

From the Heart

Dropping Out of Your Mind and Into Your Being

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Introduction

You may think it matters what happens. But what if the only thing that matters is where you are experiencing from, where you are looking from? What if you could experience all of life from a spacious, open perspective where anything can happen and there is room for all of it, where there is no need to pick and choose, to put up barriers or resist any of it, where nothing is a problem and everything just adds to the richness of life? What if this open, spacious perspective was the most natural and easy thing to do?

It may sound too good to be true, but we all have a natural capacity to experience life in this way. The only requirement is to look from the Heart, not just figuratively, but to look from the subtle energetic center located in the center of the chest instead of looking out from the eyes and the head—and not just to look, but to listen and feel and sense from the Heart.

In some spiritual traditions we are encouraged to look in the Heart, and yet what does that mean exactly? Often we are so used to looking and sensing through the head and the mind that when we are asked to look in the Heart, we look *through* the head into the Heart to see what is there. Usually we end up just thinking about the Heart. But what if you could drop into the Heart and look from there? How would your life look right now? Is it possible that there is another world right in front of you that you can only see with the Heart and not with the mind?

This book invites you to explore this radically different perspective and to find out what is true and real when the world and your life are viewed from the Heart of Being. It may both delight and shock you to find that so much richness and wonder and beauty lie so close and are so immediately available to you. But don't take my word for it. Read along and see if your experience fits with this simple yet profound way to shift in awareness to a more complete view of your life, your world, and ultimately your true nature as that openness and wonder and beauty.

Chapter One takes a look at how you got where you are, how you got used to looking out at the world through the mind and the senses.

Chapter Two provides an experiential exploration of the possibility of looking in a totally different way: from the Heart. Throughout, are exercises for your own investigation.

Chapter Three explores other possible perspectives, such as looking from the belly or from no particular place.

Chapter Four examines some of the blocks or difficulties you may encounter in applying these new perspectives. It also introduces another way to move into spaciousness by *giving space* to objects and experiences.

Chapter Five offers an exploration of using this perspective in daily life, including the effect of dropping into the Heart in the face of strong emotions, desires, relationships, and physical pain.

For those who like to ponder such things, Chapter Six playfully explores the implications of these possibilities. Who are you really if your awareness can so radically shift into other dimensions of reality so easily? Are you the body or the mind or even the Heart, or are you the formless awareness that flows through all of these?

(Note: Some people are more visual, some are more auditory, and some are more in touch with their feelings or with physical sensations. This book often refers to one or two of these modes, as when exercises invite you to look from your head or sense from your Heart. Feel free to translate and use whatever mode is most natural to you. If you find it easier to listen with your head or look from your Heart or any other combination, that's fine. You may want to experiment with the other senses also.)

Chapter 1

We Are All Baby Ducks

Your Nature as Awareness

Right now as you read these words, who or what are you really? Are you the body, mind, and personality? Or are you the spacious awareness or aware space that these appear in? What you are is this space. It is a remarkable space that is alive and aware. You could say this is what you are made of: You are aware space.

Exercise: Take a moment to sense behind your eyes. Turn your attention to the space behind your eyes. What do you sense there? If you only refer to your experience in this moment, what do you find in the space behind your eyes? Does this space have a capacity to experience sensation? Is there awareness in the space behind your eyes? Don't worry for now what this awareness is like or what you are aware of. Simply check if you are aware of anything right now, anything at all. If you let go of any ideas about what awareness is supposed to be like or what is supposed to happen in awareness, then you can begin to explore this simple miracle of awareness going on behind your eyes.

That aware space is the real you. It is what you are made of, what you exist as here and now. It also turns out that everything that really matters in life is found in this aware space. This is where love, peace, joy, compassion, wisdom, strength, and a sense of worth are found. These are qualities of your true nature as aware space. These are qualities of the real you. Everything you might ever need, including everything you need to know is to be found in that spacious presence behind your eyes.

I invite you to play in this spacious awareness. If you wanted to find out about the nature of water, it would be helpful to play in it whenever you had a chance. So if you want to find out about this aware presence that you are, you might want to explore along as we splash around in the space of awareness.

One bit of good news: It doesn't matter at all for the purposes of our exploration what you are aware of. It doesn't matter what you are experiencing. It doesn't matter if you are happy or sad, healthy or sick, rich or poor, enlightened or suffering, expanded or contracted. However, the only place you can play in awareness is where awareness is right now. So as you explore the awareness, you need to refer to whatever is happening right now, and now, and now because that is where awareness is found.

How Awareness is Imprinted

Realizing your true nature as awareness would be incredibly simple except for one thing: This awareness that you are can be shaped. Just like water takes on the shape of the container you pour it into, this awareness that you are is shaped by your thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, dreams, worries, sensations, and experiences. It is shaped by everything that happens.

Sometimes this shaping is so strong that it seems the awareness has gotten very small and that you have gotten very small. This is not really a problem as the awareness itself is not harmed and it can always expand again. This capacity of awareness to take on a different shape with different experiences is how awareness itself distinguishes how true or complete a thought or experience is. (Please see *The Heart's Wisdom* by Nirmala, available as a free download at www.endless-satsang.com.)

This awareness is not only temporarily shaped by experience, but can become imprinted onto an experience or an object in awareness. You may have heard of how baby ducks become imprinted in the first few hours of their lives: They will follow whatever or whomever they are first aware of, usually the mother duck. However, they can also be imprinted on anything, including a scientist who is studying them, in which case, they will follow the scientist around.

There is nothing wrong with this; it helps baby ducks survive in the wild to follow their mother wherever she goes. It is an inherent capacity of all awareness to become imprinted, or conditioned, in this way. Every time an experience leaves a lasting impression in your awareness, you have been imprinted or conditioned by that experience.

However for humans, this imprinting is more complicated than for ducks. You can be imprinted onto many different things. One of the things you are most imprinted on is your body. You are so strongly imprinted onto your body that most of the time, your awareness follows your body wherever it goes—just like a baby duck following its mother. Check it out. Get up and walk into another room. Does your awareness stay in the room you just left or follow your body into the other room? We are all baby ducks when it comes to our bodies.

Another thing you are profoundly imprinted on is your own mind or thoughts (from here on when thoughts are mentioned, it will refer to the entire range of internal experience: thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, hopes, fantasies, etc.). So when a thought or a fear or a longing arises, your awareness flows to that. Check it out. When you stop thinking one thought and begin thinking another, does your awareness stay on the original thought? Or does it follow your thoughts wherever they go? Isn't it kind of like a baby duck following its momma across the pond and out onto the meadow and then into a creek?

You have been imprinted onto your physical body and your mind. This isn't bad. Just as with baby ducks, it does have some benefits for your survival, although not always: Just as a baby duck will follow its mother onto a busy freeway, your awareness will follow your thoughts into all kinds of silly and sometimes dangerous places.

Since you are almost always aware of your body and your mind (because awareness follows your body and mind around), you come to the mistaken conclusion that you *are* your body and your mind. You fail to recognize that what you are is the empty, spacious awareness that the body and mind appear. You assume, since they are almost always here, *I am the body and the mind.*

This is a simple and completely understandable mistake. Unfortunately, it is also a colossal mistake and the source of all your suffering. It is so completely wrong that it is as if you had a fly on your nose that stuck around so long that you decided you were the fly. Imagine how confused you would feel and act if you believed you were a fly. You would spend all day eating rotten food and trying to mate with other flies!

Well you are making as big a mistake when you conclude that you are the body and the mind. It is not that there is anything wrong with the body or the mind; it's just that that is not really who you are. All of the problems you experience are only problems for the body or the mind. The spacious awareness has no problems. How can space have a problem? It can't be harmed or diminished in any way. You can set off a bomb in space, and when the dust settles, the space will be completely unharmed.

This mistaken identity as the body and mind creates all of your suffering. If the body or mind was having an experience that you considered a problem, but you realized that is not who you are, would you suffer from those problems? Right now, are you suffering dramatically over the problems of someone else whom you have never even met? Probably not, since they aren't your problems. So what if none of your problems are really *your* problems? What if the spacious awareness that you really are can't have problems?

Exercise: Consider for a moment something you are experiencing that seems like a problem. Without changing your experience or even your knowledge and understanding of the problem in any way, check if the space in which the thoughts or circumstances of the problem are happening has any difficulty with those thoughts and circumstances. Does the space in which the difficulty is appearing have a problem? Can space itself ever have a problem? If for just a moment, you identify with the space that both you and the problem are in, do you have a problem? Can you as the space ever have a problem?

Recognizing yourself as aware space is a radical shift in your usual identity or sense of your self. It may be a while before you can really believe or, more importantly, consistently experience your identity as aware space. We are profoundly conditioned or imprinted onto our usual identification with the body and mind. You may discover you have a deep and abiding conviction that you really are the body and your inner life of thoughts and feelings. We don't give up our deepest convictions easily.

As you read this, you might want to hold open the possibility that you are mistaken. Try out the possibility that you really are the space, and see for yourself if this fits more with

the evidence of your experience. If you can temporarily set aside the utter conviction that who you are is your physical body and the flow of mental activity, you will be better able to sense for yourself the truth being pointed to here.

What It Is Like to Look Out from the Head

As you were growing up and everyone was teaching and conditioning you to follow the experience of your body and mind, your identity moved into the body and head. Since your eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and brain are all located in your head, the awareness and the identity also became localized there. Since the head is where your awareness became located, that is where you now look, feel, and sense from.

As a result of awareness flowing through your head, it becomes shaped by your thoughts. This wouldn't matter if you only had a thought occasionally, but most of us have very busy minds. As a result, awareness is profoundly shaped and limited by its tendency to flow through the head. Every little thought that arises takes your awareness for a ride through inner landscapes of doubt and worry, hope and conjecture.

Most of the time these inner landscapes have only a slight correspondence with what is really happening, and often they have absolutely nothing to do with reality. Have you ever thought someone was mad at you, only to find out he or she just had a stomach ache? So why do we pay so much attention to our thoughts? Because every now and then, they are right. Every now and then, a thought does correspond to something out there. As any psychology student knows, an intermittent reward, or success, is more powerfully reinforcing than a constant one.

