



## Introduction



Paradigm-shifting ideas can germinate for years, even decades, until the time is right for them to manifest. So when I heard that it took over twenty years for director James Cameron to develop the vision of his recent megablockbuster film *Avatar*, I was not surprised. Although I do not have a personal relationship with Mr. Cameron, we do have something in common: I have spent the last forty years studying the deepest meanings of the word *Avatar* and the multilayered teachings associated with it. I was, in fact, teaching a series of classes on the subject of *Avatar* when, to my surprise, a student recommended I see a film called *Avatar*.

I saw the film in IMAX 3D and was greatly inspired by Cameron's expansive cinematic vision. Within days, a cascade of events was set in motion. During my daily meditation practice, I had a vision of the book you are now reading. Less than a week later, my publisher and I agreed on a book contract.





## xviii ❁ Introduction

James Cameron's choice of the word *Avatar*—a key word from the Divine stories of ancient India and my special field of study—inspired the writing of this book at this precise moment. *Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar* is dedicated to revealing the deeper meanings contained in the concept of Avatar. Behind the film and this book—and many undeniable trends unfolding at this time in history—are the will and working of something greater. One can call that will the All Mother, Mother Earth, Gaia, Divine Spirit, or whatever you like, but its existence should be clear to anyone even remotely watching that the human species and the planet we inhabit are at a watershed moment.

Both the film and the book converge on this historical moment, where what we do next could tragically—or positively—affect all life on our planet. Through science and technology, we have grown, in a sense, too powerful to continue the unconscious and at times irresponsible use of our resources and abilities. We are at a crossroads where we must somehow learn to more deeply cooperate with one another and chart a course for the future that includes the safety, dignity, and well-being of all living entities. Unless we do so, whether militarily or environmentally, we risk catastrophic consequences.

As I walked out of my first viewing of *Avatar*, I turned to my wife, Sandi, and said, “It appears that Mr. Cameron has opened ‘Pandora’s Box Office.’” I’m prone to such puns. In Greek mythology, a young girl named Pandora is given a box by her father, who cautions her not to open it under any circumstances. Her curiosity, of course, eventually gets the better of her, and she opens the mysterious chest. Out flies every manner of pestilence, problem, affliction, and misery. Just as it seems all is lost, one last being emerges from the box: luminous, quivering and sensitive—that being is hope.

Seeing *Avatar*, I felt that sort of hope for a sometimes cynical and endangered world. It was the same hope I experienced forty



years ago when I was initiated into the life-changing wisdom of the Avatars by my teachers from India. It was the same hope to which I have dedicated my life. That hope is actually a lifestyle based on a set of teachings that are the treasure of the best Indigenous cultures on our planet. As you will see from this book, India and the many noble Aboriginal cultures have been the historical keepers of the secrets of living in greater harmony on the Earth. The word *Aboriginal* means “with the origin”—in other words, “awareness of the original intention” of life. Undeniably, aspects of that original intention have been skillfully woven into the fabric of the film *Avatar*. However, what I want to do here is reveal to you the original and expansive meaning of the word Avatar—and what the deepest meaning of that word offers. And so it is with deep appreciation for James Cameron that this book is being written. By titling his box-office smash *Avatar*, Mr. Cameron has both borrowed one of the most important spiritual words in the history of India and simultaneously helped give rise to the opportunity to tell its real meaning.

The movie *Avatar* shines a glaring light on some of the oppression, unchecked greed, and injustices we see happening around us today. The movie’s message is perhaps most relevant for those profit-only corporation heads who behave as if taking from the world, without concern for the consequences, is their right—and justified by the earnings garnered for their shareholders. This attitude needs to give way to a caring corporate ethos with heart, balanced somewhere between sustainability and profit.

I also hope that *Avatar*’s message can be heard by institutions that try to force their religions on other people and erase their cultural heritage in the process. It is time to usher in the day when all people throughout the world practice religious and cultural tolerance as an essential part of their religions.



## xx ❁ Introduction

The movie could also be seen as a call against despotism and dictators of all types whom we see leading undemocratic nation-states all over the world. How can we be serious about being free if we are not allowed to speak freely?

Another important issue raised by *Avatar* is the meeting of technological science with Indigenous science. In other words, how can we advance technologically without going against Mother Nature's vast intelligence? How can we even come to believe in an intelligence that to so many is self-evident? Answers to these big questions are what the Hope in Pandora's Box is asking us to ponder.

As a teacher of the Transcendental for forty years, I'd like you to know that it is with great humility and yet a palpable excitement and joy that I invite you along on this paradigm-shifting ride. In the coming chapters, we will explore in great detail the further meanings of the *Avatar's* more subtle and important teachings, and the connection between the *Avatar* and India's two great epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, in much more intimate detail.

A color insert beautifully depicting scenes from each of the two epics has been included, and at the back of the book you will find guided meditations or practices that will help you more fully absorb the profound teachings of the Avatars.

It is my sincere wish that this book will provide tools of knowledge that help you live and be your most authentic self—whatever your worldview—and that *Spiritual Teachings of the Avatar* will inspire and encourage you to help solve personal, local, and global dilemmas through greater consciousness, cooperation, and integrity. As we will learn, the Avatars are unequivocal about one thing: with the correct vision, we can, starting today, begin to fulfill the promise of hope that remains in Pandora's Box and, most important, in the deepest, kindest, most courageous parts of our own hearts.





Introduction ❁ xxi

In guiding you, I offer my eternal gratitude and deepest respect to the extraordinary elders of so many Indigenous cultures from whom I have learned and, of course, to my gurus and teachers in India who shared with me the real treasures of the Avatar tradition in the hope that we can yet learn to live in greater joy and compassion on Mother Earth.

