

FOREWORD by MARCI SHIMOFF

# *Being* LOVE

How Loving Yourself Creates Ripples of  
Transformation in Your Relationships and the World



DR. DEBRA L. REBLE

# *Being* LOVE

How Loving Yourself Creates  
Ripples of Transformation in Your  
Relationships and the World





# PRAISE FOR *Being* LOVE...

“With deep wisdom, an open heart and impressive vulnerability, Dr. Debra Reble shines a bright light on how to embrace our connection to love, to the divine, to our truest self.”

*Arielle Ford*, author of  
*Turn Your Mate Into Your Soulmate*

“A manifesto of love. In *Being Love*, Dr. Debra Reble gently encourages readers to remember the truth of who they are—pure love. When we love ourselves and live from our heart space we become ambassadors of love in our relationships, communities and the world. A high-vibration must read!”

*Emmanuel Dagher*, Spiritual teacher and  
author of *Easy, Breezy Prosperity: The Five Foundations  
for a More Joyful, Abundant Life*

“*Being Love* is a beautiful and inspirational read. I was deeply moved by Debra’s vulnerability in sharing her own transformational journey. If you need a push to shift out of fear and negativity and into embracing the love that you are and becoming an ambassador of love on the planet, then don’t miss reading this book.”

*Margaret Paul*, PhD,  
co-creator of Inner Bonding® and author of *Healing Your  
Aloneness, Inner Bonding, Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By  
You?* and, *Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By God?*

“In *Being Love*, Dr. Debra Reble has written a powerful, much-needed guide that will help readers tap into an infinite flow of self-love and self-compassion to create beautiful, positive transformation in all areas of their life. I highly recommend this book!”

*Kristi Ling*, best-selling author of  
*Operation Happiness*

MORE  
PRAISE FOR  
*Being* LOVE...

"From the very first sentence of *Being Love*, I was hooked—in a good way! The promise of this book is a big one: that we are love, we can experience ourselves and others as love, and we can transform the world we see beyond us, through this force within us. I'm glad to say, *Being Love* delivers. It's is a juicy, loving blueprint for living from that place of promise. A book can transform the world—outside and inside—and *Being Love* does just that."

*Lisa Tener*, book coach

"*Being Love* by Dr. Debra L Reble not only speaks to your heart, but to your very essence. As she so aptly demonstrates throughout this gem, loving oneself is not a selfish act, it's essential in recognizing your truest self. Once we understand the wonderful concepts so beautifully illustrated on every page, we recognize how powerful we are, and how powerful, love really is. Dr Reble deftly explores the effects that self-love, loving others, and loving globally wield, and love's ability to heal and transform. Each chapter is also filled with concrete practices that can help you on your journey to activate love in your life and in the world. She is truly an ambassador of love, and it's time for all of us to join her. Thank you, Dr. Reble, for reminding us of who we really are!"

*Dr. Jo Anne White*, international best-selling Author of *More Heaven: Because Every Child Is Special*;  
Host and Producer of Power Your Life Radio & TV

"*Being Love* offers deep wisdom and tangible practices for fully embodying, being, and living as love. This book truly reveals how we can each do our part of healing the world with love."

*Stacey Hoffer*, self-love coach, creator of  
"Elevate Your Online Presence," and  
founder of Soul Alignment Living

# MORE PRAISE FOR *Being* LOVE...

“From the very beginning of *Being Love*, Dr. Debra Reble 's loving heart and presence can be felt right through the pages. With her words and wisdom, she evokes an immediate experience of warmth, calm, peace, and hope. When life presents challenges, we can become consumed in being our own worst critics, creating walls of distrust in our relationships, or feeling disconnected from the larger world around us. Dr. Reble 's message is a beautiful one: that we can love ourselves and others deeply by embracing transparency and vulnerability, showing compassion and forgiveness, and committing ourselves wholly in service to the greater good of humanity. When we do, we become love, and that love reverberates.”

*Dr. Colleen Georges*, Positive Psychologist,  
TEDx Speaker, five-time best-selling author,  
and *Huffington Post* blogger

“Dr. Debra Reble has woven a beautiful tapestry of personal storytelling, professional knowhow, and hard-earned spiritual wisdom into a lovely book that is both readable and inspiring. *Being Love* is one of those special books that I'll add to my library and recommend to friends and clients searching for love, self-worth, and their authentic soul-self.”

*Janet G Nestor*, author, licensed professional  
counselor, and Energy Psychologist

“*Being Love* is an important book—a beautiful validation that we were born to become the fullest expression of love. Dr. Reble teaches us how to be in the flow of pure love by sharing deeply personal stories and supportive self-love practices. *Being Love* reminded me that practicing loving kindness is the sweetest, most valuable expression of how I want to show up in the world.”

*Shann Vander Leek*, author, producer, and  
Transformation Goddess

MORE  
PRAISE FOR  
*Being* LOVE...

“Dr. Debra Reble is a shining beacon of light empowering each of us to discover our unique capacity to love. Viewing our life journeys through the sacred lens of love opens us to soulful healing and a fresh new outlook on our experiences. *Being Love* is a powerful tool to place in your personal transformation tool belt.”

*Jen Flick*, best-selling author

“This book is a gift. *Being Love* should be read by every woman who is ready to embark on a personal journey to empowerment, healing, and wholeness. Debra’s elegant and authentic way of sharing and teaching the process of cultivating self-love to embodying love touched me deeply, and I know you’ll feel the same way. I’m blessed to call Debra soul sister and now the world will receive the blessing of her wisdom too. Prepare a cup of tea, grab a comfy throw and curl up with this book, it’s nourishing food for your soul.”

*Lisa Marie Rosati*, best-selling author,  
Creatrix of The GoddessLifestylePlan.com

“From the first word to the last, Dr. Debra Reble has captured the essence of pure love with poignant elements that lifted my soul, warmed my heart, and gave me new insight to the emotional feeling we call love. With pioneering ways to transform our self-love, global love, and universal love, she has revealed her passion with incredible clarity and insight. Dr. Reble has an incredible ability to get into the soul of the matter and create change that makes sense with her intuitive understanding and intelligence. *Being Love* has changed my world and will continue to do so with grace.”

*Wendy Van de Poll*, MS, CEOL, Founder of  
the Center for Pet Loss Grief and best-selling author  
of *My Dog Is Dying: What Do I Do?*

# MORE PRAISE FOR *Being* LOVE...

“Raw, vulnerable, and inspiring, *Being Love* will open your heart and mind to the beautiful truth of who you are. With sincerity and grace, Debra shares her journey to self-acceptance and the wisdom that is revealed when we learn to let go of struggle and embrace who we are as the embodiment of pure Love. The transformational effects of this awareness are all-encompassing and make this a must-read for anyone looking to create meaningful change in any and all areas of their life.”

*Shelley Lundquist*, international best-selling author, Self-Mastery & Success Coach

“Dr. Debra Reble honestly and elegantly shares how she found a beautiful relationship with love, for herself and all those she meets. You will learn and feel the ripple effect of how peace and happiness is chasing you much more than you are chasing it. Debra’s spiritual resiliency steps gently and easily encourages self-awareness and personal growth. The more you let go of the need for other people’s approval, expectations of being appreciated, and validation of your worth from anything external, the more love will be eternally yours in everlasting abundance.”

*Deb Scott*, BA, CPC, best-selling author,  
award-winning radio host of  
“The Best People We Know Show”

“Dr. Debra L. Reble takes you on an intimate and vulnerable journey of healing through her authentic storytelling, case studies and practices. *Being Love* teaches you that love can transform us and our relationships with others and the world.”

*Lisa Hutchinson*, licensed psychotherapist  
for empathic helpers & artists



MORE  
PRAISE FOR  
*Being* LOVE...

“To understand that each of us is the essence of love, whole and complete just as we are, is the cornerstone of Dr. Debra Reble’s new book, *Being Love*. From this foundation that we are love, Dr. Reble gently guides readers to tap into this power force not only to transform our own lives, but also to become, as she so beautifully writes, ‘illuminating threads of light and love connecting the tapestry of humanity.’”

*Sheila Callahan*, best-selling  
author, intuitive success coach

“*Being Love* is a welcome invitation to use your heart to enhance your life and your relationships with others. Synthesizing insights from her own practice with spiritual tools, Dr. Debra Reble has assembled a thought-provoking and practical guide that walks you step-by-step through awakening your heart, living your purpose, and healing the world.”

*Stacey Curnow*, author of *The  
Positive Focus Journal: Daily Prompts for  
Creating Your Best Life Every Day*

“Debra’s book, *Being Love*, is a beautiful reminder of how love is our birthright, and how through the powerful energy of love, we have the ability to transform ourselves, those around us, and the world in general. The book is charged with beautiful and powerful insights that invite us into deep reflection, inspire transformation, and expand our consciousness.”

MORE  
PRAISE FOR  
*Being* LOVE...

"Through the intimate sharing of her own life experiences, Debra unravels the mystery that is love. She clearly helps us understand not only what love is but how opening our hearts is the key to healing ourselves, our relationships, and our world. Beautifully written, this powerful resource is overflowing with wisdom, tools, and practices to help us reclaim love and become the shining ambassadors of love that we are here to be."

*Pamela Henry*, certified Life  
Coach and best-selling author

"Debra skillfully and tenderly guides you on a path to a joy-filled homecoming: The heart space where *Being Love* is all there is. With her inspired insights and suggested practices, this is sure to become a classic, must-read book. Run—do not walk, do not pass go—and start reading now!"

*Lore Raymond*, Women as  
Visionaries

"In *Being Love*, Dr. Debra Reble's words are profoundly life-affirming and life-transforming. This book will undoubtedly give readers a new perspective on what it means to be love without conditions, without a scorecard, and without expectations. Debra eloquently shares stories from her own life—stories that mirror my own and those of countless others. She courageously teaches us how she reclaimed her power to be who we are *all* born to be: pure, radiant love. This book is a must-read for anyone and everyone ready to shine from their soul and share their light and love with the rest of the world."

*Peggy Nolan*, international best-  
selling author and host of the  
popular podcast, "Let Go Move Forward."

MORE  
PRAISE FOR  
*Being* LOVE...

"In *Being Love*, Debra clearly explains how love is our birthright—a gift we should bestow on ourselves as well as others. She lets us know that our vulnerability is our greatest gift, one that opens the doorway to love. She helps us learn to love and accept ourselves for who we are—to see ourselves as the love that we are. Her practices and exercises make love—even self-love—seem attainable as she walks us through how to cultivate love in ourselves, be authentically us, and walk in love. Your book is a gift. Thank you, Debra!"

*Dr. Mary E. Pritchard*, BodyLove expert

"*Being Love* captures the signature of pure love—that which so many of us yearn for, yet rarely experience in its fullness. [This book] is beautifully written, illustrating a host of effective practices for discovering the essence of love and revealing the methods available to shine its radiance into all significant relationships. Written with candor and humility, Debra's personal experiences are what set this book apart. She reveals her deep fears and challenges along with the magnificent triumph of discovering how to "love well" both inside and out. This book is a must-read!"

*Dianne Bischoff James*, author of *The Real Brass Ring*

*From my heart to yours!*

CLAIM YOUR  
*Ambassador*  
OF LOVE  
GIFT BUNDLE

AS A THANK YOU FOR YOUR PURCHASE!

*Being*  
**LOVE**   
SACRED GIFT BUNDLE



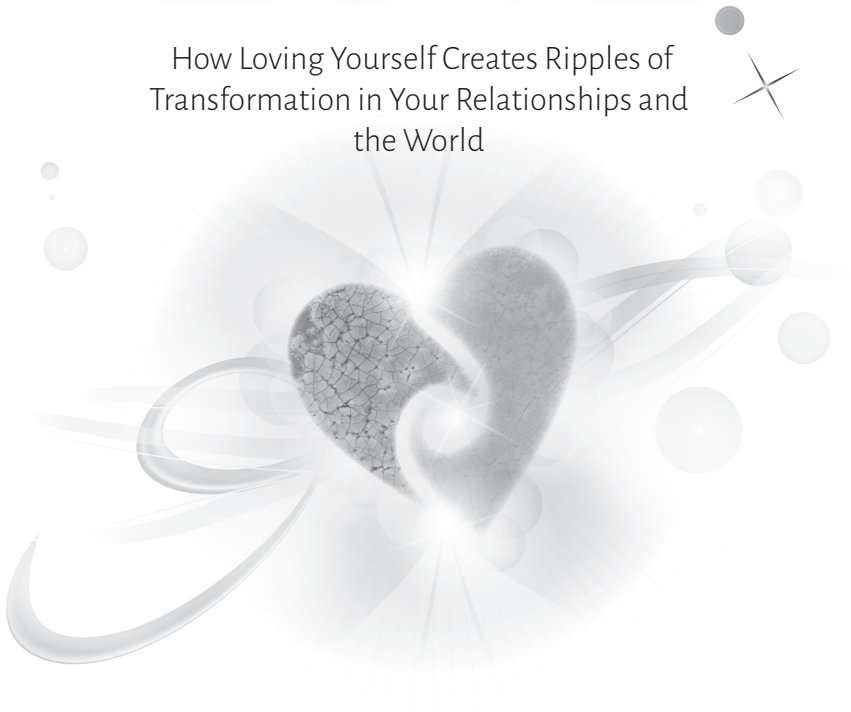
- The **Being Love Journal: 9 Spiritual Practices with Writing Prompts**(PDF)
- 2 beautiful Guided MP3 Audio Meditations:
  - "Connecting to Your Divine Essence"
  - "Coming Home to Your Heart"
- The gorgeous, printable **Being Love Affirmations Poster** (PDF)
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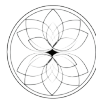


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**Dr. Debra L. Reble**



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# DEDICATION

This book is dedicated with infinite love, joy, and gratitude to the hearts  
of my heart: my son, Tom, and my daughter, Alex,  
who opened me to love.