So, you end up with your awareness flowing through your head and through your thoughts. What is awareness like when it flows through thoughts? What effect do your thoughts have on awareness itself?

Thought itself is a very small phenomenon. All of your thoughts fit between your ears, so how big can they be? So when awareness flows through thoughts, it becomes very small. Consequently, your sense of self becomes small because fundamentally you are the awareness; so when awareness contracts onto a thought, it takes on the size and shape of that experience.

However, when awareness gets focused onto something it also magnifies it. Try it out: Pick up an object and focus all your attention on it. Does it appear smaller or bigger when you focus on it? It tends to look bigger. When you habitually focus on your thoughts, the content or meaning of them is magnified, even as your awareness and the sense of self is contracted. When your awareness is flowing so constantly to your thoughts and through the head, it becomes chronically narrowed and limited.

This is not bad and even has some value at times for survival, but it is also limiting and narrow. When your awareness is narrow and limited, you miss a lot of what is happening.

Much of reality is simply not noticed because when awareness is contracted, unawareness is expanded.

Exercise: For a moment, put your hands around your eyes like a set of blinders. Does your awareness of the room you are in get bigger or smaller? The room doesn't get smaller, but your awareness of it shrinks—you are seeing less of the room. Now notice: Does the part of the room that you are not seeing get bigger or smaller? Of course what you are not seeing gets bigger if you are seeing less.

The net effect of being imprinted onto your body and especially your head and your thoughts is that you tend to look out from your head: You live in your head and look out from it. You see, smell, hear, feel, sense, and ponder life with your head. This means that what you are seeing, smelling, hearing, sensing, and pondering is limited by and filtered through your thoughts. Your thoughts mediate between you and reality and interfere with you seeing it more fully and more purely. They color it, change it, and only consider part of it. In a sense, you are living in a dream, all because you are looking out of your head and your thoughts.

This is so common that you don't even notice that this shaping of awareness is occurring. You get used to it. Just as you assume that the body and mind must be what you are because they are always present, you also assume the world you see through your mind is the real world. You assume that things really are the way you see them when you look out of your head.

While it may be difficult to distinguish the effects of this imprinting, you may be able to sense how typically narrow or tight or contracted your perspective is. Because of the magnifying effect of this narrow perspective, the content of your thoughts can seem quite huge and even overwhelming. This is how you make a mountain out of a molehill. But for a moment see if you can sense directly the shape of the awareness in this moment—not the content of your thoughts—but the flow of awareness itself.

Exercise: Awareness is flowing in this moment. Just check, are you aware of anything at all? Really anything at all will do for this exercise, including a thought arising in your mind or simply the words appearing on this page. So if you are aware of something right now, where is this awareness flowing from? Can you sense where the awareness is coming from? Is it coming from your big toe or the ceiling, or does it seem to be coming from your head?

What is the awareness itself like in this moment? Is it expanded and open and flowing freely, or is it more focused and narrow? There is no right answer, and it is always subtly changing, becoming more narrow or more open. What is it like right now—not the content of your experience, but the experiencing itself? It may be the usual awareness that is shaped by flowing through your head, but, just notice what that is like.

Awareness that is shaped by flowing through the head and by thoughts is typically tight and constricted. Just as a muscle requires effort to stay contracted, this tightness of awareness has an effortful quality. It is often not very satisfying, like trying to drink through a very narrow straw. You can never quite get enough of what is happening, so naturally you try harder: you think harder and try to understand what is happening, which only narrows the view even more.

Awareness that flows through your mind creates an underlying sense of there not being enough. Even if you are having a wonderful experience, there is a sense of not being able to absorb it all; so you may want to hang on to it or try to capture it some way (e.g. in a snapshot or home video) so that later you can get more of the experience. This is all simply the result of looking through your head. It is so habitual that it seems normal to feel so dissatisfied and incomplete. Even your Being can seem incomplete and not good enough.

But what if there is another way of looking that shapes the world in a completely different way—so differently that the world doesn't even appear to be the same world? What would it be like to look from your Heart?

Chapter 2

Another Way to Sense Your World

The Flexibility of Perspective

In spite of the habitual tendency to look out from your head, it is actually quite simple to move the point where your perspective originates from. Some have suggested that dyslexics have an unusually flexible perspective that moves so freely that, in a sense, they can see words on a page from both front and back. As a result, they can see letters in their usual order and also from the opposite side, which makes them appear backwards. For a dyslexic, there are benefits to learning to stabilize, or fix, their perspective—where they look from.

However, for the rest of us, moving our perspective around can free it up. In many of the therapeutic interventions used in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a person is invited to even see himself or herself from the outside. This gives a unique, and often useful, perspective on what is happening.

Without moving the perspective outside the body but simply down into the Heart, you can profoundly alter the shaping of your awareness.

The Shift into the Heart

The center of your chest, which is next to your physical heart, is often considered the spiritual center of your Being. For many centuries, it was believed that thinking happened in the heart rather than in the brain. What would it be like to experience the world from this energetic center instead of from the head? What effect would that have on your experience of the world and of yourself?

Exercise: Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment—the sounds, a thought, the objects around you. Notice if you are looking or listening or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently drop your sensing down into your Heart. This is not a matter of sensing the Heart or feeling what is in your Heart, but feeling your surroundings from the center of your chest. At first, it can be helpful to rest your hand on the center of your chest next to your heart, to help you orient to looking from this place. Allow what you are seeing to be seen by your Heart instead of your head. What is it like to sense, listen, and look from your Heart? Pick an object and sense it with your Heart instead of your head. How is that?

The key is to allow awareness to flow from the Heart. Especially at first, it is not important to sense the Heart itself. It's simpler at first if you just sense an ordinary object, like a piece of furniture, *from* your Heart. The important thing is where your awareness seems to be located. Because of the strongly imprinted tendency to look from the head and through your thoughts, you may find at first that you are looking *into* your Heart, or you may be *thinking* about what it would be like to look from the Heart. If you are just imagining what that would be like, your awareness would still be shaped by thoughts—in this case, a thought about this new way of looking.

See if you can do this, if only for a moment—just look or sense from your Heart. What is that like even if it only lasts briefly? Does your awareness open up and expand? Do you sense things in a different way? Most people find that their awareness becomes more open, softer, and wider. This is simply the way awareness flows when it is not being so narrowly shaped by the mind. Just as a muscle naturally expands when you are not contracting it, awareness expands when it is not being shaped and constricted by your thoughts.

Exercise: Take some time to play with this new way of sensing and looking. What do the objects around you look or feel like when you look at them from the Heart? How do you experience other people with your Heart? What are sounds or music like when you listen from the Heart? What about your thoughts? They may still be arising in the usual way, but what if you listen to and watch them from the Heart? Do they seem as important, or are they just passing words and pictures in a large open space? See how the world looks and feels from here. It is another world. Explore this new world. Discover what your day-to-day experiences are like when they are sensed from the Heart.

As mentioned, it can be helpful to close your eyes at first when sensing from the Heart. Because the eyes are located in the head, when you are seeing, the tendency is for awareness to locate itself in the head rather than in the Heart. So until you get the hang of *looking* from your Heart, it might be easier to simply *sense* objects and people with your Heart or to keep your eyes closed. Then slowly add listening and finally looking with your eyes open.

Keep checking to notice if the awareness is actually flowing from the Heart or if it has moved back up into your head. If it does, that's fine—there is no harm done to the awareness. But when it does shift back into the more habitual perspective of looking from the head, notice what that is like. Does it stay open and expanded, or does it become narrow and focused, like a magnifying glass or even a microscope? Then you can gently move the perspective back down to the Heart and check for yourself what that's like. Does the awareness open up again and relax?

At first, there may be so much momentum to looking from the head that you may only be able to sense or look from the Heart for a moment or a few seconds at a time. That's fine. Just notice what you can about the quality of your awareness whenever it is actually in your Heart. With time, you should be able to extend the time you listen, look, or sense

from your Heart. Maybe you will find you can listen to an entire song from your Heart or watch a sunset from your Heart. What if you were to watch TV, wash the dishes, or talk on the phone while looking and listening from the Heart? You may find yourself thinking about your life or planning your weekend, but for a change, notice these thoughts from your Heart.

Your awareness can flow from more than one place at a time. At times, it may be flowing mostly from your head, and at other times, mostly from your Heart. If the awareness is flowing partly from your head and partly from your Heart, the qualities of the awareness will be somewhere in between. It might be more open and allowing than usual, but still have a degree of focus and direction.

The Qualities of the Heart's Perspective

Here are some clues that awareness is flowing at least partly from the Heart: The awareness will be wider and more open. The boundaries between the awareness and the objects in awareness will seem less substantial. There will be more of a sense of oneness and connection with whatever you are sensing. Thoughts will seem to be less of a concern and possibly even inconsequential, or they may not be noticed at all. When something is very small, it can be easily overlooked, and thoughts are actually very small realities.

Most of the time, you experience thoughts from the head. This is like having your nose up close to a big screen TV. The content of your thoughts is right in front of your awareness. When you drop into the Heart, thoughts continue to occur, but you will be experiencing them from down in the Heart. Now it is as if that big screen TV is playing up in the attic instead of right in front of you. This puts the content of your thoughts into perspective. When experienced from the Heart, they are not such a big deal.

When awareness is flowing through the Heart, it also includes much more of what is happening. As a result, the experience is much more satisfying. Instead of trying to take life in through a narrow view, you can drink to your Heart's content. There is a richness and fullness to even very ordinary experiences.

If the opposite qualities are predominant, that would mean you have returned to looking from your head. So if the view contracts, the boundaries seem more real, you feel separate or dissatisfied, and thoughts suddenly take up the entire screen of your consciousness, chances are you (as awareness) are residing in the head again.

Exercise: Pick something in your environment and then sense it first with your head and then with your Heart. How are these different? The contrast between the two modes of looking, listening, and sensing will allow you to notice the differences in the awareness itself as it flows from the head and then from the Heart. For this exercise, keep your awareness on the same object or sound or thought. Then any difference will be directly related to where you are sensing,

listening, or looking from and not due to experiencing something different in your environment.

