

GATES OF POWER

Actualize Your True Self

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NOMI BACHAR



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— Nomi

INTRODUCTION

My Own Journey and How to Use This Book

This book was born out of my own personal journey and years of witnessing my clients and counseling them through their journeys. I feel deep gratitude for the inner courage and tenacity, theirs and my own, that keeps us traveling through darkness and light. I am deeply moved and inspired by my clients and all of us who are committed to our transformation.

I was born and raised in Israel, and like most young Israeli women, I served two years in the army after completing high school. I was stationed at a border kibbutz under the Golan Heights. There was beauty in the simple life in nature and in working the fields—until the war interrupted it. Then there were the long nights and the two thousand bombs that fell on that kibbutz. When the war and the service were over I could use a long vacation, but the pressure to choose a career was mounting. It came as a shock to me, as well as to my parents, when I decided to audition for Bet-Tzvi, the Academy for the Performing Arts. I did not exhibit any acting talents, so my decision was puzzling. My father considered my decision very frivolous and irresponsible. He proclaimed that he did not raise me to be a gypsy, and had no intentions of supporting my studies. He expected me to enroll in the university and become a respectable scholar.

I actually expected that from myself, too, but some other force within me was driving me toward creative expression. That inner voice seemed to know better than I did what I needed. Now in hindsight, it is clear to me that my enrollment into the academy started my personal journey toward reclaiming my aliveness, inner freedom, and creative expression—a journey that became my life path. I was a young woman restricted, bound, and even imprisoned by her fears, insecurities, and defensive patterns. Unknowingly, I was guided by a deep need to experience inner freedom.

To my parents' surprise, I was accepted into the academy and received a full scholarship. In the academy, I was surrounded by some very expressive young people, and there *I* was—painfully shy, awkward, and inhibited. "Open up!" my

frustrated acting teacher yelled at me, time and again. One little step at a time, and with an intuitive dedication to my sense of freedom, I proceeded and successfully graduated. One month after graduation, out of the blue, I received a call from an artistic director who had seen me in one of the academy's final productions. I was invited to audition, and as a result, was offered a principal role on the national stage as Nastia in Gogol's *Lower Depths*. My performance was a success, doors were opened, and I enjoyed years of performing, and later, directing, choreography, writing, and producing. At a crucial time in my life, when I was already living in New York City, I decided to train as a psychotherapist. The same path of healing, expression, and growth continued, albeit in a different form.

My personal journey has been one of many sheddings. Layers of defensive and protective shields needed to melt away to first uncover a sense of deep despair and hopelessness. It took self-awareness and much self-nurturing for the darkness to slowly dissolve. I needed to understand the roots of my suffering and to discover the real needs and desires hiding within them in order to grow beyond the pain. The gift is a passionate, vibrant, creative spirit, whose company I enjoy today.

This book is a road map to the art and craft of full aliveness—the pleasure and fulfillment of being true to the best and highest in you. The book presents the principles and philosophy, as well as the many practical processes, of the Gates of Power® Method. Gates of Power® developed slowly and organically throughout the years of my own inner work, and from 20 years of counseling others.

When reading this book, you need to know that it is not necessary for you to agree with, or even emotionally understand, everything presented, in order to glean insight, inspiration, and practical tools. Give yourself the freedom to take what feels right and useful to you personally; keep an open mind. Question, discuss, and allow for discovery. Do not rush your reading. Pause, taste, savor, feel.

I do recommend doing the exercises and using the Reflection Pauses to go within. A few words about reflection. To me, reflection means feeling into a question, using your intuition, imagination, and emotional association. It is a deeper level than just thought; therefore, it might take you some time to fully and truly answer each question. Please do not hesitate to revisit the Reflection Pauses and to change your answers if need be. At the same time, trust your instincts when answering the questions, and move through them with an ease and a speed that feels natural to you. The few lines that are present after each Reflection Pause symbolize a space for thought, but they are by no means there to limit your answers.

If you wish, feel free to work with a notebook and develop your answers as you go along. As you travel with me on the paths of this book, take yourself on an adventure. Keep in mind the Four Magic E's: Experience, Explore, and Express, so

that a natural sense of Empowerment emerges. Let the book become a mentoring companion; we can all use inspiration and a bit of mentoring. I am forever grateful for all my mentors—past, present, and future.