# IN GRATITUDE ...

Special colleagues, mentors, friends, and family members have been instrumental in making this book a reality.

Linda Joy, my soul-hearted friend, coach, and publisher, whose impeccable guidance and support have made this project possible and birthed it into the world.

Ellen Kleiner, whose editorial vision helped shape this book from beginning to end.

Bryna René Haynes, whose encouragement and creative support have inspired me to become a better writer, and whose loving guidance elevated this book to be more than I could have imagined.

Rachel Dunham, who brought the concept of *Being Love* to life on the cover of this book through her intuitive and visionary artistry.

The multitude of amazing clients I have worked with, whose dedication to spiritual transformation, inner heart work, and life-changing results inspired me to develop this material.

My dear friends, the rare gems in my life, who have come into my life for a reason, season, or lifetime, and who stood by me with their patience, encouragement, and unending support during the time I spent writing this book. Your light has inspired me to shine mine.

My son, Thomas, and my daughter, Alexandra, whose radiant light, beautiful souls, and loving energies have facilitated my own transformation and inspired me to be a better person. I'm blessed that you chose me to be your mother in this lifetime.

My father, a blessing in my life and one of my greatest cheerleaders, I love you.

My dear husband, best friend, love of my life, and soul-hearted partner, Doug, who believed in me even when I stopped believing in myself, and whom I love with all my heart. Your smile makes my heart sing with joy.

And finally, you, the reader. Thank you for coming home to your own heart with me. It is an honor to guide your journey to your essence as love itself. May my words spark truth in your heart that resonates with your soul, and may they empower you to be an ambassador of love for yourself, others, and the world.



# FOREWORD

*by Marci Shimoff*

*T*his is an amazing time on our planet!

There's a "love revolution" happening—a revolution in the way we think about, understand, and experience love. This shift in perspective is something that's vital, both for ourselves and for humanity as a whole.

At the heart of this sweeping shift is a deep soul understanding that love is not, in fact, what we have always believed it to be. It's not conditional or object-based. It doesn't require anyone else's participation or reciprocation. We don't have to do anything to earn it, or become anything in order to receive it, because love is our *essence*—the radiant core of who we are. It's a state of being, an energy that exists for its own sake, without boundaries or qualifications. I call this "love for no reason."

Spiritual teachers in every culture have spoken about this experience of "Being Love"—of dwelling in our purest and most natural state—as the ultimate goal and purpose of our lives on Earth. We're all seeking this state, whether we're aware of it or not; our desire for our connection to this state of love is at the root of our constant search for fulfillment, and is the driving force behind all of our actions. Yet, most people on this planet haven't yet experienced Being Love. In fact, the majority of people I speak to every day are suffering quite a lot: in their relationships, in their work, in their finances, and in their health. There's a sense that something

is missing, or not quite right. They may feel empty inside, despite their outward success and accomplishments. They know, intuitively, that there is an answer to be found, but feel like they've run out of places to look.

What I've discovered is that, before we experience that we *are* love, we often try to *create* love through our personality selves—our minds, bodies, roles, and titles. When this fails to fulfill us in the ways we'd hoped, we move on to the next pursuit, never realizing that the answer has been waiting within our hearts all along. However, when we enter into a state of *Being Love*—of love for no reason—we create an internal sanctuary of trust, healing, and equilibrium. Our search is over. The void within us no longer exists, because our connection to the Divine, the greater energy of the Universe, is fully established. Suddenly, we no longer need to rely on our relationships, external circumstances, or achievements to create love in our lives. The Universe begins to reveal itself as a benevolent force that responds to our personal energy and supports us through all of life's challenges and joys.

You, regardless of your life experiences thus far, have the potential to activate your internal connection to this kind of love. Everyone can live in this awakened state, and more and more people already are. When asked how they achieved this, they all say the same thing: that the solution to all pain, and all suffering, is the recognition and experience of love as who we truly are.

In other words, the answer to our inner longing isn't finding love; it's *Being Love*.

The practices that Debra presents in this book are keys to opening your heart and receiving your divine birthright as a physical manifestation of love. Her techniques, developed over years of successful private practice with her clients and from her extensive training in multiple disciplines, are accessible, compassionate, and effective. She writes straight from the heart—the seat of love in the body—and she doesn't hold back. Her message is powerful, and, if you allow it, will change your whole life.

It's been said that even if only 1% of the world's population were to open to a state of Being Love, the cascade of positive change would be immeasurable. Why? Science is proving what the spiritual masters have known all along: everything in the Universe is energy, and love vibrates at a higher rate than any other energy. This means that it has a greater power to transform, influence, and even heal than any other force of nature. There's also strong scientific evidence that when we raise our own level of love, we radiate a heart-wave coherence that affects our families, our communities, and ultimately, the planet.

By picking up this book, and opening your heart and mind to its message, you're joining a small but growing group of heart-connected people who are ready to embrace radical transformation in order to invite greater joy, healing, and fulfillment into their lives.

Enjoy this journey, and remember: love is always on your side.

With love for no reason, and *every* reason,

*Marci Shimoff*

#1 *New York Times* best-selling author of *Love for No Reason*, *Happy for No Reason*, and *Chicken Soup for the Woman's Soul*, and transformational teacher.



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# INTRODUCTION

***O*ur soul purpose is to be and express love. We dream of love, we yearn for love, and we make love, but rarely do we realize that we *are* love.**

Love has been written about for centuries as something to have and to hold. We even think we must prove that we are worthy of love. Yet love isn't something we have to strive for; rather, it's a source of divine energy that we are, and will forever be.

Love is our birthright. We came into this life as pure love—an infinite, all-encompassing energy without conditions. When we acknowledge that we were born as divine energy incarnate, we can see ourselves as loveable, with no need to prove that we are worthy. With this illuminating truth as the core of our being, we then realize that love is who we are, and that it is the source from which all our thoughts, words, and choices flow.

Unfortunately, the fear of being unworthy of love has been at the root of personal suffering throughout human history. Today we may perceive that fear differently from previous generations, but suffering still occurs because of our feelings of lovelessness. The fear that we are unworthy of love prevents us from experiencing love and connection with ourselves and others. To escape from the pain of feeling unlovable, we numb our bodies, close our hearts, and disconnect from our spirits. However, the key to ending humanity's suffering is to step into the essence of our authentic selves, and fully know and express our true nature—which is, and has always been, love.

Just as gaining awareness of our true nature as love will help end our suffering, so too will shifting our focus from personal to universal love heal our hearts, and humanity. Since the start of the new millennium, an evolution of love has been accelerating. According to both ancient mysticism and modern philosophical thought, the primary challenge of our time is to shift from an ego-centered consciousness to a universal consciousness founded in love. Ideally, we are evolving from falling in love to flowing in love, changing our collective focus from personal love—directing our energies to one person or thing—to universal love that encompasses everyone and everything, and expands our consciousness beyond the conditions of the physical world.

As a result of this evolution of love, we have the opportunity to open our hearts more than ever before, and experience love in ways we may not have been capable of in the past. Instead of operating from such fear-based polarities as right/wrong, good/bad, and win/lose, we have the chance to awaken to the energetic power of love, which transcends physical time and form, and exists beyond problems, limitations, and suffering. Knowing that we are love will heal us in such a profound way that we will become conduits for the expression of love with ourselves, loved ones, and the world. And, since unity and duality coexist, it is possible to experience unconditional, universal love in a conditional world without fragmenting or limiting ourselves, and thus enjoy more harmonious and fulfilling lives.

This evolution of love we are experiencing is reflected in the plethora of media offerings and educational opportunities related to gratitude, compassion, and love as a healing energy. Increasingly, people are participating in seminars, workshops, and retreats focused on aspects of love. Consequently, as a human community, we are beginning to experience light energy through our hearts as the physical expression of love.

*Being Love: How Loving Yourself Creates Ripples of Transformation in Your Relationships and the World* is a call to experience a homecoming to our hearts. It chronicles our ability to transform ourselves, our relationships,

and our world through the powerful energy of love. My vision for this book is that everyone who reads it comes to know, as I have, that we *do* have the power and capacity to love ourselves wholeheartedly, and that, regardless of our circumstances, we can become ambassadors of love to each other and our world.

The concept of *Being Love* has been germinating within me for my entire life. I have always been drawn to the power of love. As a young girl, I wrote and recited poetry on the theme of love—a preoccupation which, unfortunately, was not inspired by an abundance of love in my life but rather by a shortage. Through the transformational work I have done and continue to do, I have opened my heart to love, nurture, and heal myself. In turn, this energy has expanded to my relationships and every other aspect of my life. I feel that my life experiences and heart-based practices of love qualify me to guide people on their path of personal transformation even more than my credentials as a healer, coach, psychologist, and teacher.

In my first book, *Soul-Hearted Partnership: Creating the Ultimate Experience of Love, Passion, and Intimacy*, I presented a spiritual template for having a soul-connected relationship with ourselves and a beloved. In *Being Love*, I expand this concept and reveal how, no matter what our circumstances, we can love, nurture, and heal ourselves, our relationships, and our world. The spiritual principles and practices presented in *Being Love* underlie those I teach my clients and incorporate into my everyday life; they will take you, the reader, step-by-step to an expanded perspective and practice of love.

Part I of this book addresses being love with ourselves. It reveals how even our most devastating experiences can be healed through the power of love, and describes the pathway to knowing the essence of ourselves by embracing our vulnerabilities. It illuminates how **we can realize the self as the source of love by opening our hearts to awaken to our authentic selves, listening to the guidance of our hearts, and cultivating compassion for ourselves**. It also discusses ways of tapping into the transformative power of love by healing ourselves, breaking free of our

comfort zones and releasing energy blocks.

Part II focuses on being love with others. It explores how, when love is our foundation, we can attract more love to us in the form of unconditionally loving relationships. It also reveals ways to co-create and sustain soul-hearted relationships through the mutual exchange of love, trust, transparency, and heightened intimacy, as well as ways to recognize and begin to heal the individual patterns which block us from receiving, and participating in, the soul-hearted partnerships we truly desire.

Part III discusses being love in the world. It describes paths for radiating love to everyone and everything around us—our families, our communities, and ultimately all of life. It illuminates the soul of love that can create a global climate of love, qualities for being an ambassador of love, how to transform the world through love, and what it is like to live in the flow of love.

Concluding each chapter are practices featuring the principles introduced. The practices provide you with the spiritual tools necessary for affirming and living as love in everyday life.

More than anything else, this book is a celebration of two extraordinary and life-changing truths: that we are here to be the fullest expression of love, and that love is the most transformative force in the universe. My hope is that the tools provided in this book guide you to embrace love as your inherent essence, and become an ambassador of love to yourself, your loved ones, and the world.

PART ONE

*Being*  
**LOVE**

**WITH  
OURSELVES**









# CHAPTER 1



*Vulnerability*  
OPENS US TO  
OUR ESSENCE AS  
LOVE

“ *There’s a crack in everything.  
That’s how the light gets in.* ”

—LEONARD COHEN

**Vulnerability brings us closest to our light.** It dissolves the protective layers surrounding our hearts and illuminates all that inhibits us from connecting in love to ourselves and others. Through bearing our souls, we stand naked in our truth—the truth that we are all one vibrating energy source as love.

Knowing that we are love heals us in a profound way and brings us into a wholeness we have not experienced since before we were born. Surrendering to our vulnerability is the divine pathway to loving ourselves and each other.

Embracing our vulnerabilities allows us to know the essence of ourselves, which is love. Connecting with our innermost selves is the catalyst for exposing and releasing the egocentric patterns that inhibit us from experiencing our authentic selves. At the same time, it infuses our lives with spiritual depth, bringing us closer to the light at our core.

Unfortunately, our culture teaches us that vulnerability is a sign of weakness. We are programmed to take a pill at the first symptom of pain; numb ourselves with alcohol, drugs, food, shopping, or sex when we feel uncomfortable; or escape through myriad distractions to avoid fear and shame. We are rarely encouraged to embrace our vulnerabilities, or told that doing so shows us how powerful we actually are. However, in truth, the more we embrace our vulnerabilities, the more we can experience self-love, connect empathetically with others, and become ambassadors of love in the world.

OUR NEED FOR  
*Love and  
Connection*

“ *The supreme happiness of life  
consists in the conviction that  
one is loved.* ”

—VICTOR HUGO

**A**cknowledging our need for love and connection is the first step in embracing our vulnerabilities and discovering the essence of ourselves as love. Being and expressing love in connection with others is our divine legacy, and our soul purpose in being here. The Sufi poet Rumi beautifully expressed this when he wrote, “Love is the vital core of the soul. And of all you see, only love is infinite.”<sup>1</sup> We have an innate need to connect to others, as we are soul-wired to love and be loved.

Love and connection are as essential to our existence as the air we breathe. When we, as spiritual beings, enter physical bodies, we temporarily separate from our divine Source, and instead become its physical expression: love. The moment we are born, we need love and connection—and if we do not receive them physically, emotionally, and spiritually, we fail to thrive. At birth, as spiritual beings in human form, we separate from our connection to a divine Source and immediately become dependent on the conditions of our physical universe to provide us with a sense of connection. In most cases, we attach to a human caregiver for survival. As we mature, we no longer need the same kinds of nurturing to thrive, but we continue to seek the same loving connections in all of our relationships. And if we are not linked to our Source—the divine—through our hearts, we can experience separation anxiety, just like a toddler separated from her mother. Thus, it is crucial that we connect to our core as the source of love.