Feelings and Emotions

What about the deep feelings or emotions that might arise in your heart area? Just as with thoughts or objects in your environment, what matters in terms of your feelings and emotions is where you are sensing them from. You can use your Heart to sense, look, and listen to the feelings and emotions that may arise and be felt in the heart area.

Exercise: Notice the emotional quality in your heart area right now. Whether it is quite neutral or strongly emotional, just note what that is. What happens if you experience this from the Heart itself? Does this give the emotion more space to expand and flow? Is it as big a deal? Looking from the Heart allows awareness to flow from a deeper place in your Being, deeper than your emotions and desires. Allow the awareness to flow from this deeper place to the unfolding experience of your emotions.

The Contents of the Head

What about thoughts? What happens to your thoughts when you look or listen from the Heart? Thoughts are just activity in the mind, and yet you can hear, see, or feel this activity much in the same way you hear, see, and feel the physical world. However this activity is all in your mind; it is not even as substantial as the smallest physical object. Thoughts are actually very limited, small phenomenon.

Have you ever blocked your view of the moon with just your thumb? Because your thumb is so close, it can block out a much larger object that is far away. Similarly, when you are looking or listening from the head, your thoughts are right there—up close and right in front of you. As a result, they tend to block your view of everything else.

Imagine walking around all day with a TV hanging right in front of your nose. You might have a tendency to not see and hear much else than the pictures and sounds on the television. Likewise, when you look from your head, you mostly see your thoughts. Furthermore, the content of your thoughts is magnified because the awareness is so narrowly focused when it flows through your head. You watch the television of your mind through a magnifying glass. No wonder we can become so engrossed in our thoughts.

The awareness is even shaped by the thoughts themselves. It is as if you are looking not only through your head but through thoughts themselves. This is a drastically limited view of reality, and the content of your thoughts is often not so pretty. The mind is full of judgments, fears, doubts, and worries. It is filled with negative voices and with pictures of what could go wrong. Experiencing life through the busy mind is often unpleasant. Even when the thoughts are positive, they are not necessarily what is really happening;

and when reality bleeds through, it can be disappointing when it doesn't match your positive fantasies.

The good news is that it doesn't matter so much what you are experiencing. What matters is where you are experiencing it from.

Exercise: Notice the content of your thoughts as they arise moment to moment. Now notice where you are noticing them from. If you are listening and watching and sensing your thoughts from the head, what is that like? How big do they look or sound or feel? How important do they seem? Now without changing your thoughts in any way, allow your awareness to flow to them from your Heart. What is that like? How big do they look or sound or feel up there in the head from way down in the chest? How important do they seem now?

Because the view from the Heart is so wide and inclusive, something relatively small like a thought, belief, memory, fantasy, or idea can be recognized as small. The content of your thoughts may or may not change, but they will not take up so much of the screen of consciousness when awareness includes so much. Thoughts may be experienced as something relatively small, like a bug walking next to the Grand Canyon. Relative to thoughts, the world is a big and limitless place. When you experience your thoughts from the Heart, they shrink down to actual size.

Have you ever tried to quiet your thoughts? Usually you just end up thinking about thinking less. But you can quiet the impact of your thoughts in an instant by simply allowing the awareness of them to flow from your Heart. At times the thoughts will drop right out of awareness. When the experience of the rest of reality is so full and complete, you don't notice the thoughts even as they continue to occur. The experience is like first seeing the ocean or the Grand Canyon: Your mind falls silent because you are too busy taking in the vastness to notice your thoughts. Similarly, this moment now and its many dimensions can be an experience even vaster than the ocean when you are experiencing it through your Heart.

Exercise: Allow your awareness to flow from your Heart to everything you are experiencing in this moment. Unlike the mind, which can only think about one thing at a time, awareness flowing through the Heart can take in an infinite number of sensations, thoughts, sights, sounds, and subtle energies. With awareness flowing from your Heart, notice what you are seeing, hearing, and sensing in your body. Now also include the flow of thoughts and feelings and impulses. Add in all of the subtle or energetic ways of sensing you are capable of. Include the simple presence of limitless space and time. Allow awareness to flow to all of these and more simultaneously. As long as your awareness is flowing mostly or completely through your Heart, you will find you can include much more in awareness than usual.

Resting in the Heart

In many spiritual traditions, the Heart is recognized as the true center of Being. In the way we are exploring it here, you could also say that the Heart doesn't shape or limit the flow of awareness as much as the head. As a result, you can experience your Being more fully when awareness is flowing through the Heart. Just as you can experience more of the nature of water by immersing yourself in it rather than just experiencing a drop of it, the experience of Being is much more dramatic and obvious when awareness is located in the Heart than in the head.

You may even find that, as you play more with this possibility of looking from the Heart, it becomes a familiar and comfortable place for awareness to rest. Remember how awareness through the head takes on an effortful quality because of the contraction of awareness? Well when that same awareness flows through the Heart there is naturally a relaxation of the effort of contraction. The awareness can spread out and expand and simply rest from all the effort of focusing and figuring things out.

In spiritual books and gatherings, you may have heard the invitation to rest in the Heart. And yet if you are looking into the Heart from the head, it's not so easy to rest there. It can seem effortful to keep that narrow focus of awareness on the Heart. But if you allow awareness to flow from the Heart, then it instantly becomes easy to also rest in the Heart. There is no effort required. The Heart is where you reside in those moments, and you can only rest right where you are in the moment.

Exercise: Allow your awareness to flow from the Heart. It doesn't really matter what you are aware of, only where you are aware from. Now simply settle in. Allow yourself to rest here in the spaciousness of the Heart's perspective. From here, there is nothing to do and nowhere to go. You are Home.

Chapter 3

What About the Real World?

Looking from the Belly

Looking from the Heart adds richness to experience and opens up whole new dimensions to daily life, and yet there is often resistance to truly resting in the Heart. It can seem impractical or too vulnerable to consistently view the world in such an expanded, open, uncensored way; so we often return to our old habit of looking through the mind and its false sense of being in control of our lives. The mind gives us a sense that we know what is going to happen. Even thinking we know what should happen feels reassuring, although this is irrelevant to what actually does happen.

Moving in the world while looking from the mind has tremendous drawbacks, however. Most of what you think about never does actually happen, and the tendency to focus on the mind's contents can prevent you from fully noticing what is actually happening.

When life is demanding, it is still not necessary to contract into the mind with its severely limited perspective and many blind spots. There is another possibility and that is to look, listen, and sense the world from your belly. Just as you can allow awareness to flow from the Heart center in your chest, you can allow awareness to sink down even further and flow from a spot a few finger widths below the belly button called the *hara*.

Exercise: Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment—the sounds, a thought, the objects around you. Notice if you are looking or listening or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently drop your sensing down into your belly. This is not a matter of sensing the belly or feeling what is in the belly but experiencing your surroundings from the belly. It can be helpful, at first, to rest your hand just below your belly button to orient you to looking, listening, and sensing from this place. Allow what you are seeing, listening, and sensing to be seen, listened, and sensed by your belly instead of your head. What is this like to sense, listen, and look from your belly? Pick an object and sense it with your belly instead of with your head. How is that?

The belly is a reservoir of strength and capability. It has a solidity and firmness that can stand up to whatever life dishes out. When you look from the belly, the view doesn't contract and problems don't become magnified like they do when you look from the head. Instead, the view remains open and expanded. There is also a sense of something solid and real that is experiencing all of it. The real you is here, and able to do whatever needs to be done.

Awareness is shaped by the belly into a solid and substantial presence that is not easily overwhelmed or even unduly influenced by circumstances. This is a much more effective way to move in the world than thinking. It is a place where action and consistency come naturally.

Exercise: Take some time to play with this new way of sensing and looking. What do the objects around you look or feel like when you look from the belly? How do you experience other people with your belly? What are sounds or music like when you listen from the belly? What about your thoughts? They may still be arising, but what if you listen to and watch them from down in the belly? Do they seem important, or are they just passing words and pictures in a large open space? Do thoughts or circumstances have so much impact, or are they sensed from something that is solid and real that is not much affected by ideas and events? See how the world looks and feels from here. It is another world. Explore this new world. Discover what your day-to-day experiences are like when they are sensed from the belly.

The belly grounds awareness in the real world without magnifying or distorting the content of your awareness. Sensing from the belly is a direct and simple meeting of whatever happens, which includes a strong and capable sense of yourself. After all, you are part of what is here right now. Why leave out a sense of your own presence? Your existence can be included in every experience, and when you look from the belly your existence can seem to have the presence and substance of an entire mountain of Being.

From this solid base of your Being, thoughts impinge less on your awareness. There is no need to change or quiet your thoughts; just find out what they are like when seen from the belly.

Exercise: Notice the content of your thoughts as they arise moment to moment. Now notice where you are noticing them from. If you are listening and watching and sensing them from your head, what is that like? How big do they look or sound or feel? How important do they seem? Now without changing your thoughts in any way, allow your awareness to flow to them from your belly. What is that like? How big do they look or sound or feel up in the head from way down in the lower abdomen? How important do they seem now? Do they still have the ability to unduly influence or sway you from your position in the here and now?

Thoughts are useful when you recognize them as just thoughts. Looking from the belly can give you a sense of being a substantial presence that is not unduly influenced by passing thoughts.

You can also rest here in the belly. You can rest as a mountain of awareness and feel the stillness of that immense presence.

Exercise: Allow your awareness to flow from the belly. It doesn't really matter what you are aware of, only where you are aware from. Now simply settle in.

Allow yourself to rest here in the solidness of the belly's perspective. From here, there is nothing you need to do and nothing you can't do. You are real. You exist.

Putting It All Together

Looking from the Heart and looking from the belly can add so much to your awareness and to the sense of satisfaction and capacity you feel in life. Looking from the head can also be a useful capability of your awareness. Although thoughts are not in and of themselves profound realities, there is no reason to deny their existence or usefulness. It is only when you are habitually stuck in looking from the head that thoughts can limit your perspective and range of awareness in an ongoing way, but it is not necessary to limit yourself from ever looking from the mind.

Fortunately, your awareness is incredibly flexible and can move in and out of any perspective. There is no need to limit yourself to one perspective or another.

