

KEVIN J COTTAM

Aha

Mother's Pearls

4TH PEARL: BREATHE



27 insightful personal stories of Aha Moments to help you perform at your best and lead a rich life

“*Mother’s Pearls* is an enlightening read. It was a great opportunity to reflect on my own experiences and see Aha moments that I may have overlooked. Each new chapter brought to mind a simple life moment that needed to be reflected upon, helping to remind me to take each moment to heart. We may not always know an Aha moment at the time we’re in it, but patience is the key until the true meaning is revealed.”

—*Lana Bertsch, President, Birchwood Productions Inc.*

“With his insightful book Kevin Cottam presents 27 experiences that have the reader questioning her/his our life’s journey, looking for the kernel of wisdom in each visitation. The cross-cultural sweep alone makes for an interesting read. *Mother’s Pearls* is a treasure chest full of gems.”

—*J.Lafrentz, Engineer*

“Each pearl shimmers with wisdom, creativity, and everyday practicality, while inviting me to recognize and maximize the pearls in my life.”

—*Pauline O’Reilly, Teacher*

“The stories are so simple yet, they all have such powerful messages that really make you think about our conscious choices in every day life...”

—*Ira Kita, Montessori Teacher*

“To read a series of stories (the pearls), written from the heart, that shower you with truth and questions is but a unique and powerful experience. It is a guidebook and a support tool that can be picked up again and again, with some pearls read and re-read depending on your need or mood at that time. The Pearl’s are an insight to life, being both biographically educational and some more formally educational. It is a gift that sits by my bed, alongside the Dalai Lama’s Art of Happiness.”

—*Ailbhe Troubetzkoi, Communications Consultant*

‘We all have ‘Aha’ moments, times when the blur of our lives comes into clear focus, when the angles of the walls seem to bend, or the earth seems to shift under our feet with the new and powerful recognition of who we are and what our time on this planet is about.

In ‘*Mother’s Pearl*’, the author has selected 27 of such moments that have altered the course of his life.

Moving, honest and from the heart, ‘*Mother’s Pearls*’ is a true treasure – a beautiful necklace with its stones of wisdom, bright and timeless to treasure.’

—*Vivienne Vermes, Author*

Aha

Mother's Pearl



Kevin J Cottam



Singapore, Singapore

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Dedication



To my mother, Lily, for everything.

My dear friends Bojan and Robin, who believed in me throughout the challenges of writing this book.

My friend Nikos, who unfortunately didn't live long enough to write his own book.

My Guru, who has taught and assisted my awakening to *Aha* moments.

All my friends, family, and unknown people, who all live inside these stories and have created the space for awareness to happen.

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”

MAHATMA GANDHI



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Introduction



Live your pearls now, and use them to powerfully transform your life.

For a number of years, I lived in Europe and would routinely return to Canada each summer to visit my mother. Even at the advanced age of eighty-eight, she took great care to dress stylishly at all hours of the day, including breakfast. One hot summer morning, she appeared at the kitchen table wearing a double strand of pearls. My niece Launa exclaimed, “Oh Gran, you always look so good with your pearls!” We all smiled and laughed at this lovely moment, but for me it represented a profound realization. *Aha*, I thought, “‘Mother’s Pearls,’ what a great name for my book.”

That simple *Aha* moment triggered my desire to write this book. *Mother’s Pearls* is a collection of twenty-seven short autobiographical chapters of *Aha* moments of realization. These moments in life often appear like a flash of light coming out of nowhere, from a voice or an image I may have seen, a sentence or phrase I may have heard, or voice deep from within. They can sometimes also appear completely contrary to what is happening at the time. They are a mystery really. Or are they? They may appear during a truly challenging and negative experience, which is just a face, or a “façade,” if you like, as the beautiful pearl is sitting there behind the curtain waiting for us to discover it.

These moments are offered as gifts of messages, lessons, or knowledge. They are freely given to us and yet we often let them pass by, not acting upon them and letting them return into the ether. In *Mother’s Pearls*, I invite you to discover your own pearls and what they mean and can do for you. It is here you can discover your truth, explore your journey, and fully celebrate your essence.

Through the art of storytelling, I have chosen to explore my *Aha*

moments, my pearls. Storytelling is definitely not a new concept; it has existed since the beginning of time. As human beings, we discover our lives, our inner light, our worth, and more through the stories we hear and in turn relate to each other. All of this can lead to the development of our greatest human potential.