Although we want to love and be loved, we rarely converse honestly about it. In fact, we are often confused about the meaning of love. In her book *All*

*About Love*, bell hooks writes, “Our confusion about what we mean when we use the word love is the source of our difficulty in loving. If our society had a commonly-held understanding of the meaning of love, the act of loving would not be so mystifying.”<sup>2</sup> Diane Ackerman also states in *A Natural History of Love*: “Love is the great intangible. Everyone admits that love is wonderful and necessary, yet no one can agree on what it is.”<sup>3</sup>

Many of us don't know what we intend when we say, “I love you.” We look to the dictionary definition of love with its emphasis on romantic love, primarily a passionate affection for another based on sexual attraction. We read about it in books and tabloids, and see it modeled on television and in movies. Yet romance is just one way to express love. Love is more than a feeling of affection and attraction—it is an energy source.

I define love as an infinite, dynamic, all-encompassing energy source that is our divine essence. Defining love as an energy source rather than a feeling gives us a spiritual perspective on love and helps us understand that we have a responsibility for being such a source in our own lives. Our brains have no comprehension of love, but our hearts know love as an energy source we can express through inspired actions. This puts the responsibility for creating a loving world on us. In his book *The Road Less Traveled*, M. Scott Peck supports this premise, stating, “Love is as love does.”<sup>4</sup>

**To truly know ourselves, we must become aware that we are each the source of this energy that flows through us—also referred to as light, God, higher power, universal energy, or divine intelligence.** The idea of God as the source of all that we are and will come to be, while often difficult to imagine, is an acknowledgment of love in ourselves and the world.

Love is also what connects us to other human beings and all of life. Even though we are not separate from the spiritual consciousness that permeates our physical universe, many of us feel disconnected when people do not understand us, do not feel the way we feel, or do not see things the way we see them. Even communicating with others can be



difficult when they seem to have different perspectives. Yet despite these challenges, we still have a strong, innate need to connect with others, to feel a sense of love and belonging.

Interestingly, science supports the widely accepted premise that we love instinctually. Brené Brown, in *The Gifts of Imperfection* and in her capacity as a professor of social work researching shame, fear, and vulnerability, found that “a deep sense of love and belonging is an irreducible need of all men, women and children.”<sup>5</sup> Her research suggests that there was one aspect separating those in her study who felt a deep sense of love and connection from those who struggled to find it: whether or not they felt worthy of love. Additionally, the latest research in neuroscience by Daniel Goleman, reported in *Social Intelligence*, suggests that we are biologically hardwired for connection. He states, “The more strongly connected we are with someone emotionally, the greater the mutual force.”<sup>6</sup>

To thrive in this physical universe, we must have a foundation of love and connection based not only on our innate capabilities but also on a choice to love and connect with ourselves and others. Such a conscious choice is described in psychiatrist M. Scott Peck's definition of love as “the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's

***“To thrive in this physical universe, we must have a foundation of love and connection based not only on our innate capabilities but also on a choice to love and connect with ourselves and others.”***

spiritual growth.”<sup>7</sup> We have all experienced moments of extending ourselves in love and friendship to people we care about. For example, while working with others on a creative project, we may have gone beyond our physical involvement to support the effort through the mutual energy of love. In this capacity, we operate as a complete power source and take full responsibility for contributing 100 percent of our energy. As

an energetic team, we produce a synergistic integration of our energies that results in additional power. Like compound interest, this foundation of love is built not only on 100 percent of each person's energy, but on our combined energies as well.

Individuals who have shared such energy know that nothing is more important than engaging in something with those you love. *Meraki* is a Greek word often used to describe what happens when you leave your energetic signature—your soul, creativity, or love—in your work. It evokes a passion for what you do every day, and feeling connected with everyone who shares the experience with you. This energetic exchange of love is key to nurturing your creativity, fostering your spiritual growth, and enhancing your life. When you enjoy doing something that you put your heart and soul into, love and joy follows. Above all, the gracious being of your soul shines through, and it manifests as love into the world.

As children, we acknowledged our need for love and connection in more open and less complicated ways than we do as adults. We trusted ourselves, followed the voices of our spirits, expressed our truths without reservation, and felt connected to ourselves and others. Later, our impulse to extend ourselves in these ways may have been challenged or even invalidated by unaware caregivers, teachers, and other authority figures—so much so that, by the time we became adults, we no longer followed our hearts or acted on intuition. Doubting our worthiness to be loved, no longer capable of trusting love from others, and not wanting to feel the shame of our lovelessness, we may ultimately have disconnected from ourselves and others.

Disconnecting from ourselves or others early in life is often prompted by feelings of shame. In her research, Brené Brown identifies shame as the “intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and, therefore, unworthy of love and belonging.”<sup>8</sup> Throughout our lives, we absorb shame messages, such as, “I’m unlovable,” “I’m not good enough,” or “I’m unworthy of love.” Wearing this cloak of shame keeps us from knowing the divine essence of ourselves and being connected with

ourselves and others. It makes us feel invisible by silencing our voice, squelching our spirit, and suppressing our full self-expression. To lovingly connect, we must reveal who we truly are.

In my case, the shame-based core belief, “I’m unworthy of love” took root after my mother abandoned me when I was eight years old. For twenty years, I repressed my feelings, mistrusted my intuition, dissociated from my body, and became alienated from myself. I lived in a state of insecurity and unworthiness, believing that if I revealed my innermost self to others they would not love me. Through overachieving and trying to be perfect, I tried to prove that I was deserving of love.

Realizing that I was worthy of love began with embracing my vulnerabilities and connecting with the fragmented, unloved parts of myself.

For days before I finally made my first therapy appointment, I would stare at the phone in the kitchen and will myself to dial the number on the business card I gripped in my hand. At the time, I was in graduate school studying to be a psychologist, and it felt deeply shameful for me to admit that I was struggling with depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide—the fruits of all my years of self-repression. I agonized about what I would say: that my marriage was on the rocks, that I was scared, that I felt like a bad mother, and that all I wanted to do was escape to a place where no one could find me.

Then one day, while staring at the phone yet again, I heard what I now recognize as the whisper of my spirit guiding me through my heart. It said, “*Just pick up the phone.*”

When I dialed the number, a woman answered, and I haltingly said, “I’d like to make an appointment.” After the therapist had taken down my name and phone number, she asked, “Why do you want to see me?” Unprepared to let my guard down, I swallowed hard, and mumbled, “It’s personal.”

With her guidance I eventually mustered the inner strength to begin searching for my mother, which ultimately catalyzed a search for myself. The search for my mother took a full year of reviewing public records and tracing leads regarding her whereabouts over a long period of time.

Near the end of that tumultuous year of emotional and spiritual healing, I wrote this letter to her in my journal:

*December 27, 1986*

*Dear Mom,*

*After all these years, I want you to know that I love you. For many years, I've tried to forget you, put the past behind me, and pretend that you never existed. Yet, whenever I think of you, I feel so much pain.*

*I've realized that for me to heal, love myself, and be happy, I need to try to find you or say good-bye. I want to know what happened to you and if you're still alive.*

*Mom, I've really missed you. I wish you were here to hold, comfort, and just be with me. Painful questions weigh heavy on my heart. Where have you been all these years? How could you leave me? Why didn't you try to find me? Do you still love me?*

*I forgive you for not being there, for leaving me. I want to see you, to feel you, and to understand your pain and suffering. I know you once loved me, and I've always held that in my heart. Thank you for bringing me into the world. Please find the strength within your heart to reach out to me.*

*Love always,  
Debbi*

For many years following my mother's disappearance, I pretended that she didn't exist. To me, that was easier than having to confront the excruciating pain of feeling unlovable and unwanted, unhappy and unworthy—easier than trying to answer questions like, “If my own mother left me, how can I, or anyone else, love me? How can I ever be happy?”

In making that phone call to my therapist, I finally stopped running from my unbearable pain and embraced my vulnerabilities. I knew in my heart that my ability to love myself and others was an innate power. In the classic film *The Wizard of Oz*, Glenda, the Good Witch, tells Dorothy, “You've always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself.” Similarly, I realized that I had always had the power to heal my innermost wounds. But before I could heal—before I could love and connect to myself—I needed to acknowledge that those messy, imperfect parts of myself existed in the first place.

Many of us who grow up without experiencing real love spend our whole lives seeking what we *think* is love, and attaching to people for the wrong reasons. The belief that we are undeserving of love impacts all the choices we make, and makes us susceptible to forming (and staying in) unhealthy relationships with others. When blindsided by a desire to fill the void of lovelessness, we can easily mistake quick relationship fixes for the soul-hearted relationships we are really seeking.

The foundation for cultivating truly loving relationships is acceptance of our authentic selves, including the shadowy parts; the realization that our essence is love; and the acknowledgment of our need for emotional and spiritual connection.

Lovelessness and disconnection lead directly to many of humanity's problems, such as addiction, anxiety, depression, and alienation. “When as a society we fail to grasp, honor, and nurture our need for emotional connection, we pay a huge price. Without loving attachment, we lapse into the morass of depression and anxiety that increasingly characterizes

affluent Western cultures,” writes psychologist and love researcher Sue Johnson in *Love Sense*.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, when we acknowledge our need for love and embrace our vulnerabilities, we open the door to self-love and connection with others.





# TRUST, AND *Let Go*

“ *The cave you fear to enter  
holds the treasure you seek.* ”

—JOSEPH CAMPBELL



**T**rusting ourselves and letting go are two of the most important spiritual principles we can practice on the path to knowing ourselves as love. Trusting ourselves affords us the opportunity to release whatever keeps us physically, emotionally, and spiritually disconnected from our true being—including fear, insecurity, and shame. Letting go allows us to peel away the hard shell of our ego identity so we can experience the divine essence that lies beneath. These principles are synergistic: the more we let go, the more we learn to trust ourselves; and the more we trust ourselves, the more we can let go.

In his book *A Path with Heart*, Jack Kornfield identifies letting go as a central spiritual practice that helps us appreciate the brevity of life and prepare for death. He says, “When letting go is called for, if we have not learned to do so, we suffer greatly, and when we get to the end of our lives, we may have a crash course.”<sup>10</sup> Too often we brace ourselves for change instead of letting go and embracing change as an opportunity to spiritually grow. In resisting any change, however, we actually generate more energy around our insecurities, drawing toward us what we fear the most. Conversely, in trusting ourselves and letting go, we develop a receptiveness to all life experience by resisting nothing and allowing everything.

Trusting ourselves requires more than taking deep breaths and saying positive mantras; it entails a conscious connection to our divine Source. Trusting ourselves to let go conveys a sense of innate security regardless of our circumstances, like having a safety net while walking on a high wire. Even though we may often feel like we are operating without backup, our

connection to a divine Source is in fact our safety net. When we trust this connection, we realize that we are not alone because our divine Source is always with us.

Here's another way to look at it: trusting ourselves to let go is like getting into an express elevator to an observation deck, rather than taking the stairs and overanalyzing every step. In essence, trusting ourselves governs how we perceive and respond to all challenges in life. It affords us the personal power to express love, flow with the stream of life, and transcend even the most difficult circumstances.

Most of us lack the ability to trust ourselves because we fear that by letting go we will lose everything, most of all ourselves. Instead, we attempt to micromanage everyone and everything around us. We continually check our bank accounts to see if we are financially secure. We obsess about our physical symptoms, thinking we may be ill. We stay in a familiar job even if it causes us misery. We remain in unhealthy relationships to avoid being alone, and maintain toxic social connections to feel like we belong. Above all, we live in a perpetually guarded state, with locks on our hearts as well as our doors—all in an effort to avoid feeling unloved, unworthy, and vulnerable. In *When Things Fall Apart*, Pema Chödrön describes such fear as “our natural reaction to moving closer to the truth.” She states, “We often find that the present moment is a pretty vulnerable place, and that this can be completely unnerving and completely tender at the same time.”<sup>11</sup> While such fearful behavior can temporarily make us feel like our desired outcomes are certain, this is a false sense of security.

We often avoid trusting ourselves and letting go by eating, drinking, using distractions, or self-medicating—right until our lives fall apart, or a spiritual crisis brings us crashing down, broken, to the cold tile of the bathroom floor.

When I was a child, my mother, who struggled with addiction, often hooked up with questionable men. Sometimes, she would bring them home with her, to the apartment where she, myself, and my two little

brothers lived. One night, when I was eight, a young male nurse who worked at the same hospital as my mother came home with her. The two of them spent the evening drinking, and at one point, thought it would be funny to put a pillow over my face while I was sleeping. Waking up from a sound sleep unable to breathe created a fear of enclosed places that still challenges me today.

Flash forward to a diving vacation in Honduras when I was fifty-four. I'd completed my open water dive certification the previous summer, and the experience had gone a long way toward helping me overcome the fear of that childhood trauma. However, as I prepared for this, my first post-certification dive, that fear of suffocation surfaced for me again. Sitting on the boat, I felt scared and painfully vulnerable, uncertain of my diving abilities, even though my partner Doug would be right beside me, and a gentle Honduran named Api was serving as dive master for the expedition.

As the panic mounted, I realized that I had to let go of my self-sabotaging thoughts, which, I'd realized, often set me up for failure and disappointment.

Once underwater, I did have difficulty executing the diving skills I had learned. I became impatient with myself, and that triggered such self-defeating thoughts as, "How could you forget how to clear your mask?" and "Keep up with the group—you're going to slow them down!" My unkind thoughts whipped me into a panic, which caused me to breathe rapidly, using more of the air in my tank. The more frenzied I became, the more I flailed like a fish on a line, losing my buoyancy and balance until I ascended too fast toward the surface.

My strong reactions cued me to the fact that two dysfunctional patterns had surfaced—the need for control, and the need to be perfect. As I emerged on the surface, tears welled up in my eyes. I asked myself, "Who cries in their scuba mask?" At that point, I knew I needed to trust myself, let go, and embrace my vulnerabilities rather than ignoring them.

Fortunately, I had surrounded myself with loving people. Doug and Api immediately ascended to the surface to help me calm and center myself. With their support, I began to breathe more rhythmically while shifting my negative thoughts to supportive ones. “You’re new at this,” I reminded myself. “Nobody expects you to be perfect.”

