

The background of the cover features a dark, gradient background transitioning from a warm orange-brown at the top to a deep black at the bottom. Overlaid on this are numerous thin, glowing lines of light in various colors, including yellow, orange, red, and blue, which appear to be streaks of light or fiber optic trails, creating a sense of motion and energy.

101
Helpful
Illusions

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri



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Book Description

101 Helpful Illusions highlights natural veils waiting to be transcended by disciplined courage, wisdom and insight.

Everything in creation has a purpose relevant to a specific situation that could lead the seeker of higher knowledge towards the ultimate spiritual truth of oneness.

Thus our egotistic vices can indeed be stepping stones towards acting selflessly, spontaneously, and cheerfully with heightened awareness and good expectations in all situations. Indeed, all our mistakes can lead us towards the desired spiritual awakening – the ultimate purpose in life.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri shares with the reader that whatever we consider confusing illusions or paradoxes are actually conducive to and helpful along the path of awakening and soul discovery. When consciousness transcends duality and recognizes all-encompassing unity, then all paradoxes and illusions are resolved.

About the Author

Acknowledged as a master of self-knowledge and a spiritual philosopher, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri's role as a teacher grew naturally out of his own quest for self-fulfillment.

He travelled extensively on a spiritual quest which led to his eventual rediscovery of the pure and original Islamic heritage of his birth, and the discovery of the truth that reconciles the past with the present, the East with the West, the worldly with the spiritual – a link between the ancient wisdom teachings and our present time.

A descendant of five generations of well-known and revered spiritual leaders, Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri has taught students throughout the world for over 30 years.

He is a gifted exponent of how the self relates to the soul, humankind's link with the Divine, and how consciousness can be groomed to reflect our higher nature.

The unifying scope of his perspective emphasizes practical, actionable knowledge that leads to self-transformation, and provides a natural bridge between seemingly different Eastern and Western approaches to spirituality, as well as offering a common ground of higher knowledge for various religions, sects and secular outlooks.

He is a prolific author of more than thirty books relating to the universal principles of Islam, the Qur'an, and its core purpose of enlightenment.

Foreword

The greatest adventure a human being can undertake is the journey from the ego, the “I,” to the Self, the divine consciousness that exists within each of us. This most demanding and fulfilling journey takes us from a world of separation, governed by the ego’s fears, anxieties and desires, into the experience of divine unity, the oneness, peace and harmony that belong to the core of our being. It is a radical shift in consciousness that unfolds gradually within the traveler, helped by spiritual teachings, practices, and above all the grace that is given. Traditionally it is described as a turning away from the illusions of the outer world of the senses, to discover the deeper truth that is within us. In the Sufi tradition it is a “turning of the heart” that reveals the truth of divine love that is veiled by the illusions of the ego and our lower nature. Traveling the path these veils are gradually lifted, and we awake in the sunshine of the Self, in the wholeness of our divine consciousness.

The outer world is initially seen as a place of illusion that distracts us from this quest. And the spiritual seeker often has to make an intense effort to become free of these illusions, free of the grip of the ego and the desires of our lower nature. We work hard to free our self from the many attachments, the conscious and unconscious patterns that imprison us. But Sufism has revealed a deeper truth that the illusions of the outer world can also be read as signposts on the journey Home. God, the Beloved, is hidden in the depths of our heart, and for the mystic is an unknowable Essence. But in the outer world He manifests Himself in all the multiplicity of existence. The outer world is a reflection or manifestation of divine Truth. To quote the great Sufi, Ibn ‘Arabi:

How can I know You when You are the Inwardly Hidden who is not known?

How can I not know You when You are the Outwardly manifest, making Yourself known to me in everything?¹

¹ [Trans. Pablo Beneito and Stephen Hirtensein, *Seven Days of the Heart*, pp. 43-44]

The challenge presented by *101 Helpful Illusions* is how to use the illusions of the outer world as guidance along the path without being trapped in its distortions and distractions. How can the multiplicity of creation lead us back to the unity of the Self, the truth of our divine nature?

