

HOW TO SAFELY, RELIABLY, AND RAPIDLY REACH FUNDAMENTAL WELLBEING

LESSONS FROM THE LARGEST
SCIENTIFIC PROJECT EVER
ASSEMBLED ON **AWAKENING,**
ENLIGHTENMENT, NONDUALITY,
UNITY CONSCIOUSNESS,
AND OTHER FORMS OF
PERSISTENT NON-SYMBOLIC
EXPERIENCE

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INTRODUCTION

Since 2006, we have spearheaded the largest global scientific effort to understand forms of human experience such as enlightenment, non-duality, God consciousness, the peace that passeth understanding, unity consciousness, persistent mystical experience, and hundreds of similar others. Academically, we refer to these as types of Ongoing and Persistent Non-Symbolic Experience (O.N.E./PNSE). Publicly, we most typically call them **Fundamental Wellbeing**.

THE first phase of the research project lasted until approximately 2010 and involved over 1,200 individuals reporting on Fundamental Wellbeing, all around the world. Participation in that phase of the research ranged from answering a few questions to getting your brain waves measured with EEG, and a great deal in between. Most people filled out at least some 'gold standard' scientific psychology measures and/or were interviewed in-depth about their experiences.

This work resulted in our being able to classify the different types of Fundamental Wellbeing. My book on this research - *The Finders* focused on describing Fundamental Wellbeing and was primarily targeted to those who already experienced it. However, the richly detailed descriptions it contained from thousands of Finders also attracted many seekers to it.

This companion guide is a supplement and follow-up to that work. It's designed to help seekers and contains the best practices we've learned about how seekers become Finders.

The various types of Fundamental Wellbeing are all related to each other. They form a 'Continuum' of related experiences. We situate each type as a 'Location' on this continuum. You can learn more about this in *The Finders*, or at our research website: nonsymbolic.org.

During this first phase of the research, the work was only descriptive. We found people who claimed to experience Fundamental Wellbeing and conducted research on them, but we were not able to examine before and after changes involving the transition to it.

By 2014, all this had changed. Between then and 2017, we used what we learned during the first phase of research to create a protocol that transitioned a large percentage (approximately 70%) of people who used it to Fundamental Wellbeing in 4 months or less (see FinderCourse.com and nonsymbolic.org for more information). This allowed us to track changes in people before, during and after Fundamental Wellbeing set in, in ways that were previously unimaginable.

This book covers a number of key points that we've learned over the past decade plus research on how people transition to Fundamental Wellbeing. A vast amount of time and resources have gone into it. Enjoy!

**Much Love,
Jeffery**

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HOW PEOPLE BECOME FINDERS

In the early study, roughly thirty percent of participants transitioned to Fundamental Wellbeing over time. Sometimes this process took a few hours or days, other times for weeks or months. The rest experienced a shift that was immediate and sudden, like the flip of a switch.

Later, the Fundamental Wellbeing protocol developed by our research project called the Finders Course that helped around 70% of the hundreds of people who completed it become Finders essentially reversed this. Most Finders Course participants transitioned over the course of a short period of time, but not instantly.

As these examples demonstrate, there probably isn't a dominant way that people become Finders. Whether you take the immediate and sudden path or transition more slowly depends on a range of factors that haven't been fully worked out yet. However, it does suggest that there is no one correct way.

The feeling of shifting into Fundamental Wellbeing can range from subtle to dramatic. If the initial shift occurs into Location 1, surprisingly new Finders may not immediately recognize they've transitioned. Often, these are individuals who already experience high wellbeing, a relatively quiet mind, positive or peaceful emotions, and so forth. The degree of deepening they feel simply isn't dramatic enough to make them realize the transition to Fundamental Wellbeing has occurred.

This can also happen for those who gradually transition to it. Although they may initially have low wellbeing, as they phase into being a Finder, this can change. They may even experience unhappy periods before their shift, but just prior to becoming Finders, they can still shift to wellbeing that is high enough to make them overlook their transition. It's worth noting that everyone seems to feel the shift into later locations, and depressed individuals are likely to notice their shift into Fundamental Wellbeing right away, regardless of the location they land in.

Powerful hallucinogenic or mystical experiences prior to transitioning can also obscure the shift. These types of temporary experiences are generally not a good gauge for what Fundamental Wellbeing is like. Also, the expectations set by some religious and spiritual traditions can be too high, and in the wrong direction. Any of these can lead to incorrect assumptions that make a person errantly believe that she/he is not a Finder.

What Triggers Fundamental Wellbeing?

The precise moment of the shift into Fundamental Wellbeing is as varied as the people who experience it. There seems to be no common subjective trigger. Finders often realize this and can be reluctant to share the specifics of their story out of concern that others will believe it is a path to follow. This caution is understandable, but it only takes hearing a few of these accounts to realize they aren't a helpful guide. In fact, it's fascinating how diverse these experiences are.

The transitions, like the Finders, reflect a cross-section of the human experience. For some, it comes in moments of prayer, meditation, or contemplation. For others, it arrives when they have sunk to the deepest and darkest despair of their life. Still, others enter Fundamental Wellbeing during what most would consider normal day-to-day events. Examples collected during the research include but are by no means limited to: looking out on a landscape, watching a bird land on a railing, driving down the road on the way home from work, playing with a cat, reaching for the soap during a shower, going for a walk, watching television, and getting dressed in the morning.

The Three Ways Of Getting There

All of the transition stories collected during the research fell into one of three categories. The first contained individuals who actively sought Fundamental Wellbeing. The second category was comprised of people who were depressed or in significant psychological distress at the moment of transition. The third was a catchall for those who didn't fit into either of the first two categories.

1 SEEKERS

Many Finders in the first category actively, even doggedly, pursued Fundamental Wellbeing. We'll refer to them as 'seekers.' Their range of dedication and time investment varied greatly. On one extreme are those who have devoted the majority of their lives to trying to transition. On the other extreme, it was a casual, part-time endeavor.

For those of you reading this who wants to transition, the information from these individuals may be the most important in this book. The lessons from this group suggest that the pursuit of Fundamental Wellbeing often takes far longer than is needed. Within the seekers category, three paths emerged. Two seemed to lead much more rapidly to Fundamental Wellbeing than the third.

▶ **A Common Scenario**

Imagine a man reads an article about Fundamental Wellbeing and becomes interested in it. The author mentions meditation, so this person surfs the web for more information. The more he searches, the more confused he becomes. He discovers that the internet is full of conflicting stories, information, techniques, recommendations, and so forth. Eventually, he gives up and decides to start asking people he knows who have experience with it.

One friend meditates using a mantra, which she explains is simply a word or phrase repeated silently or out-loud to quiet the mind. Another describes a form of meditation he calls mindfulness. This friend says that it involves trying to pay more attention to the present moment. A third practices a form of concentration and prayer that she learned at church.

All of these friends seem excited to be asked and rave about the difference the practices have made in their lives. After thinking it over, the person decides to try mindfulness meditation. He arrives for his lesson and discovers that it's easy to learn. He practices it together with his friend and then goes home. Over the next several days, he follows the friend's advice and tries it for an hour a day.

After a week, he has likely had one of two experiences. First, he may have felt like 'something' was happening. This can range from a mind-blowing, life-altering experience to an intuitive hunch that something deeper could be going on. Alternatively, he may not have noticed anything. When he checks in, his friend encourages him to stick with it.

▶ **The Three Paths Of The Seeker**

Our research suggests that the decision made at this point is critical. Participants in the study who stuck with a technique that seemed to be "doing something" typically made a more rapid transition into Fundamental Wellbeing. Those willing to abandon things that were not working for them and try other techniques until they found one that produced an effect also made more rapid transitions.