Finally, with their encouragement, I decided to go back down and try again. I trusted myself and let go, slowly descending to thirty feet while breathing deeply and focusing on the beauty that surrounded me.

*“To be courageous is to lead with your heart, and reveal your truth—your inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences—honestly and openly. It dares you to fully express who you are as love.”*

Grateful for having finished the dive, I climbed back on the boat. As much as I wanted to avoid the challenge of another dive, I knew it was crucial for me to reinforce the trust in myself that I had just established. Before the next dive, I affirmed my trust in myself, let go of any expectations, and reminded myself that I was co-creating the experience right in front of me. I declared my intent to simply enjoy whatever I encountered, releasing from my mind all negative thoughts by repeating the mantra, “Play, and just be.”

As I lowered myself into the water and started to experience difficulty again, I took deep breaths, reassured myself, and let go of fear and the need to control and be perfect. Ultimately, by focusing on my present experience rather than my own potential difficulties, I sustained my balance, my movements became more fluid, and I felt more serene.

Courage comes from the Latin word *cor*, which means “heart.” Courage sources deep within our hearts as self-acceptance and compassion.

It *encourages* us to engage in every life situation, no matter how scary, as an opportunity for spiritual transformation.

To be courageous is to lead with your heart, and reveal your truth—your inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences—honestly and openly. It dares you to fully express who you are as love. When you express yourself as love, you venture into the unknown territory of your own being. Being courageous doesn't necessarily mean performing feats of external bravery and strength, but rather acknowledging your internal fears, hurts, and imperfections, and boldly acting in the face of them. Thus, trusting yourself to let go and embrace your vulnerabilities is one of the most courageous choices you can make.

When I received the edited draft of my first book, *Soul-Hearted Partnership: Creating the Ultimate Experience of Love, Passion, and Intimacy*, I was ecstatic. It had taken me ten years to summon the courage to share my writing with an editor, and I was eagerly anticipating the results. However, as I scanned the cover letter, I felt my stomach lurch and my heart sink. Even though there was both positive and corrective feedback, I zeroed in on the corrective feedback, which I immediately perceived as negative.

The ricochet of shameful thoughts began: “Who do you think you are, trying to write a book? You have nothing to share that people want to read. You're not a writer, so give up now.” Feeling disappointed in myself, I wanted to throw the marked-up pages in the fireplace and be done with it. But before making an impulsive choice that I might ultimately regret, I paused and checked in with myself. Turns out, my strong emotional reaction was a clue that my vulnerability had surfaced for me to embrace.

That night, I lay coiled up in a fetal position on the cold tile bathroom floor, feeling like I would never stop crying. I allowed the debilitating thought of “not being good enough” to unravel me. I beseeched God, asking, “Why is this happening to me and why now? I've tried so hard to do everything right.” Finally I gave myself permission to fall apart—which felt like falling down the rabbit hole. Then, while in the grip of pain, I tapped into a well

of courage deep within me, picked up my journal, and wrote until I had thoroughly exhausted myself and my emotions.

The next morning, I placed the edited draft in the freezer, believing this would take the negative energy from it and give me some healthy distance. During the next several days, while my draft lay out of sight in the frozen Green Giant tundra, I shared my vulnerability with my partner until I felt the weight lift from my heart. I needed to recognize my experiences as pathways to personal transformation, see that each one could show me how to trust myself and my connection to a divine Source, and remember that I would benefit no matter how dire and uncomfortable the situation seemed at the time.

Gradually, I started making the suggested corrections to the draft while letting go and embracing any vulnerability that surfaced. As I shared this experience with my editor, a supportive member of my energetic team, she lovingly said, “I think the world of you, and I’m pleased that you’ve uncovered the value inherent in cryogenics.”

What I ultimately gleaned from this experience was that we can’t think or feel our way into being courageous. Trusting ourselves and letting go is the ultimate vulnerability, and also the most powerful and inspired action.

**To discover our soul potential, we have to trust ourselves and courageously excavate all that inhibits our full self-expression.** We must give ourselves permission to make mistakes, experience disappointments, acknowledge our failures, and create messes. As Anne Lamott writes in *Bird by Bird*, “Perfectionism is a mean, frozen form of idealism, while messes are the artist’s true friend. What people somehow forgot to mention when we were children was that we need to make messes in order to find out who we are and why we are here.”<sup>12</sup>

Our greatest mistakes, and our biggest messes, are our best teachers. The process of trusting ourselves, letting go of fear and control, and embracing

our vulnerabilities may not be neat and tidy, but if we do it enough, it will eventually put us in touch with our authentic selves and the power in the universe that is our birthright.

Trusting ourselves and letting go gives us the freedom to see our vulnerabilities and imperfections in a new light. Instead of feeling ashamed of them, we can courageously embrace them to create new potential for loving ourselves and others. **To trust ourselves is to love ourselves even when we feel unlovable, to make loving choices for ourselves even when we feel unworthy, and to open ourselves to love even when we are afraid of being hurt.** It permits us to participate fully in life without holding back any part of ourselves.

LEANING IN: HOW  
VULNERABILITY  
*Releases*  
OUR PAIN

“ *One word frees us of all the weight and pain of life; the word is love.* ”

— SOPHOCLES



*T*he more we lean into our vulnerabilities and release our pain, the more open we become to spiritual transformation. The areas of our lives in which most of us feel most vulnerable are health, relationships, and finances. Whether or not we had a healthy and loving childhood, we all experience some form of loss or suffering as a reflection of the human condition. Our subsequent pain, when left unresolved, keeps us living in habitual ways and inhibits us from co-creating a fulfilling and happy life.

Leaning into our vulnerabilities requires spending time alone so we can confront the source of those vulnerabilities—our feelings of unworthiness or disconnection—and stand face to face with whatever unresolved pain surfaces. Many of us find, however, that gaining this awareness is scary, or makes us feel uncomfortable. When spending time alone, it is therefore important to provide compassionate company for ourselves, imparting the sense that we are with an old, trusted friend whom we unconditionally love and accept. Then, when we lean into our tender places, we can discover that love has been there all along.

When I was searching for my mother, my unresolved pain started breaking through the protective barriers I had set up early in my life. So, ensconced in the safe sanctuary of my burgundy corduroy chair, I allowed myself to notice the anguish that threatened to engulf me. Sitting with my vulnerability was suggested by my therapist and began a healing journey that would take months, and require the release of layer after layer of pain. Every morning as I sat in that chair, I immediately became

restless and uncomfortable. I would cut short my sitting time, or fidget until it was time to get up and start the rest of my day. This happened every day until finally, one morning, I sat still until my pain rose and burst through its protective layers. I felt as though my heart had been flayed open. Although I felt shattered into a million shards of glass, I didn't die. I realized I had chosen to create, in my chair, a sacred space of love where I was safe to unravel and release the pain that had debilitated me. This realization, along with the compassion I showed myself, kick-started the release of years of unresolved pain.

The more I sat with myself, the deeper I released. I incorporated journaling as another tool to facilitate the excavation of my layers of loss. With trust and compassion, I leaned into my deepest vulnerability, the fear that I was unlovable, becoming aware that this fear had colored nearly my entire life experience.

From that pivotal morning, and for months following, I allowed myself to fall apart and release the layers of loss I was uncovering from my heart. I began to realize it wasn't just the loss of my mom I was releasing but decades, even past lives of loss.

**Trusting ourselves and letting go creates and holds the sacred space for self-healing and spiritual transformation.** The release of pent-up emotional pain is the key to our recovery to love. We cannot open to love when we are clutching our hurts so tightly.

When we confront the source of our vulnerabilities, we often discover that the person or situation causing our distress is not as formidable as the fear that is amplified in our minds by our disconnection from love. We learn that we've been living in a vicious cycle: we are afraid because we feel wounded by our vulnerability, but the fear blocks the flow of the very love energy we need to thrive. When we trust ourselves enough to let go, our courage kicks in, enabling us to observe that our vulnerabilities are no match for the energy of love within us.

Until we allow ourselves time alone to lean into our vulnerabilities and release our pain, we may not even realize that our bodies, especially our autonomic nervous systems, hold on to pain. For example, we may have parts of our body that are numb, shallow breathing, or a nervous system in a constant state of anxiety. Leaning into our vulnerability loosens the vice grip our brains have on our thoughts. In order to heal, we have to expose those negative thoughts, worries, and wounds to the light, and reveal all the ways we've been striving to protect them and keep them hidden from sight.

Our physical and emotional reactions are flags which alert us to underlying patterns and unresolved pain. This sort of information usually surfaces in situations that engage the brain in survival mode—for example, my experience on the dive trip in Honduras—but sometimes a simple word, a glance, or another seemingly benign interaction with another person can cause them to erupt in a defensive reaction. Such patterns need not have originated with us, but can be triggered by behavioral patterns evident in another person or situation. Nonetheless, no matter where a pattern originates, the stronger the reaction is, the more deeply seated the vulnerability which underlies it.

Consciously observing our physical and emotional reactions from an expanded spiritual perspective can help us see the origins of these patterns. Giving ourselves permission to push the pause button and interrupt our own automatic reactions helps us compassionately detach from the person or situation, and gauge what is going on within us. We can then lean into our vulnerabilities, notice where our bodies are holding tension and creating energy blocks, and ask ourselves such questions as, “What is this physical or emotional reaction

***“In some ways, change—even the hard change of healing old wounds— is easier when the alternative is unthinkable.”***

telling me about my vulnerabilities? What is the origin of the pattern being triggered? What spiritual information am I being guided to see?”

Unfortunately, many of us dip our toes into the water of our vulnerabilities, but then pull back before getting too deeply into our pain. We think that by staying on the sidelines, strapped inside our fluorescent orange life jackets, we are safe, and won't have to jump into the water. Yet, what we actually must do is take that leap of trust into the unknown depths. Only then can we overcome the barriers we've erected, break open our hearts, and find the source of pain needing to be released.

Sometimes a crisis such as a serious illness, trauma, or loss forces us to lean into our vulnerabilities and open to intense transformation. In some ways, change—even the hard change of healing old wounds—is easier when the alternative is unthinkable. But for many of us, daily life isn't enough to trigger that kind of radical transformation. Instead, the pain is left to build up for years, even decades, because it's easier to ignore it than to let go and lean in. Without release, however, these old wounds create chronic distress that can manifest as depression, anxiety, or physical illness. Only when the pain is released can we bring about self-healing.

Our vulnerabilities offer us a great gift because when we lean into them we initiate an *experiential death*. This metaphorical death allows us to release the past and confront ourselves with nothing, “no thing,” to attach to—except ourselves. This creates a shift in our consciousness, much like the experience of dying and physically detaching from the body. Such a shift can be frightening or disorienting, especially when the brain reacts to the act of letting go of the pain as a threat to life, and triggers symptoms like anxiety, heart palpitations, and light-headedness. But even in experiential death, what really die are our ego-centered identities, not our true selves. In fact, when we let go of our old, painful self-definitions, our authentic selves are given permission to rise from the ashes like the phoenix—the mythical creature of purification and transformation.

When my client Jocelyn, a longtime nurse, was forty-eight years old, she began attending the Cleveland Institute of Art. Although she had always dabbled in art, she felt unprepared for the rigorous curriculum she encountered during her first year at the school. As she attempted to both care for her family and be actively engaged as a student, sustaining a balance proved to be challenging. She was responsible not only for presenting work that was appealing visually, but also for interpreting the meaning behind it. Consequently, there was no way around taking a hard look at herself.

Jocelyn's final assignment in her first-year drawing class brought her to a spiritual crossroads. She was asked to find an object, draw it utilizing a multimedia approach, and then discuss the meaning behind the piece during class. While taking a walk one morning, she discovered a weathered piece of an iron gate. She was attracted to the strength of the metal, and the history represented by layer upon layer of paint. As she began rendering this object, chunks of the old paint began to peel away, exposing the iron underneath—like the layers of her own life experiences. As Jocelyn stripped away layer after layer of paint, she thought about the meaning behind each one and how she would discuss it in class. She liked to keep things simple, so when her professor asked her to talk about her concept Jocelyn simply said, “You spend the first half of your life acquiring layers of baggage from your parents, siblings, friends, and childhood experiences, and then you spend the second half of your life ridding yourself of the layers that no longer serve you.”

Two years later, she had renowned artist Charles Bergengren as her art history teacher. The information he shared about the medieval alchemists interested her, as she realized how this concept applied to her own life. Although the popular idea of alchemy during the Middle Ages centered around the attempt to burn away the “dross” of an ordinary material (such as lead) and transform it into a refined substance (such as gold), true alchemists of the time understood this process to be spiritual—the task of transmuting the “dross” of our material body into the more refined essences of mind and spirit—the gold of our true being.

Four years later, Jocelyn separated from her husband of twenty-five years, and graduated from art school. As she adjusted to her youngest child leaving home, she continued to harness her creativity and maintain a disciplined art practice. It was also during that time that she began a therapeutic relationship with me, working to let go of past patterns and relationships that no longer served her.

Not long after her divorce, Jocelyn received an e-mail from a friend in Massachusetts asking if Jocelyn would come to her home to share in a ritual of release based on the theme of the phoenix rising from the ashes. Jocelyn subsequently visited and, during the ritual, felt released from things that no longer served her life or were inappropriate to her being at this time in her life.

Seeing an experiential death as a beginning rather than an ending teaches us how to fully live. As Pema Chödrön says, “The kinds of discoveries that are made through practice have nothing to do with believing in anything. They have much more to do with having the courage to die, the courage to die continually. To live is to be willing to die over and over again. From the awakened point of view, that’s life.”<sup>13</sup> Just as we know light through darkness, so can we know life through death.