In telling my own stories, I have chosen pearls and oysters as metaphors for my journey. The pearls are the *Aha* moments of wisdom that have appeared to me throughout my life. The oysters are the locations where the pearls have occurred—they hold the pearls. I've had the rare opportunity and privilege to live in many different places and among numerous cultures, each of which has offered moments of revelation, learning, and inspiration—providing the pearls that, strung together, have so lovingly helped guide my way.

For me, discovering the bigger picture behind the story is what life is about. I hope you will also find the wisdom of each story by getting inside, behind, and on top of it. In turn, this new awareness will assist you to make more powerful decisions in your life. With these pearls, you will begin to see and experience how your life can transform with more self-confidence and self-worth.

Accepting and honouring my past, realizing what is present, and actively moving toward the future is a valuable truth. *Mother's Pearls* reflects some of the lessons on my journey that have led me to find the truth, my truth, and my reality. Through these pearls, I am now discovering how to perform more vibrantly and authentically from my heart. My hope is that, through this book, you can also find this awareness, comfort, and knowledge in your pearls.

Life today often feels comparable to a hurricane. When you are in the storm, it is extremely challenging to be objective. But if you simply stop for a minute, listen to the *Aha* moments, reflect on their teachings, and move toward the calm, interior eye of the storm (or simply step outside of it), you will begin to see the picture of your life in a much bigger way.

Take the time to really receive the *Aha* moments. Their gifts are there

for you to move forward in your life with elegance and strength.

Imagine a closed tap. The water is being held back so tightly it cannot get through. Now when you open the tap, you allow the water to flow through. Allow yourself the fluidity and flexibility so you can loosen your grip on life a bit. Then, the messages or *Aha* moments will come, flowing through to you at the exact moment when you are ready to receive the pearls. Loosen up so you can hear, see, and feel the pearls that come with the *Aha* moments, which can appear at anytime in your life without any warnings at all. Be like a pirate and discover the treasure; but go farther to discover the treasure beneath the treasure.

As I have mentioned, my mother and her pearls gave me the title and metaphor for this book. Her love gave me the freedom to explore. My mother and my father gave me life, and I thank them for this. And now, I have also come to realize in a more profound way the meaning behind the saying, "We choose our parents and the life we come into." I am grateful and honoured to consider my own role in my creation.

I also want to thank all the people from around the world, from different cultural and professional backgrounds, who contributed to the creation of this book. They offered important perspectives and insights. Thanks specifically to Pauline O'Reilly, a fellow seeker in life, John LeFrenz, Jenny Tarrant, Kate, Lana, Sandy, Danny S., and Peter M. for providing valuable feedback.

*Honour the Pearls that you are.
Honour the Oysters you have had.
Honour what you have created along the way.
Honour you and just be.
Be aware of that Aha moment as
You never know when it will appear.*

Kevin J Cottam



4TH PEARL

Pearl • Breathe



Oyster • Toronto, Canada

*“When
the breath
wanders the mind also
is unsteady. But when the
breath is calmed the mind
too will be still, and the yogi
achieves long life. Therefore,
one should learn to control the
breath.”*

SVATMARAMA, HATHA YOGA
PRADIPIKA



One muggy summer evening, I was sitting at the dining room table having dinner with my partner. At one point she said to me, "Every time you see Ming Tu, you come home different. Why is this?" Her voice didn't reveal delight, but rather some bitterness and edge. I didn't understand her question. I said, "Different? How so?" She replied, "I don't know. You are just different and I don't like it very much. It makes me uneasy because you seem so distant." I could sense her "dis-ease" with this situation and I became stressed over this conversation.

I couldn't put my finger on it at that time, but I have come to realize it was my breathing; there was definitely a major shift in my breathing pattern after my visits with Ming Tu. It had dropped deeper into my body and became slower, calmer, more open and much richer.

I began to think about what this difference could mean. I began thinking about how I was before, during and after meeting with my friend. A devout Buddhist, Ming Tu had an immense presence for a small man. I sensed a deep change within whenever we spent time together.

Ming Tu was an opera stage manager by profession and monk-like in appearance. When I first met him, I sensed something very different about him and I became curious. We struck up a friendship immediately.