Those who stuck with a practice that did not appear to be working took the longest amount of time to reach Fundamental Wellbeing, by far. Often, these Finders were part of a religious or spiritual tradition that insisted it had the “best” or “only working” technique(s). These research participants typically knew others who had used the same method and become Finders much faster. They also knew people who took even longer than they did, as well as many who hadn’t made it. Often the latter category was the vast majority of people they’d known over the years who used the technique(s).

Usually, their tradition had philosophical explanations for these differences that the person accepted. Examples of this included the unpredictability of God’s grace, current and past life Karma, and overall deservingness. These explanations were generally broad enough to cover most situations. For example, when a person transitioned to Fundamental Wellbeing more rapidly than others but appeared less deserving, it might be attributed to the unpredictable grace of God.

► **Tuning What’s Working**

Many of the research participants practiced more than one technique prior to becoming a Finder. Some were part of religious or spiritual traditions that incorporated multiple methods. Others actively sought out practices that worked best for them.

These individuals generally had one or more primary technique that was working well. They paid careful attention to what it was producing and sought out other methods when its effectiveness started to diminish. Techniques were viewed as tools. Just as a hammer isn’t good for turning a screw, they viewed specific methods as relevant only for certain tasks. When it felt like one stopped working, they would assume its job was done and try to find the next one that enabled progress.

Finders’ use of multiple methods also showed up in another way. Some were always on the hunt for a more effective method. At any given time, these individuals had one or more techniques that were solidly working for them. However, they were continuing to experiment with variations or new ones. These Finders not only transitioned faster than others who were pursuing Fundamental Wellbeing, they were also much more likely to shift between locations on the continuum. An important lesson here is that even if your current method is producing results, a better technique might be awaiting you.

► Part-Time or Occasional Seekers

For some fortunate Finders, Fundamental Wellbeing was a casual pursuit with a rapid conclusion. These individuals are placed in the ‘seeker’ category, even though they put in much less effort than many of their fellow Finders. Sometimes they would transition while reading their first book about Fundamental Wellbeing. Other times, a few attempts at meditation would do the trick.

Perhaps the most common example was the Christian conversion process. A small percentage of those who “asked Jesus to come into their heart” or participated in a similar ritual immediately transitioned. Though it seemed to happen more with Christianity, the initiation rituals of other traditions also occasionally produced it. For example, a tiny number of participants transitioned during the Hindu-derived ceremony that accompanies learning Transcendental Meditation and prior to actually having practiced the technique.

Next are those who pursued Fundamental Wellbeing, but decided to abandon their quest. These Finders are also placed in the seekers category. They include individuals who tried meditation for only a brief period, sometimes years before their transition to Fundamental Wellbeing.

This category also includes Finders who rigorously pursued Fundamental Wellbeing for months, years, or decades before eventually giving up. These individuals had usually thrown up their hands, convinced that nothing would ever work for them, just prior to transitioning. Some viewed their long and dedicated spiritual practice as what was necessary to get their mind to finally accept that it had done all it could, and surrender. Others had given up their dedicated practice but were still interested in Fundamental Wellbeing and continuing to learn about it when it arrived.

2 Depression

Many Finders were not happy prior to Fundamental Wellbeing, with bouts of depression being common. Some had even attempted suicide. For clarity, the ‘depression’ category refers only to individuals who were both severely depressed and had never sought Fundamental Wellbeing. We classify formerly depressed individuals who actively sought Fundamental Wellbeing as seekers.

Often, these individuals described themselves as being at the lowest point of their life just prior to their transition. Some, but not all, had a long history of battling depression

and other severe mood disorders. A tiny fraction reported the arrival of Fundamental Wellbeing during or immediately following suicide attempts. Others felt that their failed suicides were pivotal in later bringing it on.

The impact depression and suicide can have on shifting into Fundamental Wellbeing have been known for centuries. There are even a few secretive spiritual traditions that attempt to drive their adherents to suicidal depression, in hopes it will produce the shift. Obviously, this is not a recommended path, and anyone reading this who experiences depression should seek immediate professional treatment.

After they transition, it is common for people in this category to passionately devote their lives to helping depressed individuals experience Fundamental Wellbeing. This is especially true in the years immediately following the transition. They often view it as a virtually unknown remedy that seems to work where so much else fails. Quite a few spiritual teachers in the West have this background.

3 The Others

This final category is a collection of individuals who transitioned without any frame of reference for Fundamental Wellbeing. They were not religious or spiritual in any way. They had not practiced any techniques relating to it, nor were they a contemplative or reflective person. They were not depressed. For them, one day the transition to Fundamental Wellbeing just happened, and they had no idea what to make of it.

The 'other' category also includes Finders who claim that a narrative sense of self never developed for them. Interviews with these individuals revealed that they had no transition story or pre-Finder history to relate. This tiny handful seems to have absolutely no idea what it is like to live with a Narrative-Self.

In some circles that study Fundamental Wellbeing, there has been considerable debate about the importance of developing, then losing, a narrative sense of self. These Finders suggest it might not be important at all. They have raised families, held down jobs, and otherwise lived outwardly 'normal' lives. During this time it was unlikely that anyone suspected them as Finders, much less that they had never developed a Narrative-Self. They seem at least as resilient and capable as the rest of the population, and some are highly accomplished.

These three ways that people transition leave clues for those who haven't. One of the most important involves why so many methods fail to work while others do. And, why the ones that do are so difficult to understand and get yourself to stick with. It's all about on the mind versus in the mind as you'll see in the next chapter.

ON THE MIND VS. IN THE MIND

As I've discussed in many talks and in the book 'The Finders,' most people are deeply embedded within and view the world from their Narrative-Self. Since over 99% of the population seems to live from this perspective, it isn't surprising that psychology mostly focuses on what can be done to, and with, this dominant sense of self. It tries to affect change in the mind, where our thoughts, emotions, memories, and so forth seem to reside and interact.

THE results of this focus have been mixed. Over the last century, major advancements have been made in reducing many psychopathologies. However, what can be done to meaningfully and substantially increase wellbeing for the average person largely remains a mystery.

Can You Improve Your Way To Fundamental Wellbeing?

Several years ago, we conducted a study to test the developmental levels of Finders. At the time, many people believed that traditional psychological development led to Fundamental Wellbeing. In other words, that maximally developing the moral, cognitive, emotional, and other aspects of the narrative sense of self would eventually lead to a transition. This view placed becoming a Finder as the pinnacle achievement of individual development.

Our research results went against this orthodox thinking. It showed that Finders were at varying developmental levels. Though they generally had high scores, they didn't all cluster at the top as many expected.

In addition to standard psychological techniques, most self-help and personal development methods are also designed to work in the mind. Given this focus, and the

results of our developmental study, it's not surprising they weren't cited by research participants as important for becoming Finders. Though, it is worth noting that a few of the most successful methods Finders have used to shift into Fundamental Wellbeing also have in the mind benefits.

In recent years, many high-quality scientific studies have examined meditation. The researchers looked for, and found, a range of psychological (in the mind) benefits. They've also found physiological benefits, such as reduced blood pressure. However, our research suggests that the most important effects of meditation relate to how it works on the mind.

On the Mind

Imagine you grew up in a single room. You would have never seen what was beyond it or had any way to even conceive of that. Now suppose that the roof above your room starts leaking when it rains and that eventually your ceiling becomes saturated and begins to drip.

You try in vain to repair the ceiling. Sometimes your patching seems to work. Magic appears to happen that stops the water, and it allows for a temporary repair until the next rainstorm. No matter how much you try, though, over time it won't stop leaking. You don't know that there is a roof or anything beyond your room. All you can do is continue your hopeless effort of trying to keep the ceiling patched during the dry periods.