Nancy, my piano teacher, created the Spring Recital as a safe space for her adult piano students to play for one another. I knew it would be a nurturing environment in which to be vulnerable—and yet, when I walked into the room, I immediately chose the old wicker chair in the corner, and sat huddled, trying to quell the terror mounting inside me. As the classroom doors closed, I quickly volunteered to play first so I could escape my anxiety and the underlying emotional pain that was rising up within me. When I sat at the piano and placed my hands on the keyboard, fear gripped me. My breath caught in my throat. Aware that I was holding my breath, I quickly withdrew my hands from the keyboard and inhaled deeply. In that moment, I wanted to hide under the piano; instead, I watched myself deliberately place my hands back on the keyboard.

As I played the first few notes of a Bach concerto, I felt myself free-falling into my past experience of fear. Losing my place, I made several mistakes. Every time I played a wrong note, I chastised myself, until finally I pulled my hands away from the keyboard as if it were a hot stove.

I started over, but as soon as I made a mistake I stopped and scooted the piano bench back away from the keyboard. Soon I couldn't move my body forward or bring my hands back to the piano. I put my head down and felt shame sweep over me like a tidal wave. Scared of falling apart in front of everyone, I quickly took my seat among the other students.

While I sat there, shame and disappointment grew until I dissociated from myself like I had always done in painful situations. Experiencing myself outside of my body, I faintly heard Nancy and the other students discussing my performance, yet at the same time I observed myself from the outside, as if I was still seven years old, just hearing the news of my parents' impending divorce.

When I was young, I spent hours in the basement of my parents' house playing my old, secondhand upright piano. I would lose myself in the tinkle of the keys while the chaos in my family played itself out in the rooms upstairs. One day, after blissfully skipping home from a piano

lesson, I walked into our kitchen only to interrupt a conversation between my parents about getting divorced. Later I found out that my piano would be sold, as there wasn't space for it in the one-bedroom apartment I would soon share with my mother and two brothers. I would have no more piano lessons.

Jolted back to the reality of the Spring Recital, I watched as the students played their chosen pieces,

*“The heart-based practice of leaning into our vulnerability and releasing pain opens us to our most authentic selves formed of love.”*

and, touched by their music, I gave myself permission to feel the pain of my loss. After the others had finished playing, Nancy looked over at me, her eyes encouraging me to return to the piano and finish my piece. This time, within the first measure I played a wrong note but took a deep breath, kept my hands on the keys, acknowledged my mistake, and began again.

This time, I played from my heart. I let go of needing to do it “right”—and as I did, I stepped over a threshold from the past to the present, and realized that I had let go of my pain. In the safe environment of the Spring Recital, I had finally been able to release my past. Soon my fingers moved more fluidly over the keys.

After I played the last chord, Nancy put her arms around me, and I fell into them sobbing. I had played my entire piece by heart. But more importantly, I had courageously confronted the pain inside myself, released it, and gained awareness of the love that remained at the source of my authentic self.

**Loving and accepting ourselves fully are acts of courage. They allow us to become our own heroes, and step into the unknown not as frightened human beings, but as powerful beacons of love.** The heart-based practice of leaning into our vulnerability and releasing pain opens us to our most authentic selves formed of love.



# PRACTICES

- 1 Practice leaning into your vulnerabilities. Spend time alone in quiet reflection, whether meditating at your desk, sitting in a garden, looking out a window, or writing in a journal. Begin with five minutes at the beginning and end of each day, then gradually increase the time to allow your vulnerabilities to surface.
- 2 Notice when you feel uncomfortable, restless, or irritable. These are cues that there are emotions just below the surface of your conscious awareness that need to be released. Sit, lie, or walk with any vulnerability or pain until it releases.
- 3 Identify the types of situations that cause feelings of vulnerability by journaling. Ask, “What is the energy in my body telling me? What person or situation makes me feel vulnerable? What is the person or situation showing me about the origin of my underlying pain?” Discuss the sources of emotional pain that triggered any reactions with a supportive friend or therapist.
- 4 Throughout the day, acknowledge yourself as a strong, loving, and confident person connected to your source. Trust in your ability to fulfill your divine potential. Use the following mantras:
  - I trust that everything always works out for my highest good.
  - I am strong enough to handle any challenges that come my way.
  - I choose to embrace my vulnerabilities with all my heart.

- 5 Be a conscious observer of your experience, and disengage from drama. Give yourself “permission to pause” by using a visual cue—such as a stop sign, comma, or pause button—whenever you are triggered. You can walk out of the room, call the person back, or write a response in a letter or e-mail to send later.
- 6 While sitting or walking, use your breath to create an opportunity for release. Breathe in and look within with love of yourself, breathe out and look out to the world with love of others. Do this until your breath is rhythmic, and you feel calm and centered.
- 7 Observe nature’s cycles, noting parallels in your own life to appreciate how your physical existence is based on such cycles. Create personal rituals based on the seasons, the cycles of the moon, or the cycle of each day. For example, let sunrise be a time for opening fresh possibilities, and let sunset be a time of releasing. As the sun dips below the horizon, free yourself from any resentments, grievances, or disappointments by blessing and releasing any troubling events of the day.





## CHAPTER 2



# WE ARE THE *Source of Love*

“ *We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create.* ”

—JOHN LENNON

**L**ove is not only an emotion; it is the infinite energy source of our existence. Realizing we are the source of love allows us to fully acknowledge our inherent worth. Moreover, accepting ourselves with all our weaknesses and imperfections cultivates compassion toward ourselves and others.

Love is the highest energy frequency in the universe. When we open our hearts, light energy flows through us as pure love, linking us to our authentic selves—an ever-evolving genuine expression of ourselves through thoughts, words, and actions—and making us conduits for the flow of love to others. As *New York Times* best-selling author Marci Shimoff writes in her book, *Love for No Reason*, "When you live with an open heart, you effortlessly radiate love because the channel connecting you to the love at your core is unobstructed. You're able to give and receive love as freely and naturally as you breathe in and out. Kindness, compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude become second nature, and hostility, hurt, indifference, and loneliness dissolve."<sup>14</sup>

As conduits of love, we can receive and transmit energy that is divinely sourced. Then, we can use this information to align with our soul's journey and make inspired choices in our lives, sustaining the circulation of loving energy through positive thoughts, feelings, and choices that benefit ourselves and others.

*Opening Our Hearts*  
**TO OUR**  
**AUTHENTIC SELVES**

“ *Dare to love yourself  
as if you were a rainbow with  
gold at both ends.* ”

—ABERJHANI



Opening our hearts awakens us to our authentic selves. Seeing ourselves through the eyes of our hearts, we can acknowledge that we are love, and therefore whole and complete. In this state of expanded awareness, we become our own safe haven, free to fully express who we are, for there is nothing we need to do except *be love*—at one with our source of love, and at peace with ourselves. Seeing ourselves as love prepares us to cultivate loving relationships and live from the enlightened perspective of universal love.

Opening our hearts to our authentic selves takes conscious awareness. “Conscious awareness” is our intuitive ability to tune in to the spiritual information which provides us with a broader, more loving perspective. Such heightened awareness bypasses logical thinking and leads to an inner knowing through our hearts. It assists us in noticing and appreciating the information that comes from Spirit. Through conscious awareness, we see, sense, and intuit what is in alignment with our soul’s journey.

**Awakening to our authentic selves as love leads us to letting go of who we think we should be and embracing who we actually are.** Living as our authentic selves is like singing karaoke. At first we may be nervous; yet each time we trust ourselves and surrender our need for perfection we gain increased awareness of the value of living “out loud.” Our minds may be racing with thoughts such as, “I’m afraid to make a mistake,” or, “I can’t sing as well as my friends.” Yet when we override our negative beliefs and let go of what others think, we express ourselves wholeheartedly.

To live as our authentic selves we must communicate from our hearts. We must speak our truth—our intimate thoughts and feelings—honestly and openly, without holding back. When we communicate in this way, our words take on a more profound meaning to the listener. Sincere, honest, and loving words encourage people to listen to us; they are like the nectar that draws thirsty bees to a flower.

When we communicate from our hearts, we feel secure enough to express our inner truths without fear of judgment, criticism, or retaliation. However, when we are feeling vulnerable, we must rely on people who can support us regardless of our struggles, such as individuals on our energetic support team. Honoring ourselves and our experiences takes sharing our truth with those who not only have our backs but, most of all, have our hearts. Such soul support comes from kindred spirits who encourage the full expression of our being rather than our identity or the roles we play to survive in the world. As such, they motivate us to trust ourselves and follow our hearts.

Sharing our vulnerabilities with loving, connected, and trustworthy people enhances our sense of security and deepens our experience of trust and intimacy. When I separated from my first husband, I found that I needed to share my paralyzing fear of repeating my father and mother's legacy of divorce, so I called my brother. Shaken by shame about the failure of my marriage and anguish over putting my son through this kind of ordeal, I opened my heart and shared my vulnerability with him.

As I spoke, I experienced a flashback to the day I was told of my own parents' impending divorce. My heart had imprinted the emotional pain of this past trauma, and it was now surfacing through my entire body like superheated water erupting from a geyser. I remembered walking into our kitchen only to interrupt a conversation between my parents and I knew by the worried look on my dad's face that he was about to tell us something that would change our lives forever. Through his tears he made eye contact with me and haltingly said that he and my mother were getting a divorce. At first it felt like a shock wave moved through me,

paralyzing me so I couldn't speak. My father then spoke the words that have haunted my dreams ever since: "Who do you want to live with—me or your mother?" At that moment, I began to cry. I remember saying to him through my tears, "No, Daddy. I love you both."

At that moment, I realized that I was superimposing my own experience on my son. I felt that I was putting him through the same difficult experience—the experience that had haunted me for so many years. But as I talked through the connection between this past pain and my present situation, my brother lovingly offered a new perspective, "You are not our mother," he told me, "And your son is not you. You're both going to be okay, because you only want the best for everyone involved." Exposing my deep pain, and feeling supported through my vulnerability, encouraged me to find self-compassion in the days to follow, even when things got sticky. It also elevated my spiritual perspective, and helped me see that my path was, in fact, my own.

Communicating about our vulnerabilities and accepting every experience as valid and transformative (even when it may differ from your family member's, friend's, or partner's point of view), creates a loving relationship environment that supports us in acknowledging that the essence of our authentic selves is love. When we know ourselves as a source of love, we acknowledge that our *being* is much deeper than our patterns, identities, and roles. It is our sense of aliveness and authentic relatedness—the exquisite expression of our soul's journey through our human experience. Moreover, surrounding ourselves with our *energetic support team*—provided they listen well, respond meaningfully, and support our needs—helps us stay connected to our authentic selves.

In opening our hearts, we realize that the love within us is an all-encompassing energy that can be shared with others. Connecting in this way with an animal, child, friend, partner, or stranger helps us see that we are not separate, but rather linked with others in a mutual flow of universal love. Like the Hindu gesture of *Namaste*, which opens the heart to recognize Spirit in another, saying "I love you" to anyone or anything is

actually saying, “I love myself, and I give love to you.” By contrast, when we close our hearts (and as a result feel unlovable, insecure, and inadequate), we disconnect from ourselves as a source of love, and therefore disconnect from the love we can receive from others as well.

Lovelessness directly impacts the thoughts and feelings we have, the choices we make, the relationships we create, and our perceptions and responses to every life situation. In such a state, we are more likely to take things personally; overreact by blaming, judging, and attacking others; or defend a position. In the process, we give up our power and our capacity to listen to the voice of our spirit for guidance.

Opening our hearts also enhances personal healing. When I opened my heart to my brother, I began to heal one facet of my feeling of being unworthy of love. My heart began to close the day my father told me that he and my mother were getting a divorce. It closed further after my mother, my two younger brothers, and I moved into the rundown tenement apartment far from my old neighborhood and friends. As my mother's drug addiction and self-destructive behavior continued to worsen, the little girl I had been was forced to step aside, put away her dolls and play ponies, and become the adult in the household. There were no more birthday parties or trips to the beach. There were no more music lessons. There was only fear, and responsibility.

On the weekends, we went to stay with our father. Every Sunday night, I begged him not to send us back to the apartment—and yet, responsibility weighed on me. My mother needed me. I was the one who got her out of bed in the morning, made her breakfast so she wouldn't shake or pass out, and helped get the questionable men she brought home (like that awful male nurse) out the door.

And so, every Sunday, we went back. But despite my best efforts, I couldn't save my mom.

I came home from school one day to find my four-year-old brother, Chuck, crying on the concrete steps outside our building. He was freezing, and

soaked from where he'd wet himself. Our door was locked and bolted from the inside. I had no choice but to run to our neighbors' apartment and call 9-1-1.

My father arrived on the scene not long after the paramedics. With my nose pressed against the glass of his car window, I watched as my mother was wheeled to the ambulance on a stretcher and driven away. She'd tried to commit suicide. She was committed to a psychiatric hospital, but was only there for a short time before she escaped with a fellow patient. I never heard from her again.

For the next twenty years I believed that if only I had been more lovable she would have never abandoned me. Viewing my mother's abandonment of me as a gauge of my worthiness, I saw myself as unlovable—and the more I viewed myself as unlovable, and closed my heart to protect myself from more pain, the more my unlovability became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

My father received custody of me and my siblings, and married a woman named Lee. Once Lee and her four children moved in, it was as if my early life with my mother had never existed. Instead of expressing my grief, I was terrified to talk to anyone about my mother abandoning me because, according to my magical thinking, if I didn't talk about it, then it hadn't really happened. As a result, my emotional pain turned into self-loathing, which I hid well, maintaining the facade of the "good girl" who kept the peace at all costs.

