter 6, “The Healing Crisis,” reveals how the journey of descent, which most people who commit themselves to the spiritual path eventually encounter, leads them to the capacity to discern and penetrate broader and deeper aspects and dimensions of their experience.

Chapter 7, “The Tantric Principle,” considers how the careful application of discernment can literally turn internal and external poisons into medicine and ordinary experience into the extraordinary.

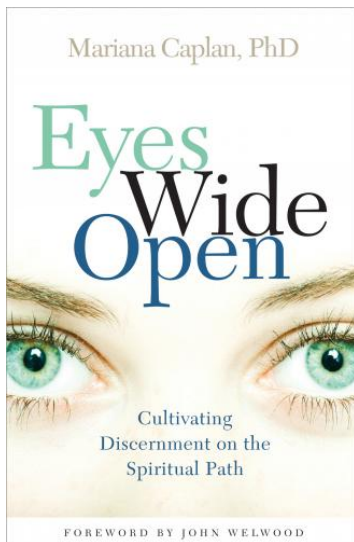
Chapter 8, “Pandora’s Secret: Demystifying the Shadow,” further illustrates how the application of discernment to our shadow selves reveals a radiant possibility for potent and integrated spiritual transformation.

Chapters 9 and 10, “The Body as Bodhi Tree: The Imperative of Embodiment” and “The Union of Psychology and Spirituality,” explore the living integration between psychology and spirituality and how we assimilate and express this integration through the body.

A book on discernment would not be complete without considering its application to the student-teacher relationship, which is one of the most difficult aspects of spiritual life to navigate with clarity.

Chapter 11, “The Question of the Teacher,” attempts a balanced view of the unique spiritual benefits of working with a teacher as well as the psychological challenges this relationship presents to both student and teacher.

Finally, in Chapter 12, “Om Mani Padme Grow Up!” we close our consideration of discernment by reflecting on what it means to grow up—both psychologically and spiritually—and move toward authentic spiritual maturity.



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Author Q&A

Q. Why did you write *Eyes Wide Open*?

A. I had not published a book in some years, and my experience since *Halfway Up the Mountain* and *Do You Need a Guru?*, has continued to unfold. To study the movement of contemporary spirituality and to share those insights with receptive readers, is a deep pleasure and gift in my life. I love to communicate with others. I wanted to share my main insights and explorations from the past seven years since my last book was published, and hopefully my readers would be nourished.

Q. What is the core message and why is it especially important in today's American culture?

A. The core message is that we must learn to be keenly discerning when we approach the path of psychological and spiritual transformation, so that our efforts will be effective and our journey fruitful. Discernment needs to be cultivated and learned, and we all have the capacity to develop discernment.

Q. Earlier this year you wrote and produced a play in San Francisco called *Zen Boyfriends -- What is the Sound of One Heart Breaking?* How does this relate to the concepts in *Eyes Wide Open*?

A. The play presents many of the ideas in the book through humor and music. The ideas are very similar. The book expresses it in more depth, the play is hysterically fun and funny. It was a wonderful experience to present these ideas through humor, and yet it is so important to articulate these ideas in a deeper way.

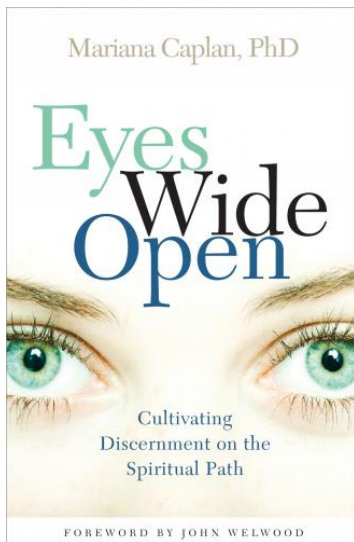
Read more: <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/g/a/2009/03/09/findrelig030909.DTL#ixzz0Q5FQtiKK>

Q. How is *Eyes Wide Open* relevant to yoga practitioners?

A. Patanjali wrote in the Yoga Sutras that discernment is the "crowning wisdom" on the spiritual path, and that with it one can pierce all veils and levels of illusion. Yoga is one of my greatest passions, and the book is full of reflections on yoga and the Yoga Sutras that I have contemplated through many years of study of yoga philosophy and practice of asana. When we place our asana practice in the context of yoga philosophy, our practice can deepen and expand into unimagined depth and wholeness. This book should be a great support for yoga practitioners, as these principles are a tremendous help in my own life and practice.