For non-Finders, this room is their Narrative-Self. It is all they know. While it and the form of mind it represents certainly seems related in some way to the brain, huge portions of our neurological architecture lie outside of this form of the conscious mind, and beyond its reach. Trying to reach Fundamental Wellbeing from within the confines of your mind is like patching the ceiling to try to fix the leak in the roof.

The research suggests that for progress towards Fundamental Wellbeing to be made, 'on the mind' methods are needed. This attempt to produce changes from outside of self-referential thought. Numerous 'on the mind' techniques have been found and refined over the years, such as some forms of meditation, direct inquiry, and prayer. They are primarily designed to tip the balance away from the Narrative-Self and towards Fundamental Wellbeing. The good news is that practicing a form of meditation to get its scientifically validated in the mind benefits can also lead to effects on the mind, and vice versa.

Developmental Programs and Techniques

When you use a personal development program, you usually have at least some idea of how it's supposed to work. Maybe it is intended to reduce negative thinking. Or, perhaps it is designed to call up traumatic experiences from the past, and reprogram them. These in the mind type operations make sense. We can understand them. That's often not true of on the mind techniques. Understanding how they work is nearly impossible. Their effects must be experienced. It would be like trying to understand the house and roof having never seen more than your room.

This is why techniques such as meditation have to be taken initially on faith. From inside the Narrative-Self, we can never truly understand how or why they might work, or even what they would work for. The best forms of them aren't designed to be useful in our mind. Rather, they tip the scales away from it.

Some argue that direct inquiry techniques such as deeply and iteratively asking 'Who Am I?' or using Zen Koans (statements or mental puzzles that don't appear to make any sense to the mind, such as "What is the sound of one hand clapping?") are in the mind techniques. To a degree this is true; however, they seem primarily designed to force a perspective shift that objectifies the mind. They engage and take advantage of the mind's strengths, but eventually lead beyond the Narrative-Self to Fundamental Wellbeing.

If we look beyond the seekers to the depressed group, it seems like objectification and transcendence of the Narrative-Self is also present. Imagine how much one has to objectify the Narrative-Self to want to kill it, as happens with suicidal depression. Of course, many depressed individuals never transition. The sad truth is that neither do the vast majority of individuals who practice various transformative techniques, even for decades. Nonetheless, important clues seem to point in the direction of ensuring that you choose on the mind techniques if you are interested in becoming a Finder.

HOW TO SHIFT INTO FUNDAMENTAL WELLBEING

By 2012, our research data was a treasure trove of insight across philosophies, spiritual and religious systems, traditions, and cultures. It offered a unique opportunity to determine which teachers, materials, concepts, and techniques had produced the most impact on participants. At this point, many people were asking us for advice about how to transition.

THE research focus had always been on trying to understand the psychology, cognitive science, and neuroscience of Fundamental Wellbeing. Very little thought had been given to which techniques were more effective, or why. A decision was made to dive into the data and see what could be learned. The following four-part formula on how to increase the likelihood of reaching Fundamental Wellbeing emerged:

- 1** Try multiple, proven methods and pick the one that you notice the most effects from. Make this your primary method, but don't stop exploring new ones. Be ready to discard any technique when it stops working or you find a better one.
- 2** Find a teacher with a good track record who seems flexible and understanding, and is not dogmatic.
- 3** Reach out and connect with a variety of Finders. Spend time with the ones that you feel a resonance with, or who seem to produce a positive effect within you.
- 4** Get in a community of like-minded seekers for social interaction and support.

This formula may seem simple, but there's a significant complexity both between and within each of these steps, nuances that have to be 'just right' to maximize effectiveness.

1 Find a Proven Method

Although there doesn't seem to be a 'one size fits all' method, some have worked for many more people than others. Among the research population, the most successful methods were (not in alphabetical order):

- **Awareness-centered practices:** Directly placing attention on awareness itself using verbal and non-verbal techniques, during individual or group practice.
- **Direct inquiry:** Using the mind, emotions, and sensations to actively dig into and seek the truth of one's self. This is done by constant attention to what the Narrative-Self feels like, or actively trying to deconstruct it through ongoing probing and questioning.
- **Mantra-based practices:** Using specific words or sounds as an object of concentration for meditative purposes. They may or may not have a meaning, and can be recited aloud or silently. Found across all major religions and spiritual traditions, their most common purpose is to quiet the mind.
- **Mindfulness-based practices:** Contemplative and meditative techniques for focusing on the present moment in a non-reactive way. Generally, the goal is to obtain a stable, non-judgmental awareness of arising thoughts, emotions, and sensations.
- **Noting-based practices:** Awareness and mental labeling of ongoing experience. Noting can be done silently or aloud. Both internal (thoughts, emotions, and sensations) and external events can be noted. Traditionally, an individual practice in recent years forms of 'social noting' has become popular that involves noting out-loud with one or more others.

The above are best thought of as categories. Many different techniques are contained within each. There are probably hundreds of different mindfulness-based practices alone. Narrowing these down further to the 'greatest hits' among them is difficult. This was another benefit of our data.

An interesting thing about this list is that it essentially covers the core techniques from the world's major religious and spiritual systems. It's as if the cream rose to the top over centuries of trial and error. However, many times a tradition is limited to only one or two of these categories. As a result, only some of a tradition's followers are likely to match up to its methods.

The effectiveness of a tradition's techniques can also be limited. For example, some don't work very well outside their original culture. If a specific tradition's practices haven't worked for you, it's a good idea to try some other methods.

► Matching Up To The Best Method

As previously discussed, finding a proven method isn't enough. It's also critical to find the method that will work best for you. The research has not yet reached the point where a questionnaire or device can match someone with their best method, though we are working on this every day.

So, how do you find the optimum method or methods? The best bet is to try one technique from each of the categories and see where you get. By practicing one method at a time you can be more certain that any effect you feel come only from it. Based on the research, one week of practicing a minimum of an hour a day should be enough time to determine if a method has something to offer you.

If you are fortunate enough to have the first technique seem to be working, don't stop there. Trying some other techniques from the same category may lead to finding one that works even better. Alternatively, you can shift to a different category. You might find that the first method was ideal, or surprise yourself by uncovering that you were just experiencing a deep state of relaxation.

Relaxation is great, but you're looking for a method that takes you in the direction of one or more of the things talked about in my core book on this topic, *The Finders*, such as: higher wellbeing, deeper peace, a reduction in self-referential thought, distance from thoughts and/or emotions, a marked reduction in emotional duration or reactivity, a significant shift in your sense of who you are and what it feels like to be you, and so on. Look for changes that you notice outside of, not just as a part of meditation. If you see positive effects in the rest of your life, not just during your meditation period, it's a good sign that you're on the right path.

► Methods Generally Don't Work Forever

A method can stop working at any time. Methods that work produce change and, ironically, that change can make the method that produced it less effective for you. It is important to pay careful attention to the effectiveness of each one being used. When a technique stops working or seems to be getting less effective, move on and try some others. The research has shown that people often get attached to methods that have worked, and can have difficulty letting go of them. Don't let that happen to you.

Often, seekers practice many different methods before finding one that works. This makes it hard to give up a cherished technique, even if it doesn't seem to be working anymore. They usually believe its effectiveness will return if they just keep trying. In a situation like this, the research has shown that it is fine to give the practice another week or two. But, if it doesn't come back within that time frame you should move on.

Techniques shouldn't be permanently discarded. Just because a method isn't working right now, it doesn't mean that it never will. Sometimes research participants reported key practices that worked off and on over the years. Others reported that methods suddenly started working that had been tried previously with no results.

2 Find a Teacher or Mentor

A teacher or mentor isn't necessary but can be helpful. Unfortunately, she/he can also set you back. Over the years, I've heard many stories from people who mistakenly selected teachers that had a dogmatic view of Fundamental Wellbeing. These teachers are usually adamant that they know the Truth (with a capital "T"), so it's not surprising that seekers are attracted to them.