In order to open ourselves to joy, pleasure, and true expression, we need to find out what holds us back and binds us. The book explores the roots of suffering and the “Gates” to our inner power.

I believe that we are innately wired for happiness and fulfillment. The pursuit of bliss is our sacred right and our deepest blessing. We’re meant to relearn how to be present in the moment and naturally intimate with ourselves and life. We can learn to have fun and engage in pleasurable activities, as kids do. We can learn to love with abandon, like wise fools; express ourselves like the inner artist that exists in each one of us; and be as caring and responsible as a great parent. What’s more, we can enjoy all of these facets of ourselves simultaneously. The book offers you guidelines to create a joyful discipline for inner freedom and fulfillment.

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AN INVITATION TO BE

I invite you on a journey to full aliveness. “Full aliveness” is not a real expression, per se, so you won’t find it in a dictionary; rather, it is my shorthand way to express the idea of being fully alive, and I will be using it from here on. If you are already on the path to full aliveness, enjoy the information and any new ideas or tools presented to you.

To me, full aliveness means self-expression, creativity, capacity to feel all of our feelings, openness to love, adventure, and learning, and the ability to actualize our vision and deepest desires to create a life of contribution. I know it seems like a lot, but why not go as far as we can? Nature intended us to be the healthiest, best version of ourselves, and our dreams want to come true. Commitment, passion, and discipline are necessary companions on the journey, and this book is here to assist you in the process. It is based on the Gates of Power® Method, a path to self-transformation and self-actualization.

On the one hand, it is important to be able to experience and accept all the aspects of living as a human being and, on the other, to realize that we are beings of consciousness moving through a human life. Our journey is one of embracing our earthly existence, creatively and expressively, while at the same time coming to know our true nature as spirit, pure awareness, and ultimately one with the Absolute.

I have learned that what gives us the most fulfillment and happiness is the ability to be who we are and grow into our true power. Being who we are, as simple as it sounds, is not that easy. It takes time, awareness, self-knowledge, and courage. It is a life-long process of learning to accept and express ourselves, to give of and to ourselves, and freely and confidently open up to receive and create happiness. We have a deep yearning to feel and know everything that lives within us. Since we’re made of the same intelligence and energy that the whole universe is made of, we have a natural appetite to experience infinite possibilities within ourselves—an appetite that entices us to constantly grow, change, and learn. This wonderful yearning for life is our jewel.

How is it, then, that sometimes it seems as though we are living alongside life, not really in it, as if there is a glass wall between us and life? A sense of emptiness

and sadness is born out of that. I remember myself in my twenties, sitting on a bus and watching a group of people my age laughing, kidding around, and being silly. It sounded like they were miles away. There was that glass wall feeling. I was so withdrawn and joyless at that point in my life that laughter and silliness were things I observed, not things I experienced.

I think of children before they lose their spontaneity: their sense of curiosity, adventure, presence of being, playfulness, creativity, and open-heartedness. They have the ability to love. They are empowered and moved by things around them. They *are* fully. We were all children at one time, then something happened within us and we lost touch with our innocence, simplicity, and spontaneity. As adults, we do have extra responsibilities; we all do have to grow up, but the loss of our openness and spontaneity is not a necessary part of growing up. Our personal life history, as well as the cultural and societal influences, can inhibit our capacity for being fully alive and present. In varying degrees, we lose touch with our spontaneity. At times it is buried so deep that it feels like we cannot reach it.

I hope this book inspires and encourages you to make a commitment to find a path that takes you back to an open and expressive state of being. These abilities have not disappeared—we have just lost touch with some of them. We can reclaim them when we return to our source.

A beautiful poem by the Persian poet Rumi about the journey back to ourselves struck me as I was writing this chapter, and you will find passages from it scattered throughout. I am not including the entire poem, but it is called “If A Tree Could Wander,” and it is widely anthologized and available on the internet if you would like to look it up.