Exercise: Pick something in your environment and then continue to sense it first with your head, then with your Heart, and then with your belly. How are these three different? The contrast between the three modes of looking, listening, and sensing will allow you to notice the differences in the awareness itself as it moves up into the head, down into the Heart, and further down into the belly. For this exercise, keep your awareness on just one object or sound or thought. Then any difference will be directly related to where you are looking from and not due to experiencing something different in your environment. You can repeat this exercise with several different experiences in order to become familiar with each mode and gain a sense of when each might be appropriate or useful.

The mind is especially appropriate when focusing and performing certain tasks, like balancing a checkbook, giving someone directions, teasing apart a philosophical idea, or memorizing a phone number.

The belly is especially appropriate when action, consistency, strength, or discrimination is needed. Examples are times when you need to persist to get something done, when you need to say no to someone, when it is important to either act or leave an uncomfortable or dangerous situation, and when an experience is especially intense or overwhelming, including overwhelmingly pleasurable.

The Heart's perspective is always appropriate, especially when the opportunity exists to simply rest and be. It is always enough to just be. This spacious awareness that you are is all you ever really need. In it, is everything that really matter in life—love, peace, wisdom, clarity, joy, strength, value, and wonder. The true Heart is much, much bigger than the space in your chest and actually includes your head, your belly, and everything else.

Looking from the Heart, Belly, and Mind Simultaneously

This true Heart is your real home. The perspectives of the head, the chest, and the belly are all components of this spacious Heart of Being. One way to experience this is to use all three modes of perception simultaneously.

Exercise: Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment—the sounds, a thought, the objects around you. Notice if you are looking or listening or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently allow your sensing to flow from the Heart and from your head at the same time. What is that like? Do they complement each other? Now include the belly. Don't worry if you are doing it right; just allow awareness to flow from all three places to whatever degree it is doing that. What is that like? How is it to have so many channels of information and awareness simultaneously? What is it like to sense, listen, and look from all three? Pick an object and sense it from all three places. How is that?

What you really are is pure awareness—empty space that has this miraculous ability to sense the world. While this space is shaped by life and by the human containers it passes through, its fundamental nature as space is not changed. By allowing it to flow through your true Heart (including your head, chest, and belly), you give it the most room to expand and function. Life is a rich and ever-changing challenge, so why not meet it with everything you are? From here on, when it is suggested that you allow awareness to flow from your Heart, that is also an invitation to allow it to flow from all of your Being—from the head, the belly, and the Heart. Your true Heart encompasses all of these and more.

Looking from Space Itself

The aware space of your Being is limitless and infinite. As you move more fully into looking from the Heart, you are also moving into a fuller experience of this infinite Presence of your Being. It is possible to drop even farther into your Being and look or sense from there. Awareness is a quality of the space itself and not contained in your head or chest or belly. What actually senses is this infinite space which is all around the physical body.

Exercise: Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment—the sounds, a thought, or the objects around you. Notice if you are looking or listening or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently allow your sensing to flow from the Heart, the belly, and the head all at once. What is that like? Now allow your perspective to drop more deeply into the infinite space of your Being. You can look from everywhere and nowhere in particular. Don't worry if you are doing it right; just allow awareness to flow from the depths of Being itself to whatever degree it is flowing. What is that like? What is it like to have so much of your sensing open and flowing? Allow what you are seeing and sensing to be seen and sensed by the

empty space of Being. What is it like to sense, listen, and look from vast spaciousness? Pick an object and sense it with the limitless space of Being. How is that?

Your awareness doesn't always need to orient to your body. It can move directly from the infinite Presence of your Being. When awareness moves in this way, it is unshaped by any imprinting or conditioning. You can profoundly rest as this Space while awareness moves freely in whatever way it is happening to flow.

Exercise: Allow your awareness to flow from the limitless space in the depth of your Being. It doesn't really matter what you are aware of, just where you are aware from. Now just settle in. Allow yourself to rest here in the vastness of Being's perspective. From here, there is only space.

Chapter 4

It Isn't Always Easy

The Human Condition of Imprinting

Your existence in human form means that the imprinting, or conditioning, you have received has many dimensions. It is not as simple as the baby duck's imprinting. Everything you experience imprints, or conditions, you to some degree. Your awareness is just that sensitive to life. You have been imprinted by your DNA, parents, teachers, siblings, acquaintances, environment, astrology, past lives, and of course, by the media. Add to this, every experience that has left a lasting impression, and you have quite a symphony of influences affecting the unfolding of your life and your awareness. Fortunately, you are not to blame for any of your conditioning. No one is to blame, or you could say that everyone is equally to blame, since we all share our conditioning with others whenever we interact with them.

The net result of all this conditioning is that it is not always easy to shift your awareness and look from your Heart or from your belly. It is always simple, but it is not always easy.

Some of us have been particularly strongly conditioned to look from the mind. If you grew up with very intellectual parents or if you have been rewarded for your mind's capacity throughout school and work, the tendency to look from the mind may be especially strong.

In addition, if negative associations were formed around the body or the emotional side of life, it may be difficult for you to move into the belly or the Heart space. When you do, you may experience discomfort that blocks your ability to perceive from that place.

Your experience may differ somewhat from what has been described. For instance, instead of a sense of solidity or strength in your belly, you may experience the opposite—a lack of support and stability there. Or you may find that awareness seems to contract when you to move into your Heart because of some unresolved pain or hurt that seems to reside in your chest.

When these experiences arise, it is not a sign of anything wrong with you or your awareness. It is just another layer of imprinting that has accumulated. You didn't do anything to put it there; you just inherited it.

The invitation is to simply stay with your experience no matter what happens. Sometimes if you sink a little deeper and sense the lack, resistance, pain, or blankness from even deeper in your Heart or belly, this can allow you to finally see the truth of that pain or

resistance. From the more complete view of the Heart, it will at least seem less significant.

Other times, it is necessary to stay present to the experience you are having for as long as it continues to arise. These hurt, scared, or seeming lacking places are actually just in need of simple acceptance and love. Staying with them is often all you need to do.

It is also fine to get help with anything that is stirred up by these new modes of awareness. Sometimes, just the caring, listening presence of another person is enough to allow you to stay with your experience as it unfolds.

Start Where You Are

If you are interested in discovering the truth of your awareness and what its possibilities are, the best place to do this is where awareness exists, and awareness is always right where you are. After all, it is what you are—where else could it be?

The key to all spiritual practices is to apply them to your actual experience as it is right now. An idea of how you need to be different or what needs to change is just another thought that filters and shapes your awareness. Meanwhile here you are.

Exercise: Allow your awareness to flow from the Heart, head, and belly as fully as you can to the conditions of your existence right now—to whatever sensations are present, whatever thoughts are arising, whatever blocks or difficulties are being triggered, whatever is happening right now. Relax, because you can always simply be aware of what is happening right now. That is all there is to be aware of. Allow yourself to rest from trying to change any of it or trying to stop it if it is changing. It doesn't matter what you are experiencing. What matters is where you are experiencing it from, and that is true even of the difficulties or painful experiences.

Giving space

When it seems especially difficult or even impossible to move into your Heart or belly and look from there, another way to move into a more spacious perspective is to simply give space to your experience. You can give space to your sensations, your thoughts, your feelings, and to the physical objects and events occurring around you. You can give space to whatever is appearing in your experience right now.

You are unlimited, aware space, so you don't need to pick and choose what you are aware of and what you allow into your experience. You can just give it all space to be here. Imagine if you were a multi-trillionaire. Having essentially limitless money would mean that you could give lots of it away and still not run out. You are like a multi-multi-trillionaire when it comes to spacious awareness. You truly cannot run out. You can give space to anything that shows up.

When you give space to your experiences, it shifts you more fully into the spaciousness of your Being, which is experienced in the Heart. You can simply imagine space flowing to or around the objects and sensations, or you can simply notice that there is already space for them. A simple test to determine if there is space for something is to notice if it exists: If something exists, there must be enough space for it to exist.

Exercise: Experiment giving aspects of your experience space. Imagine space flowing to them or around them. Or simply notice that the objects and events around you and within you already do have enough space to exist. Give space to your body and your sensations just as they are. Give space to your thoughts and feelings and desires. Give space to the objects in the room. Give space to the sounds appearing in your environment. Give lots of space to everything you can notice right now. What is that like? How spacious and free do you feel when you give space to everything?

There's no need to be stingy—give things as much space as they need and more. If some aspect of your experience seems difficult or uncomfortable, then give it lots and lots of space. What happens if you give that difficulty or discomfort all of the space in your neighborhood? How about if you give it as much space as the state of Texas? Or all of the space in the world or the solar system? How important does it seem now? What else do you notice about that difficulty or discomfort when you are giving it lots of space?

It can be helpful to start experimenting with giving space to something neutral like a piece of furniture or the sounds of birds outside. Once you have a sense of your capacity to give space to your experiences, you can experiment with giving space to more challenging, difficult, or painful aspects of your life.

Don't worry too much about what it actually means to "give something space." Even if the experiment of giving space is at first mostly intellectual, it can still put you in touch with that space; and since that aware space is what you are, it also puts you more in contact with your true nature.

Much of the time we have a sense of being limited. It seems like there is only so much time and awareness available, so we feel the need to pick and choose what we give our awareness to. We try to withdraw awareness from the events or circumstances we don't like or want, and focus it on what we do want.

The key is to give space and awareness to everything. You can give space to *both* your thoughts *and* your sensations. You can give space to *both* an external event *and* the feelings it evokes within you. You can give space to *both* a sense of excitement *and* a sense of fear about the same event, *and* any doubts or worries that you have about it, *and* any memories that get triggered, *and* any insights that arise in the midst of all these other responses. You can always give space to this, and that, and everything else.

Exercise: Notice something that is happening in your environment or, more generally, in your life right now. As you give space to this, also give space to the thoughts appearing in your mind about it. Simultaneously, give space to the feelings or desires you have about it. Give as much space as all of these events and internal reactions need and more. You can't run out. As you continue to give space to these, also give space to everything else in your environment: other people, unrelated events and objects, thoughts and feelings unrelated to the original concern. Notice that you can just keep giving space to more and more of what makes up your life and experience. What is that like? Are you only in your head right now, or are you experiencing more fully from your whole Being, including your Heart and belly?