I stepped into my role as peacekeeper and self-sacrificing caretaker whenever my stepmother Lee was hospitalized for paranoid schizophrenia and my father was on the road making sales calls. When Lee began exhibiting unpredictable, violent behavior, such as throwing frozen food or threatening us with kitchen knives, I was the one who stepped in to calm things down. A day before my sixteenth birthday, Lee died from complications of her mental illness. Within six months, my father remarried for the second time in eight years, and my new stepmother and her five children moved in with us.

Again my desire to escape the pain of lovelessness propelled me into the role of peacekeeper and self-sacrificing caretaker. This co-addictive pattern of needing to be needed temporarily filled the void left by the absence of self-love.

Only later, with the assistance of the energetic support team of my therapist, spiritual guide, and friends, did I discover how to heal by opening my heart to self-love, walking the path of absolute vulnerability, and choosing not to be a victim of my past.

First, I had to become my own loving coach, embrace my vulnerabilities, and connect with the emotional pain I had long suppressed. In exploring my mother's past, I discovered that she had experienced a traumatic life growing up as well. When I learned that her father, a state patrolman, had committed suicide by shooting himself in the basement of the family home while she and my grandmother waited upstairs for him to take her to school, it put her depression, sexual promiscuity, and drug abuse in perspective. Finding out that she had been given up for adoption by her mother within a year after her father's suicide allowed me to better understand the feelings of unworthiness and lovelessness that led her to neglect and abandon me as an eight-year-old child. My father had a painful upbringing as well, having been abused repeatedly in front of his extended family.

Although I could never experience what my parents felt, this awareness helped me forgive them and release the hurt I had felt regarding the limitations of their love. As a result, I was able to acknowledge my mother and father for bringing me into the world and make peace with their shortcomings and my past pain. In the process, I learned that, through opening our hearts, we can channel the power of love we possess as spiritual beings—but that, until we let go of anger, blame, and shame, and stop deploring our life's circumstances, we will not be able to fully open to that power.

To channel the power of love within us for beneficial purposes, we must also free ourselves from the opinions and expectations of others, as well as comparisons with others' circumstances that keep us constantly doubting and defending ourselves. Feelings that surface when we compare ourselves with others are a barometer of how much we love ourselves. When we truly love ourselves, we do not envy the good fortune of others; instead, we trust that there is enough love, success, joy, and abundance to go around.

When someone says, "I love my life," do you feel happy for this person, and say to yourself, "Yes, I love my life, too"—or do you feel envious and think, "What's wrong with me? Why am I never happy?" In envying the experiences or circumstances of others, we devalue ourselves and amplify our own feelings of unworthiness.

*“If you focus on the flow of energy emanating from your heart, you will feel a distinct coherence as your brain and nervous system align vibrationally with your heart rhythms.”*

**Giving and receiving love releases a continuous stream of positive energy that supports spiritual clarity, creativity, and personal effectiveness; strengthens the immune system; eliminates energy blocks; and diminishes fear, stress, and negativity.** It brings us into emotional balance so we feel less irritated when someone cuts in front of us in traffic, or when our partner makes an insensitive remark. It also helps us better observe our reactions, stop negative self-talk, cease judging others, and access our inner guidance to make more enlightened choices. Most importantly, our overall quality of life improves because we wake up each day with positive energy, inspiration, and a sense of gratitude for the many blessings in our lives.

If you focus on the flow of energy emanating from your heart, you will feel a distinct coherence as your brain and nervous system align vibrationally with your heart rhythms. You may sense a tingling or warming sensation, a buzzing, goose bumps, or a subtle vibration in parts of your body; or, you may feel like a sunburst, with waves of warm energy radiating from the center of your chest outward into the world. In such a state of openheartedness, you will feel relaxed, grateful, and compassionate toward everyone and everything around you, and enjoy a sense of peace, harmony, and universal love. The resulting emotional and spiritual balance not only frees you from being affected by the negative energies and choices of others, but also empowers you to feel secure in where you are in your own life, right now, without the need for comparison or judgment.

Opening the heart can not only calm an anxiety-ridden brain, but can also flood the body with a healing vibration that releases internal energy blocks. Like an electrical circuit breaker that has been tripped, our natural healing ability may have shut down due to stress, fatigue, challenging life circumstances, or negative emotions. This shutdown leads to discordance in the heart's rhythms and stress in the nervous system. When we open our hearts and focus on love as a healing vibration, we can alleviate many of these detrimental effects.

The strongest electromagnetic field of energy in the human body emanates from the heart. When we operate as a source of love, we generate a high-frequency energy that brings body, mind, and spirit into harmonic resonance. When we tap into this energy, we rise above being a victim of our circumstances and become the creator of our reality. Listening to the guidance of our hearts, we tune in to this energy for living in alignment with our soul's journey.





LISTENING TO  
THE GUIDANCE OF  
*Our Hearts*

“ *It is only with the heart that  
one can see rightly; what is  
essential is invisible to the eye.* ”

—ANTOINE DE  
SAINT-EXUPÉRY

**B**y listening to the guidance of our hearts, we discover that we are love. When we open our hearts, we become conduits for transmitting and receiving divinely inspired information which directs us to use this love for the benefit of ourselves and others. Thus opening the heart not only helps awaken us to our authentic selves, but also leads to self-healing.

All of us are born with the ability to be an open channel of love and spiritual information, for it is our divine nature. Although each person tunes in to this energy and information differently, we all tap into the same divine Source. It is not our “ability” or “talent” which determines the extent to which we can receive and use this energy, but rather how open we are, and how much we trust ourselves. For some of us, it is natural and easy to listen to the guidance of our hearts. For others, it takes continuous effort and practice. Many people have not yet realized that it is even possible to learn how to take advantage of spiritual information accessed in this manner; as a result, they either believe such connection is out of their reach, or recoil from it out of fear.

Mystics, spiritual leaders, and healers have long known that the heart center is the gateway to wisdom and well-being. This is evident in images of saints, sages, and Christ, all of whom are depicted with open, shining hearts. Helen Keller once wrote, “The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched. They must be felt with the heart.”<sup>1</sup> Her words have become even more meaningful to me as I have gained awareness of the scientific research emerging about “heart intelligence.”

Heart intelligence, as defined by the Institute of HeartMath, is “the flow of awareness, understanding, and intuition we experience when the mind and emotions are brought into coherent alignment with the heart ... Heart intelligence underlies cellular organization and guides and evolves organisms toward increased order, awareness and coherence of their bodies’ systems.”<sup>2</sup> According to the Institute of HeartMath, heart coherence is a scientifically verified state in which our brains and hearts resonate and exchange information. In fact, the heart center even has its own measurable wave signature.

What this means in daily life is that, when our minds and emotions are in alignment with our hearts, we become consciously aware and more in tune with intuitive information—those “gut feelings” or “a-ha” moments which signify an intuitive response to situations or stimuli. We can then act on these intuitive responses in a deliberate, positive manner.

When the connection to Spirit is fully integrated through the heart, this connection creates a consistent flow of energy, and we intuit freely. When we are creatively inspired, for instance, we sense the pulsating vibration of such information. While in such a state, we bypass the chatter of the brain, and instead tap into our positive energy flow to bring forth clarity, joy, and the physical manifestation of our creation.

My client Sheila was diagnosed with Lupus, a chronic auto-immune disorder, at the age of ten. Her illness significantly limited her participation in normal activities because she was exhausted and in constant pain. Overwhelmed and in despair, she felt as if her chronic illness had become a way of life—that it defined and confined her. By the time she started working with me at age fifteen, Sheila had already spent much of her young life suffering from physical pain and depression. Being a highly sensitive person, she often absorbed other people’s negative energies, which only further compromised her energy and vitality.

After working with me for several years, Sheila began to see that she was caught between two realities: one, a projection of self-loathing and the

self-sabotaging beliefs surrounding her illness; and the other, a world of self-love that she felt unworthy of entering. With my guidance, she began to make peace with her physical limitations by loving and accepting herself as she was. Through cultivating self-love and listening to her heart, she learned to embrace her life with all its challenges instead of waiting to live life as she had hoped or imagined it would be.

Ten years later, after another physical setback and a new diagnosis of a rare auto-immune disease, Sheila fell into an emotional black hole. Devastated by the news, she commented, “So few people actually live a full life, even when they have no physical or emotional obstacles. And yet, here I am, putting my whole life on hold until I feel well enough to start living again. It just doesn't seem fair!”

Before I could reply, she continued: “I knew to take a shower to clear my energy field when I started feeling this way. While I was in the shower, the movie 'Peaceful Warrior' came to me. I knew that I had to review the scene that resonated so strongly with me when I watched it the first time.”

Sheila used the excerpt from this movie to elevate her perspective and practice self-acceptance. Acting as her own loving coach, she inserted herself into the movie dialogue and used the conversation to guide herself back from the depths of depression and into the heart of self-love.

*Sheila:* “Look at me! Look at me! I have been chronically ill and fatigued for fifteen years. Not a single day has gone by that I haven't been symptomatic. I have done nothing but treatment after treatment, doctor after doctor, pill after pill, and nothing has worked. In fact, I now have a second chronic illness and will need IV replacement therapy for the rest of my life.”

*Peaceful Warrior:* “A warrior is not about perfection or victory or invulnerability. She's about absolute vulnerability. That's the only true courage.”

*Sheila*: “What kind of healing do you think I can do, huh? I am sicker than I ever have been in my entire life. I am more limited now than ever before. I can't exercise, read, go to school, have friends, work, or even go out.”

*Peaceful Warrior*: “The illness is your training. Life is a choice. You can choose to be a victim or anything else you would like to be.”

As Sheila openly shared her experience, we exhumed her layers of vulnerability so she could tune in to the guidance of her heart. We sat compassionately with her pain, just as we would sit with a dear friend who was suffering—until, at last, it released.

Sheila shook her head, and said quietly, “I can't believe, after everything I have been through, that my heart is telling me to not give up on healing myself or stop living. I never thought in my wildest dreams that this would be the message my heart is telling me. It feels so right—and scary, of course—but I know in my heart that's what I want. I'm ready. How do I start?”

Holding the sacred space of love, I responded to Sheila, “There's no starting or stopping, only being. Expressing our fullest soul potential, no matter what our circumstances, is *being*—and *being* is love.”

Sheila looked at me with tears in her eyes and said, “My head is screaming right now with endless chatter, fear, and frustration. But I'm ready to embrace the space of self-love.”

Although faced with a challenging path, Sheila chose that day to live with courage, compassion, and ultimately, congruency with her soul's journey. She chose to accept her physical limitations, heal herself, and embrace her personal transformation by opening her heart.

Being an open channel of love is not being a Pollyanna out of touch with reality. On the contrary, at times we may feel like we are participating

in multiple realities simultaneously. When fully opened, the heart center creates an energetic vibration that expands and illuminates the surrounding space. This is our energetic signature and impacts everyone and everything around you.

Tapping into the heart's vibration allows us to experience an expanded field of energy that interconnects us with all living beings. Quantum physics shows us that these electromagnetic particles of energy remain connected no matter the physical distance between them. And through conscious awareness, we can open ourselves to the spiritual information

flowing through us as if we had pushed the buttons on a radio, thus inviting our spirit to guide us in ways that benefit ourselves and others.

“There's no starting or stopping, only being. **Expressing our fullest soul potential, no matter what our circumstances,** is being—and being is love.”

Another way to envision this process is by thinking of the heart as the “GPS of the soul.” Similarly to the way a GPS gives us driving directions so we can travel without getting lost, the heart can be used by Spirit to guide us on our soul's path through our connection to our source. It is because the

heart's energy transmissions bypass the brain that we receive spiritual information through the heart center to guide us. We all have the ability to receive such information, whether it's a gut feeling, an “a-ha” moment, or an inner knowing. But we must open our hearts and practice conscious awareness to be able to intuit and use such information to our benefit. Put simply, we must follow our hearts, and then use our heads.

While working with clients, I often intuit information in the form of physical sensations, intuitive feelings, and heightened visual perceptions. Sometimes I sense what they were just thinking or about to say. Often I feel a rush of energy through my body creating goosebumps (or “God-

bumps,” as I like to call them) which affirms the spiritual information coming through me. Tapping into such spiritual information allows me to guide these transformative sessions for each client's greater good and well-being.

Unlike our hearts, which tap into spiritual information, our analytical brains are similar to computers that scan, store, and retrieve data from the past. Data accessed by the brain often takes the form of negative mindsets, beliefs, and patterns stored on the brain's “hard drive,” like “Be careful not to let your guard down,” “If you take that risk, you'll get hurt,” or “Don't confide in anyone because you can't trust them.” All such negative messages produce a lack of trust in ourselves and our experiences, because they contradict the information our hearts are sharing. In giving our minds command control over our hearts, we fall prey to the dictates of the brain, which judges, instead of the compassionate voice of Spirit coming through the heart, which encourages.

To channel the invaluable spiritual information coming through the heart, it is important to allow the mind to recede. This creates a harmonic balance between the two entities. For example, when you swim, your brain tends to first focus on your strokes, pace, or the distance you have traveled. However, once you let go of keeping track of these aspects, allow your mind to recede and focus attention on your heart, you swim less self-consciously in a meditative, rhythmic manner that is beneficial to performance.

Just as the muscles in our bodies must be developed so they don't atrophy, so must we strengthen our ability to listen to our hearts. One way to do this is by sitting in a quiet place and entering a trancelike state through breathing, prayer, or meditation. Open the heart by touching it, or saying, “Open my heart.” Then, listen to the voice of Spirit speaking through the heart.

At first it may be difficult to decipher the voice of Spirit, because it often sounds like our own thoughts. Listening to Spirit is like listening to an



imaginary best friend. However, with practice, we can discern the voice of Spirit through a physical sensation (such as tingling), a feeling of intuition, an image that pops up in the mind, a message arising from out of the blue that seems to be coming from a broader perspective, or an emotion. The voice of Spirit is often activated when our brains are turned off—like while we are listening to music, writing, exercising, or making love. It doesn't matter when the information arrives; what matters is that, when we receive it, we trust its source and use it to guide our lives.

