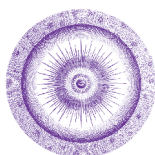




Prana Nidra

The Art of Conscious Rest



*An ancient, simple, and powerful technique
that renews your vitality in minutes.*

Andrei Ram



Jorge Caraballo Cordovez



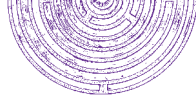
*Only when you look through the single eye can you see the
divine realm.*

Sri Dharma Mittra

*Who can wait quietly while the mud settles?
Who can remain still until the moment of action?*
—Tao Te Ching (translated by Gia-fu Feng and
Jane English)

Rest is the beginning of beauty.

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Prologue

Jorge Caraballo

I met Andrei one summer in New York. He wasn't there, but his teacher was. I was working at a startup during the day, and in late afternoon I would meet my wife in Union Square and we'd go together to practice with Dharma Mittra. One day, after the kind of class that leaves one floating, we ran into Dharma in the changing room. He asked where we were from, we told him Colombia, and his face lit up with mischievous complicity: "Ah, so you must know Andrei." We had no idea who this Andrei was, and he didn't explain. He just smiled as if he knew we would inevitably meet the man.

A few years later, in 2018, my wife gave me a yoga class for my thirtieth birthday. She didn't tell me who the teacher was, just gave me the address and told me to be sure to show up. The class, in Medellín, was with Andrei. It was an intense, demanding practice, yet at the same time sweet and elegant. I remembered the summer I had spent with Dharma: Andrei had his own unique touch, but it was clear where he came from. At the end of the class I felt I had found a spiritual brother, someone

with far more experience than me, but who was there, with his feet on the ground and his hand held out to accompany me on my path. Since then I've done several courses with him, and he became a touchstone not only as a yogi, but as a seeker of knowledge, as a man, a father, and a friend.

The idea of writing a book about prana nidra came up in January 2024. Andrei was leading a five-day prana nidra training in Medellín, and in the middle of one of the *satsangs*—the conversations that follow the practice—he said he wanted to write about conscious rest because it isn't only the people who attend his courses who need it.

I had just finished writing a book as a ghostwriter for a businessman in that city, and I was ready to start a new project. But there was a problem: I didn't want to be a ghostwriter again. Although I learned a lot from the businessman and he treated and paid me very well, I had signed a confidentiality agreement that would never let me say that book was written by me. It was a year of rewarding work, but work that remained secret. If I was going to write another book, I wanted to be able to reap the full reward. So, while I was riding my motorcycle to the training the day after Andrei expressed his interest in a book, I thought of proposing that we do the project together: he would bring his experience and knowledge, and I would bring the listening and the writing. It would be a book by both of us: obviously him as the protagonist, and me as the midwife or facilitator. I suggested this to him over lunch and he, with his finely tuned intuition, didn't think twice. "Let's do it," he said, "with both our names on the cover."

Andrei has had dyslexia since he was a child. He not only finds writing difficult but finds reading very hard too, so the world of books feels strange and intimidating to him. That was

the main reason he hadn't dared to write a book. I, by contrast, was born in a library. Or almost. Even more than identifying as a journalist, or a writer, or a consultant, I identify as a reader. I've read since I was very small, and it's the only thing I've been constant about for my whole life. Books have been part of me for as long as I can remember, and making one with Andrei is an honor I still can hardly believe.

The writing process wasn't entirely easy. Although this is a short book, it took me almost a year and a half to finish. I had estimated I'd have it ready in half that time. I assumed that what he shared during the prana nidra training in Medellín would be enough. I transcribed and underlined the twelve hours of teachings I had recorded during that course, and then organized them by category, but I realized that if I used only that material, I'd end up writing a manual, not a book. So we scaled the project up and turned it into what you are about to read. More than the presentation of a practice that transformed Andrei's life, my own, and the lives of many people we know, we wanted to take this opportunity to tell several ways prana nidra can help in the age of exhaustion.

So I interviewed Andrei a dozen more times so he could tell me the stories of how exhaustion manifested itself in his life, of the moments that defined his childhood and youth, of the experiences that later led him to become a renunciant with Dharma Mittra, retreating from the world as a monk might do. I spoke with many of his friends and students, read several books about yoga, others about rest, and read poems and essays that seemingly had nothing to do with the topic but that nourished my main question: how to better communicate the priority of conscious rest in life? In what ways do rest and the spirit intersect?