Q. What is emerging or unaddressed in the field of psychology today that makes your book relevant to this audience?

A. So much is emerging and has emerged, in the field of psychology that is still not fully integrated in mainstream psychology, yet is so critical to effective psychological transformation. The book attempts to address in a very clear and grounded way, why it is critical to include the dimensions of the spiritual and of the body in psychological thought



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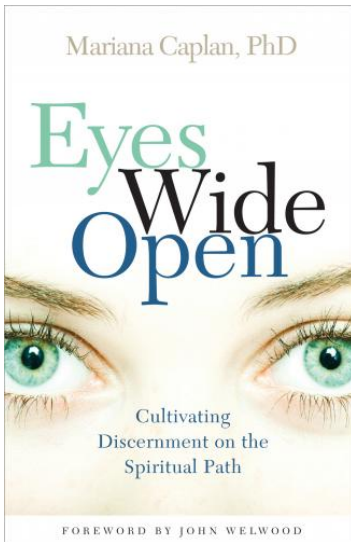
and treatment, and discusses ways that we can do this within ourselves. Western psychology is only just over 100 years old, and yogic and Eastern psychologies have existed for thousands of years. By sharing these insights and their relevance to Western psychology, I hope to do my part in articulating the importance of Western and Eastern approaches to human integration.

Q. You wrote, “I, personally, can no longer relate to the idea of enlightenment, and it is not simply because I am not enlightened.” Do you think people tend to think of themselves as more enlightened than they really are? Is enlightenment really possible, or even the point of the spiritual path?

A. I really think that for most of us, enlightenment is besides the point. I’ve met tens of thousands of practitioners around the world, and only the smallest fraction of them could be considered enlightened to any small or large degree. Yet many people have great wisdom, a deep capacity to share, a wish and ability to serve. I think aiming for spiritual maturation and spiritual integration are more effective goals. Whatever enlightenment is, if we are destined to be enlightened, we will not be able to avoid it, and spiritual maturation and integration are realistic and brilliant possibilities.

Q. What issues are you working on spiritually or philosophically these days? What questions are you currently asking yourself? (this could turn into a longer answer to use on our blog, so this can be short or longer).

A. I am working understanding and embodying the principle of “self-responsibility” and how integral that is to my own spiritual and psychological maturation. My appreciation for the profound subtleties on the spiritual path—both in the traps and in the profound possibilities—continues to deepen. I want to take full responsibility for my life, work, and relationships, and to try to find ways to be more and more useful to others.



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Notable Quotes

To provide the flavor of Eyes Wide Open, here is a selection of quotes from Chapter 1, "What Is Spirituality, Anyway?":

As is wise when we shop for anything of value and import in our lives, becoming a discerning consumer is essential when it comes to spirituality. (p 8)

Absolutely no one, including teachers and ourselves, is exempt from the pitfalls one inevitably encounters on the spiritual path. (p9)

As we further explore the subject of psychology in this book, we will come to appreciate how frequently our spiritual aspirations are confused with unmet childhood needs and wishes; thus, we often find ourselves in spiritual circumstances that replay unresolved circumstances of our early lives. As Carl Jung taught, "When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate." (p13)

Our attraction to spiritual paths and practices usually results from a combination of the soul's authentic need combined with our own inevitable psychological needs and blind spots. (p 14)

What if enlightenment were less about fireworks and eternal bliss and more about dissipating the illusions we have about what life itself is? (p20)

On the spiritual-seeker scale, most of us evaluate ourselves far higher than we actually are. (p23)

Our spiritual path and practices must support us in being part of the solution to the immense challenges humanity faces—not part of the problem. (p25)

From the final chapter, Om Mani Padme Grow Up!, on the concepts of self-responsibility, service, gratitude and discernment:

Every life is an unanswered question and an uncharted possibility. There are questions of the soul that no guru, dharma, book, therapist, or wise friend can answer for us. (p 255)

The degree to which we are awake, conscious, and discerning in our experience and choices is the extent to which we can consciously participate in our soul's unfolding. (p 255)

Whether we call this God, emptiness, or something in between, the clarity of our discerning vision leads us to praise. (p 261)

To grow up on the spiritual path is to be whole in oneself and a radiant exemplar of spiritual wisdom in a world full of suffering. (p 264)

From Chapter 2, “Spiritually Transmitted Diseases” (Send an email to publicity@soundstrue.com to request a longer excerpt or article based on this chapter.)