*The drop that left its homeland,
the sea, and then returned?
It found an oyster waiting
and grew into a pearl.*

When we become committed to our fulfillment, we begin to ask ourselves what really makes us happy. What brings us joy? What fulfills us? We’re all unique, and our needs are different. Identifying our wants and needs and honoring them is the first step to fulfillment.

◦ ◦ ◦ REFLECTION PAUSE ◦ ◦ ◦

What are some of the things that move you and bring you joy? Is it being in nature, hiking, swimming, or sitting by the sea? Is it reading, writing, dancing, or creating artwork? Is it a deep, fun-filled conversation with loved ones?

Reading the book will offer you many reflection pauses; these are a great opportunity to take time and engage in discovery. I suggest that you have your journal available when reading the book. Linger over the questions and enjoy them. Write, rewrite, ponder, and imagine. Brainstorm and question.

When I was pondering this question myself, I was utterly surprised to discover that I had written on my joy list: “Lying down in bed, watching history and art series.” Since I did not grow up watching television at home (Israel, in its formative years), most of my life I have watched as little television as possible. Surely not in bed! The television set in my childhood home was in the living room, behind closed doors; placing a flat-screen television on the wall of the bedroom was new and almost felt politically incorrect. I wondered if I was becoming a “bed potato.” But I had to admit to myself that a good movie in bed is fun. So let yourself indulge while you’re writing your joy fulfillment list—it will do you a lot of good.

◦ ◦ ◦ REFLECTION PAUSE ◦ ◦ ◦

Is there a common thread that connects all of the things that make you feel fulfilled? Maybe you find that travel, discovery, and adventure are a common thread for you. Or, family, friends, connections, and heart-filled dialogue fulfill you most. List your common threads. Remember, there may be more than one.

What did you find? Does what makes you happy have to do with expressing yourself? Sharing with others? Contributing? Being in a space of creating and playing? Enjoying the world through your senses? Learning new things? Discovering and growing?

A client of mine, who is a very successful manager of several stores, told me he enjoyed being in a leadership position and was on his way to making the kind of

money he had set out to make. But despite this, the joy and the fulfillment ingredients were lacking in his life.

When we made his joy list, we discovered that playing soccer (an old passion of his) and playing the guitar (another oldie!) were the first two items on the list. He was not enjoying either one of them. It took acknowledging the joy these gave him, as well as making time and space for them in his busy life, to replace the missing ingredients. He had to overcome the uncomfortable feeling that he was reverting back to adolescence. And if he was, so what? A bit of adolescence is a good thing.

We found that the common thread connecting all the elements on his joy list was physical and artistic expression. Honoring that thread changed his life. I think that if you look at what truly fulfills you, you will find it has to do with being expressive, creative, open and related—which brings us back to the idea of full aliveness and sense of inner power. Our journey is to return to what we already potentially are.

As we move into adulthood, most of us become aware of insecurities, repressions, and defensiveness, as I did. We feel that we are not as expressive or as secure as we want to be, but we don't know how to go about liberating ourselves. Some of us begin to question ourselves. When did I lose my spontaneity, my authenticity, and my ability to live joyfully? What happened in my life that took me away from myself? These are not easy questions to answer. It can take months or years to fully understand how and why we have lost certain abilities, but understanding is the basis of change.

Obviously, each one of us has a unique and personal history that influences the decisions we make and the way we view the world. I remember having one of these “aha” moments in acting school. We were doing an exercise connected to childhood memories, and I found myself sobbing uncontrollably in front of the class. It seemed like I somehow unearthed a painful memory.

I went back to the age of four. I had done something that angered my mom, who was very stressed by her life as it was, and I got severely beaten. I was terrified. Sobbing, I told Mom that I would tell Dad when he got back that she was unfair. When my dad got home, I rushed to him to tell him about the unjust punishment, but he had no patience to listen (he could hardly handle the simplest chores of life at that point in time, having just barely survived being physically wounded in the war, and three years of mental anguish). At that moment, I remember feeling like the light in the room went out.