But above all, what I did during that year and a half was to practice prana nidra and observe its effects on me. During this

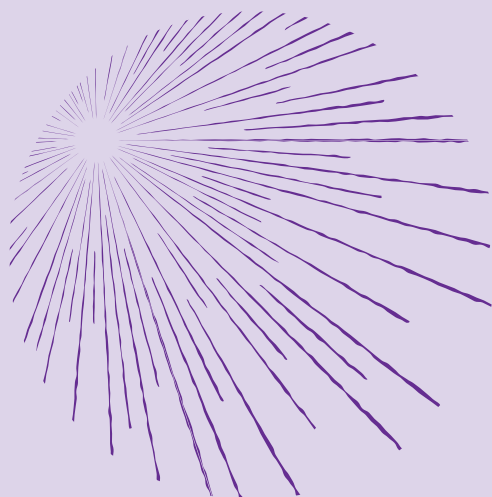
time of writing, my third daughter was born, and the fathering and mothering of three small children, plus the responsibilities of work, plus the writing of the book, became the best proving ground for living through exhaustion firsthand and putting *nidra* to the test. There were days I wanted to throw it all away, abandon the project, and flee from my to-do list. But I kept writing, slowly, one prana nidra at a time, until this book came to be.

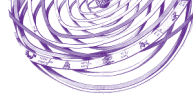
The book is mostly written in the first person, in Andrei's voice. His role, besides agreeing to the thousand meetings I set up to talk about the project, telling me about his life and patiently explaining the finer points of *nidra*, was to make sure that everything I wrote genuinely represented his voice and his experience. I would send him a chapter, and he would send back a twenty-minute WhatsApp audio pointing out what worked and what might be adjusted. It was a beautiful exchange, a writing shared between the two of us, in which each of us brought our talents so that this could appear, so that while you hold this book in your hands, you remember that rest is the portal to beauty, that it is a direct path to your spirit, and that if you rest with consciousness you are not only cleansing and revitalizing your life but inviting other beings to pause, to do without doing.

I hope this book fulfills its purpose.

Without further preamble, I leave you with Andrei.

El Capiro, Colombia, 2025.





I.

Introduction

Nidra took me by surprise. I first encountered it in 2002, during one of my earliest classes with Dharma Mittra, my teacher. I already had a personal practice before I set foot in his New York studio, but I never suspected that yoga could be more than postures on the mat or breathing exercises. That was what I'd been doing—*asana* and *pranayama*—with fiery discipline ever since one of my contemporary dance teachers introduced me to yoga five years earlier in Colombia. But Dharma showed me soon that the palace was vaster, that in yoga not-doing is as important as doing, that my effort was valuable but fell short if I didn't learn to let go. Through *nidra*, Dharma taught me to rest, and rest became a direct doorway to the spirit.

Dharma's temple was on Third Avenue, in Manhattan. While we practiced, we could hear New York's iconic sirens, its impatient traffic, the hydraulic drills pulverizing the pavement, that tectonic rhythm of a city that never stops. The noise didn't bother me; it was part of the cityscape, and besides, the sessions were so intense that eventually my attention settled only on what was happening in the room. (Dharma's practices prioritize the *asan-*

as, and it is through work with the physical body, above all, that he guides his students to refine their consciousness.) Up to that point everything felt more or less familiar, but one morning, in the middle of a sequence, Dharma did something that changed my life. It was so subtle I can barely articulate it, and so powerful that it is the reason I am writing this book today. Between two postures, Dharma took us into *savasana*, or corpse pose, the one almost always done at the end of a class. I no longer remember his exact instruction, but I was lying down, eyes closed, and he, in his Brazilian-tinged English, told us to inhale while directing our attention to certain points, and to exhale while moving it to others. And that was when I disappeared. I disappeared, time disappeared, the body disappeared, the noise of the mind, the chaos of New York. And so, in an instant, I went from this world of ideas and words, of goals and results, to a state of complete relaxation.

Be the whale in its mother's womb, mother whale suspended in the deep night of the sea.

I don't know how much time passed—two minutes, perhaps?—until Dharma brought us back and went on with the class as if nothing had happened. That parenthesis of *nidra* revealed to me a universe within yoga. What happened? Or rather, how did everything stop happening? Because *nidra*, like meditation, leads to being, to a consciousness unconditioned by time. And right there, reposing there, energy renews and harmonizes.