Ten Spiritually Transmitted Diseases

Anyone can fall prey to spiritually transmitted diseases, and there is no known antidote. Most do not operate in isolation but in relationship with other diseases. When our spiritual immune system is weak, which is inevitable in a culture in which spiritual discernment is not taught, we are likely to be infected with one or more of these at any given time.

As with diagnosing physical or psychological disease, identifying spiritual disease has its pitfalls. While we should become aware of the diseases we have been infected with so we can deal with them and restore ourselves to spiritual health, we need to be careful that in identifying and categorizing them we don't fall prey to imposing rigid labels and categories on ourselves and others. Spiritual dis-ease is not “bad”; it is simply a broken thread in the greater fabric of our deeper possibilities and potentials. Labels are useful only to the degree that they help us isolate and become aware of specific problems. Becoming overidentified with our own spiritual disease, or entranced by analyzing those of others, is simply another level of spiritual disease.

The following categorizations are not intended to be definitive but are offered as a tool for becoming aware of some of the most common spiritually transmitted diseases.

1. Fast-Food Spirituality
2. Faux Spirituality
3. Confused Motivations
4. Identifying with Spiritual Experiences
5. The Spiritualized Ego
6. Mass Production of Spiritual Teachers
7. Spiritual Pride
8. Group Mind
9. The Chosen-People Complex
10. Survival of Ego Based on the Illusion of Separation

+ The Deadly Virus: “I Have Arrived”

The greatest protection we have against contracting spiritually transmitted disease is the capacity for spiritual discernment, known in Sanskrit as viveka khyātir, or “the crown of wisdom.”

A critical part of learning discernment on the spiritual path is discovering the pervasive illnesses of ego and self-deception that are in all of us. That is when we need a sense of humor and the support of real spiritual friends. As we face our obstacles to spiritual growth, there are times when it is easy to fall into a sense of despair and self-diminishment and lose our confidence on the path. We must keep the faith, in ourselves and in others, in order to really make a difference in this world.

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Chapter 3, *The Posture of the Mind*. (Send an email to publicity@soundstrue.com to request a longer excerpt or article based on this chapter.)

Twelve Attitudes for a Discerning Journey on the Spiritual Path

“Once we decide to take responsibility for our own attitude—for its continued development, maintenance, and growth—we have begun a process of internal work.” – Mariana Caplan

Developing a healthy mental posture is both the prerequisite for developing discernment on the spiritual path and a fruition of our labors. It cannot be overstated how essential the cultivation of attitude is to having a successful journey on the spiritual path.

To change our attitude deeply enough that it will last a lifetime is not an easy—or quick—task, but what is more worth doing? According to yogic philosophy, our attitude must be assiduously cultivated.

Twelve attitudes can strengthen our discernment and help us travel the spiritual path with greater clarity and less confusion:

1. Sincerity of Intention
2. Compassion
3. Vulnerability and Openness
4. Patience
5. Equanimity
6. Responsiveness
7. Passion
8. Relaxation
9. Contentment
10. A Sense of Humor
11. Wonder and Openness to Magic
12. Humility

Not everyone is capable of cultivating and expressing all twelve of these attitudes. Even the great teachers are human and prone to moments of faithlessness and even desperation. However, much as the overall health of the body is a result of attending to and nourishing its various components, our overall attitude improves as we attend to certain aspects of our mental posture. It is the sincerity of our attention combined with intelligent and discerning efforts that is responsible for an overall healthy posture of the mind.

When we finally admit that there are things about ourselves we cannot see, there arises a possibility to begin to take responsibility for our lives and, in so doing, to open ourselves to more understanding, more heartbreak, more challenge, more expansion, and a greater ability to serve humanity in progressively deeper ways. Although we may have felt we were looking inward in years past—and we were to the degree that we were capable at the time—we turn more deeply inward than we ever have before. We let go of our previous knowledge and allow ourselves to be rebuilt into something greater.

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