Much of the time you can simply drop down and look from the Heart and/or belly, and the flow of spacious awareness will open up naturally. However, when you just can't seem to stop thinking and looking from your head, then to loosen things up, give that experience some space. Then see if you can drop more easily into your Heart and belly. Giving space is another way to contact this spacious awareness that you are. As you give more space to your experience, awareness naturally shifts into the Heart and belly.

When to Stop

The point of these exercises is to bring you more in touch with your essential nature as aware space. Once you experience the potential of transforming your experience by looking from the Heart, you can simply rest and allow awareness to move in whatever way it most naturally wants to move. You are still aware space no matter where it is flowing from or how it is being shaped by your head, Heart, or belly.

So how do you know when these exercises have served their purpose and it is time to rest and allow awareness its free and natural expression? The simple indicator is if, in the absence of any particular demand on awareness, your awareness naturally drops into the Heart and beyond, into the depths of Being itself. Because there is so much momentum to looking from the head, it is important to practice the alternatives. But once the new habits of looking from the Heart and belly are well established and you are doing this as often or more often than looking from the head, then there is no need for further practice. How long this takes will vary.

Life is full of challenges and opportunities and profound mysteries. Why not bring all of your Being's capacities to this incredible journey called life? But remember, the ultimate goal is simply to rest in the Heart. It is your true home.

Chapter 5

The Heart in Everyday Life

Clear Thinking

We are strongly conditioned to watch our thoughts. Most of the time it is as if we have our nose pressed against the TV screen of our thoughts. The sheer volume of thoughts can be overwhelming. We think and think and then think some more. Often our thoughts are contradictory or irrelevant. How do you make sense of all this mental activity? How do you distinguish what is important and what is just idle chatter?

The important thing is to get some distance from your thoughts. Just as a painter needs to step back from the painting to get perspective on what he or she is doing, you need to step back from your mind and get some perspective. The simplest way to do this is to drop down into your Heart and belly and view your thoughts from there.

Exercise: First, simply observe your thoughts. Notice the overall quality of your thinking. How much are you thinking right now? Are you quietly observing this moment's events? Or is there an endless stream of commentary and judgment or, perhaps, fantasizing about what should or shouldn't happen? Now allow yourself to drop down and experience your thoughts from the fullness of your Being in your Heart and belly. Without changing the nature or quantity of thoughts, what is your perspective on your thoughts when you experience them from there? Can you sense the overall patterns of your thoughts more easily? Do they seem as important or meaningful? Can you more easily distinguish which thoughts are important or meaningful? Whenever you find yourself lost in thought or analysis, you can drop down into the Heart and regain perspective.

There is nothing wrong with thought. It is a sometimes useful and often entertaining capacity. What matters is where we are experiencing the thoughts from. When we look at them from our head and focus narrowly on them, they seem much more relevant and important than they really are. In reality, most thoughts are irrelevant. A thought like "What if I get a flat tire and I am late to my appointment?" is not relevant unless you actually get a flat tire, and even then, it doesn't contribute anything; yet our minds generate thousands of irrelevant thoughts each day. However, every now and then a thought pops into our mind that is useful and relevant. Sometimes, when we have a thought like "Remember to pick up the dry cleaning" it is actually time to remember to pick up the dry cleaning. The important thing is to be able to discriminate between relevant and irrelevant thoughts.

When we experience thoughts from the head, the focused quality of our awareness magnifies the content of the thought. It is as if our nose is pressed up against the big screen surround sound TV of our mind's pictures or comments, so all of our thoughts

seem very big or loud and therefore very important. In contrast, when we drop down and experience the mind's images or words from the depth of Being, they become actual size—which is very small. From here, there is no need to get rid of thoughts or even go to battle with them. If one of them happens to be relevant, it will still be noticed and acted on.

Find out what it is like to experience your own thoughts from the deepest places in your Being. Find out what it is like to have some distance and perspective on the contents of your own mind. The open, spacious awareness that you are is also very wise and discriminating. Given a wide enough view, it can easily determine what is important and what is not so important in this moment.

Emotions

Feelings are like thoughts on steroids. If our usual experience of thought is like watching a wide screen TV, a strong feeling can be more like being at an IMAX theatre with a 10,000 watt sound system. While the energetic impression of a strong emotion can arise in our chest or belly or throat, what matters is where we are experiencing the feeling from. If we stay in our head as strong emotions arise, it is often experienced as an internal conflict or split. The emotions seem huge and overwhelming, so we may resist or deny them. We are here in the head, and the feelings are down in the body, and it can be quite a challenge to manage them from up here in the head.

Usually when we suppress or deny our feelings, it works for a while. But they haven't really gone away, so eventually they surface. Sometimes the expression of the feeling at that point is like an explosion of pent up energy. When we finally are able to cry or yell or throw things, there can be a profound sense of release. However, all of this expression often creates a mess. The sense of relief from releasing these feelings is often followed by regret or guilt over what we said or did.

The mind is not a very good manager of the energy of emotions. It tends to magnify feelings and the thoughts generated by them. This magnification is what makes it seem important to suppress the feelings or release them through expression.

Another possibility is to drop into the Heart and experience the feeling from an open, spacious perspective. From the infinite space of Being, even a very strong emotion is not that significant. It is not that important to either suppress or express feelings when there is so much space available for them.

Exercise: Remember a recent experience that triggered a strong emotion in you. As much as possible allow yourself to feel the feelings you had. Then drop into the depth of your heart and especially your belly if it is difficult to contain or stay with the feelings. Remember that you can also simply give space to the feeling, as much space as it needs. How important is the feeling when you give it lots of space and experience it from deep within? Is there room here for the feeling to be here just the way it is? As you rest ever more deeply in the heart and belly, do you

really need to either suppress your feelings or to vent them or express them strongly?

When you explore your feelings this way, be gentle and patient with yourself. Feelings often have strong charges and sensations associated with them that can be very difficult to experience. It may be helpful to find a therapist, counselor, spiritual guide, or group that is supportive of this kind of exploration.

As you practice dropping into the Heart and belly, or simply giving space to your strong emotions, you will find that it becomes much easier to experience, explore, and understand your feelings. Much of the energy and charged quality of your emotions is on the surface of your feelings, so when you look at your feelings from the outside with your mind, they can seem painful or overwhelming. However, when you drop into the Heart, those same feelings can be experienced as rich and full and without the sense of pressure or overwhelm. It doesn't matter so much what you feel or how strongly you feel something but where you experience it from. From the spacious, openness of true Being, there is plenty of room for strong emotions to arise.

When a strong emotion is present, you may find it difficult to drop into your Heart. This is because, as you drop into your Heart, you are starting to move inside the emotion rather than remain on the surface of it. Since most of the energy and sensations associated with your feelings are on the surface of them, as you drop into your Heart, you also drop through the energetically charged surface. This can be like jumping through a hoop of fire: It's only hot if you stop halfway through. With experience, you will find that it gets easier to trust dropping into the Heart when a strong emotion is triggered. While it may be more intense at first, the end result is a profound softening and relaxation of the struggle to contain or express your feelings.

What if you have within you the space and limitless capacity to really feel your most intense emotions? What if there is no problem with feelings as long as there is enough space for them to be here? What if you could just allow them to be here without having to exert yourself to suppress or resist them? What if you could allow them to be here so completely that you didn't even need to express or release them?

You may be surprised to find that it is possible to enjoy the richness and fullness of emotional energies when there is so much room, or space, for them in your Heart and Being. When something like anger or sadness arises, you may even find it is more satisfying to just feel them rather than express them. Why waste all that red hot energy of anger on somebody else? Why not just let it warm you and fill you with strength? With a big enough container, all of your emotions can add to the fullness of life. In your true Being, you already have a big enough container.

Desire

Desires push and pull you in so many directions. It is as if you were magnetized to what you desire: When you see something you want, or even if you think about something you

want, you are irresistibly drawn to move towards it. On top of this, you have lots of contradictory desires, which leave you with internal conflicts: “I want to eat more, and I want to lose weight.” “I want to find a relationship, and I want to be independent.” “I want to buy a vacation house, and I want to simplify my life.” However, desire is also normal and natural. It is what fuels many of your actions and accomplishments.

What really matters is not what desires you have, but where you experience them from. When you experience a desire from the head, you are on the surface of it and feeling the full force of wanting, as it draws you towards the object of your desire. When you drop into the Heart and experience the same desire from deeper within, you are taken to the source of the desire, where the force of the magnetic pull is less powerful. The desire is still present, but you are resting in the quiet source of your impulse to act.

The difference is like being in the rushing water of a giant spillway versus resting in the lake that is the source of the spillway. If you stay in the head, with its magnified focus on the object of desire, that is like being in the rushing water that is destined to flow over the spillway. From there, it is extremely difficult to resist the flow of desire, and most of the time, we don't. However, when you drop into your Heart and belly, it is like being in the center of the lake, where the water is still and calm. The spillway of your desire is still present, but there is more choice about whether to act on it or not.

Exercise: Think of something you really want—a possession or an experience you desire. As you think about it, notice what that is like. Can you feel the magnetic pull of that object of desire? As you continue to focus on it with your mind, it may seem more and more important and irresistible. Now move down into the Heart and/or belly and experience your desire from there. You don't need to change your desire; just experience the same pull from deep within your Being. How important is the desire when you feel it from the Heart and belly? Is it easier to resist the pull, to just rest here in the spaciousness of your Being?

As you rest deeply in your Heart, it is more possible to see the full range of your desires and impulses. You have many desires. Since you do have so many, including contradictory and unhealthy ones, it can be helpful to rest in the Heart, where you can more easily see which ones are true and valuable. Even very strong contradictory desires are not a problem when you are resting in the center of your Being, where they don't have so much leverage.

Exercise: Take a moment to list several of the desires you have in this moment. Be sure to include any contradictory or opposite ones, which create internal conflicts (e.g., wanting to eat more and wanting to lose weight). Notice what it is like to have all these desires. Do you feel pulled this way and that by them? Can you feel how some desires pull you in opposite directions? Now drop into your Heart and/or belly and consider the full range of your desires from deep within. Here in the stillness of your Being, how important are your desires? When you rest in the center of your Being, do they push and pull you as strongly? Take a moment to

consider from your Heart which desires are worth acting on and which ones are not.