Of course, my parents were doing the best they could to keep us going, but these years of stress took their toll on me. To the four-year-old me, this was a

moment of deep fear and loneliness, a moment that would color the way I experienced life. Needless to say, I had to work it out—and I did. But at that moment, crying in front of my acting class, I suddenly realized why the world up until then had felt so cold, indifferent, and punitive to me. This feeling lingered as a result of the experiences I had had as a child, and I needed to understand it to be able to move past it. I also realized that the moment was not an isolated experience; rather it was emblematic of a period of time in my early childhood.

There are different degrees to losing one's natural spontaneity and one's inner sense of power, and there are different reasons why this happens. One of the most important reasons is fear of disconnection. Because we are human beings, we naturally identify ourselves with our body and our personality. We feel separate from others, because I am in this body and you are in that body. This sense of separation makes us feel very vulnerable and transient. We need each other, and we need a sense of connection. Experiencing ourselves as separate, we try to somehow secure the connection with other people to ensure receiving comfort, love and caring. As children, we definitely felt this way.

At a young age, we create what can be called a “protective coat”—a way of being, inside and outside, that helps us feel secure and acceptable. This protective coat is an energetic, psychological, emotional, and behavioral defensive construct. It is an organized pattern associated with our response to early stresses and survival instincts. We create it in an effort to avoid feeling vulnerable and exposed to what we experience as the dangers of life: being alone, being unloved, being an outsider, feeling isolated emotionally and physically, the possibility of being different and unaccepted—all that scares us. Living under a protective coat, our expression is compromised. When we compromise our truth for a long time, the protective coat becomes our second nature, and we don't know that we are compromising anymore. It becomes our way of life. It becomes our identity.

The following story demonstrates the process of creating a protective coat.

Nina, one of my clients, is the eldest in a family of four children. Her father battled cancer on and off for eight years, and passed away when she was 10 years old. Her mom had had to go back to a full-time job when Nina was three. As Nina grew a little older, she needed to take on more and more responsibilities around the house, and with her younger siblings, to help her mother as much as possible. She learned to be a caretaker to her younger brother and two sisters. She needed to repress her needs and desires to become helpful, ready, and able at all times. Her role as a caretaker was necessary for her survival and the survival of her family. That was the “protective coat” she had had to create.

When she started working with me, she was deeply depressed and unmotivated

to care for herself. She told me that as a child, she lived with the constant fear of losing her mother, too, so she did everything she could to help her. In the work we have done together, Nina has had to discover her needs and wants, which were buried under the habit of taking care of others. She has had to face the fear of losing people's affection if she lives for herself, too. Slowly, she has begun to enjoy fulfilling her desires, a bit at a time, and releasing the fear. Taking a bubble bath, for example, was unheard of in her former way of life. So was spending time reading on a bench on a sunny day. Or saying, "Not today" to a friend when she did not really want to do something. The list has grown over time, as joy has filtered in.

It is, at times, a slow and always courageous process to let go of our survival habits. What starts out as giving to ourselves overflows and becomes a joyful giving to others.

Imagine for a minute living inside an invisible protective layer. Can you see how that would create the sensation of a glass door, a separation between you and life? It is impossible to be fully present when we are constantly and mostly unconsciously feeling anxious about our survival, and living within a layer of insulation. At the same time, deep down, our anxiety persists. We worry that we might not be able to provide ourselves with the security that we need and want.

There are different colors and shapes to our protective coats. Some people create coats of shimmering colors and beautiful shapes to charm and engage others, while others create coats to hide inside, in order to appear nonexistent and as gray as possible. (We will explore more about this in the following chapters.) Moreover, in the effort to survive, we also hide away a part of ourselves—the unacceptable part that we don't think will help us survive in our family, culture, or society.

We are constantly on the lookout, constantly navigating our lives. It is a lot of work. We have gotten so used to the effort that it feels natural, like it is a part of us, like it is us, but it is a construct: a Defensive Self. We are not present and available to the moment; we are actually missing out on our lives. Our mind is constantly in the past or in the future, assessing situations. Feelings that do not fit into this attempt to survive are not allowed to come to the surface, making it difficult to fully connect and to contribute to ourselves and to others.