Everything I am going to share in this book began that morning. From that moment on I began to cultivate *nidra* as my way of resting, of healing, of centering myself. During the ten years I spent in his temple, Dharma taught me what he knew without reservation. He never did it formally: he never sat down to ex-

plain how *nidra* worked, much less how to guide it. It all came through practice, experience, and self-observation. Today, after twenty years of personal practice, of observing the impact of *nidra* on me, of sharing it through workshops in various parts of the world, and of feeling the urgent need for rest in those around me, I am writing this book and recording these audios as a way of extending to more people the gift Dharma gave me.



In Sanskrit, the word *nidra* means “sleep.” In the yoga traditions, however, *nidra* refers to a very specific practice of resting: conscious rest. There are several forms; the best known is yoga nidra, a protocol in which practitioners lie down while someone guides them with *mantras* and visualizations into a state of deep relaxation. Some call yoga nidra “the yogic sleep,” and it is common to find it on the schedules of yoga centers all over the world, even when they change its name and try to present it as a new product. The truth is that, with good guidance, yoga nidra brings about a relaxation of the soul. It is an extraordinary practice of energy restoration, so much so that conventional science has studied it in detail, and articles on its benefits have appeared in many of the most prestigious scientific journals. Those studies confirm what we feel, those of us who have practiced some form of *nidra*, whether today or thousands of years ago: conscious rest revitalizes, harmonizes the senses, reduces mental noise, sharpens attention, stimulates creativity, opens the door to meditation.

There is another practice of *nidra* that is not as well known, though I believe it fits the rhythms of today especially well. It is the practice that has sustained me for two decades through the most turbulent moments, the most complex transitions; it

is the practice that has given me vitality when I am exhausted, focus when I scatter. It is called prana nidra, and this book will revolve around it.

Prana nidra is a form of conscious rest through *prana*, or “vital force.” In short, it is a practice that uses simple exercises of breathing and visualization to cleanse, relax, and harmonize the energetic body¹. That sounds abstract, but it isn’t. On the contrary, it involves a process that is physical and mental, a process of energy and consciousness, with unmistakable effects. Unlike yoga nidra—which requires at least 45 minutes and the guidance and care of an expert—prana nidra can be done alone and takes only between seven and twenty-one minutes. It can be practiced at any time and wherever we can lie down without being interrupted. I know friends who do it in their offices before important meetings or presentations; others who do it the moment they wake up, or after their physical exercise routines, or before some activity they want to undertake with full attention and presence. I do it before meditating, when I feel I am slipping into autopilot, or in situations that demand more of my energy than usual: workshops, retreats, trips.

The effect of prana nidra depends greatly on the needs of the person practicing it. In some people it can ease physical pain; in others it brings emotional clarity; for some it helps to locate the place where they have a blockage of energy, or helps to regenerate vital force after long periods of chronic weariness. The most common effect after practicing is that sensation of light-

1. “Energetic” is commonly used in discussion of prana nidra to mean “related to flows or blockages of internal energy.” It does not mean “energetic” in the usual English sense of “vigorous” or “strenuous.” When possible, in this book I will paraphrase to avoid confusion (for instance, saying “energy blockage” instead of “energetic blockage,” but often I go with “energetic” because that’s the standard usage in the field.) [Translator’s Note]

ness, lucidity, and balance we have after a full night of restorative sleep. And none of this happens by magic: although the principles of prana nidra have been refined over thousands of years, the practice requires discipline. Many yoga masters insist that what matters is not to sleep but to rest. And *nidra* is just that: concentrated rest. That said, it is important to make clear right away that *nidra* does not replace sleep, nor the natural rest that sleeping gives. Many people have misunderstood its benefits and, by cutting back on hours of sleep, have done themselves physical and psychological harm.

I would never have believed anyone who offered me a technique with the benefits prana nidra supposedly has. And so I don't expect you to believe me either. Skepticism is one of my spiritual principles. I resist believing for the sake of believing, believing out of escapism or laziness, and especially believing out of obligation. If I have been practicing prana nidra for twenty years, it is because it has provided fertile ground for knowing myself and, above all, for confirming the indispensable role of rest on the path of self-knowledge. But what has been true for me may not be true for others. If I hope for anything from this book and the audios that accompany it, I hope simply for you to try prana nidra with curiosity, for you to give yourselves a chance to practice its different versions and observe what happens in you when you bring it into your routine. Perhaps, as it did for me, this practice will reveal a new way of cultivating your vital energy. Perhaps not. Only by experimenting will you know.