Open minded teachers have generally experienced more locations on the continuum than their narrower minded counterparts. They also usually have a much broader knowledge of techniques. These combine to make them more able to accurately assess and address your needs.

There is one situation when the best teacher may be a dogmatic one. When seeking a specific continuum location, it's best to find a teacher or mentor based on that location. Their narrow focus can help keep you on track to the desired destination. This can be especially important for individuals who are targeting Location 4, or beyond.

Perhaps the most important consideration regarding a primary teacher or mentor is his or her track record. Surprisingly, our research revealed that most Finders have not had much success in helping others experience Fundamental Wellbeing. Don't be afraid to ask about this.

The most successful teachers are often in high demand and difficult to get appointments with. If you'd like to work with one of these individuals but s/he doesn't have time, ask for a referral. The teacher will probably refer a friend or former student who is less well known, but still quite effective. And, this person will likely have access to the main teacher when it's needed.

In general, the research suggests that it is best to talk with multiple potential teachers and mentors. This will allow you to see how easy they are to stay in touch with, how well you understand each other, and so on. Teachers shouldn't be the only Finders you spend time with, though.

3 Reach Out and Connect with Finders

Fundamental Wellbeing is a broad and complex topic. Each Finder has his or her own way of experiencing and describing it. Some Finders will be easier for you to understand than others. Keep in mind that a specific Finder's viewpoint might only help you to understand a small part of the overall picture. Exposure to others can lead to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of Fundamental Wellbeing.

Finders who make themselves available to the public are easy to find if you know where to look. Many spend a lot of time discussing Fundamental Wellbeing, online and off. Typically, the more they have interacted with others to share their experiences, the better they are able to communicate. The downside is that this often makes them extremely busy. The number of other people contacting them can make it difficult to build a deeper connection with them.

A great alternative is to locate a Finder, either locally or online, who isn't as public about his or her Fundamental Wellbeing. This can be difficult, as the person isn't actively advertising themselves as a Finder. If you've read *The Finders* you are in a better position to know where and how to spot them, but it can still be challenging.

One option is to sign up for online forums that relate to Fundamental Wellbeing, and post that you are looking for someone to speak with privately. Be sure to include plenty of information about yourself, as well as what you are looking for. The private message options on these forums allow Finders to contact you without others knowing. Many more monitor these types of forums than publicly participate in the discussions on them.

Local meditation groups can be another place to locate Finders. A surprising number regularly attend them, but don't let on that they experience Fundamental Wellbeing. These individuals can even be found in the meditation groups of highly dogmatic spiritual or religious systems they disagree with, where they rarely, if ever, say a word about their own beliefs. Some Finders also attend 'new age' and similar type groups that have a spiritual component. In all of these examples, they are showing up to be of service. Letting your fellow attendees know what type of guidance you're looking for will attract these Finders right to you.

Finders can also be found at religious gatherings. Among the Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism), relatively few mainstream denominations welcome the 'mystical' aspects of their faith. Adherents that shift into Fundamental Wellbeing

often feel unwelcome. One of several things happens at this point. A Finder may opt to remain silent about his or her experience and continue attending the same church, mosque, or synagogue. Or, s/he might stop going to services altogether.

If the Finder lives in a reasonably sized city s/he probably has a third option, especially if his or her religion is the culturally dominant one. A city dwelling Finder in the United States can usually find a small church where other Finders gather. Large cities typically have more than one. They are often led by experienced ministers who transitioned to Fundamental Wellbeing and subsequently felt rejected by their denomination.

These 'churches' (or, much less commonly, Mosques or Temples) are usually ad hoc. They rarely maintain their own buildings, offer additional services like Sunday school, and so forth. It's common for them to rent theatres, storefronts, and other temporary locations for their meetings. Some even meet in people's homes. Their lack of advertising and formal outreach can make them a bit difficult to find, but they are out there and are an excellent source of Finders to build relationships with.

Finders can also often be found more readily at Unity, Religious Science, Science of Mind, and Unitarian Universalist churches, because of their inclusive doctrine. Even in accepting environments like this, they rarely discuss their Fundamental Wellbeing. If you go there, expect to do some networking. It helps to be explicit about what you're seeking. Sometimes, they are known to the organization's leadership and they can speed up the search process.

In the United States, many Christian Finders attend more than one type of church. They may still attend their original church, but also one or two others. Each church holds their interest in a different way. Their original church is often the home of their religious social activities but provides little spiritual sustenance. The church comprised of fellow Finders provides their primary spiritual support. A third church might allow them to worship in another way that they find rewarding. For example, if their original church is a conservative Presbyterian church, they might also attend a charismatic church. The good news for you is that this makes them easier to find. You just have to locate one of the churches they regularly visit.

Fundamental Wellbeing is often flavored by the context in which it arrives. For a Christian Finder, it may have shown up instantly when they converted. Or, it might have come later after devotion to a specific practice, like contemplative prayer.

Using a phrase like 'Fundamental Wellbeing' will probably not get you very far when talking to most Finders. It's important to phrase things in a way that they will understand. For example, Christians usually use terms like mysticism, mystical, Union with the divine/God/etc., indwelling of the divine, experiencing the heart of Christ, or powerful conversion experience, among others. Make sure you do your homework so that the Finders you are seeking will understand you.

4 Find and Participate in a Community

Don't underestimate the importance of community in your quest to transition. Having others who are going through what you are, and people who came before you can be a true blessing. Today, the best place to find a like-minded group of others is probably online.

There are many online communities that focus on Fundamental Wellbeing, both in traditional forums and on social media. Take your time and sample as many as you can before deciding which ones to join. The most important thing is that you feel comfortable and safe. The more deeply you can open up and share your personal experiences, the more others can help you. Often, the relationships you make in these groups will be among the strongest in your life.

If you decide to have a teacher, s/he may have a group. This is a wonderful place to start because you are all on a similar journey. Everyone is probably practicing similar techniques and trying to grasp the same material. Don't limit yourself to just one group, though. It's a good idea to branch out into other communities and remain open to different ideas and experiences.

A mix of in-person and online groups can be beneficial. You will probably only attend an offline group one to four times a month. However, your online groups will be there to support you around the clock. You can check in, comment on what others are saying, and share what you are going through in spare moments throughout your day.

Don't be afraid to flow in and out of communities. As you change, groups may become more or less relevant. It's important not to get stuck in ones that hold you back.

EXPERIMENTING WITH THE METHODS

Field data can only take research so far. In 2013, we began to integrate everything that had been learned into a series of experiments. Our goal was to see if a more reliable path could be found for transitioning to Fundamental Wellbeing.

AS we saw in the previous chapter, by this point, categories of methods had been uncovered that seemed to work best for the study participants. Unfortunately, there didn't seem to be a way to match an individual up to these methods using the psychological data we had accumulated. This meant that there was no simple way to help people find which technique would work best for them.

The earliest form of the experiment involved meditation novices trying the 'greatest hits' that had emerged from the research data. These were the specific techniques that had worked best from each of the categories mentioned previously, based on what we'd learned from the Finders who had participated in our research. Each of these methods was tried, one after another, for a period of time ranging from a few days to a month. We were looking to both validate the methods and for how long each should be practiced to determine if it was a good fit. When a practice worked, the person continued with it and stopped trying new ones. This scattershot approach worked well. All of our initial subjects eventually found a technique that worked for them and was encouraged to keep practicing it.