**When we listen to our hearts, we live with passion and purpose. We feel a sense of alignment with our soul's journey.** We realize that full self-expression is greater than the job we do, the roles we play, or how successful we are in the world. Instead, full self-expression is being on purpose in every moment no matter what we are doing, where we are, or who we are with.

In his commencement address at Stanford University in 2005, Steve Jobs, the creative visionary and founder of Apple Inc., succinctly described being purposeful in the moment when he challenged students to ask themselves: “If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I'm about to do today?”<sup>3</sup> When our answer to this question is yes, we know we are listening to the guidance of our hearts and making choices that align with it. If we answer no, we must examine our choices and ask ourselves why we are not aligned with our soul's journey.

In Japan, having such purpose is called *ikigai*, meaning “the reason we get up in the morning.” Although we have many mindsets dictating what we should do, knowing our reason to get up in the morning derives from connecting with the spiritual information coming through our hearts. Often we are so afraid we will make a mistake, displease someone, or lose what we have that we avoid listening to the guidance of our hearts and instead drift aimlessly through life without a compass. Listening to the guidance of our hearts and receiving spiritual information to live purposefully takes *ab-soul-lute* trust in ourselves, and a desire to be in sync with our soul's journey.

To heal ourselves, others, and our world, we must open to the possibility of experiencing a divine encounter with ourselves. In *The Healing of America*, spiritual teacher Marianne Williamson writes: “We cannot learn to deeply communicate until we learn to listen, to each other but also to ourselves and to God.”<sup>4</sup>

Listening to the guidance of our hearts to access spiritual information allows us to have an intimate, introspective, and integrated relationship with ourselves, as well as receive assistance with daily problems, waste less time and energy being anxious about life's difficulties, and respond rather than react to situations. Most importantly, it leads to a more spiritual way of life, and gives us greater peace of mind.



# CULTIVATING *Compassion*

“ *Compassion and love are not mere luxuries. As the source of both internal and external peace, they are fundamental to the continual survival of our species.* ”

—HIS HOLINESS THE  
FOURTEENTH DALAI LAMA

**C**ultivating compassion for ourselves is our best pathway to inner peace and our true source of happiness. Compassion infuses love into every encounter we experience with both ourselves and others, supporting healthy relationships. Living as compassionate beings, we can bless and release the suffering of life by trusting that every human being is on their own spiritual path. This increases our capacity to create peace and harmony in our lives because it reminds us of the interconnectedness of all life and that we are a part of the universal energy of divine love.

Cultivating compassion starts by accepting all aspects of ourselves without reservation, no matter how we feel about them. If we are unwilling to do this for ourselves, we cannot expect others to do it for us, and we certainly cannot do it for others.

One way to foster acceptance of all aspects of ourselves is by eliminating all of the violent thoughts, words, and actions we inflict upon ourselves. Many of us move through our days berating, shaming, and terrorizing ourselves with our thoughts in ways we would never express to anyone we love. As Buddha tells us, “Your worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own thoughts, unguarded.”<sup>5</sup> Negative thoughts can trigger a chain reaction of violence—first to ourselves, then to others and the world at large.

To practice self-compassion we must stop beating ourselves up or putting ourselves down every time we become aware of an imperfection, make a mistake, or expose a vulnerability. Instead, we need to realize that all

our thoughts, feelings, and choices originate in our being of love—even when we step in dog poop while wearing our most expensive shoes, break a favorite vase, lose a job, or hurt someone we love.

Another way to cultivate self-compassion is by responding positively rather than reacting negatively when stressful events occur. Whether it's a sunny day or a cloudy one, we can sustain positive thoughts and a positive energy flow. We can wake up in the morning intending to express self-love, even in challenging situations or when we feel tired or uninspired. We can focus on the aspects of ourselves we love rather than on those we dislike. We can note how one moment of self-compassion can change our entire day, and then imagine how such moments, repeated over and over, could change our lives and the lives of others.

I had a fantastic opportunity to practice self-compassion while driving to Chicago to attend a Peace Summit at Loyola University. One of humanity's greatest peace leaders, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, was scheduled to speak on nonviolence the next day. While en route, instead of becoming angry when my GPS system failed and I took a wrong exit, or when I got a nosebleed and had to pull over, I took a few deep breaths, smiled at others, opened my heart, and repeated such mantras as “Trust and let it be” and “Bless and release.”

Once I arrived at my hotel, opportunities for practicing self-compassion continued. When my room key didn't work, instead of getting annoyed I embraced the problem and quickly found someone from housekeeping to let me in. When I was given wrong directions to a restaurant, I lovingly encouraged myself to walk a few more blocks, and eventually found it on my own. When I was told there would be no public parking at the Peace Summit the next day, I approached a Metro employee, who kindly showed me which train would get me there.

With each situation, I challenged myself to sustain self-compassion by deliberately engaging in *personal nonviolence*. Whenever I began to react to anyone or anything, I paused, checked in with myself, and observed

the thoughts that had triggered my reaction. Noticing such negative thoughts as “How could you forget to charge the GPS?” “You were stupid for making the wrong turn,” and “You should know how to take the train without asking for help” was the first step in remaining nonreactive. Then, I converted my reflexive negative thoughts into affirmations expressing self-compassion, such as, “It’s okay that you forgot to charge the GPS, because making a mistake is an opportunity to spiritually grow,” and “You’ve never taken the train here, so asking for help was a good idea.”

**Life challenges us to spiritually grow. Once we embrace this truth, we can transcend any situation with love.**

In the past, when I had reacted with anger toward myself in response to a cascade of challenging events, like those which plagued my Chicago adventure, I just chalked it up to the fact that I was having a bad day. But instead of getting better with each subsequent challenge, my bad days just got worse. Through my practice of self-compassion, however, I found that I could be at peace, and that I didn’t have to take these irritating setbacks personally, or get caught up in their details.

You can practice self-compassion by observing life’s processes without getting invested or entangled in them. When you’re first learning to do this, it’s important to remain aware of your reactions so you can immediately bring your nervous system into balance by breathing and focusing on your heart center. Once you’ve calmed your reaction, you can clear negative thoughts and expectations by substituting encouraging phrases such as “Bless and release,” “Open and let go,” and “Let it all be”—all the while engaging in supportive self-talk. Finally, pause frequently as you move through the challenging situation so that you remain aware of yourself, your environment, and any additional reactions that may arise. In this way, you can not only soothe your own anger and anxiety, but refrain from doing harm to others through your reaction. In fact, simply by practicing self-compassion, you can leave whatever space you’re in charged with more positive energy than it contained when you arrived.

I understand that this may be easier said than done. The first reaction of most people feeling pain is to avoid it. In fact, the brain automatically moves into self-protection mode when it senses pain, since at the heart of our reaction to pain is, ultimately, the fear of death. It takes courage to confront such fear with compassion, and self-discipline to hold back the self-violence we may be conditioned to unleashing at the slightest twinge of pain. Practicing self-compassion brings us closer to what we fear—but when we gently surrender our defenses, we can allow our old friend, fear, to surface and release.

In repeatedly avoiding pain—especially pain associated with the past—we forfeit opportunities to heal ourselves and thereby transform our future. Sadly, many people wait until a crisis or even the approach of death before forgiving themselves and others for events that are years, decades, or even half a century old. Too often, end-of-life professionals such as hospice workers, priests, and ministers witness individuals' grievances and regrets about the past when the time to create change has run out. Harboring anger, grievances, or regrets only binds us to our past and fosters more negativity. **The greatest gift we can give ourselves—right now, at this moment—is forgiveness, for it transforms judgment into acceptance and makes the past powerless over us.** To heal our pain,

we must find the courage to forgive ourselves and others, the strength to suspend judgment, and the compassion to release our suffering.

*“Too often, we set aside our own needs while caring for others, or put off self-care in favor of the endless to-do lists, career obligations, and other distractions in our lives.”*

When I was working through my residual pain around my childhood experiences, I would picture myself, my mother, my father, and other figures from my childhood as spiritual beings. Seeing them in that state made it much easier for me to forgive them their human frailties. I used the mantra “Bless



and release” to bless all of our spirits in white light. Then, I would release our dysfunctional patterns and poor choices in pink light, because the vibration of pink light, which governs the physical universe, short-circuits negativity, thereby isolating it. The more I opened my heart in compassion to myself and my parents and forgave our faulty human choices, the more I eliminated the negative energy associated with my memories of them. This created new space for positive energy to return to me, and opened more space in my heart for me to love myself.

Cultivating self-compassion also requires us to nurture ourselves with all the kindness and love we would shower on someone we cherish. Too often, we set aside our own needs while caring for others, or put off self-care in favor of the endless to-do lists, career obligations, and other distractions in our lives. However, disregarding our needs to focus on activities we consider more important takes a toll on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It triggers such mindsets as “I should be doing things for others right now, not wasting time on myself.” Putting off self-care may seem noble and selfless—until we become stressed, exhausted, or ill, and suddenly lack the energy to care for anyone.

Showing more compassion to others than to ourselves can result in a loss of our internal heart connection to ourselves as love. The heart center is vulnerable to congestion because of the emotional processing that occurs there. Such emotional congestion can create feelings of depression, anxiety, and lethargy, particularly if we are over-sensitive to others’ energies. If necessary, we can reframe “self-care” as “deep rest,” so we can stop beating ourselves up for not being or doing enough. When we are tempted to ignore our needs, we must remind ourselves that we are more than enough, no matter what we do or don’t do, because we are love.

Balance doesn't come from making every aspect of our lives equal. On the contrary, balance is achieved by prioritizing the aspects of your life that matter most: what you hold most dear, and what's non-negotiable. Once we know what is nourishing to the core of our being, we can channel most of our time and energy toward those things.

Restorative self-care doesn't require a lot of money, or even a lot of time. In fact, it primarily entails performing small acts of kindness and compassion toward ourselves throughout the day. For example, taking a few minutes at the beginning and end of every day to meditate, journal, or relax; transforming our daily shower or bath into a ritual to cleanse our energy field after a stressful day; or engaging in activities such as walking, yoga, massage, acupuncture, T'ai Chi, or energy work all constitute restorative self-care. Such behavior is not self-indulgent, but rather essential to enhancing our bodies, minds, and spirits. It increases our energy, brings peace of mind, and restores that all-important inner balance. Setting aside time each day to nurture ourselves can help us reduce stress, calm our nervous system, feel renewed, and be more productive. Making a *compassionate covenant* with ourselves to practice at least one act of kindness toward ourselves every day can sustain happiness, well-being, and self-love, while giving us more energy to serve others.

When we cultivate compassion for ourselves by being kind, non-judgmental, and nonreactive—especially when we struggle, make mistakes, or feel unworthy—we are more likely to behave this way toward others. Such behavior generates universal love, inner peace, and spiritual attunement with everyone and everything. When we are truly compassionate with ourselves, we never stop seeing the beauty of our being as love.

# PRACTICES

- 1 Begin your day by initiating self-love. Close your eyes, place a hand on the center of your chest, and focus your attention on your heart. Radiate love in the form of gratitude or compassion to yourself. Acknowledge the blessings of who you are and what you already have. Over the course of the day, keep a journal of things for which you're grateful. Share three good things that happen each day with a friend or partner, and go out of your way to show gratitude when others assist you. Enhance the practice by repeating the mantra, "I am a blessed being," or, "I bless myself, my fellow human beings, and the earth."
- 2 Wake up in the morning intending to focus on the aspects of yourself you like, rather than those you dislike. As you move through your day, notice any negative, self-deprecating, or violent thoughts, and replace them with positive affirmations such as "I am light," "I am love," "I am kind," or "I am trustworthy."
- 3 Be forgiving of your mistakes and imperfections. When you react negatively to situations, bless yourself, and release blame, resentment, and judgment. Coach yourself by using supportive self-talk to clear negative thoughts and reactions, replacing them with encouraging phrases such as "Open and let go," and "Let it be."

- 4 Give yourself permission to follow your heart in some new way. Let go of something that no longer serves you, and choose something more appropriate to your current life.
- 5 Focus on the guidance of your heart. Sit in a quiet place, and enter a trancelike state through breathing, prayer, or meditation. Open your heart by touching it, breathing through it, or saying, “Open my heart.” Then, listen to the voice of your spirit speaking to you, and ask it questions if you desire.
- 6 Take purposeful breaks throughout the day to gauge your reactivity level. Use GPS4SOUL, an application for your smartphone that measures your heart rate and stress level to assist you in bringing your nervous system into coherence with your heart.
- 7 Reflect on what inspires you to get out of bed every morning. Consider whether you direct your energy positively through every thought, feeling, and choice, and whether your life reflects what you want to create for yourself and others.
- 8 Yoga poses such as cobra, upward facing dog, fish, or camel are great for opening the heart center and proving an opportunity for release of emotions. Rolling up a towel and placing it under your heart center between your shoulder blades and lower back can open the heart and offer a release to tension and emotional stress held here.





## CHAPTER 3



# THE TRANSFORMATIVE *Power of Love*

“*Love has the power to transform everything because in the presence of love, nothing else can exist but love itself.*”

—PANACHE DESAI



**T**he transformative power of love liberates and heals us so we can realize our soul potential and create a more fulfilling life.

When we acknowledge the spiritual power inherent in loss and grief, we can finally let go of the past, better appreciate the present, and create a more positive future free of old burdens and paradigms. By breaking free of our comfort zones, we can clear the way for self-love, spiritual growth, and full self-expression. And through releasing energy blocks, we can open ourselves to the flow of love for increased health and happiness.

Ironically, it's only by stepping into the pain that we can finally free ourselves from pain. Using the steps in this chapter, it is possible to prepare ourselves to become conduits of love, free ourselves from the limits and conditions placed upon us, and truly love who we were born to be.