When you experience desires with the mind, trying to manage all of the impulses you have around them can be exhausting. Even when you satisfy one, it usually stirs up an opposite one. This is why we end up in yo-yo patterns of behavior. In contrast, when you experience desires from your Heart and belly, satisfying them is not so important. Paradoxically, this makes it easier to see how to respond to them.

This practice of experiencing desires from the Heart and belly can be especially useful in regard to addictions or compulsions. Addictions are desires we have been so strongly imprinted or conditioned to pay attention to that they often seem truly irresistible. Nevertheless, if you rest more deeply in your Being, it is possible to resist them. With any very strong impulse or addiction, it is especially helpful to move all the way down into the belly and experience it from there. The belly is a place of solidity and groundedness. Dropping all the way into your belly is like sinking to the bottom of the lake and becoming a giant boulder. Even the strongest spillways of desperate desire won't be able to move you from the mountain of Presence in your belly.

The Buddha said that desire is the cause of all of suffering. And yet, the end of your suffering isn't dependent on getting rid of your desires but on simply moving into the depths of your Being and experiencing them from a place where they have much less pull. Your suffering is the internal conflict you experience when you are so mentally involved with your desires that you feel you must satisfy or resist them. As you move into the Heart and belly, your desires no longer push and pull on you so strongly, and the effort to control them or satisfy them is no longer there and neither is the suffering. Being in the Heart allows you to be at peace internally while you move through life.

Relationships

Your life is full of relationships: with people, objects, nature, the world, and society in general. Your experience of these relationships is affected by your conditioning. The good news is that you don't have to get rid of the conditioning that limits or diminishes your ability to be fulfilled in your relationships. When this conditioning arises in relationships, you can simply allow your awareness to flow from the Heart and belly rather than from the mind.

Exercise: Think of someone in your life whom you are having difficulty with. For a moment, allow yourself to experience all the reactions and judgments this person evokes. Notice what it is like to be very involved with thoughts about this person. Allow any thoughts that arise, and notice what it is like to experience them from the head. Really focus on the details of your relationship: what he or she said or did, how he or she said or did it, etc. Now drop into your Heart and/or belly as you continue to consider that person. What is it like to experience another from the Heart and belly? You don't have to change anything about what he or she did or said. Give that person space to be the way he or she is, and give

yourself space to feel the way you feel. Notice what the experience of the other is like from in your Heart. Is there more ability to allow that person to be the way he or she is? Are you able to perceive even more of his or her nature?

Sometimes we are afraid that if we don't defend ourselves with judgments, we will be a doormat to the undesirable behaviors of others. However, when we are busy with our thoughts and judgments, we aren't able to be present to others in the moment. Our thoughts and judgments keep us at a distance from reality and interfere with relating to others as they are in the moment. As you experience others from the Heart and belly, all of your senses and observations are flowing freely, and you can respond to what is actually present or happening. When your awareness flows from the belly, you are especially able to act or respond appropriately with strength and firmness if that is needed.

Exercise: Imagine or remember a situation where someone confronts you with criticism or conflict. Notice what it is like as you think about the situation from your head. Now drop your awareness into your belly. Take a moment to really experience the firmness or strength that flows from here. What is it like to consider the criticism or conflict from this place of solid Presence? How important or overwhelming does it seem when you are experiencing it from a spacious and solid center? Try dropping into your belly just before and during any challenging interactions that come up in your life.

We have been conditioned to pay lots of attention to others, either to protect ourselves or to be nice and take care of others. Unfortunately, because our attention or awareness seems limited, we often abandon ourselves to take care of others. It can be a big relief to discover that there is enough awareness available to pay attention to others and also to stay in full contact with our own experience and Being.

Exercise: Imagine or remember a situation where you were very focused on someone else and his or her needs. Notice what it is like to focus (from your mind) on what is happening for that person and what he or she wants. Where are you when your focus is totally on that person? Now drop into your Heart and/or belly and allow awareness to flow equally and freely to the other person and to your own sensations and responses. See if you can fully sense that person's presence and needs and at the same time fully sense your own presence and needs. The openness of awareness that flows from your Heart and belly is available for everyone present—including you!

In addition to being the source of many challenges, relationships are also the source of great joy and satisfaction. Why not experience the richness of life's gifts from a place of openness and full awareness?

Exercise: Think of someone you feel great love and/or appreciation for. For a moment, just think about that person only from your head. Notice the degree of connectedness and intimacy you can experience through the head. Now drop

down into the fullness of your Heart and belly and allow your love and appreciation to flow from the depths of your Being. How is it to experience this fuller flow of connection and intimacy? Try dropping into your Heart and belly just before and during any intimate and joyful interaction that comes up in your life.

Surprisingly, we can also abandon ourselves when we focus positively on others. We project all of the goodness and joy onto them, and we may even become overly attached because we assume they are the source of that joy and fulfillment. Even in the most satisfying moments of deep contact and enjoyment with others, there is enough awareness available to include your own Being and the limitless source of joy that you are.

Exercise: Imagine or remember a moment when you found great joy in another. Notice what it is like to focus entirely on that person with your Heart as you experience his or her goodness and presence. Now drop deeply into your Heart and belly and notice what it is like to also be fully aware of the goodness and presence in your own Being. There is goodness and presence in everyone—including you!

The Body

We are strongly imprinted onto and identified with our physical bodies, so much so that it can seem crazy to even question the belief “I am the body.” Underlying this belief is the belief that the physical dimension of life is the most real. We believe in something when we can see, hear, or touch it. While there is nothing wrong with or bad about the physical world or our bodies, such a strong focus on that dimension of life is limiting. We can be so involved with the experiences on the physical level that we overlook, discount, or deny the experiences of more subtle dimensions.

Our over-involvement and identification with the body can also cause a lot of suffering. How we look or feel physically can seem much too important, and we suffer over it. The suffering doesn't actually come from our physical reality, but from our judgments and excessive effort to change, improve, or protect the body. Our true nature is much more vast and spacious than our physical form and appearance, but when we struggle to change or improve the physical, we suffer.

Doing things to take care of the body, like eating well and exercising, is not a problem. The problem is an over-involvement with our body image and judgments about our body. We are so involved with our images, fears, doubts, and worries about our bodies that we don't experience the body as it is. The body-image can seem more real than the body itself. This image is often felt to be inferior and to require a lot to make it better.

Fortunately, the antidote to this suffering is not to improve your body image but to experience your ideas about the body and the body itself from deeper within your Being. Without changing what you think or what you look like, you can experience all of that

from your Heart. The body and your judgments of it become much less important when seen from the Heart. You can sense the spaciousness of Being in which the body and your body-images appear. What you are is that space, and the body is only a small part of what appears within you. There is also your love, wisdom, compassion, strength and the simple miracle of your awareness. These non-physical dimensions of your Being are actually much larger and more real than the body.

This broader perspective doesn't disconnect you from your body or physical sensations, even if they no longer seem so important. Instead, putting physical reality into perspective frees you to fully experience the richness of experience available in the physical world. When it is not so important to change or improve your body and sensory experiences, you can simply enjoy your body as it is.

Exercise: Take a moment to notice your body. Observe how you are currently experiencing the body and notice the thoughts, feelings, and desires that arise when you consider your body. Now notice where you are experiencing your body from. If you are experiencing it from your head, notice what that is like. Do you really feel your body from up in your head, or are you mostly thinking about it? Notice any judgments, fears, worries, pride, resentments, or attachments you have in regard to your body.

Now drop down into your Heart and belly and experience the body from deep within your Being. Continue to notice all the ideas, beliefs, and reactions you have to the body that are going on in your head. Then sense the physical form of your arms, legs, and torso from deep within. What are the physical sensations of your body like when you experience them from your Heart and belly? How important are they? Can you sense the open, spacious awareness that your body and so much more of your Being is appearing in? Can you sense the field of awareness the body appears in and the many other rich dimensions to your Being in that open awareness? Check if there is any peace, love, compassion, or curiosity in your awareness. How important is it to fix or change your body when you experience it from deep within? How important is your body when you can also sense many other dimensions of your Being?

While you rest more deeply in the spaciousness of your Heart, remember to also give space to the body. Give it the space to be the way it is in this moment. Return to the physical sensations of your body in this moment and experience them from the Heart with this expanded perspective. Notice if there are sensations of heat or coolness. Notice any pressure or texture to the objects you are touching. Notice any sounds or visual sensations or internal sensations of the body, as you breathe and digest your most recent meal. Does resting in the Heart allow you to experience the physical sensations of your body more fully?

The body is one of the more miraculous creations of your Being. Shifting out of the head, where over-identification with the body occurs, allows you to more completely experience the incredible symphony of physical sensation going on in every moment,

without the suffering caused by endlessly trying to fix or change your body. There is enough space and awareness for every amazing bodily experience that life offers and also for all of the other dimensions of your Being. Dropping into the Heart allows the richness of life to be met and enjoyed.

Pain

Enjoying the body sounds great, but what about when you are in pain? Physical pain is there for a reason. It is usually telling us that something in the body is out of balance or needs attention. The pain of a blister is there so that you will stop and put on a band-aid. The continuing pain of a physical illness or injury is there so that you will get treatment or rest. A life without the capacity to feel pain would be dangerous and disastrous. So, it is important to recognize the message in pain and respond to it.

Having said that, it is possible to have pain but not suffer over it. Suffering doesn't come from physical pain but from our judgments about it, our resistance to it, and our struggle to change it. When we experience pain through the head, the experience is strongly colored by all of our beliefs and fears about pain and what it may mean in terms of our safety and well being. Pain scares us (because of what we believe about it), so we struggle to get away from it. Our suffering actually comes from these beliefs and fears and our struggle to get away from the pain—not from the pain itself, which is only sensations. We learn to associate the sensations of pain with the internal experience of suffering and struggle.

This association of pain with suffering and struggle can make the pain worse. In his books about back pain and mind-body medicine, Dr. John Sarno explains how our anxiety about pain triggers physiological responses that cause more pain. This can become a vicious cycle, in which our beliefs about pain cause more pain, which triggers more fear and then more pain.

