

LIVING UNDER FIRE



The Art of True Living
in a Violent World

Dr. Venkata Rao
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Dedicated to

*Those who look beyond the horizon of the self,
who listen beyond the noise of thought,
and who touch the infinity that is always here.*

Introduction

In a world aflame with conflict, violence, and division, we find ourselves living under constant fire — not only the outer fire of wars and social turmoil but also an inner fire that silently consumes us from within.

Dr. Venkata Rao Potluru, in his earlier book *Operating Under Fire*, shared his experiences as a surgeon working in a war-torn region. There, amidst the chaos and the immediate urgency of saving lives under bombs and gunfire, he came face-to-face with the raw, undeniable reality of life and death. He discovered that while physical wounds could be treated on the operating table, the deeper wounds of humanity — fear, hatred, and psychological conflict — demanded a different kind of healing.

In *Living Under Fire*, the author now turns his compassionate and penetrating gaze inward, inviting us to examine the fires that burn in each of us. We are conditioned to focus on external crises: wars, political battles, social injustice. We seek to reform society through movements, revolutions, and laws. But these efforts often fail to bring about real change because they address symptoms, not the source.

The true source of conflict and suffering, Dr. Potluru reveals, lies within us — in the self. This self, which we guard so carefully and identify with so completely, is a construct of thought and memory, a continuous movement sustained by fear, desire, ambition, and the relentless urge to become something more. This restless movement of the self is the inner fire that gives rise to the outer fires we witness in the world.

The self creates division — between individuals, communities, and nations — and this division inevitably leads to conflict. As long as the self exists as the centre of our psychological existence, we are bound to perpetuate violence, both inwardly and outwardly.

This book is not a prescription, a set of techniques, or a collection of comforting beliefs. It is, instead, an invitation to look deeply and directly at the self — to observe its subtle movements without judgment, without suppression, without escape.

Through this direct seeing, Dr. Potluru guides us to perceive the falsity of the self — to see it not as an essential core but as a bundle of memories, images, and projections. In seeing this clearly, choiceless awareness arises naturally — an awareness that does not choose, does not control, does not compare.

Choiceless awareness is a profound flame of attention. It is a state in which the mind is wholly attentive, silently watching without interference from the past or anticipation of the future. In this sacred space of total observation, the fire of the self begins to extinguish itself naturally, without effort or conflict.

When the self subsides, there is a profound transformation. A mind free of the fires of conflict, desire, and fear becomes a vast, clear space where compassion and intelligence can flower effortlessly. In such a mind, love is no longer entangled with attachment or possession; it becomes a vast, unconditioned movement, touching all life without measure.

Living Under Fire is a gentle but urgent call to each one of us to see that we are the world, and the world is us. When we

transform ourselves deeply and inwardly, we transform the world outside. To live under fire is to live amidst challenges and provocations without being consumed — to discover a way of living that is whole, fearless, and profoundly sacred.

In this spirit, the author offers these pages not as final answers but as an open invitation to inquire together into the art of true living — to meet the fires of life with clarity and compassion, and perhaps, to discover within ourselves a flame that illuminates but does not burn, that warms but does not consume.

A flame that is the essence of true living.

If this book touches even a few hearts and sparks a quiet flame of inquiry and compassion, it will have served its purpose.

Dr. Venkata Rao Potluru

Consultant Surgeon and Author

Operating Under Fire & The Timeless Awareness

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The World in Flames

"The outer disorder is but a reflection of the inner chaos we refuse to face."

We look out at the world and see fires everywhere — wars that tear apart nations, poverty that grinds the human spirit, violence in the streets and in the home. Each day brings news of new conflicts, of children orphaned by bombs, of refugees wandering in search of safety, of people clinging to fragments of hope amidst ruin. We see religious hatred boiling over, political divides deepening, and endless struggles for power and security.

But if we look deeply, we see that this outer chaos is not separate from us. It is not some distant drama staged by others, unrelated to our own lives. It is the surface expression of an inner fire — the disorder within each one of us.

Most of us are conditioned to blame: we blame governments, corrupt leaders, religious authorities, systems, or our neighbours. We say society is responsible, as though society is something apart from us. Yet society is the collective expression of our individual desires, fears, ambitions, and conflicts. We are society; it is built by each one of us through our daily thoughts and actions.

The wars on the outside begin as wars within. The violence we see in the streets is born in the violence of our own hearts — the violence of comparison, of wanting to be superior, of holding tight to our beliefs and images. We seek security in identities — national, religious, ideological — and in that search, we create division. From division comes conflict; from conflict, hatred and destruction.

Look at your own life closely. Observe how quickly anger rises when someone contradicts you, how easily jealousy burns when another succeeds, how the need to dominate or to submit shapes your relationships. These are the seeds of the same violence that we condemn in the world. We want peace outside while nurturing conflict within; we want order outside while carrying confusion and contradiction inside.

We invent reforms, new systems of government, new laws, hoping that structural changes will heal the human heart. But no revolution in society can be real or lasting unless there is a revolution in the individual psyche. We change outward forms, but the content — the self with its greed, fear, and craving for power — remains the same. Like putting on new clothes, we change our political parties or religious affiliations, yet inwardly remain violent and self-centred.

Can there be peace in the world if each one of us is ambitious, competitive, and driven by fear? Can there be harmony if we are forever comparing ourselves with others, seeking to become something more?

To truly bring about change in the world, we must begin with the fire burning in our own hearts and minds. This is not an easy path. It demands tremendous honesty, a willingness to look at oneself without illusion or defence. It means observing our own anger, our own pettiness, our attachments, our subtle forms of violence — not to condemn them, not to suppress them, but to understand them completely.

Understanding is not an intellectual activity. It is a movement of deep perception, a seeing without the interference of the past. When we see clearly, without distortion, there is immediate transformation. The problem is not "out there" to be solved by others; it is here, in each one of us.

The world is what it is because each one of us is what we are. If we are inwardly confused, our actions will create further confusion. If we are inwardly at peace, if we are free of the fires of greed and hate, our actions will naturally bring about order and harmony.

A mind that is caught in conflict cannot create a peaceful world. Only a mind that has understood its own violence, its own movement of becoming, can act without sowing further seeds of disorder.

So, the real question is not "How can we change the world?" but "Can I understand myself so deeply that the inner fires of conflict and fear are extinguished?"

This is the true revolution — a revolution not of ideologies or political systems, but of human consciousness itself. It is not something to be achieved in the distant future, but something that must begin now, in each moment, in each relationship, in each thought.

To see the world in flames and to realize that the source of that flame is within oneself is both a great challenge and a great opportunity. It is an invitation to step out of the endless cycle of blame and reaction, and to discover a new way of living — a life rooted in clarity, compassion, and deep inward silence.

When we truly understand this, perhaps then we will act not as separate individuals seeking personal security, but as human beings living together on a sacred earth. Then, maybe, the outer fires may finally begin to subside, as the inner fire of the self ceases to consume us.