Because it is an energetic and subtle practice, when we speak of prana nidra we run the risk of remaining in the realm of the abstract, in the discursive. That is why this book rests on guided practices and life stories. I believe it is there, in the laboratory of each life, that prana nidra can best be known and communi-

cated. In this book there are stories of people of different ages and contexts who practice prana nidra: from yoga teachers to bankers, consultants, and engineers. But before that, I will begin with myself. I will tell my own story.

My life was one thing before prana nidra and another after. Coming to know it, I realized I had spent years burdened by exhaustion on every level, by a weariness that at times had me, literally, on the verge of collapse.



I arrived in New York toward the end of 2001, a few weeks after the attack on the Twin Towers. It was strange, because I met a city that mirrored my inner world: I too was wounded and dazed. I was supposed to be traveling to New York to present my first original choreography and to audition for a lead role in a work by a choreographer I admired, though it is clear to me now that I was looking for something else: I went to New York because I needed help.

Bogotá, the city where I grew up, was deeply affected by the Colombian war that began in the mid-eighties. Like many in my country, I found it impossible to dodge the blows. The first came when I was fifteen. My family lived in a middle-class neighborhood that, like others in the city, had become the territory of youth gangs. One night, leaving a party alone, I ran into two gang members at the door, furious because they hadn't been let in. In their frustration, they tried to take it out on me, though I had nothing to do with it. One of them shoved me, looking for a fight, and I shoved him back so he would leave me alone. He fell on the sidewalk, and I went on my way home, thinking that was the end of it, but ten minutes later, on a deserted street, I heard a

shout ring out, “There he is!”, and when I turned to look, a dozen young men were coming at me with knives and chains. They threw me to the pavement and pounded me for ten minutes. I remember almost nothing. I woke up in the hospital with several fractures and stab wounds. I spent several days hospitalized. They almost killed me.

A few years later, when I was in college, I worked as a bartender in one of the most popular clubs in the Colombian capital, famous for its parties and its drugs. The atmosphere could sour in the blink of an eye, turning from euphoria to hostility. Often I ended up caught between two groups squaring off. First I would try to calm tempers, and then, almost always, I was pulled into the brawl, defending myself however I could. It was a dense, noisy place where I always had to be alert, distrustful, aggressive. I felt the world was stalking me and that I had to be ready so its claws wouldn’t catch me off guard.

It was no accident that I orbited those spaces of conflict: there was something in me that unconsciously pushed me toward the places where violence was about to spill over. From the age of six, after a bicycle accident, I began to have terrible dreams—recurring dreams of war, of abuse, deaths, revenge; dreams of unknown figures, relatives from another time; dreams that woke me agitated and confused. I was a quiet, withdrawn boy who gave little trouble, though deep down I was tormented by those images I did not understand and did not mention to anyone. Until, in high school, from one day to the next, I became one of the wrathful figures from my dreams.

“Andrei!” the teacher suddenly shouted at me. His voice thundered through the classroom and yanked me back to earth: I had been silent, daydreaming about who knows what. I looked at him from my seat and smiled nervously, seeing him undone

by something so trivial—surely I wasn't the only distracted teenager. "You find this funny?" he asked, indignant. "Stand up and laugh in my face!" I stayed seated; it was obvious the teacher was having a bad day, and I didn't want to escalate the situation—it wasn't my style, I had never been the center of attention as a rebel or a provocateur. "Stand up!" he shouted again, coming at me like a fighting bull. I stood up. He stopped, his reddened face a couple of fingers from mine, and snorted again: "Laugh!" The scene was ridiculous, and I let out another nervous laugh. Then the teacher exploded. He shoved me in the chest, knocking me to the floor. I fell on my back, hit my head, and lost consciousness for a few seconds. When I came to, what I saw horrified me: I was gripping the teacher by the neck with both hands, I had lifted him off the ground and pinned him against the blackboard. My friends watched it all from behind, mute at their desks. The teacher, pale, unable to speak, searched for help with his eyes. It was terrible. I felt both the strength and the rage that would allow me to finish him off on the spot. Of course I had to change schools, and I left with an unresolved question: where does this anger come from, this anger that drags me in its wake?