One way to interrupt this cycle is to give space to the physical sensations just as they are, and then drop into the Heart where it is easier to experience the sensations directly. From the Heart, it is possible to separate the experience of physical sensations from the thoughts and beliefs about them and thereby eliminate suffering.

Exercise: Notice if there are any painful sensations in your body right now. It is best to start with something simple, like a minor ache or even just an itch. If there are no painful sensations present, then remember a physical pain you had in the past and work with that. Repeat this exercise when you are having some pain.

Notice all of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the painful sensation. See if you can discover some of the beliefs and, especially, the fears you have regarding pain.

Notice where you are experiencing the pain and the thoughts from. If you are experiencing them through the head, what is that like? How important does the

pain seem? How important do any fears, doubts, or worries about the pain seem when you experience them through your head?

Now drop down into your Heart and especially your belly and experience the sensations and thoughts from there. What is that like? How important is the painful sensation from this grounded and spacious perspective? How important are any fears, doubts, or worries that are happening in the head? Take some time to sense the physical sensations you are experiencing while resting deeply in your Being. What is the sensation itself like if you pay full attention to it and for a moment just give space to the thoughts and fears in the head, without paying attention to them? What are the pure sensations like? Is there one constant sensation or an ever-changing series of sensations in the painful area? Exactly where is the sensation located? What is the quality of the sensation right now, and now what is it like in the next moment? Give space to the sensations as they occur and rest as deeply as possible in the Heart and belly.

As you continue to give your full attention to the sensations in your body moment to moment, notice what the overall quality of your experience is like. Are you able to relax with the pain when you give it your full attention, as you rest more deeply in your Heart? Is there as much of a sense that the pain is a problem, or is the pain more of an experience of ever-changing sensations? Do the sensations have the quality of suffering when you experience them this way? Or are they more bearable or at least less uncomfortable when you experience them from your Heart? Is it possible that the suffering comes from the magnified experience of judgment and fear that happens when you are in your head and caught up in your thoughts about the pain? Is there less or possibly even no discomfort in the sensations when you experience them free of the coloring of your mind's comments and projected fears?

Especially if there is some kind of chronic painful condition, take some time to rest deeply in this more relaxed open place of simple sensation. Give yourself a moments' rest from the struggle to fix or change the sensations.

Remember you can still do whatever is indicated to take care of your body and any painful messages it is sending you. As you take action to relieve or correct a painful condition, continue to explore the truth of where the suffering comes from. Is it possible to experience pain from a depth of your Being where there is no resistance to the situation and therefore no real suffering over it?

It is best to begin this exploration with something simple like a minor ache or other relatively small pain before you attempt to discern the true source of suffering in a strong pain. However, it is profound to discover that the same principle applies to the more painful conditions that can arise. Imagine how freeing it would be to discover that even extreme pain is not the cause of your suffering—that you can always drop into the spaciousness of Being and experience the most difficult sensations from there. While you still need to do whatever is within your power to correct or relieve the pain, the

perspective of the Heart offers a simple way to reduce or relieve the suffering that is so often associated with physical pain.

Death and Loss

In some spiritual traditions, life—and particularly the experience of loss—is seen as an opportunity to practice for the ultimate loss—death. The belief is that if you can remain fully present and aware at the actual moment of physical death, it is a sign that you are free of the limited perspectives that cause all of our suffering. Everything short of death is an opportunity to explore this possibility when the stakes are not as high. You have all of the rich and varied experiences of ordinary life to practice with before you meet the moment of your death.

Just as physical pain is one of the more challenging experiences to meet with an open Heart and a full and grounded perspective, so are the moments when we are confronted with death or loss. Like pain, death and loss stir up all our fears. These moments are opportunities to explore the truth of your mortality and the impermanence of everything and everybody you love. Why not explore this most challenging aspect of life from the wisest and most complete dimension of your Being? Why not face death, your own or others, from your Heart instead of just with your mind?

Exercise: Take a moment to sense the possibility of your own death. You can also do this exercise by sensing the possibility of the death or loss of anything or anyone you hold dear. Allow yourself to consider the many consequences of the end of your physical existence or the loss of someone or something. Notice all of the thoughts, feelings, desires, reactions, fears, and beliefs that are stirred up by considering this. Now notice where you are experiencing these thoughts and feelings from. If you are mostly experiencing them through your head, what is that like? How important or difficult does death or loss seem to be from that perspective?

Now drop deeply into your Heart and allow the awareness of the same possibility of death or loss to flow from the most open, spacious dimensions of your Being. How is that to sense this possibility from your depths? How important or difficult does death or loss seem from deep within awareness itself? Take some time to rest here in the Heart and sense the endless flow of time through all comings and goings of form and experience. Drop as deeply as you can into the spacious awareness in which your body appears and into which it will return.

You can return to this exploration again whenever the thought of death or loss arises, especially if you or someone you care about is facing this possibility. While it is inherently freeing and liberating to discover that your true nature is limitless eternal space, this discovery is especially profound if you are facing a death or loss. Space itself cannot be harmed or diminished in any way. What a profound gift to recognize that space is what you actually are and what you always will be.

Chapter 6

What Is Going on Here?

The Qualities of Awareness

The exercises and practices offered here can profoundly shift the way you experience your life, the events, and the people in it. When you experience your everyday life from your Heart, it can seem like you are living in a completely new world. And in a sense, that is true. It is a world where what happens is less important than where you are experiencing it from.

Why does this shift to looking from the Heart have such a profound effect on your experience? Even when it doesn't actually change what is happening, the difference can be transformative. This is because looking from the Heart shifts you more fully into your own Being, your true nature. While you are made of aware space, it is not exactly empty space. Everything that really matters is found in the space that you are and not in the external events or experiences of life, as we so often assume. For example, the experience of joy or happiness is a natural quality of the openness of aware space. When your awareness opens up and flows more freely, you naturally become more joyful and fulfilled. This happiness is inherent to the space of Being, so life naturally becomes a fuller and richer experience as you move more fully into the space of your Being.

This can and does also happen when external circumstances line up with your desires. However, this is only because the desire has been fulfilled, so your awareness relaxes and expands, and in that expanded awareness is an experience of joy and happiness—for the moment. Unfortunately, we often mistakenly assume that the external circumstance is the source of the happiness, when the true source is actually the spaciousness of your Being.

The same principle applies to everything that really matters in life: love, peace, worthiness or value, compassion, clarity, wisdom, strength, beauty, and perfection. These very real and important experiences are qualities of the space that you are. So anything that opens up your experience of this spaciousness can put you more in touch with these qualities of Being. Anytime you have been in contact with the truly meaningful dimensions of life, you have been contacting this spacious awareness of your Being and the qualities inherent in it.

It Is All Divine Nature

The experience of looking from the Heart is quite different from looking from the head, but the looking itself is fundamentally the same. To contact your Being, it is actually not necessary to look from the Heart or from anywhere in particular. While it is much easier to contact the nature of your Being when you look from the Heart, even when it is

flowing less fully, it is still your true nature. The point of these exercises is to show you the nature of your Being so thoroughly that you can rest as that aware space.

It is freeing to experience your capacity to look from the Heart and experience more fully the limitless nature of your Being. It is even more freeing to discover that this is always the nature of your Being, no matter what is shaping or limiting your experience of it. You can rest in this essential awareness no matter what is happening or how you are experiencing it. Just as you don't need to see your car to know that it exists, you don't need to have a rich and full experience of your Being in every moment to know that it exists. It is always here. It is what is living you.

This alive awareness and spaciousness is the nature of you. It is your divine nature. You are divine. Even when you are contracted and confused, you are divine. It is all divine. That is all there is and you are that.

What are you?

It doesn't matter that much what you are experiencing in life. What matters is where you are experiencing it from. What matters is what you really *are*. Is it possible that you really are not the body or the personality or your mind? Is it possible that these are things you experience but they are not what you are made of? Is it possible that you are space—an open and allowing space—that the body and the mind appear in? What if this space is aware? What if it is really the space that is perceiving these words?

This space that you are is limitless. This space of Being has no boundaries. If you go on and on forever, what would this mean? What would this mean if there is unlimited awareness available in every moment? Would you still need to be so careful about what you experience and what you avoid? Or could you just allow every experience to have some of the limitless space that you are?

What if there is only one space? You are it, and so is everyone and everything. What if you already contain everything you could ever desire or want to experience? What if you already are everything you want to become?

What if this space is alive? What if space itself is the aliveness you feel right now? What if this space is full of peace and joy and love? What if this space is already full and rich and satisfying in ways that the experiences of the world have never been?

What if this space is you?

Exercise: Take a moment to reread the last five paragraphs while resting deeply in your Heart. Take each question one at a time and hold it in awareness as you drop more deeply into the spaciousness of your Being. Don't worry about getting an answer or holding on to any answers that arise. The questions themselves will show you more and more of the truth of your nature.

Welcome home

Like any good adventure, this exploration of your nature can bring you back to where you started, only with a transformed and more complete view. Where you start and where you end up is always in what you really are: aware space. Welcome home.

it is here
in the breath
it is here
in the stillness between breaths
 it is here
 in the active mind
 it is here
 in the resting mind
it is here
in the dream's panorama
it is here
in each moment of awakening
 it is here
 when all is well
 it is here
 when fear has nothing left to fear
even then
there is pure noticing
even then
there is no need for doing
 no frantic searching
 can find the obvious
 no seeking needed
 to find that which seeks
it is here
where it can never be lost
or found

CONTACT INFORMATION

For information about Nirmala's satsang* schedule and to download free copies of his other books and publications, visit:
www.endless-satsang.com

You can contact Nirmala at *Nirmalanow@aol.com*.

For information about Nirmala's teacher, Neelam, visit: www.neelam.org.

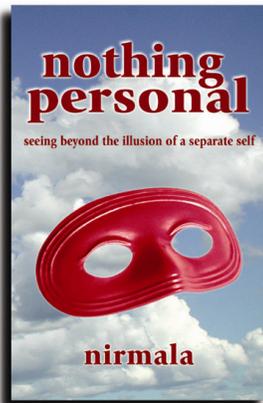
For information about Nirmala's teacher, Adyashanti, visit: www.adyashanti.org.

