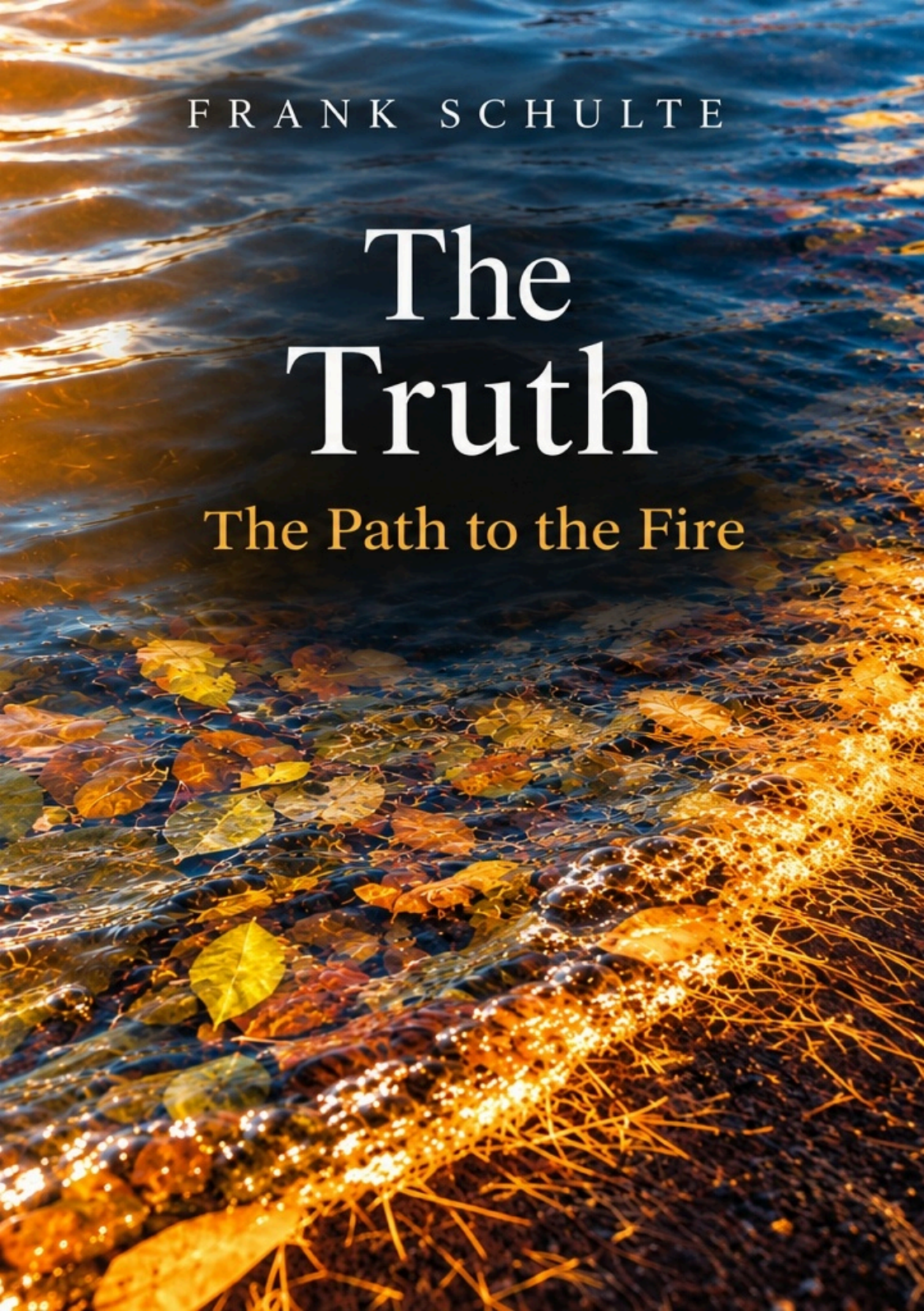




FRANK SCHULTE

The Truth

The Path to the Fire

*Truth does not have to fit our worldview. Our
worldview must be prepared to shatter in the face
of truth.*

The Truth

The Path to the Fire

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Note

This book contains personal philosophical reflections and invitations to examine questions of truth and self-knowledge for oneself. It is neither a therapeutic or medical guide nor a substitute for individual professional advice. Every reader remains responsible for their own decisions and actions.

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I. The Encounter

1. The Attraction of the Fire

A fire draws us in. From a distance it seems warm and inviting. We approach because we want to feel its warmth. Only when we come close do we discover that it does more than warm us. It can burn.

The search for truth begins in much the same way. A question will not leave us alone. A familiar explanation no longer convinces us. We encounter a contradiction we can no longer ignore. At first, this is stimulating. We read, ask questions, compare, and discover new ways of looking at the world.

But eventually the question no longer concerns only the world. It concerns us. What we have taken to be true has shaped our lives. It determines our decisions, our relationships, and the image we have of ourselves. An insight can therefore change more than an opinion.

The fire is not a teacher. It promises nothing, rewards no one, and sets no conditions. It stands for the encounter with what is true, whether we welcome it or not. Its warmth is no assurance that we will remain unharmed.

Each person decides how close to approach. We can turn away, stand still, or continue. This makes the fire neither more nor less true. Only our relationship to it changes.

2. Truth Is Not a Belief

We speak of my truth and your truth. Often we mean personal experiences, perspectives, or beliefs. These can differ. But their differences do not mean that a fact is different for every person.

Someone can be utterly convinced of something and still be mistaken. The strength of that conviction changes nothing. Nor does a large following make a statement true. Truth is not created by agreement.

This does not mean that human beings can know everything. There is a difference between truth itself and what we know about it. Our knowledge may be limited or mistaken. That is precisely why examination is necessary.

Anyone seeking truth must first endure a simple question: What do I really know? Not: What have I heard many times? Not: What fits my previous experience? And not: What would I like to believe is true?

It is not enough to replace a familiar explanation with an unusual one. The new explanation, too, is a claim that must be examined. The freedom to ask questions is not a license to mistake every answer for an insight.

This is where discernment begins. It seems unspectacular. Yet it takes away the convenient possibility of equating our own convictions with truth.

3. The Backdrop of Our Thinking

No one begins the search without assumptions. Early in life we learn what the world is supposedly like. Parents, schools, language, social expectations, and the media give us concepts, judgments, and explanations. Much of this is useful. Some of it later proves incomplete or false.

The difficulty is not simply that we are influenced. It is that we often no longer notice how we have been shaped. What we have

absorbed seems self-evident. We look at the world through a particular picture and confuse that picture with the world itself.

For some people, talk of a matrix describes this web of conditioning, dependencies, and possible deceptions. As a metaphor, the term can illuminate something. It does not, however, explain which specific influences are actually at work. Anyone who goes further and makes claims about deliberate manipulation through particular frequencies or fields must examine those claims as well. Suspicion is no substitute for evidence.

The decisive work begins closer to home: What assumptions am I bringing with me? Where did they come from? What speaks for them, and what against them? What would I accept as evidence to the contrary?

The path behind the backdrop first leads behind the backdrop of our own thinking. That is less exciting than the idea of a hidden world order. It is also harder, because the person doing the examining cannot exempt themselves.

II. The Approach

4. What It Takes to Recognize Truth

Recognizing truth calls for an attitude we cannot simply assume we possess. We must be willing to see something that contradicts our expectations.

Silence helps. It does not put an end to thinking, but it creates distance from the constant inner commentary. Without that distance, we scarcely notice how quickly we judge an experience, explain it, and fit it into our accustomed picture.

Even more important is honesty. Not the honesty with which we tell others what we think, but unsparing honesty with ourselves. It does not ask whether we like an answer. It asks whether we are overlooking an objection because it makes us uncomfortable.

This includes independence from the judgment of others. Someone who needs approval for every insight will avoid certain questions. They will consider the consequences of an answer before examining it and thus limit themselves.

Finally, everything must be open to question: social certainties, religious teachings, spiritual experiences, our own beliefs, and even our image of truth. That includes the habit of rejecting everything on principle. Constant opposition is no freer than blind agreement.

These conditions do not mark out exceptional people. They are demands made by the sincerity of the search. No one meets them once and for all. They must prove themselves in actual life.

5. Fear of the Consequences

People do not always fear the insight itself. Often they fear what follows from it. A belief may be tied to a relationship, a role to recognition, a worldview to a sense of belonging. When the belief falls, more than a single thought is shaken.

That is why explaining away a contradiction can be easier than allowing it. We find reasons why this particular objection does not count. We appeal to authorities, seek reassurance, or postpone a decision. None of this need be conscious.

The fire grows hotter when the question becomes personal. As long as we discuss other people's errors, we remain at a safe distance. Only when our own certainties are at stake does it become clear how seriously we mean the search.

Yet pain is not proof of truth. Someone who suffers may have recognized something true. They may equally have been mistaken. A willingness to bear consequences is no substitute for examining what we are bearing them for.

Fear need not disappear. Courage does not mean failing to see the consequences. It shows itself when we refuse to let those consequences determine what may be true.

6. Protective Clothing

No one willingly walks into intense heat unprotected. We seek protection from the fire of truth as well. Our protective clothing consists of explanations, exceptions, justifications, and familiar roles. It lets us look closely at an uncomfortable insight without allowing it to touch us.

That clothing comes at a price. Anyone wishing to preserve a belief that has become questionable must defend it again and again. New experiences are made to fit, counterarguments are turned aside, inner doubts are drowned out. What was meant to provide security demands constant effort.

In this way, protection consumes the strength we would need to go on.

There comes a point when the question is no longer whether we can bear the heat. We have to ask how long we want to carry the weight of our protection.

Protective clothing cannot be replaced with a new suit of armor. Even a particularly radical worldview can serve as protection if it may no longer be questioned. The fire makes no distinction between old and new beliefs. It calls both into question.

7. The Point of No Return

Some insights change our relationship to something for good. We may continue to act as though we know nothing. But the innocence of our former perspective cannot simply be restored.

This is the point of no return. It does not mean that a person has no choice left. We can refuse the consequences, remain silent, or distract ourselves. But we know we are suppressing something.

At this point the weight of the decision changes. At first, continuing seems the greater risk. Later, staying away takes more strength than moving closer.

That does not make the path pleasant. Insight does not remove responsibility or uncertainty. Yet a return to the old certainty is no longer a genuine possibility.

We should not confuse this point with every powerful experience. A shattering encounter or sudden decision can be significant without amounting to a definitive insight into reality. The search for truth demands that we make precisely this distinction.

8. The Strength to Go On

Where do we find the strength to continue? In determination, certainly. In courage and perseverance. Yet these qualities do not explain everything.

Some strength is released when we stop living against what we have recognized. The inner contradiction no longer has to be maintained.

Approaching the fire, then, does not only cost strength. It can release it. This is neither a reward nor a promise of an easier life. The outward consequences may remain difficult. But the inner contradiction diminishes.

The search for truth does not demand that we change everything at once. Sometimes there is a long road between insight and putting it into practice. Sincerity also means not denying that difficulty.

Being unconditional does not mean being inconsiderate. We remain responsible for the consequences of our actions.

III. The Examination

9. The Unconditional Search for Truth

Many people seek answers. Not everyone seeks truth without conditions. Often we want an explanation that gives meaning, offers comfort, or confirms our existing view. There is nothing unusual about that in itself.

The unconditional search for truth begins when the desire for confirmation is no longer allowed to decide. We do not prescribe which answers are permissible. We allow the inquiry to reach even our most cherished beliefs.

This is different from stubbornness. Someone determined to be right may experience every objection as an attack. Someone determined to seek truth must allow for the very possibility that they are mistaken.

McKenna calls his form of this examination Spiritual Autolysis. You write down what you hold to be true and examine the statement until its assumptions become visible. Every answer may lead to another question. This is not a ritual or a promise of enlightenment. What matters is the willingness to keep asking even when a cherished explanation falls apart. Once we have recognized a self-deception, we cannot simply make ourselves unsee it.

Freedom is not necessarily a feeling of relief. Someone who loses familiar certainties may at first feel exposed and unsettled. Schwarzenbach's *Das glückliche Tal* makes this vulnerability palpable in literary form. The fire offers no comfort; it asks only that we not look away for fear of the consequences.

An unconditional search for truth is no promise that we will end up possessing a particular insight. It is the decision not to give our wishes veto power over what we recognize.

10. False Lights

Not every light is the fire. Along the way we encounter explanations, experiences, and people promising direction. Some answers meet our deepest longings exactly. They give our lives meaning and make contradictions disappear.

For that very reason they can become false lights. A false light need not deliberately deceive. It is enough that we stop examining it. Then the search ends wherever we feel we have arrived.

This applies especially to spiritual paths. Someone who leaves an old religious or social attachment behind may bind themselves to a new teaching. The words change; the dependence remains. A teacher may inspire, but that does not make the teacher's insight our own. A community may sustain us, but its agreement does not make a claim true.

Extraordinary experiences, too, call for discernment. Unity, ecstasy, deep peace, or a vivid inner image can change a life. That does not settle what those experiences mean.

Jed McKenna explicitly distinguishes mystical experiences from the recognition of truth. An extraordinary state of consciousness can move us profoundly. What does it actually prove?

The greatest danger of a false light is that we stop searching for the fire because we believe we are already standing before it.

11. How Do We Recognize Truth?

There is no simple external standard that settles every question. Yet we are not confined to mere belief. We can examine claims, uncover their assumptions, look for counterexamples, and distinguish experience from interpretation.

Even a powerful feeling of certainty is no substitute for examination.

When it comes to verifiable facts, intelligible reasons and evidence matter. In questions about our own experience, careful observation helps. Where we go beyond what we can test, we must acknowledge the limits of our knowledge. That is not weakness but intellectual honesty.

Even what seems self-evident must be examined. How do I know what I claim about myself? Is it an observation or a story I tell about myself? What part do memory, desire, and fear play?

The search for truth is not the same as the search for unshakeable certainty. Anyone who demands certainty at any price may become especially susceptible to false lights. The ability to leave a question open protects us from premature answers.

The fire does not stand for a feeling. It stands for the willingness not to shape reality according to our expectations.

12. Knowledge, Letting Go, and Silence

We are accustomed to associating insight with an increase in knowledge. We learn something, add an explanation, and believe we have moved closer to truth. Sometimes that is exactly what happens. But not every additional explanation brings clarity.

The Tao Te Ching sets the path of letting go alongside the accumulation of knowledge. This contrast is food for thought, not a ready-made answer to our questions. It reminds us that our problem may not only be knowing too little. We may also be clinging to too many unexamined ideas.

The fire, then, is no gathering place for new certainties. It takes away. It calls into question the images through which we describe the world and ourselves.

Silence has a simple value here. It interrupts the habit of filling every gap immediately with an explanation. Someone who does not have to answer at once can look more closely.

Letting go does not mean abandoning thought. It means refraining from unnecessary claims. We may say what we know. We need not conceal what we do not know behind a beautiful phrase.

The fire stands for the willingness to relinquish certainties, even when it hurts. Stillness stands for the ability not to force anything. Both belong together.

Someone who knows only the fire may lose themselves in a struggle against their own ideas. Someone who seeks only stillness may turn it into a hiding place from uncomfortable questions.

Some questions remain open. That need not be a deficiency. Resting in truth does not mean having understood it completely. Nor does stillness take away our freedom to keep asking.

Freedom means neither having to fear the fire nor having to cling to stillness.

IV. What the Fire Takes Away

13. Growing Independence

To begin the search, a person needs a measure of independence. They must be free to ask questions even when others consider them pointless or dangerous. But the independence with which we begin is not enough for the entire journey.

The closer we come to the fire, the greater the demands. At first we risk disagreement. Later, recognition, belonging, and relationships may be at stake. Eventually even our self-image enters the heat.

Independence must grow along with these demands. It does not mean becoming unfeeling or looking down on others. It means refusing to make other people's judgments the standard for what may be true.

At a certain point, however, independence itself becomes a question. Someone who constantly needs to assert their independence remains bound to its opposite. They need others to define themselves against in order to sustain their self-image.

Independence often begins with drawing boundaries. Freedom does not need that opposition. A free person need neither agree nor disagree in order to remain true to themselves. They can examine another person's view without accepting or rejecting it merely because of its source.

Anyone who has to prove their independence is still bound to it. This protective clothing, too, can be reached by the fire.

The philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti raised the question of freedom with particular force. When he dissolved the Order of the Star in 1929, he declared: "Truth is a pathless land." Truth is not a

destination to which an organization, teacher, or prescribed method can lead us.

That is also a test of our image of the path to the fire. This path is not a set of instructions or a sequence of exercises. The fire describes what happens when someone no longer shields their certainties from examination.

Krishnamurti also asked whether inner freedom can be produced through gradual effort at all. An insight can be immediate. The long path described here is therefore no proof that truth can only be recognized after a certain amount of time. It shows how difficult it can be to relinquish our resistance.

For that very reason, the fire must not become a new system. Anyone wishing to follow our metaphor must also be free to question it.

14. The Seeker, Too, Stands in the Fire

The search begins with someone who wants to find truth. They read, investigate, doubt, decide, and change their life. From this activity a new description of the person can easily arise: I am a seeker of truth.

As long as this merely describes what someone does, it is harmless. When it becomes their identity, it demands protection. They must experience themselves as more consistent, clearer, or more independent than others. They now have something to lose: the image of the seeker.

A related tension appears in Annemarie Schwarzenbach's novel *Das glückliche Tal*: the narrator wants to free herself from attachments and, in doing so, confronts the desire to have to liberate herself at all costs. Even that desire can become a new

chain. This is the experience of a literary character, not proof of a philosophical doctrine.

Then comes one last uncomfortable question. Who, exactly, is seeking truth? Is this I more than the story it tells about itself? And what happens when even that story loses its self-evidence?

Jed McKenna describes the radical dissolution of identification with a separate personal self as No-Self. He distinguishes it from discovering a higher or enlightened self. That is his position. We must not adopt it as a conclusion simply because it sounds consistent or uncompromising.

McKenna's No-Self is a radical answer to the question of the I, not an answer we are obliged to accept. Even the claim that there is nobody who seeks must be examined. The question remains open: Does a supposedly fixed I disappear, or does identification with it end? In everyday life, a person remains, with a body, memories, relationships, and individual traits. What this continuity tells us about their nature is not thereby settled.

The seeker of truth cannot decide what the search must spare. The wish to emerge as someone special belongs in the fire as well.

15. What Remains?

The fire creates nothing new. It burns away what conceals the truth. What remains reveals itself only afterward.

This statement does not assert the existence of an indestructible essential core. Even the expectation of a true self may be an idea to which we cling.

The fire does not indiscriminately take away everything human. The ability to love, act, think, or maintain relationships does not become untrue merely because identification with particular roles

weakens. What matters is what we infer from these qualities about our own nature.

What changes need not be the personality. Temperament, humor, directness, and individual quirks may remain. Seeing through a deception does not turn someone into a uniformly gentle, unvarying person.

The image of someone who has recognized truth and now only smiles mildly and never contradicts anyone is also an idea. It deserves no special protection from the fire.

Clarity can sound harsh. Not every direct statement is arrogant, and not every kind statement is true. Truth has no prescribed tone of voice. The person who speaks about it retains their own voice.

The question of what remains is therefore more demanding than the search for a new name for the self. It requires us to bear not knowing, before the inquiry is over, who we will then be.

V. Freedom and Life

16. Living with the Consequences

Insight does not happen only in thought. It may demand decisions that affect other people. Someone who abandons an old belief does not automatically lose responsibility toward the people with whom they live.

The unconditional search for truth justifies neither harshness nor indifference. It demands sincerity even when we must explain our decisions and bear their consequences. We cannot determine how others will react. But we can take care not to turn them into mere figures in our own journey.

As we approach the fire, loneliness may grow. Familiar conversations become harder, shared certainties fall away. That does not imply superiority. Someone who thinks differently is not therefore less advanced or less sincere.

McKenna sometimes describes people with great certainty. He seems to recognize the ideas to which they cling and the questions they avoid. Someone who has seen through their own self-deceptions may perhaps recognize similar patterns in others more clearly. Yet such insight does not make their judgment of another person infallible.

Independence from the judgment of others also means allowing them their own view. We need not convert anyone in order to be free to walk our path.

The fire is no pretext for leaving life behind. It raises the question of how we act within this life when we need less protection from roles and beliefs.

17. No New Promise

It would be easy to end this book with a promise. Beyond the fire, freedom, peace, or final knowledge awaits. But such a promise would prejudge the outcome of the search.

Jed McKenna distinguishes radical recognition of truth from the life that continues afterward. His “Done” need not mean that every question has been answered. His account, too, remains a stimulus, not an authority.

The search for truth can change our relationship to life. It guarantees no happy ending, no special status, and no immunity from error. We remain responsible for what we say and do.

Liberation from something is not yet the same as the freedom to encounter truth. Here lies the connection to *The Architecture of Liberation* (*Die Architektur der Befreiung*)—and at the same time the step beyond that book.

This book is no measure of anyone's recognition of truth. It cannot establish where a person stands or certify any final state. It can only offer impulses and raise questions.

What readers recognize through it is not up to the author. This book, too, belongs in the fire.

At the end there is no instruction and no new system. One question remains, and no one can answer it on another's behalf: How far am I willing to go if even what I take myself to be is not protected from the fire?

In Closing

A substantial part of this book was written in Sils in the Upper Engadin. Among mountains, lakes, and a landscape that explains nothing and demands nothing.

Here, thoughts that had occupied me for a long time found their form.

Truth needs no special place. But sometimes we need distance in order to face our questions without distraction.

Sils was such a place for me.

Sils, Engadin, October 2026

Inspirations

This book grew out of an engagement with thoughts and works that opened up questions. They are sources of inspiration, not authorities or evidence for the reflections presented here.

Jed McKenna — Spiritual Enlightenment: The Damnedest Thing; Spiritually Incorrect Enlightenment; Spiritual Warfare.

Laozi — Tao Te Ching (Daodejing).

Jiddu Krishnamurti — Freedom from the Known (Einbruch in die Freiheit); biographies by Mary Lutyens and Pupul Jayakar; Radha Rajagopal Sloss: Lives in the Shadow with J. Krishnamurti.

Annemarie Schwarzenbach — Das glückliche Tal.

Weep, laugh, truth is.