For the spiritual traveler, one of the most important qualities to learn is spiritual discrimination: how to differentiate what belongs to the ego and what belongs to the Self. The Self is waiting and wanting to help us on this journey of liberation, but we have to learn how to listen to its voice, how to know when it is guiding us rather than the deceptive voices of the ego and the mind. If we can read this book with real receptivity, we will find the wisdom of one who has already made this journey and can help the traveler. Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri speaks with the wisdom and understanding of one who has seen through the world's illusions, but rather than just dismiss them as obstacles, guides us into a deeper understanding of how they can help us. This is the real value of this book.

Today we live in a civilization where it is not easy to turn away from the world. On every side we are bombarded by a thousand images designed to distract us. The work of the traveler is not to find a place of isolation, to separate himself from the world, but to continue the journey amidst all of these distractions. It is so easy to get lost in the maze of life's illusions. It is the art of a master to be able to use these illusions as signposts on the journey, as a way to develop, or reconnect with the pure consciousness of the Self. Life has real lessons to teach us, from the patterns and flow imaged in nature, to recognizing and differentiating between the needs of the ego and the needs of the soul. But without understanding life's signs, we pass by, blinded by our own limitations and conditioning.

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri explores the illusions of the natural world, and the human illusions that we find in relationships with its many projections, also the addictions and collective patterns that determine our values and ways of behaving. And always we are shown how real understanding can free us from their grip and help us to realize the unity of a deeper consciousness. Through these apparent paradoxes we can grow towards this light that is within us, begin to claim what is real. We are even made aware of the higher illusions of spiritual life, which so easily waylay the traveler. Rather than projecting our wisdom and spiritual qualities on others, we are reminded of the sacred treasure within our own heart. The Sufi says that the outer teacher always points to the

inner teacher, and that the greatest teacher is life itself. Like a Zen koan, these simple sayings affirm the true teaching that life has to offer; that life itself is a real gateway to God.

Of course it is easy to read such a book and feel its wisdom and guidance. The real work is always to practice such precepts, to take the teachings that are offered and live them in our daily life. My own teacher said that mysticism is to “bear the heat and burden of the day.” In the midst of life’s clamor there is a deeper secret waiting to be uncovered, to be claimed, to be lived. The test is to dare to encounter life’s many illusions with the strength and commitment of one who wants to make this journey for the sake of what is real, for the sake of Truth. Then, and only then, will life and the Beloved come to meet us, and, taking us by the hand, guide us from the limited consciousness of the ego to the vaster dimension of our true Self. This is what is being offered: how to recognize and return to the oneness that is all around us.

Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee Ph.D., February 2009

Preface

The essence of a human being is glorious, but like the kernel of a nut it needs to be prised out of its shell, the self-ego. This process is the awakening to the eternal and boundless soul within the inner heart. In the appropriate season of maturity the self needs to transcend. The seeds of plants perform that process naturally whereas the human has an apparent choice and needs to apply conscious effort to purify the heart and be illumined by the soul. A child needs to develop its ego and personality but the mature person will reflect upon the higher self until the realization of the perfect soul within supersedes all other considerations. The wise realize that the self ego was only there like a shell to protect the inner heart and soul until the appropriate time of transformation and spiritual awakening.

All Illusions and paradoxes of human experience are part of the shell. Once they dissolve then everything becomes beautifully clear and non-worldly – beyond mental limitations and normal causalities.

This book shares with the reader that whatever we consider confusing illusions or paradoxes are actually conducive to and helpful along the path of awakening and soul discovery. When consciousness transcends duality and recognizes all-encompassing unity then all of these paradoxes and illusions are tolerated, for like the shell their purpose becomes clear. We move from outer uncertainty to inner clarity and therefore all outer dualities and agitations become insignificant.

Introduction

We all love to discover rare gems or treasures in life. The human soul (or spirit) is the supreme treasure, hidden and veiled by the ego – the self.

The essence of human nature is an eternal light within the inner heart – a super consciousness called spirit, or soul. This soul is like a sacred hologram that bears desirable attributes and qualities considered universally virtuous and which give rise to human morality. But this intangible soul also gives rise to its shadow companion, the individual self or ego, which grows and evolves towards the recognition and knowledge of the soul and eventually to union with it. Personal individual consciousness is conditioned and is derived from the soul's consciousness which replicates pure or supreme consciousness. Thus it can be said that every soul is a flash of the cosmic soul or God and overflows with attributes of the sacred essence.

The duality of self and soul within the human being echoes all existential pluralities and complementary opposites: the outer and inner, form and meaning, earth and heavens, seen and unseen, good and bad, birth and death, easy and difficult and numerous other states within our inner make up. All of these opposites and dualities are experienced by us and are mirrored in the outer world. Thus the human being is a microcosm resonating with the macrocosm, and reflects the unifying field and one reality or truth that holds the universal realities.

Consciousness has numerous levels and spheres. Lower consciousness is basic and life giving. This gives rise to a local, conditioned and personal awareness to animated creatures. Higher consciousness, however, is exclusive to human beings. This is often called pure, divine, supreme or God-consciousness. Lower consciousness is an aspect of higher consciousness and is dependent upon it.

Conditioned human consciousness evolves with age and wisdom, towards higher levels until there is unison between the self (ego) and soul, through the inner heart. This unified consciousness is sometimes called enlightenment or spiritual awakening. The human soul is like

a sacred spark representing the cosmic soul or God within the human kingdom of body, mind and intellect.

The human journey and growth is both physical as well as spiritual. The physical or biological part is governed to a great extent by genes, as well as the environment. Spiritual growth follows alongside physiological and psychological maturity. Self-realization or enlightenment brings about personal contentment, peace and joy without negating the ever-changing outer realities.

Life's journey is an adventure to discover inner and outer perfection and then to discern true goodness in every situation. The purpose of all worldly challenges is to discover the ever-present sacred essence that permeates the universe through knowledge of the soul within our heart. Terms like 'humanity', 'unity' and even mundane 'relationships' reflect different levels of the unique Oneness of the cosmic essence, which manifests and appears as diverse dualities and pluralities, gross and subtle.

Space-time is the nursery wherein all possible creations occur and manifest as interaction between energy and matter in a natural cyclical fashion, with births and deaths signifying beginnings and ends of particular events. This nursery provides local and broader boundaries so that entities experience individuality due to conditioned consciousness relating to survival, growth and ongoingness. This is the cause of egotistic conduct for survival and growth.

This basic level of consciousness appears as separate from higher consciousness due to the self delusion of its independence and willfulness. However, human beings have the potential to transcend to a higher soul consciousness where self and soul are in unison and end the illusion of separation and confinement of space to time. This breakthrough leads to the realization of cosmic unity and eternal oneness in essence, which permeates the universe.

There are two levels of human evolution and growth. One involves physical and mental maturity with the development of certain uniqueness about each individual. The second level is spiritual evolvment and the realization of higher consciousness, and the falsehood of all earthly events and experiences which are initially helpful for survival, but become barriers to soul consciousness and thereby lasting relief and contentment.

The human drive for wellbeing, harmony and happiness and avoidance of sickness, discord and misery can be a great force to realize the source and essence of life – the free and joyful soul within. The human soul is ever-free, content and stable, and is not subject to the changing world of duality, insecurity and uncertainty experienced by the ego-self.

What starts as a selfish, egocentric and conditioned but evolving personality is in fact necessary for our early development but becomes an obstacle and handicap with regard to higher consciousness and liberation from all worldly mental boundaries. We spend the first half of our life learning skills to act, gather and achieve outer objectives. This process is a prelude to the wisdom that success and failure are never separate and that pleasure and pain are twin companions, appearing as opposites. Mind and intellect become sharp and focused but the ‘soul-mate vacancy’ may persist. Through spiritual wisdom the self will eventually learn to submit to the soul and thereby rest in perfect unison and contentment. This state represents the final purpose of human life.

In truth, the self and soul are never separate except that the ego is acting as the shadow companion of the soul, desiring all the soul’s qualities and blissful state, but is distracted by the illusion of its independence as a separate and worthy entity.

Self delusions are the result of the illusion that the self is real on its own and is free of the soul. Until the self discovers its own resident master within the heart it remains restless and hapless – moving from one delusion to another. Anger, disappointment, denial and other so-called ‘negative’ emotions are due to the self being distracted from yielding to soul attraction and the original primal addiction to it. The soul is broadcasting its unconditional love to the self, which avoids acknowledgement of its dependence upon the soul. Self importance, distractions and the ever-changing roles and identities continue until at last, through shocks and divine grace, it may surrender and awaken to this sacred call and embrace. This is the union worth celebrating on earth whose decree was written in heaven.

A spiritually insightful person will discover that all so-called faults, vices or negative traits belong to the ego-self while all perfection and virtues are attributes of the soul; and it is these higher qualities and ideals that have been beckoning us all along. Guilt and neglect arise due to

the discrepancy between what a person *could* have done and what was *actually* done. Mistakes occur due to the lack of self awareness or presence of mind and heart at the time of action. This is why an apologetic person may say ‘I was beside myself’, or ‘it wasn’t really me who did that’ or ‘I don’t know what came over me’. So who is the real ‘me’? A better version than the usual! A self that refers to the soul?!

The restless self may fall through to greater distraction, confusion and self-delusion or surrender to a more harmonious and wholesome state by sensitive understanding of the signs of the soul. This state of heartfelt awareness of the ‘higher self’, or consciousness, is a natural state as the soul is the essence of life.

If illusions cause the seeker of truth to suffer then it is a healthy warning to retract from inappropriateness and to refocus and follow the illumined map leading to inner liberty and harmony. Vices can be keys to virtues and illusions can lead towards illumined conclusions.

To recognize personal illusions, traps and biases and to go beyond them is the necessary step towards awakening to the ever-present truth and bliss. This outcome is what we describe as a fulfilled life. What was early on a selfish act justified as intelligent self-interest is now replaced with ‘soul’ interest – far more durable and reliable. Enlightenment is the outcome of an evolution from basic personal need for survival and growth to pure consciousness. It is a metamorphosis from the dark cocoon of delusion to the ever-present garden of light and delight.

This book highlights natural veils waiting to be transcended by disciplined courage, wisdom and insight. Everything in creation has a purpose relevant to specific situation that could lead the seeker of higher knowledge towards the ultimate spiritual truth of oneness. Thus our egotistic vices can indeed be stepping stones towards acting selflessly, spontaneously, and cheerfully with heightened awareness and good expectations in all situations. Indeed, all our mistakes can lead us towards the desired spiritual awakening – the ultimate purpose in life: experiencing and knowing the universal oneness.

Chapter 1: Natural Illusions

Nature can be deceptive in many ways and at different levels of subtlety or obviousness. Rainbow colors appear to reveal the vibrant components of light, yet there is a far broader range of frequencies and wavelengths in light than we can visibly discern. The common assumption is that light is what enables us to see; the rest of the story eludes us. For example, birds have learned many ways to distract potential threats from their nests. Often the male bird acts as a decoy while the female lays still on the eggs, blending in with her surroundings, a trick which gives birds an advantage in order to survive. In fact, nature is full of deceptions and illusions.

Consciousness is the foundation of life that connects the unseen with the seen through light. Without light there would be no energy or the physical world. Our apparent world hides numerous levels of subtler forces, which are barely discernible or describable. Logic and causality are keys in describing what appears to us as real, but what is not apparent is of much greater magnitude, like the bulk of the hidden iceberg.

Consciousness is subtler than light and is at the root of existence and creation. There are countless ways of looking at consciousness and differentiating between its levels, spheres and spectrums. Two spheres stand out clearly, however. First is the basic level that makes human beings sentient and alive. This basic consciousness is the face behind the will to survive, grow, replicate, and so on. All living entities are energized by this consciousness. Human beings are distinct from other creatures due to a greater sphere of consciousness, which is higher consciousness, god-consciousness, supreme consciousness or soul consciousness. To this level belong all higher attributes and virtues such as mercy, generosity, forgiveness and others. Human ethics and morality evolve due to higher consciousness.

To be like an animal at first is quite natural, but not to evolve and realize higher consciousness signifies an unfulfilled life. Every creation reaches its appropriate destiny when its highest potential (in terms of consciousness) is accomplished. God is the essence of universal supreme consciousness.

For a child it is natural and normal to be selfish and concerned mostly with its own physical sensory needs. With maturity comes the quest for a sustainable fulfilled life. The lights of higher consciousness begin to supersede the early ‘survival’ consciousness. To remain mainly bound to conditioned consciousness is to be deprived of awakening to the one real potential of soul essence. Our animalistic state of existence reinforces itself through multiple delusions, veils and worldly distractions, which divert us from accessing soul-consciousness.