For information about Nirmala's wife's book, *Radical Happiness: A Guide to Awakening* by Gina Lake, visit www.radicalhappiness.com.

Nirmala has also been profoundly inspired by the teachings of A.H Almaas and his work, *The Diamond Approach*: www.ahalmaas.com.

* *Satsang* is a Sanskrit word that means coming together to speak about and share Truth.

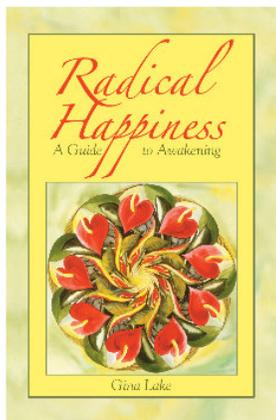
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***Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self* by Nirmala.** In this concisely edited collection of satsang talks and dialogues, Nirmala “welcomes whatever arises within the field of experience. In the midst of this welcoming is always an invitation to inquire deeply within, to the core of who and what you are. Again and again, Nirmala points the questions back to the questioner and beyond to the very source of existence itself—to the faceless awareness that holds both the question and the questioner in a timeless embrace.”

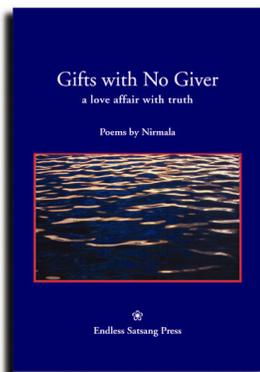
–From the Foreword by Adyashanti

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***Gifts with No Giver* by Nirmala,** non-dual poetry.

truth is too simple for words
 before thought gets tangled up in nouns and verbs
 there is a wordless sound
 a deep breathless sigh
 of overwhelming relief
 to find the end of fiction
 in this ordinary
 yet extraordinary moment
 when words are recognized
 as words
 and truth is recognized
 as everything else

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The following PDF e-books are available for free from www.endless-satsang.com:

From the Heart: Dropping out of Your Mind and Into Your Being

Nirmala's newest e-book offers simple ways to shift into a more open and allowing perspective and to experience your true nature as aware space. Here is an excerpt from the Introduction:

“You may think it matters what happens. But what if the only thing that matters is where you are experiencing from, where you are looking from? What if you could experience all of life from a spacious, open perspective where anything can happen and there is room for all of it, where there is no need to pick and choose, to put up barriers or resist any of it, where nothing is a problem and everything just adds to the richness of life? What if this open, spacious perspective was the most natural and easy thing to do?

It may sound too good to be true, but we all have a natural capacity to experience life in this way. The only requirement is to look from the Heart instead of from the eyes and the head—and not just to look, but to listen and feel and sense from the Heart.

In some spiritual traditions you are encouraged to look in your Heart, and yet what does that mean exactly? Often we are so used to looking and sensing through the head and the mind that when we are asked to look in the Heart, we look *through* the head into the Heart to see what is there. Usually we end up just thinking about the Heart. But what if you could drop into the Heart and look from there? How would your life look right now? Is it possible that there is another world right in front of you that you can only see with the Heart and not with the mind?

This book invites you to explore this radically different perspective and to find out what is true and real when the world and your life are viewed from the Heart of Being. It may both delight and shock you to find that so much richness and wonder and beauty lie so close and are so immediately available to you.”

The Heart's Wisdom

In this short booklet, Nirmala points the reader back to the Heart, the truest source of wisdom. Here are some excerpts:

“The Heart is wise and accurate and can show you how true it is to stay or go, how true it is to buy a house, how true it is to take a new job, even how true it is to eat another cookie. But it also can show you much more of the possibilities inherent in this life and much more of the truth of your ultimate Being. In relation to these bigger truths, the practical questions of your life turn out to be relatively small matters. Using your Heart only to know things like what to do or where to live is like using a global positioning satellite system to find the way from your bedroom to your bathroom; it utilizes only a small part of your Heart's capacity.

However, following your Heart day in and day out can put you in touch with the richness of the functioning of this dimension of your Being. Along the way, you may also find your Heart opening in response to the deeper movements of Being that touch every life.”

“In the midst of a very profound and large experience of truth, the sense of your self can become so large and inclusive that it no longer has much of a sense of being your Being. When you awaken to the oneness of all things, the sense of a me can thin out quite dramatically. If you are the couch you are sitting on and the clouds in the sky and everything else, then it simply doesn't make sense to call it all me. If it's so much more than what you usually take yourself to be, then the term me is just too small.

In a profound experience of truth, the sense of me softens and expands to such a degree that there's only a slight sense of me as a separate self remaining, perhaps just as the observer of the vastness of truth. Beyond these profound experiences of the truth, is the truth itself. When you're in touch with the ultimate truth and the most complete sense of Being, there's nothing separate remaining to sense itself there's no experience and no experiencer, no Heart, and no sense of self. There is only Being.”

Living Life as a Question

This is a compilation of talks given in satsang by Nirmala from 2002-2004 throughout North America. They have been edited and arranged to read in sequence. Satsang is a Sanskrit word meaning “gathering for the Truth.” This truth does not refer to any particular dogma but rather to the truth of who you are, the truth of your Being. Here is an excerpt:

“We’ve been so conditioned to think the point of questions is to get answers that we overlook that the point of answers is that they get us to more questions. The questions are as valid and rich as any answer because every answer is full of questions. You can even begin to enjoy the questions, even trust the questions, as much as any answer that comes.

When you value the questions themselves, you just naturally hold the answers more lightly because they aren’t the goal. If the question is just as rich as the answer, then it’s fine if the answer comes and goes. Have you ever noticed that you’ve forgotten everything you once understood? Every insight you’ve ever had has faded, and that’s great because then you’re back in the question. You’re back in this really alive place where you’re getting to find out what you know now, what’s happening now, what’s moving, what’s changing, what it’s like now. What is it like now? You’ll never be done with that question. What’s happening now? You could say that answers are just a temporary side effect of having questions.

This is a gentler, more respectful way of being with your experience. It’s a more intimate way of being with your experience every moment to ask what it’s like instead of How can I fix it? How can I get more? How can I get less? How can I improve it? How can I change it? How can I avoid it? How can I hang onto it? Do you see how all of these questions have an effort to them? They have a sense of violence to them, a sense of being in battle with or in opposition to your life. It’s hard to be intimate with someone when you’re pushing them out the door or trying to keep them from leaving. There’s no intimacy in that kind of interaction. How much possibility is there for real, deep contact? The same thing is true for other dimensions of our Being. The opportunity is to intimately experience the expansions and contractions, the openings and the closings, the freedom and the stuckness, the wonder and the confusion, the understanding and the lack of understanding.”

Gifts With No Giver

A collection of poems by Nirmala. Here is a sample poem:

*every taste
every sensation
every possible pleasure
is already present
in the timeless
awareness
that is beating my heart
what use
in chasing dreams
that have already
come true*

Nothing Personal, Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self

Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self. In this concisely edited collection of satsang talks and dialogues, Nirmala “welcomes whatever arises within the field of experience. In the midst of this welcoming is always an invitation to inquire deeply within, to the core of who and what you are. Again and again, Nirmala points the questions back to the questioner and beyond to the very source of existence itself—to the faceless awareness that holds both the question and the questioner in a timeless embrace.” –From the Foreword by Adyashanti.

Testimonials about *Nothing Personal*:

“*Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self* is an excellent book, very clear and warm-hearted. I love it and recommend it highly. Nirmala is a genuine and authentic teacher, who points with great clarity to the simplicity and wonder of non-dual presence. He invites you to ‘say yes to the mystery of every moment.’ Good stuff!”

–Joan Tollifson, Advaita teacher and author of *Awake in the Heartland*

“Nirmala offers a variety of subtle spiritual practices for inquiring and seeing the truth about you in every moment and, most importantly, accepting it. First, you find the truth through inquiry; then you stay with it until you rest in it; then you fall deeply in love with it....Another beauty of this collection is that Nirmala does not attempt to reject anything that arises in consciousness by hiding out in the Absolute. As he says, accepting the whole truth means that nothing matters and everything matters: ‘The goal of spiritual life is not to transcend the world or be done with it but to bring the Absolute to the suffering of the world.’...Besides wisdom, you will find honesty and humor in these talks....This book points to that which we truly are - the already present and permanent source of joy and happiness, the Heart of Being.”

–Dennis L. Trunk, Third Millennium Gateway

“As with most modern books on Advaita, this is a psychological rather than a metaphysical presentation, but it is full of sincere love, wisdom and humour. It is highly practical and readable with many original ways of looking at the situation in which the seeker finds him/herself. I highly recommend this book. A wonderful gift to the Advaita community.” –Dennis Waite, author *The Book of One*.

Excerpt from *Nothing Personal*:

“What if even your strongest emotions aren’t personal? Is anything personal? What if this experience we are having as a body and mind is more like a radio that receives things rather than creates or generates them? You need a radio to play the songs that are passing through this room now, right? All this experience is floating around, and this radio called “you” is playing these songs called desire, fear, love, envy. Even resistance is just one more song called “I want to turn off the radio.” What if your internal experiences are not personal but more like something a musician recorded years ago and being played now?

Even the love songs aren’t personal. Even the very dramatic, very sad, very happy, or very romantic ones aren’t personal. There is nothing wrong with them; they just aren’t yours. You can still pay attention to them, but there is no reason to get invested in trying to change them or get them to stay around. Every song on the radio eventually ends—even “Bye-Bye Miss American Pie,” which was 17 minutes long. It would go on and on, but eventually there would be another commercial.

A radio is a great metaphor because a radio isn’t like a CD player, which you can program to play what you want it to play. What plays on the radio is not up to you. Sometimes, it is a happy song, sometimes it is a sad one, sometimes it is an inspiring one. The Mystery is so wise that it knows exactly what song to put on in this moment. It decides what song gets played, and once it has been played, you can’t hang on to it. Just being present while it is being played is the best you can do. That is all you *can* do. Paradoxically, this recognition that everything that arises on this radio called “you” is impersonal makes it easier to pay attention to what is arising because, if it’s not personal, there is no reason to hold back from it.”