The second version of the protocol was only slightly more refined. New participants picked their way through the 'greatest hits' list. However, this time they were asked to continue trying additional techniques at regular intervals, even after they had found one that seemed to work. The goal was to determine if they could tell which methods were more effective for them over others they were trying. The third iteration involved customizing the methods used by each individual. Another batch of participants tried every technique and attempted to determine which ones worked best. Each person was then asked to combine the most effective parts of the methods s/he preferred into a new technique. Many were able to create hybrid practices that they felt worked better than the originals. The final experiment in this initial round of exploration examined the order in which the most effective techniques were used, to see if a specific lineup

would improve the results. Up to this point, people were allowed to select methods from the list in any order. It seemed logical that some ways of ordering them might work better than others, and this turned out to be the case. When awareness-centered practices were grouped together earlier in the protocol, for example, participants were more likely to report temporary experiences of Fundamental Wellbeing.

These experiments allowed the top methods and their order to be established. They also taught us that people could sense which techniques worked best for them, and combine these in new ways to increase their effectiveness. However, this work also uncovered a significant issue. Some of these techniques were known to produce so-called 'dark night of the soul' experiences, intense periods of traumatic cognitive, emotional, and physical experiences that could last from a few moments to several decades. Although these methods are taught to the public every day around the world, we were not comfortable releasing a protocol that carried a high level of risk. Work began on how to mitigate it.

THE DARK NIGHT PROBLEM

A dark night can occur while someone is trying to transition to Fundamental Wellbeing, or when someone who experiences it is transitioning between locations. Although we had reports of it in our data, because our focus was on the Fundamental Wellbeing, at this point we knew very little about the dark nights that could arise prior to it. Looking into this produced two interesting findings.

FIRST, individuals who had high wellbeing prior to their transition seemed much less likely to experience dark nights. This was encouraging because the previous decade had produced a considerable amount of research on how to increase traditional psychological wellbeing. It provided hope that a pathway could be created to avoid these nasty periods that too many endure while trying to transition.

Second, temporary glimpses of Fundamental Wellbeing also seemed to play a role in producing dark night experiences. ‘Bad trips’ are well known among users of hallucinogenic drugs. Though little known, the same can happen in near-death experiences. For example, some have reported dying and finding themselves in what seemed to match the Christian description of Hell. It turned out that temporary experiences of Fundamental Wellbeing can have negative aspects as well. These include paralyzing fear and other components that are similar to undesirable drug and near-death reports. Examining the research studies on hallucinogenic drugs and speaking directly to researchers led to a clue regarding how to alleviate this potential problem.

‘Set and setting’ is considered very important when giving people hallucinogens during research. Essentially, this refers to the environment and context that someone takes the drug in. ‘Bad trips,’ it turned out, were greatly reduced by an environment that felt supportive and safe. The question at this point became, “What would be a safe ‘set and setting’ for Fundamental Wellbeing?” It didn’t take long for it to become clear that this wasn’t the first time the question had been asked. The lens it provided brought new meaning to some of the communal religious and spiritual practices that had been previously examined.

For the most part, Fundamental Wellbeing is considered a solitary experience. This isn't surprising since it occurs inside an individual's private experiences. This isolation, however, usually means that there is an absence of support when a negative experience of it occurs. These communal religious and spiritual practices were an effort to moderate this. A group-oriented practice provided several benefits. A familiar and trusted group brought a feeling of safety. It also allowed different perspectives to be shared. This seemed to help everyone clarify what they were experiencing. And, it made it more likely that multiple people would have a similar experience. Whether sublime or jarring, these occurred within the context of a supported environment, rather than internal seclusion.

These two key pieces of the puzzle became the cornerstone of a strategy to help reduce the risk of dark nights during experimentation with the new research protocol. Six additional weeks of practices were added before participants used the 'greatest hits' methods that had been uncovered. These new techniques included proven interventions from positive psychology to increase wellbeing. A group exercise that attempted to give participants a safe-feeling initial glimpse of Fundamental Wellbeing was also added.

THE FINDERS COURSE EXPERIMENTS

By 2014, the experimental protocol to help people transition to Fundamental Wellbeing seemed solid enough to begin welcoming the public to try it. It was formatted and advertised as both a research experiment a 12-week online class (later this would be extended to around 15 weeks). The initial participants were drawn from existing email lists. Some of these were from books like *The Fourth Awakening*, which is a fiction book about awakening that became a bestselling series. It had been written several years earlier to attract research subjects. Others were information signup lists on the Center for the Study of Non-Symbolic Consciousness and related websites.

THE experiment was called the ‘Finders Course.’ It is still running, and the current version can be found at FindersCourse.com. This name reflected the overall goal, to help participants ‘find’ the methods that worked best for them. It was hoped they could also be trained to evaluate methods encountered outside the course, so they could maintain an effective long-term practice. The program was also set up to explore the impact a broad-based, secular education about Fundamental Wellbeing would have on participants.

The research data suggested that individuals who found working methods transitioned in as little as a week to as long as several years. Accordingly, the Finders Course was initially designed to be a longitudinal study that would track participants over time. It seemed overly optimistic to some of our research collaborators, but we thought that perhaps one or two participants might transition while they were being monitored.

On February 1st, 2014, six individuals began what was originally scheduled to be a twelve-week program, and five completed it. The protocol had not previously been used in a group environment. The number of participants was kept intentionally small because some of the methods the protocol contained were known to occasionally

produce adverse psychological effects and it was important to ensure they could all be supported no matter what occurred.

There were three men and three women, ranging in age from 43 to 63. Emotionally, they ranged from very happy to deeply depressed. There was a business owner, a school psychologist, a photographer's assistant, an IT professional, a wilderness addiction specialist, and a retiree. Four were married, and two were divorced. Most lived in the United States, in the: Midwest, Southeast, and Southwest. One man lived in Wales. The person who did not successfully complete the program resided in South Africa.

The class was a mix of seekers. It included people who had, consistently or occasionally, practiced meditation or centering prayer for decades. Alongside them were participants who had very little experience with any methods before the class. All knew very little about the research or experiment going into it.

What resulted from their participation still seems beyond imagination. All of the participants who successfully completed the program experienced Fundamental Wellbeing either during the course or within a few weeks of it ending.

The previous data had shown that there was no predicting how long it would take for someone to transition. A tiny minority might transition shortly after beginning their pursuit, but for most others it often took years, and usually decades of dedicated work to reach Fundamental Wellbeing. Suddenly we had a research finding that suggested five 'average' people, had experienced it in four months or less.

One-by-one, as these participants transitioned from seeker to Finder, the name of the course took on a new meaning. Towards the middle of the class, the first person transitioned to late Location 2. She later relocated to Location 3. Three more transitioned during the second half. They landed in Locations 1, 2, and 4. The final person shifted into Location 2 within a few weeks of it ending. You can watch interviews with them by searching for "Finders Course" on YouTube.

The experiment didn't just rely on the experiences reported by participants. In order to take the course, each had to agree to fill out a wide range of psychological measures. There were three measurement periods: before the course, at the midpoint, and after instruction ended. Given where many participants started from, the transformations reflected on these were simply remarkable. The final results showed anxiety, stress, and depression at virtually non-existent levels, alongside high wellbeing, happiness, and gratitude.

While the course outcomes dramatically exceeded expectations, it wasn't entirely smooth sailing. The instruction was delivered live over Google Hangouts, and the person in South Africa often had difficulty connecting. This combined with English

being a second language to put him at a significant disadvantage. Though he tried his best to stick with it, by the mid-point he was quite far behind.

He was one of two participants with a history of severe depression. The other transitioned to and remains in Location 4, but the South African participant experienced a 'dark night' that lasted for approximately half of the training. Towards the end of the course, he disappeared from view altogether. A few weeks after it ended, he rejoined his fellow classmates to announce that he'd found his way through. Since then he has reported being in and out of Fundamental Wellbeing.