One day I had tea with him at his house. His home had the most wonderful air of serenity, love, and gentleness. The colours of the home were soft and it embodied a sense of feng shui. He had a serene, beautiful little Zen garden with a fountain of running water, and a lovely Buddha with old incense sticks and some greenery and small stones surrounding it. This garden was one of the places he meditated and there was truly something different about the energy in this space and indeed throughout the entire house.

His home held a sense of being that I had not experienced since visiting Thailand many years before. The balance and centeredness of the space was present and touching me at a deeper level than I realized.

When Ming Tu spoke, he was humourous, vivacious, and stimulating in a very grounded way. Whenever he was busy on stage, he did it with a flow, happiness, and grace. It seemed that nothing threw him off and his energy transcended the space around him.

I became more restful in his presence, calmer, more center, and very peaceful. I felt a wonderful light breath of energy flowing through my body. I remembered what bliss this was, but I was also wrapped up in my thoughts to truly grasp what was happening.

During this period of my life, I had begun to tentatively explore yoga, spirituality, and other practices. What I experienced through my visits with Ming Tu was something that I wanted for myself, but I didn't know how to get it. I have come to realize that even though I sensed this blissful state, I was definitely not yet ready for such deep spiritual work.

The centering that I sensed inside was definitely apparent to my partner. She sensed a shift in me, and although it was positive, the change made her somewhat frightened and insecure.

Over time, I came to learn that breathing is in itself a centering technique. It is a life practice which can assist us to move through stressful situations and give us more mind control over who we are and what we want to be. It can also give us more focus and take us deeper to the truth within us. It is a journey to the heart. It is a necessity if you want to lead a purposeful, engaged life. And, although it is the most essential aspect of life, breathing is often misunderstood.

Breathing leads to presence. Honouring the breath of life is what inspires us. We inspire the breath of life. The inspiration leads to a center nature, if we so wish to focus on this result. Have you ever focused on your breathing? When tuned into it, you begin to find the depth of your being. Breathe deep into your belly.

As human beings, we all consciously, or perhaps unconsciously, search for this zone that creates a calm and happy nature. Centering assists us to

make this leap of faith. Before we can do anything in life, it is helpful to be center as we become clearer in our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual intelligence. We gain clarity in a warm and meaningful way.

Eventually, Ming Tu left Toronto and I never saw him again. Prior to his departure, I asked him to leave his address and contact details. He said something like, "If we are to come together again, that is our destiny. If not, our encounter has been a great lesson in life." This was not the answer I wanted, but it was what I had to live with. I was left with a deep sense of sadness.

I now realize after all these years that Ming Tu taught me a profound lesson. In retrospect, he was teaching me to be center in the present moment, to breathe with awareness, and allow grace to fill my heart. At that time, I chose not to follow his wisdom. It was only years later when I realized what he had taught me that the divine appeared loud and clear. Eureka, *Aha*, I awoke out of ignorance, and now know the reason he came into my life.

Aha moments are magical because although they are often immediately startling, their meanings sometimes take a long time to become clear. Be patient, remain alert, and breathe gently.

My dinner may have not gone well that evening with my partner, but now I can say thank you, Ming Tu. You led me to the realization of this magnificent pearl, Breathe.



DISCOVERY

Have you ever consciously focused on your breathing? ~ As you sit at your desk or in front of the TV, as you move around or stand still, and as you get into conversations that are stressful or harmonic, how is your breathing different? ~ Explore the possibilities of becoming more aware of your breathing patterns and ways to breathe more deeply, taking full inhales and exhales. Sense how it can change your state of being and performance in life. Focus on your breathing.

EPILOGUE

To my mother and the mother within us all.

*I thank my mother for her biggest pearl of all, truth.
Whether it was her intention or not,
I accept this as her greatest gift and
lesson for me in her life.
It has taken me five decades to realize this and
many of us will come to it
at our own pace and time in life.
Others may not,
but here is your chance, now.
Through sharing this with you
my wish
is that it won't take as long for you as it did me.
But again, life plays tricks on us and
when the student is ready
the teacher will appear.
Stand on guard,
be alert, and
keep that door open,
your senses piqued, and
be ready to move when awareness strikes,
as it may be a fleeting moment.
Grasp it,
run with it,
dance with joy, and
forever be grateful that
this is the bigger picture of life.
The reason you are here,
is to seek the truth,
through your own stories.*

With all my love and respect, I welcome you to your Mother's Pearls.



NOTES: