

High Above The Clouds

Richard Bach talks about his latest book *The Pilot*

Interview by Christian Salvesen

The Outer

1. In the first chapter of "The Pilot" you have the main character helping a woman, whose husband – the pilot - is unconscious, to fly the plane for the first time and finally land safely – because of his hypnotizing way of talking to her. Have you experienced anything like this in your own life as a pilot and would you like to share a story with your German readers?

Richard Bach: Jamie Forbes was natural for me to write because I was a flight instructor, as he is. Neither of us has a hypnotizing way of talking, it's simply focused conversation. I realized after many hours instructing that I almost never touched the controls, I just sat there and made suggestions for the student to consider. "Smooth and easy, now, try just a little more back pressure on the control wheel...there you go. See how we're losing airspeed as you hold the nose above the horizon?"

It no more occurred to me than it did to Jamie that what teachers do is guide students into a sort of trance, encouraging them to try new ideas and watch what happens as they do. If that's hypnosis, so is every other suggestion human beings make, one to another.

2. We have a German song that is very popular since the 70's. Its about someone who watches his beloved disappear in an airplane and the refrain is: "above the clouds, freedom must be boundless" (if you like, look in the internet under Reinhard May: Über den Wolken, and you can hear the song)). Would you like to say something about this longing to go "above the clouds"?

Wie schoen! Thank you for letting me listen. There's a longing that every pilot shares, that inner yearning to live in the sky, to dwell in this enchanted landscape, to slice down the blue and spin rainbows from our wingtips. Not many of us talk about it, of course, as pilots are imagined to be technicians instead of creatures of spirit and swirling cloud-stuff. But it's there, within, and to us it's home.

3. If you have to compare "Jonathan Livingston Seagull" to your latest book, what are the similarities and what are the differences? Did recent bestsellers like "The Secret", "Bleep" or the discussion of the "Law of Attraction" influence or challenge you?

I don't find many parallels between *Jonathan* and the new book, save that each suggests that we're something more than we seem to be. Though I'm familiar with the law of attraction, I'm not well read in the bestsellers. There are some hints in *Illusions*, I suppose, that prefigure this book by thirty years or so. I've been fascinated by hypnosis since I was a kid, and I'm a slow learner...it's taken me most of a century to fit the obvious together on these pages.

4. What do you recommend if someone is afraid of flying? (Also: in the metaphorical, spiritual sense)?

All fear, I think, is overcome by knowing, by understanding. On the one level, learning that there's an invisible principle that lifts and guides the path of aircraft goes a long way to setting us free of the fear that airplanes somehow fly on a shaky sort of luck. It's true on the other level, too: there's an invisible principle and lifts and guides each of us, as well. Know the principle, and trust it -- what's to fear?

Forward of the flight deck door of every air transport, nobody's afraid. There's thousands of hours of experience, years of study and practice in a calling that's almost mystical, a calling so strong that you can find quite a few airline pilots on their days off messing around with little planes of all kinds: sailplanes and old biplanes and homebuilts, racers and paragliders. Learn what they know, what calls them, you'll never fear again.

5. How do you spend your day? Do you still fly? Please share a bit about your daily life.

I can't imagine life without flying. We have two flying boats and a floatplane, and a Beechcraft T-34B — the same kind as Jamie flies in the book. (On the jacket of the American editions, part of the cover art is a photograph of the wing of our airplane.) Yes, I know that's too many airplanes. But they're old friends, souls in steel-tube and painted fabric and polished aluminum.

Most often I don't fly anywhere but up, my destination is the sky, an hour or so at a time. I never get tired of that high land, never bored with the wind or the clouds or the turnings of horizons. Every landing's a different test, to make it perfect: the wind shifts and changes, the sun's in your eyes or it isn't, the airplane's a little lighter or heavier than it was last flight, the landing field's wet or dry, pavement or grass, long or short. The fun is control, putting the wheels or the floats exactly where you want them at touchdown no matter how the variables shove and pull. At heart, the game is to be one with the aircraft, your soul so in tune with the soul of the machine you're a single creature in the air.

Some days I work on the planes, some days I write. No parties, no crowds, no bright lights flashing.

The Inner

6. The experience of hypnosis – someone (the hero) is led by the hypnotist into a cave, which he cannot escape – what made you choose this example? Did you personally have a similar experience?

Not a cave as much as it is a sort of dungeon, surrounded by stone walls. I haven't had just that experience, but I have had a few strange times with hypnosis: sensory effects that seemed awfully real to me, insights from characters that I suppose were technically imagination, creative visualizations that rather remarkably turned true within hours, glimpses of what might have been other life experiences. Interesting stuff, to me.

7. The author of a novel doesn't necessarily present his own view or belief in one of his characters, but the pilot pretty obviously is you, isn't he? There is a kind of awakening that happens to the pilot that everything appears due to a suggestion/hypnosis. What is your own experience? Can you go through a wall?

You're right, Jamie Forbes pretty obviously is me. I lived the sudden understanding that he found, in the book, the same epiphany: we are where we are this second because we have accepted certain suggestions to be true. Doesn't matter if they're true or not, our truth is what we accept as valid, for us. Realizing this can radically change our lives. Rainbows from our wingtips, when we dare to notice.

I can't count the number of walls I've walked through, that we all walk through, after we discover the only power walls have to trap us is our own belief that they're limits. Learning skills in any field is expecting ourselves to walk through walls which once confined us. Long time ago, I couldn't fly an airplane; today I can...straight up, straight down, adrift above the clouds, feather-touch on the water, glad those old walls are gone.

8. Do you want to say that thoughts create reality? Is the next moment not unknown? What would be the outcome if we really could decide about the next movement? Is that not making ideas and idealism run the world?

Thoughts have nothing to do with reality. Reality, to me, exists beyond all our illusions of space and time, beyond our belief of separation from perfect Love, which I like to call the Is. To me that unseen perfection is the only real, and everything else -- beliefs of galaxies and worlds and societies and houses and economies and bodies and airplanes -- isn't. They seem real to us, they are valuable tools for understanding, but for me there's only one Is, and "us" inseparable from that Love. I have deeply understood, known this radiant Light, for a period of perhaps 75 seconds during this lifetime. Some amazing seconds!

"The next moment," I think, is a figment of our belief in time. In reality, there are no moments. There is only Now. There are no distances. There is only Here.

We each of us choose the paths of our illusory lifetimes, we've already decided the major issues before we arrive. There is no "world" out there. There is only our perception of a "world," and that perception is our own personal tightrope stretched between adventures on the spiderweb we call "daily life."

Of course all of this could be wrong. It gives me pleasure, though, to walk my own silver strands of those beliefs.

9. I presume that you sometimes also have dreams of flying (during the night in sleep)? If so, would you like to share one and tell us, what you think about this phenomenon? Are we really flying? In a dimension which we forget but could remember?

I almost never dream of flying. Once in a long while, and always with the same lovely feeling of being *airborne*, in a sense I rarely have flying airplanes, oddly enough. More like flying a paraglider, skimming down a mountainside just a few feet over the slope, boots now and then swishing through grass-tops.

Our everyday memory isn't well suited to recall dream-times, but it can do it now and then.

To practice, I used to set my alarm to wake up early, then write the dream at once before it's gone. Important things happen in dreams, I think, but I don't have the discipline for good research, and sleep through miracles.

The Beyond

10. As I see it there is a hidden mystical level in your books, and especially in the "Pilot". I would like to ask you: What is the most significant and strongest suggestion/hypnosis in this existence?

That we are individual souls, trapped in separate bodies, distant from Love, limited by space and time. That belief's not only true in our so-called physical world, but on a number of levels of our afterlives, as well. We're creatures *deeply* attached to our illusions!

11. In your book you mention the illusion of time and space (maya), but what about the I itself, the idea, that I am a separate individual in and against an outside world? In your book

I couldn't find anything about that basic suggestion that I am . Am I, really? Please comment!

There is a bit in the book about this. That strange little affirmation that comes unbidden to Jamie, sitting under the wing of his airplane: "I am a perfect expression of perfect Love, here and now. Every day I am learning more of my true nature, and of the power that I have been given over the world of appearances. I am deeply grateful, on my journey, to the parenting and guidance of my highest self."

We *are* our higher selves, no matter how we try to distance and separate. The guardian angels, hovering nearby? They are ourselves, in forms we see as separate, till we grow to realize: *We're already spirit*. The wall between "us" and "them" is no more real than were the stones around Jamie Forbes onstage after he was was hypnotized. The only walls were his, not shared by the hypnotist, not shared by the audience...his alone. Ours alone. And we can walk through them whenever we decide to wake from our trance.

Ghosts, for instance, don't share our beliefs about the limits of walls. Read a thousand texts...soon as we believe we're "out of body" we slip through walls as flyers slip through clouds. The belief that we are mortal is just that. When we stop believing we're mortals (that is, for most of us, when we die, or have a near-death experience) we're no longer subject to the beliefs of mortals. It's not planets and geologies and mountains that are eternal, they vanish in a flicker of belief. It's us that lasts through forever now, undestroyable spirit.

12: "What is real?" asks the pilot and that is probably your question, too. What is real in the end? Real is what doesn't change, says the pilot to himself. What is that for you?

By definition (for me) the only Real is the Is. Not subject to beliefs of space, not subject to beliefs of time, or limits of any imagining.

Some writer of a Bible chapter defined God as "I AM," and for those two words, I agree. Not "I was," or "I will be," or if "I had a body I would be," -- I AM. My belief is that the Is doesn't recognize us as upright bipeds on the surface of a little planet in the edge of nowhere.

The Is doesn't even perceive the isn't, as the principle of arithmetic doesn't perceive the errors people make with numbers. It knows only its pure Self. Same with Love, Spirit, Life. It Is. And we: the Real Thee and Me, far more advanced than angels, are one with It.

Then again, maybe no such thing. Maybe God's the jealous tribal author of all the death and destruction and hatred on earth, poking us ants with a stick. I prefer to not accept that suggestion, however, and embrace my meta-illusion of what's real. Us and Perfect Love, One.

Richard, thank you for your profound answers.

Thanks for your unusual questions and thoughtful time, Christian,

(German version published in Allegria Magazine and VISIONEN)