The other five participants kept up with the course. This included having their wellbeing evaluated halfway through. The South African participant didn't complete this evaluation. This taught us the critical importance of verifying that each participant's wellbeing is high enough to proceed to the second half of the course.

The lessons learned in Finders Course 1 were applied to its successor. Seven participants in Finders Course 2 were ejected at the mid-point for failing to fully fill out their psychological measures, including individuals who were keeping up with the course practices. Weekly feedback forms were added to track, in part, who was keeping up. The bar was also raised on admissions standards for psychological health.

Overall, though, the success of the pilot run was both undeniable and astonishing. It led to a decision to run a second experiment as quickly as possible. Most of the instructional sessions from Finders Course 1 were recorded so participants could review them if needed. The videos weren't pretty. They were recorded webcam sessions of live training, but this presented a unique opportunity. Subsequent groups could take the course using nearly identical instruction as the first group, via these recorded videos.

RESULTS FROM THE FINDERS COURSE

As this book goes to press, the data from eleven Finders Course experiments have been analyzed. To date, 455 participants have successfully completed the program out of 571 who began an 80% completion rate. Of these, 319 (or an incredible 70%) of those who completed it reported a transition to Fundamental Wellbeing. And, a majority of the remaining participants reported at least temporary glimpses of Fundamental Wellbeing during the program.

AT this point, the program has included people from six continents and dozens of countries, including many who speak English as a second language. Ages have ranged from the 21 to 81. People came from a wide range of backgrounds and professions. Overall there was strong participant diversity in every area except race and education. Most participants have been white and educated.

A broad range of gold standard psychology measures continued to be used to collect data from each cohort, including the following:

- **CES-D:** Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale
- **PERMA:** Positive emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment
- **FEQ:** Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire
- **PSS:** Perceived Stress Scale
- **NEO-FFI:** Neuroticism-Extraversion-Openness Five-Factor Inventory
- **CRQ:** Close Relationships Questionnaire
- **STAI-Y2:** State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Trait Anxiety)
- **SWLS:** Satisfaction with Life Scale
- **GHS:** General Happiness Scale

A full range of the measures used and the results from them can be found at the Center for the Study of Non-Symbolic Consciousness' website (nonsymbolic.org), but a summary of some of the data is presented in this chapter so that you can see how dramatic the changes have been.

The table below shows the percentage change for participants who completed the program for several of the major measures. Some measures changed over time, so not all measures were given to each participant. If you're familiar with these measures from other research, the changes will seem huge to you. They are. Overall the program has a massive impact on overall participant wellbeing. Also, note the large drop in the personality trait Neuroticism. Personality traits are supposed to be relatively durable over time, so a drop like this over a four-month program is remarkable. Importantly, all changes are highly statically significant ($p < 0.00001$).

Percentage of change for participants from the beginning of Finder's Course to completion

Measure	Percent Change
Depression (CES-D)	-47%
Loneliness (PERMA)	-46%
Percent of Time Unhappy (FEQ)	-46%
Negative Affect (PERMA)	-41%
Stress (PSS)	-34%
Neuroticism (NEO-FFI)	-32%
Attachment-Related Anxiety (CRQ)	-26%
Persistent Anxiety (STAI Y-2)	-21%
Percent of Time Happy (FEQ)	+35%
Satisfaction with Life (SWLS)	+21%
Positive Emotion (PERMA)	+20%
General Happiness Scale (GHS)	+20%

Another way to look at the data is to ask if there is a difference between participants who reported a transition to Fundamental Wellbeing (FW) or not by the end of the program. The no Fundamental Wellbeing, or nFW, category includes both those who experienced temporary Fundamental Wellbeing as well as no glimpses of Fundamental Wellbeing at all. Recall that most people in this category would have experienced at least some glimpses of Fundamental Wellbeing. Longitudinal research, including at least one project that spanned decades, have shown that glimpses of Fundamental Wellbeing are often regarded by people as among the most transformative and significant experiences of their lives. In fact, we do see quite remarkable improvements in the nFW group. However, it is not nearly as profound as changes experienced by those reporting Fundamental Wellbeing.

If a glimpse was as transformative as a full transition to Fundamental Wellbeing, we'd expect to see the two groups being close together in their numbers. In fact, they are quite far apart. It's very clear that the group that experiences Fundamental Wellbeing is in a very different place in terms of their experience of the world than the group that does not. Importantly, the difference between the groups on every measure is highly statically significant ($p < 0.00001$).

Percentage of change for participants from the beginning of Finder's Course to completion

Measure	% Change FW	% Change nFW	% Difference
Depression (CES-D)	-60%	-25%	-60%
Loneliness (PERMA)	-58%	-27%	-56%
Percent Time Unhappy (FEQ)	-56%	-29%	-56%
Negative Affect (PERMA)	-51%	-25%	-49%
Stress (PSS)	-41%	-19%	-41%
Neuroticism (NEO-FFI)	-39%	-18%	-43%
Anxiety (STAI Y-2)	-25%	-14%	-26%
Percent Time Happy (FEQ)	+37%	+30%	+41%
Satisfaction (SWLS)	+24%	+14%	+27%
Positive Emotion (PERMA)	+21%	+16%	+25%
General Happiness (GHS)	+22%	+15%	+25%

The “% Difference” column in the table above might seem confusing to you. It is calculated on the difference between the ending score for each group. So, for example, let's say the total score for a happiness measure was between 0 (miserable) and 100 (gloriously happy). If the FW group's final score was 100, and the nFW group's final score was 50, the FW group would be 100% happier than the nFW group. You can see a lot more about these types of changes on our academic website, in some of my detailed presentations (see appendix).

In addition to using gold-standard psychology questionnaires, participants were also asked some general questions, such as if they had more inner peace after the program. The results from some of those questions are in the table below. These numbers are not the amount of increase, just the number of people that reported more or less of a given experience as a result of the course.

Top percentage categories for all participants who completed the course

Question	More
Inner Peace	88%
Mindfulness	83%
Gratitude	82%
Happiness	80%
Emotional Balance	79%
Contentedness	78%
Positive Emotions	78%

Question	Less
Reactivity	83%
Negative Thoughts	82%
Negative Emotions	81%
Anxiety	77%

The two tables below compare the scores for participants who reported transitioning into Fundamental Wellbeing versus those who did not. Although most categories are the same, notice that the lowest score in the FW list is well above the highest score in the nFW list. Also, notice the categories that are different. The FW list includes two categories that the nFW list does not: Emotional Balance and Contentedness. Conversely, the nFW list also has two unique categories: Gratitude and Tolerance of Others.

Consider the difference between these four items. Two of them are nearly impossible to will yourself to Emotional Balance and Contentedness. Although many people try to force states like these to occur, ultimately these just happen. They really cannot be willed or forced to occur without causing their opposite.

Now consider the other two items from the nFW list: Gratitude and Tolerance of Others. While wonderful attributes, these can be forced. You can sit down right now and make yourself feel gratitude, for instance. Of course, these can also naturally arise, but in many ways, these two items highlight a key difference in Fundamental Wellbeing.

The traits that comprise the psychological experience of Fundamental Wellbeing often just arise with no additional action needed. It is literally a new norm that appears in one's experience, not something that has to be actively maintained in each moment.

Another thing to note in the tables below is that, even for the highest category in the nFW list, the Fundamental Wellbeing group has a higher reported percentage. In other words, participants reporting Fundamental Wellbeing at the end of the course also reported higher levels of both Gratitude and Tolerance of Others. Also, notice how rapidly the top scores for the no Fundamental Wellbeing group drop off compared to the participants who reported Fundamental Wellbeing.