That episode marked the beginning of a spiral of fury. Over the years I became a punk; I studied biology at the university, worked at the club, and lived as a squatter in an abandoned building in downtown Bogotá. Urban violence in Colombia was at its peak, and I suppose my rage served as a shield when I walked the pre-dawn streets after a bartending shift and crossed paths with what surfaces only in the dark.

In the mid-nineties I switched to studying anthropology at the public university, and it was in that new setting that I realized I was trapped. I swore that my rebelliousness, my contempt for authorities and institutions, my surviving one more party

each night, one more confrontation, were proof of my freedom, of my capacity to exist outside an unjust, corrupt, abusive system. But no. I was imprisoned in my own anger, repeating self-destructive patterns, without the energy or the resources to imagine myself beyond them. Luckily, anthropology brought me closer to indigenous wisdom. Between 1995 and 1996 I had several encounters that helped me lower my guard, breathe a different way. Some *mamos*, the spiritual elders of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, and *taitas*, healers from the south of the country, began to speak to me of blockages of energy, of the fragmentation caused by anger, sadness, and fear, of how healing a good and gentle word can be.

In a session with a *taita* I had a revelation that began to change everything. I understood that to heal my pain I had to use my body. The vision was very clear: my path of self-knowledge began in movement, in dance. That same day, when I returned to the building where I was squatting with a friend, something happened that I still find hard to believe. Half an hour after I got back from the meeting with the *taita*, there was a knock at the door. It was a dancer I knew, looking for a place to live. And she did not come alone: she was with one of the dance directors from the Universidad Nacional, where I studied. The dancer introduced me to the director, I talked with her, and she invited me to one of her classes. Through that coincidence I began to dance, and through dance I came to yoga. It was 1996; I was studying anthropology, but I spent most of my time with my friends from Danza Común, our contemporary dance company. We spent hours and hours rehearsing, creating choreographies, touring Colombia and other countries. Several times a week, as a warm-up, we did yoga with a Venezuelan teacher. I clung to dance and yoga like a plank after a shipwreck. Slowly, movement helped me open up space to handle my emo-

tions and my wounds in a different way. For the first time I felt I was creating my life, that I was not condemned to orbit forever around the black sun of rage. I could feel it, but it no longer consumed me or dictated my responses as before. Until one day everything burned again.

It was August 30, 2000. That morning a student protest had been organized over the visit of the president of the United States to Colombia. I was at the university, and the scene was nothing new: students blocked the street, police arrived to respond with force, and then a battle began that disrupted classes for the rest of the day. Many students left before the melee intensified, but I was one of those who stayed, indignant, defending the university with shouts and harangues until the tear gas became unbearable and we had no choice but to leave. We were used to this routine by now, but that day something happened that had never happened before. The riot police entered the campus—still packed with students—and brutally forced their way through with gas and stun grenades. Once they were inside, a group of hooded men ambushed them, and the police, finding themselves cornered, broke formation and ran in terror for the exit. That image—police fleeing, police frightened—was synonymous with victory for the students, and I remember how we were filled with excitement, how we hurled insults and whistled at them as they retreated. But what seemed a triumph turned into a nightmare. One of the officers did not manage to escape: he passed near where I was with some of his comrades, running as best he could in his black armor and plastic shield, and he was only a few meters from the exit when a hooded man rushed up at full speed and threw a homemade grenade at his back. The explosive went off against his head, blew off his helmet, and dropped him instantly. Get up, get up, get up, I begged, terrified. And no, there he stayed, lying forever a few meters from

us. That day was a watershed in my life. It was too much. I felt that we were all responsible for that killing, even though we had not thrown the bomb. Once again, despite my efforts to heal through dance and yoga, I had let myself be dragged to the place where death makes its rounds.

I was sick of it. And, above all, I was emotionally exhausted: I felt that, no matter what I did, there was something broken in me, an irremediable pain, a shadow that overwhelmed me. I wanted to go far from Bogotá, the scene of so much trauma in my history. A few months later came the chance to present my first choreography in New York and, perhaps, to stay there as a dancer. New York was, in a way, my second home: my grandfather lived there and I had grown up visiting him often. His apartment was my happiest place, the closest thing to a temple I had known until then. So I packed my bags and landed in Manhattan, where the ruins of Ground Zero were still smoking.