If we look closely at all paradoxes and illusions, we see that they were in fact appropriate for us at a particular time or situation in this world, like the shell that protects the kernel of a nut. That is why it is said that there is goodness in everything that exists – if only we look with the eye of spiritual discernment. It is context and specific causality that needs to be viewed. A poison can kill and can cure. Egotism is essential in a child but out of season in a grown up and even detrimental.

Everything in nature reveals some aspects of itself and hides others. Everything earthly has also a heavenly aspect and every lie betrays an aspect of truth. To progress spiritually we need to witness naturally occurring illusions, assumptions and fallacies and break past them to the essence that is eternally constant and perfect.

Natural Illusions: 1. *Survival*

Most animals, insects and other creatures use various ways of camouflage and deception to maximize their survival.

The survival instinct is paramount in all creation. The soul does not die and every self echoes that state. Life continues and every entity with a limited lifespan seeks longevity.

Natural Illusions: 2. *Ongoing Evolution*

Just as biological evolution continues, so does consciousness.

Evolution is an endless process from unity via everythingness back to singularity. Natural physiological growth is accompanied by the growth of mind and consciousness.

Natural Illusions: 3. *Blind Spots*

In nature, diversity and duality create a complex interactive world not easy to grasp as a whole. Thus, we focus on a particular direction and thereby miss many points along the way.

Realities are often masked by human emotions. A youngster in love will not see faults in the object of his affections.

Natural Illusions: 4. *Extending Boundaries*

Within microbes, plants and animals the urge to procreate and extend personal and species domain is clearly evident.

The soul is boundless and every self or ego desires to occupy and dominate the earth, hence the plethora of species spread all over the earth.

Natural Illusions: 5. *Respect of Age and Distance*

Long periods of time or distance, such as historical events or inaccessible mountain tops, seem to acquire the patina of sacredness.

The human soul originates from beyond space and time thus the self desires to be liberated from the restrictions of space and time and yet respect them.

Natural Illusions: 6. *Work in Progress*

There is no meaningful finality or end to life since everything is in flux and subject to change. Yet we always look for closure and completion.

The soul is beyond space and time whilst the self on earth is on a quest for the permanent.

Natural Illusions: 7. *Sensory Illusions*

All of our senses are subject to false prescriptions. Some of these include optical illusions such as the famous Kanizsa triangle, or auditory illusions in which an imaginary sound is heard, or tactile illusions such as phantom limbs. Why can't our senses always be true?

The soul does not see or hear; it just knows the truth. The self, comprising body, mind, intellect and heart, is being led to truth as known to the soul. During this process of evolvment, errors and faults are natural.

Natural Illusions: 8. *Eternal Life*

We know that life doesn't end with personal death, yet we fear and regret death and consider it a calamity instead of a natural step forward.

The self is born into a world of space/time and acts as a veil to the eternal soul. With the realization of the sacred soul's presence, an enlightened person is liberated from the fear of death. There is only perpetual life in this world and beyond.

Natural Illusions: 9. *Orderly Chaos*

With wisdom and science we discover order in every situation and event. With self knowledge, we also discover the reason behind physical and emotional chaos and confusion.

The soul is eternally in its perfect state and when the self focuses on higher consciousness and beyond limited identifications, it experiences harmony and contentment.

Natural Illusions: 10. *Seeking the Uncommon*

It is a natural human tendency to seek and explore beyond the boundaries of the common and the familiar. The unknown on earth and beyond holds a strong fascination.

The restless self is in constant search for the boundless and absolute – the soul within. In the meantime, it follows the familiar pursuit of exploring the outer worlds!

Natural Illusions: 11. Universal Symmetry

Everything in nature has its complementary or symmetrical opposite. There is no shadow without light, no inner without outer, no beginning without end.

Reflections and mirror-imaging are aspects of complementary duality. Eternal oneness has brought about natural diversity and two-ness, all of which point to their singular essence – One and Only One – every other illusion of special or independent oneness is merely echoing the truth of the sacred One.

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Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

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A collection of extracted spiritual nourishment from Shaykh Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani's existing works.

Autobiography

Son of Karbala

Shaykh Fadhlalla Haeri

The atmosphere of an Iraq in transition is brought to life and used as a backdrop for the Shaykh's own personal quest for self-discovery and spiritual truth.

Health Sciences and Islamic History

Health Sciences in Early Islam – Volumes 1 & 2

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