Top 5 percentage categories where 'more is better' for participants who completed a course that reported Fundamental Wellbeing (FW) vs. no Fundamental Wellbeing (nFW)

Question	FW	nFW
Inner Peace	92%	79%
Emotional Balance	88%	58%
Mindfulness	88%	72%
Happiness	87%	62%
Contentedness	87%	58%

Top 5 percentage categories where 'more is better' for participants who completed a course that reported no Fundamental Wellbeing (nFW) vs. Fundamental Wellbeing (FW)

Question	FW	nFW
Inner Peace	92%	79%
Gratitude	86%	72%
Mindfulness	88%	72%
Tolerance of others	85%	64%
Happiness	87%	62%

What about items that are ideal to have gone down, like negative thoughts and emotions? Here again, we see key differences between the two groups, and our previous observations hold up. The lowest score for the Fundamental Wellbeing group is still above the highest score for those who didn't report experiencing it, there are huge differences in the percentage reporting being in the various categories between the two groups, and so on.

All of the categories are shared between the groups, except for two. A large reduction is reported in internal mental chatter in the Fundamental Wellbeing group but not in the no Fundamental Wellbeing group. As outlined in The Finders and many of our other materials, the reduction of internal narrative is a key component of Fundamental Wellbeing. The other difference is a reduction in conflict that shows up as one of the categories for those who do not experience Fundamental Wellbeing, though at a far lower level than for those who do.

Top 5 percentage categories where 'less is better' for participants who completed a course that reported Fundamental Wellbeing (FW) vs. no Fundamental Wellbeing (nFW)

Question	FW	nFW
Negative thoughts	90%	63%
Reactivity	88%	71%
Negative emotions	88%	64%
Mental internal chatter	85%	52%
Anxiety	85%	61%

Top 5 percentage categories where 'less is better' for participants who completed a course that reported no Fundamental Wellbeing (nFW) vs. Fundamental Wellbeing (FW)

Question	FW	nFW
Reactivity	88%	71%
Negative emotions	88%	64%
Negative thoughts	90%	63%
Conflict	83%	61%
Anxiety	85%	61%

We were fortunate to have this project be the first in modern history that could reliably, safely and rapidly produce a transition in such a high percentage of people into Fundamental Wellbeing, and thus allow tracking the before and after changes.

No matter how this data is examined, it is clear that these are two groups of people who are experiencing the world through very different internal experiences. Both groups improved significantly across major scientific measures of wellbeing, emotion, personality, and more. In fact, if the experimental protocol had only produced the changes seen in the group that did not report Fundamental Wellbeing, it would have been a smashing success.

As incredible as the changes for all participants were, the results reported by individuals reporting Fundamental Wellbeing were vastly higher. It's completely clear which group you'd want to be in, given the opportunity. The good news is that you can be!

THE FINDERS COURSE EXPERIMENTAL FORMAT

A person has to be dedicated and highly motivated to make it through the roughly 4 months of the Finders Course experimental protocol. The Finders Course has a complex structure and it requires a lot of work from participants. To our knowledge, no one who has attempted to work through it on their own (meaning outside of the official course environment) has made it, yet. Remarkably, despite this, there has only been a 20% drop-out rate to date. For reference, often online programs are happy when 20% of individuals complete a program. An 80% completion rate is virtually unheard of, especially for a program that is this intensive.

ALTHOUGH the data is still being analyzed, it looks like the highly structured course environment, the amount of progress experienced over time, and the bonds formed within groups play important roles in retention and helping participants to finish the program. Both the first and second half of the course have group practices. Participants who drop out can negatively affect their fellow small group members. This is stressed when participants want to enroll, and they seem to take it to heart.

The level of support provided during the program is also important. The public information about Fundamental Wellbeing is highly contradictory. The ability of the course staff to answer a vast range of questions from the research data has clearly been important for student success. In addition, the sizable network of Finders built during the research has served as an effective extended support mechanism.

Although the program is simple to follow, the sophistication of the protocol requires a considerable amount of time from participants. Each day requires at least an hour and a half of core, personal practice time. By week three, this can increase to as much two and a half hours for the most dedicated participants. During the final part of the course, it can easily even grow beyond that depending on a participant's level of dedication.

Instruction is delivered once a week and ranges from thirty minutes to two hours. Additional clarification is provided in question and answer videos that are released during the week. Participants must meet with their group at least once per week for a general check-in and sharing session, which takes around an hour. During the first half of the course, many weeks have one or two supplemental activities. These are 'one-off' exercises that take a half-hour to an hour to complete. Each of the middle six weeks has at least one additional ninety-minute group session. These sometimes occur in later weeks, as well.

Two Halves

The protocol can be visualized as having three distinct phases, and two halves. The first half has four primary objectives. The first is to raise participants' wellbeing so that the risk of dark nights in the second half is minimized. As mentioned, this is done with a series of positive psychology techniques. The methods that have the greatest risk of producing dark nights are situated in the second half of the class. The second objective for the first half is to provide a safe initial taste of Fundamental Wellbeing or get participants as close as possible to it. This is accomplished with a group technique that focuses on awareness.

The first half is also used to establish daily routines. A set of positive psychology practices are done every morning upon awakening and night just before going to sleep. A solid hour, at a minimum, must also be set aside each day for other practices. These routines take some getting used to. They need to be well established by the second half of the course. The final objective is for participants to gain initial experience sensing what methods are most effective for them.

The first part of the course is followed by a two-week break from instruction. During this time, participants continue to practice. Up to this point in the course, they are required to rigidly follow all instruction. Now their primary goal becomes determining which methods from the first half are most effective for them. They are encouraged to experiment and combine techniques in unique ways. This provides an important experience that is needed to identify what works best among the practices that follow.

During the second half, participants work their way systematically through the remaining 'greatest hits' methods. A new technique is introduced each week. They also continue doing the morning and evening positive psychology exercises, along with another core practice or two from the first part of the course.

The Three Phases

The protocol can also be viewed as divided into three phases. The initial one lasts two weeks. During it, participants get acclimated and start to settle into the course's routines. The positive psychology exercises quickly start working to raise their wellbeing. This begins to convince their mind that something positive is happening, and recruits it to help keep them on track.

The most difficult adjustment during this period is usually the required hour of daily meditation. Even for the most experienced meditators, this can feel like a long time. Participants often have to push hard to get through it. Usually, it is well established by week three.

The second phase lasts from weeks three through eleven. It primarily focuses on awareness-centered techniques. The research revealed these to be the fastest path to Fundamental Wellbeing for most people. Weeks three through eight uses a group awareness exercise, for reasons mentioned previously regarding dark nights. Although focusing on awareness can be very difficult for some, these six weeks provide plenty of time to make progress with it.

Participants are also placed in groups during week three. This isn't done earlier so that they can focus on and establish their initial routine. Most weeks have just one instructional session. The initial couple of weeks have two sessions each. This intense pace does not provide time for getting to know fellow participants.

It is preferable to initially do the group awareness exercise with people you don't know well. This is because it helps to not have a lot of stories and information built up around those you learn it with. Introducing participants to their small group the same week this exercise starts allows this to be the case.

New awareness-centered exercises are introduced in weeks nine and ten. These are not group based, but groups continue to meet for support once a week. Week eleven is a practice week, with no new instruction.

Phase three begins with week twelve. Several final methods from the remaining 'greatest hits' categories provide additional opportunities for participants who didn't resonate strongly with the awareness-centered exercises. Some of these techniques also effectively target Locations 3 and 4, two places on the continuum that participants often show a specific interest in. Participants who transition to Fundamental Wellbeing earlier in the program often use these weeks to progress more deeply into it.

SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

The road from 2006 to today has been a remarkable one for this research project. It began with most people advising that we could never find enough people in Fundamental Wellbeing to research and ended with thousands of participants who did – hundreds of which got there in recent years by using our experimental protocol.