Writing this takes me to the memories of my first "big love." It was the first time I dared to open myself to love and, more frightening still, to the need to be loved. It was a bottomless need, and I was falling and falling. My old fear of being abandoned was so present that I could not enjoy the nurturing affection that was embracing me. I could not relax and be in the moment. I lived in the fear, not in the love. Living in my survival anxiety, I missed out on the bounty that was available to me. I remember one instance in particular: my partner was in the shower,

and I was in bed, propped up on the pillows, reading. It was a peaceful, sunny Sunday morning—a moment of grace. All of a sudden, the thought that one day I might not be with him overwhelmed me, and I started crying hysterically. Sunny Sunday morning turned into Purgatory. Even though I was young and unaware, a budding commitment was born that Sunday. I vowed to myself to do whatever it takes to learn to enjoy my moments, be present in them, and become an inspiration to myself and others. Then there was the long and winding road of getting there.

*You lack a foot to travel?
Then journey into yourself!
And like a mine of rubies
Receive the sunbeams[...]!*

There is a good reason why people are not eager to do the work of reclaiming full aliveness. It feels very scary to let go of protection. Our protective ways have brought us a certain sense of security, but underneath, the hidden part of the self is experiencing self-rejection, fear, pain, anger, unfulfilled expressions, and needs. These emotions are not allowed expression because they threaten our guarded way of being. At the same time, our emotional side also carries loving feelings, excitement, passion, and creativity. Those too are not allowed full expression. So all the things that we yearn for most—deep connections with other people, spontaneity, sense of play, creativity, joy, self-expression—all these treasures are not as easily accessible to us, because it is hard to be spontaneous and defensive at the same time. The two simply don't go together.

There are varying degrees of defensiveness. Some people are more open than others, and the level of our defensiveness fluctuates at different times. Most of us find little corners in our lives where we can allow some of our inner selves to come through. Artists find it when they create art. At times we find it with our most intimate friends, family, or lovers. We find moments to be in the truth for a little bit, but we are not living it fully.

There is no need to judge ourselves for creating a protective coat. This is what we do in order to survive. As long as we identify with our body and our defensive thoughts, we live in fear. As we learn to experience ourselves as beings beyond a body and a persona, beings of consciousness (infinite and eternal) our fear of separation and death eases, our ability to relax into living grows, and with it comes our ability to share our gifts. In fact, our lives are a journey toward the realization of our truth and our spiritual power.

The journey that I am inviting you on is one of daring: dare to shed this protective coat slowly, lovingly, consciously, layer by layer, like a snake shedding its skin. Let yourself slowly emerge as that core of the creative, expressive, giving human being that you are. The core may be shriveled like a seed in the dark, unable to burst out, but it is there. It needs permission, attention, and support; it needs the loving and compassionate support of YOU, your Expanded Self, the loving companionate witness that is the essence of you.

*Out of yourself? Such a journey
Will lead you to your self,
It leads to transformation
Of dust into pure gold!*

We should honor our passion to emerge into ourselves. The journey takes great courage and commitment. It requires daily practice and attention. The beauty of it is witnessing life changing within us and for us. The Gates of Power® Method offers tools to do that and a system that can support you in the process.

Notice also how you react to this invitation. You might be asking yourself: *What is going to happen if I am completely myself and out there? Am I going to be attacked, criticized, or ostracized? Am I going to become obnoxious and insensitive to others?* These are good questions. You might experience all of these things. People who live in their defensive mode resent those who are free and expressive. It threatens them. They might judge and criticize you. The fact is that when you live grounded in the expanded and companionate witness within, you are in a place of true power and freedom—a place that allows you to be naturally respectful and generous to others.

It does not mean that the possible judgment or hostility of others won't hurt you, but the fulfillment this state offers is worth the feeling of danger about what might happen. If you feel that freedom is worth the risk, then this invitation is for you. On the road less traveled the rewards are great—the ability to fulfill your true destiny, to contribute your talents and gifts, and to become who you truly are.

Are you willing to be free, accepting, and present—to be the “you” willing to open the door to endless possibilities and to the richness of your life? This is an invitation to the greatest adventure of all, the most tremendous act of creativity.

The first step in achieving something is to know what you are up against. This is a vital step, worthy of much contemplation. How can we free ourselves if we don't know what binds us? With that in mind, let's look at the roots of our suffering so that we can use the Gates of Power® Method to liberate ourselves.