And so, with my spirits as low as they had ever been, I came to Dharma by chance. I was walking down Third Avenue when I saw the sign for his yoga center. I went in out of curiosity and started looking at a poster in the reception area with photos of a man doing 908 *asanas*. Suddenly I felt something in my back, a strange burning sensation, and when I turned, I saw a man opening the mailbox. He put on a pair of little glasses, picked out some envelopes, left others, closed the mailbox again, climbed onto a very old bicycle, and disappeared. When I turned back, it dawned on me: the man on the poster and the one who had just left were the same. I returned to my apartment inspired, eager to practice, and found on the table a little book I had picked up for a dollar months before. It was a book of that same figure doing postures, a book by Dharma, the sixty-something man who had magnetized me that day. The next morning I went to his class and knew at once that what I sought was there. In that place,

with that teacher, I wanted to wipe the slate clean, to cleanse my history of violence, of those scars that had been etching themselves into my body and my soul, one trauma after another.

What began as an intuition extended itself into eleven years at my teacher's side. I was a renunciant for a couple of years, and then I stayed nine years as part of the team. Only recently have I understood that perhaps the most transformative part of that period was learning to rest consciously. *Nidra*, one of the subtle practices my teacher taught, condenses nearly all the principles of yoga, and it helped me recognize and let go of the pains I had arrived with—not through mental action but through energy work. That is what I have sought to distill in this book.



This book is intended as more than the presentation of an ancient practice of rest. We are almost always doing something; we jump quickly from one activity to another, and few are the moments when we consciously “do nothing.” Even reading, much of the time, is a kind of doing, a continuation of our endless chain of thoughts: more information, more content, more noise.

Therefore, Jorge and I decided to write and design this book so that it would itself be an instrument of repose, so that you see it, touch it, smell it, and remember what good rest feels like. That's why the book foregrounds stories of lives (not only mine) transformed by prana nidra, as well as poetic illustrations, a light design, and to an evocative, symbolic language that speaks to the imagination and not only to the intellect. This is not a theoretical manual or an essay on the importance of rest in the age of exhaustion; it is, or we want it to be, a personal invitation

for you to experience what happens when you join will and rest, when you do from non-doing.

Between one chapter and the next, you will find testimonies of practitioners who have integrated prana nidra into their lives. Their experiences are windows into the possibilities the protocol offers. What's more, the fact that this is a choral book reminds us that the practice is the true teacher, that the practice is refined among those of us who undertake it. The voice of the real can only be the collective voice. What would the world be like if every person's gifts ripened in rest, amplified vitality, and consciousness?

The book mirrors the structure of prana nidra: it begins by identifying the pain of weariness, naming what exhausts us and how this shows up in daily life. Then it describes the anatomy of *pranamaya kosha*, our energetic body, and the movements of consciousness and breath that allow us to drain the blockages and revitalize ourselves. Between chapters it shows, in different ways, what conscious rest feels like, how life is transformed when it comes to repose in the original center. At the end, you will find the basic protocol presented in detail and with four specific variations, followed by a reflection on prana nidra as the meditation of the future, a phrase my teacher often repeated but that I came only recently to understand in its true dimensions.

I hope this book brings you closer to your inner sun, the original force that sustains life. May prana nidra nourish and recharge you, may conscious rest be a path to the spirit, to connection with the earth, and from there may you flourish.

What does good resting feel like? What does it resemble?
What happens when you repose in consciousness and let
everything begin there? Who are you when your vital energy
flows fully and without obstruction?

A tree taking in sun after the rain

*The child who leaps from bed in the morning to try out a
brand-new bike*

Someone who, while meditating, breathes for everyone

A little stone that skips once more across the mirror of water

A choir in springtime

Laughing out loud without noticing

*One of those parties happens without anyone having planned
it*

The shield that never had to be used again

Your firmest, most comfortable posture

*Knowing how all that is alive depends on you, and feeling
lighter as a result*

*The certainty that something even better than chocolate is still
waiting to be discovered*

An embrace that's exactly your size

The peace that is with us when we are one

The smell of the sea right before dawn

A seed that senses the moon inside the fruit

A sense of gratitude that is calm and just

The sea foam vanishing slowly in the conch shell's opening

The little girl who asks: Do you want to play with me?
A prayer that prays itself

Return to the questions that opened this chapter. They are not questions to answer with words. Take them to a place in your body where you feel they can germinate, and listen to how they change. Then let them express themselves through you.