From all of this, we've learned several key points that can greatly help anyone trying to reach Fundamental Wellbeing. These are summarized below:

- 1** It's important to spend your time on the most well vetted and proven methods you can find.
- 2** At any given time, only one or a few methods are likely to match up to where you're at and work optimally for you.
- 3** A working method can transition you in a matter of days when earnestly done for at least an hour each day. It doesn't take years or decades to reach Fundamental Wellbeing.
- 4** Methods can work synergistically with each other. Sometimes a method that doesn't work on its own will do wonders when one or more other methods are used during the same period of time.
- 5** Even if a whole method doesn't work, part of it might. It's important to pay careful attention to the effects different aspects of methods have. Combining parts of several methods into a new method that works optimally for you might be the best strategy.
- 6** Always experiment. Even if you have a working method, it's a good idea to devote some time to experimenting and trying to find one that works even better or trying to mix up pieces and parts into a custom one that does.

- 7** If you've used a method for an hour a day for more than a week and haven't seen results, it's probably best to move on and try to find one that fits you better.
- 8** When evaluating a method, it's best to look for results in your life, not during your meditation time. Positive changes in your reactions to daily events can be a great indicator of meditative effectiveness.
- 9** Methods run their course and stop working. Methods that work produce results change you and change because you fall out of step with the method that produced them. It's important to know if a method is just in a lull or if it is no longer effective for you and needs to be swapped out.
- 10** Your level of wellbeing matters a great deal. A powerful method can easily cause a "Dark Night of the Soul" experience in someone whose wellbeing is low. It's important to do everything possible to raise your psychological wellbeing prior to using highly effective methods.
- 11** Often it's impossible to understand why a method works because it is working 'on the mind' not 'in the mind.' Generally speaking, the more effective a method is at working 'on the mind,' the more the method is tuned to help you reach Fundamental Wellbeing.
- 12** It's important not to engage the mind. Consuming more information about Fundamental Wellbeing can be detrimental. It allows the mind to turn it into an object, which makes it increasingly difficult if not impossible to actually reach. The best strategy is diligent and systematic experimentation with known methods.
- 13** Teachers, Finders, and interested communities can be helpful but are not essential – especially if they primarily engage the mind.

If all of this seems a bit overwhelming, you're not alone in feeling that way. There are two ways to use the information this book provides. First, you can view it as a series of general best practices for your own exploration. The tips provided here should go a long way towards guiding your path through the often-confusing world of seekers, Finders, and Fundamental Wellbeing.

Second, you can use the information to try to create your own protocol for exploration. Several times over the years, we've tried to help people create their own, customized, Finders Course type protocol. The last time we tried this, over \$30,000 was spent to create a lengthy video training series that taught everything that had been learned from the research, from beginning to end, and it was given away for free.

Sadly, these attempts have never worked. Although the Finders Course protocol looks quite simple when you take it, on the backend, it is actually a highly complicated and carefully constructed protocol. No matter how much they swear they do, no one seems to really want to take a ton of time out of their life to try to create their own version of it.

On one level, the idea of it is actually quite simple. This goes back to the first way to use this information. The protocol is primarily a systematic exploration of the most likely to work methods. This is something that you can replicate quite easily on your own. You can use the method categories in Chapter 3, search online and find instructions for one or more methods from each, and then do one each week until you find one that works.

There are two important things to consider if you try these out. First, it's best to raise your traditional psychological wellbeing first. Take one or more of the happiness-based tests at the University of Pennsylvania's Authentic Happiness website to get a baseline of where you're at. If you don't score highly, obtain a good book on positive psychology practices such as *The How of Happiness* by Sonja Lyubomirsky, *Happier* by Tal Ben Shahar or *59 Seconds* by Richard Wiseman, and do some these until your scores are higher when you retest. Then start working down your list of methods to try. Order your list so that you begin with awareness-centered practices. Just these simple steps can make a huge difference.

You're also welcome to take advantage of all of our research to date and use the Finders Course protocol. As of this writing, the Finders Course is still an active research project. The project is the largest crowd-sourced and crowd-funded scientific experiment involving Fundamental Wellbeing. The course is not free; however, the funds generated by participants go back into supporting the research and helping the protocol reach more people. You can find a link to it, our research, and more below.

***Best wishes on your path! May you reach
Fundamental Wellbeing very soon!***

APPENDIX A: RESOURCES

Research data, presentations, interviews, and so forth:

Center for the Study of Non-Symbolic Consciousness

<http://nonsymbolic.org>

Finders Course Experimental Program

<http://FindersCourse.com>

Explorers Course Experimental Program

Adjustment to Fundamental Wellbeing is not trivial, it's a life-long process. Our project has comprehensively researched this as well and makes a program available that is based on what we've learned called the Explorers Course. We often say that seekers become Finders, and Finders become Explorers. This program is designed to help Finders optimally live their lives.

<http://ExplorersCourse.com>

Dr. Martin's Personal Website

<http://DrJefferyMartin.com>

Transformative Technology Lab

<https://transtechlab.org/>

Facebook

<https://www.facebook.com/finders.course/>

<https://www.facebook.com/CenterforNonSymbolicConsciousness/>

<https://www.facebook.com/jeffery.a.martin>

<https://www.facebook.com/transtechlab/>

YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChY5xr43awqH1T0NK-jjIdA>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCH6pMDwo3MF-a9CANDYBAPA>

Twitter

<https://twitter.com/jefferymartin>

<https://twitter.com/finderscourse?lang=en>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jeffery A. Martin, PhD, is a scientist, technologist, entrepreneur, and investor who focuses on advancing the highest forms of human wellbeing. For over a decade he has conducted the largest international study into ongoing and persistent forms of non-symbolic experience (ONE/PNSE), which includes the types of consciousness commonly known as: enlightenment, nonduality, the peace that passeth understanding, unitive experience, and hundreds of other terms.



THIS book refers to these as Fundamental Wellbeing. His research resulted in the first reliable, cross-cultural and pan-tradition classification system for these types of experience. More recently, he has used this research to make protocols and information available that help people obtain profound psychological benefits in a rapid, secular, reliable, and safe way.

Dr. Martin is also the founder of the Transformative Technology ecosystem, which promotes the use of science and technology to substantially raise human mental and emotional wellbeing. Since he conceived of and created the space in 2007, he has been a catalyst in bringing together makers, scientists and other researchers, engineers, entrepreneurs, companies, educational institutions, non-profits and NGO's, public policy experts, and investors.

He co-founded the first academic TransTech lab, its first conference, taught the first university-level course, organized the first investor gatherings, and many other firsts. He serves as a formal and informal advisor to a wide range of companies and other organizations in the space, is an active early-stage investor, and is a frequent public speaker on Transformative Technology related topics.

In addition to his wellbeing work, Dr. Martin is a bestselling author and award-winning educator who has authored, co-authored, or co-edited over twenty books. His work has regularly been featured at leading academic conferences worldwide, as well as major public forums such as Wisdom 2.0, H+, the Science and Nonduality Conference, the Asia Consciousness Festival, Deepak Chopra's Sages and Scientists Symposium, and TEDx. He has been covered in media as diverse as the South China Morning Post and PBS's Closer to Truth, and been an invited speaker at many top universities including: Harvard, Yale, Stanford, University of London, and the National University of Singapore.

Among other roles, he is currently the Director of the Center for the Study of Non-Symbolic Consciousness, a Research Professor and Director at the Transformative Technology Lab in Silicon Valley, and the CEO of Alchemas, Inc., which is pioneering the use of brain stimulation for Fundamental Wellbeing. Dr. Martin has served on the faculty of several universities, including as a visiting professor in the School of Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and as a Distinguished University Professor, the William James Professor of Consciousness Studies, and Dean of Research at Sofia University.

His personal website is: <http://DrJefferyMartin.com>.