# THE SPIRITUAL SIDE *of Loss*

“ *There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief and unspeakable love.* ”

—WASHINGTON IRVING

**D**espite the pain it elicits, loss shows us the healing power of love. It teaches us about the delicate balance, intensity, and richness of life, and above all, provides life's greatest opportunity for transformation. We cannot experience the pain of loss without first having experienced the joys associated with what has been lost, and the heartbreak that wounds us most deeply can also, eventually, lead us to the greatest enlightenment.

Grieving our losses by embracing our vulnerability is the path to healing our fractured selves. We experience loss not only through death, but through changing, letting go, and moving on. Feelings of loss can emerge in a wide variety of situations, such as losing a job, ending a relationship, suffering from an illness, or losing a loved one. We can grieve our unfulfilled dreams, our missed opportunities, and—perhaps most of all—the loss of our authentic selves.

Being human naturally sets us up for an excessive emotional attachment to loss. Whether real or perceived, we experience loss when we are deprived of, or have to let go of, something we had and valued, or something that we needed, wanted, or expected. As we make strong affectionate attachments to others, we undergo deep emotional upset when we are separated from or lose that person. Therefore, the loss of a significant relationship—whether a long-term partnership or a soul connection that lasted only a few moments—disrupts the bonds of love, connection, and security. Such loss can produce separation anxiety or distress.

**“It is the experience of loss, more than any other event in life, which compels us to step into the space of our vulnerability.”**

Acknowledging our losses is a critical step in healing feelings of lovelessness for most of us. Change and transition are passages which bring about physical, emotional, and spiritual maturation, but without the healing power of love, we can have difficulty moving through or accepting loss of any kind—let alone the kind that unravels us to our core, and challenges us to find the strength to live in the midst of devastating pain.

For the first thirty-one years of her life, Chloe lived a storybook life devoid of major loss or tragedy. She grew up in a family with two parents who loved her and provided well for her needs. As planned, Chloe graduated from a private high school and went on to college, where she met her husband, the love of her life. Soon after their college graduation, they became engaged, and Chloe obtained her first teaching position. Within a year of their marriage, they purchased their first home, and Chloe announced that she was pregnant.

Although her pregnancy had proceeded without any complications up until this day, Chloe felt a nagging intuition that something was going to happen to her baby. Yet even after reassurance by her doctors, family, and friends that everything was progressing fine, she couldn't shake this ominous feeling.

Passing her expected due date, Chloe's anxiety continued to escalate until the morning of September 11, 2001, when she woke up and didn't feel her baby move. Sensing that something was wrong, Chloe called her doctor and immediately went to his office for an ultrasound.

As she lay on the examining table waiting for the procedure to begin, Chloe clenched her husband's hand, held her breath, and tried to suppress the panic rising within her. While the ultrasound technician robotically moved the scanner across her full belly, she still felt no movement.

Without making eye contact, the technician remarked, "Unfortunately ..." and walked out of the room.

Terrified, Chloe locked eyes with her husband and knew that her intuition had been right.

Already in shock, she got off the table, dressed, and walked into her doctor's office. From behind his massive mahogany desk, her doctor dispensed the devastating news that her baby had died in utero and she would have to deliver him stillborn.

As if in suspended animation, Chloe moved through the excruciating procedure of induced labor and delivery. To survive the ordeal, she spiritually detached and floated outside her body while it struggled to deliver her nine-pound baby.

After twenty-eight hours of agonizing torture and no birth, a new doctor was summoned to assist in the delivery. Seizing her from the brink of death, Chloe's angel doctor compassionately attended to her and delivered her stillborn baby.

As Chloe placed her baby boy's hand in hers, she was struck by the immense love and connection she experienced with her child, which superseded even the intense trauma she had just come through.

Grieving the loss of her child, Chloe felt both a great love and a deep sorrow in her heart. She went through the motions of her daily life in a haze, while the underlying shock, anger, anxiety, and hopeless despair threatened to consume her. She felt hollow, like her spirit had fled her body, leaving an empty shell in its place.

Over the next year, Chloe slowly began to emerge from the tomb of her own experiential death. Surrounded and nurtured by the intense love, compassion, and acceptance of her energetic support team, she finally felt ready to share her pain, guilt, and overwhelming grief, and begin to heal her shattered self.

As part of her energetic support team, I was privileged to help Chloe through this challenging time. I shared with her that this experience was the spiritual contract she had entered into with her child before he was born. Not all spirits on their soul journey intend to be born or live an extended physical life. Some are only here for a short time to ground their human experience through the birth process, and acquire whatever physical information they need for their continued spiritual progression. It's similar to stopping for a layover when traveling by plane.

Ultimately, we cannot know another's soul journey, even when that person is as close to us as a child or spouse. Therefore, we must acknowledge that whatever choices they make are part of their divine path—even when that choice is death. Therefore, we must be grateful for the precious time we have with them, even if it's only a few years, months, or moments. Regardless of the length of time we spend together physically, our love and soul connection transcends the physical universe, and energetically resides in the eternal space of the soul.

There is no preparation we can undertake for the life-shattering loss of a loved one. It is an unfathomable pain that penetrates our lives and pierces our hearts. However, we can choose to honor our soul connection with our loved one by transforming our loss into love. We can channel the energy released at our loved one's death by putting their powerful light to positive use.

With the support of her team, this is exactly what Chloe did. Realizing that she still felt an intense desire to have a child, she directed the energy of her son's loss into becoming pregnant again. Every ounce of her being went into her own self-care during her pregnancy, and bringing her

healthy daughter, Caroline, into the world as a manifestation of the love she had for herself and her baby boy.

Another way to direct the energy of loss or change is to send love out into the world for the betterment of humanity. We can become more kind and compassionate partners, more patient and tolerant parents, and more supportive friends and coworkers. We can channel our losses into love by healing others as we rid the world of racism, abuse, hatred, and malevolence. **Resonating as a field of love, we can become love activists in our love-starved world.**

Acknowledging the positive side to loss doesn't numb the pain—nor should it. It is the pain itself that breaks our hearts open to deeper love and spiritual healing. The pain lets us know that life is precious. When it arises, we must take precious, loving care of ourselves by sitting with our feelings until they surface and release. Time may ease the pain of loss, but it's being fully present with our heartbreak that leads to healing. Leaning into such vulnerability allows us to face and experience the other side of loss, which is unconditional love of ourselves and others.

Experiencing unconditional love is critical to healing our feelings of lovelessness and releasing our pain. Without full release, such pain creates chronic distress, which may manifest in such conditions as depression, anxiety, and physical illness. If left unresolved, these losses will continue to be repeated and recycled through our interactions with others. As Judith Viorst aptly says, “Our childhood and youth are gone, and we must pause to mourn our losses before we move on.”<sup>1</sup>

We cannot fully release the pain of grief with our minds alone. In fact, until we open our hearts, we can remain stuck in the grieving process, which can in turn lead to a state of unremitting suffering. Feelings of sorrow, anger, guilt, self-loathing, and depression cannot be processed in the mind—but when we at last release the “heart stuff,” it opens up sacred space to heal so we can become whole again.

It is the experience of loss, more than any other event in life, which compels us to step into the space of our vulnerability. Like dominos falling back upon each other, each loss unleashes the next in a chain reaction, until we feel the collective loss of our entire lives. Like stripping away layers of paint to reveal the woodwork beneath, the more pain we peel away, the deeper the release. Dredging up decades (or even past lifetimes) of loss, while excruciating in the moment, creates space within our hearts to transform the agony into something exquisite: the revelation of who we truly are and how deeply we can love.

A useful tool that can help release our pain from unresolved losses is a self-designed ritual of release. Rituals of release include making a picture scrapbook, using old photos in a collage about the past, journaling, or simply lighting a candle. Such rituals transform energy that is stuck from unresolved grief into positive healing experiences.

For example, to release her lifelong sense of unworthiness, my client, Donna, used photos from her childhood, textured papers, and inspiring quotes to create a visual journal that depicted her self-healing from childhood sexual abuse. This ritual of release transformed her emotional release and vulnerability into a positive, creative force.

The experience of loss, balanced by the healing power of love, gives us hope, empowers us to let go, and transforms our lives. Most of all, it begs the question, “How will we live?” No matter how painful our lovelessness, love heals us as we emerge on the other side of our pain, transformed for all we have experienced. It opens us to embrace our natural life cycles, and accept life for what it really is: a series of births, deaths, and transitions that ultimately lead to soul-hearted transformation.





*Breaking Free*  
OF OUR COMFORT  
ZONES

“ *We delight in the beauty of the butterfly, but rarely admit the changes it has gone through to achieve that beauty.* ”

—MAYA ANGELOU

**I**n 1992, a Chinese freighter accidentally dropped a crate of thirty thousand rubber duckies into the Pacific Ocean. The little yellow ducks were later discovered on the coasts of Indonesia, Australia, South America, Alaska, and England. This “worldwide distribution” resulted in scientists gaining a better understanding of ocean currents.

Metaphorically, this example shows us how breaking out of our comfort zones (in this case, the freighter) and trusting the current of life to carry us forward can not only bring us to fascinating new shores, but also contribute to a greater good in the process.

**Breaking out of our comfort zones challenges us to expand our range of spiritual understanding and stimulate our personal growth.** We can initiate this process by uprooting the negative habits and mindsets that form those “safe” zones. Throughout our lives, we have probably been conditioned by others to fit in at all costs, to adhere to prescribed rules and mores, and to be “perfect.” Even the people to whom we are closest may have rigid ideas about how we should live our lives—sentiments that can come from a desire to see us happy, a desire to fulfill their own needs, or both. For instance, a father may want us to live out his dreams and enjoy worldly success in the process, or a friend or spouse may wish us to play a defined role in support of their agenda.

We often become fixated on how others perceive and define us, and try to remain within limited parameters for fear of making mistakes, failing, or disappointing them because we desperately want their approval.

But such behavior diminishes our sense of self-worth, limits our ability to make discerning choices, undermines trust in our own experiences, and muffles the voice of our spirit. There is nothing enlightened about “shrink-wrapping” ourselves so that others feel secure or fulfilled.

Many of us spend our entire lives accepting such limitations, believing that the comfort zones they constitute are the fixed circumstances of our lives. We become bogged down in daily problems that threaten to engulf us, and often feel as if we're just going through the motions. As if on automatic pilot, we make the same choices repeatedly: eating the same foods, taking the same route to work, reacting to the same issues, and interacting with the same people. We do everything in our power to avoid expressing who we are and stay safely within the confines of fear, negativity, and complacency—and thus disconnected from our authentic selves as love. This disconnection from our power source drains our energies and reinforces a sense of futility and unworthiness. If we continue to live this way, we will miss opportunities to manifest our dreams because we are afraid to step out into our light and claim the power of our authentic selves.

**The word “scared” becomes “sacred” when we interchange two letters. Vulnerability is sacred space.**

Many of us equate living within our comfort zones with security and predictability. Yet this only creates an illusion of security, and keeps us focused on external conditions such as who we are with, what we do, where we live, or what we own. As a result, we feel as if we are victims of our circumstances, lacking the power to manifest the lives we want. Instead, we must learn to see that our true source of security comes from within us—and is our essence as love.

Although it can be disconcerting, even painful, to step outside our comfort zones, spiritual growth requires us to take responsibility for the patterns, beliefs, and choices we make in our lives, and compassionately eliminate all that is not in alignment with our soul's journey.

In other words, by choosing to spiritually grow, we choose to love ourselves.

**When we break free of our comfort zones, we no longer feel we have to sacrifice our worthiness.** We let go of our fixations with what other people think, and show up fully. Open to our worthiness, we embody love because we are love. When we spend our lives people-pleasing, proving, or suppressing aspects of ourselves that don't fit with who we think others want us to be, we remain hidden in the shame-shadows, stuck in the cycle of our own obsessive need for external validation.

Last October, I traveled to Santa Fe, New Mexico. While staying there, I took my first class in NIA, a sensory-based movement practice that incorporates dance, martial arts, and healing arts. Originally, I was going to stay in my comfort zone by going to a yoga class; however, I wanted to experience my vulnerability, and taking the NIA class turned out to be a good motivator. As we began to move, my first thoughts were, “Am I doing this right?” and “Do I look like a fool?” I compared myself to everyone else, immediately felt five years old, and moved to the back of the room where no one could see me. Then, I realized that there were floor-to-ceiling mirrors on the walls, which meant there was nowhere to hide.

At this point, the teacher asked us to break out of our usual movements, calling out, “Are you doing anything new? Are you doing the same hippie arms? Are you staying in one place?” Of course, I was doing the same hippie arms in the same place, stuck in my habitual movements and afraid to transcend my comfort zone. Summoning my courage, I opened my heart and said to myself, “Oh, what the heck. Just trust yourself, Deb.” I surrendered to my inner dancer, experiencing a freedom I had never felt before on the dance floor, and discovering a way to express myself that better reflected my authentic self.

Our habitual comfort zones, when they suppress our authenticity or hobble our expression, might more accurately be termed “deadening zones.” They are like the yellow tape outlining a body at a crime scene, keeping all the ugliness in—and keeping everyone else out. In order

to express who we truly are, we must step outside the confines of our “deadening zones” and move toward, rather than away from, what we fear. **When we break out of our familiar habits of resistance, avoidance, and control, and embrace change as a mantra for our lives, we can finally begin to love our way to our authentic selves.**

Some things, like letting go of a significant relationship, can do more than take us outside our comfort zone; it can transform us in ways we never thought possible. Even when we know it is in our best interest to release someone we love and move on, thoughts of doing so can trigger separation anxiety and feelings of guilt, anger, disappointment, and sadness. This is especially true if the two people are in different stages of spiritual growth, or if they disagree on terminating the relationship. While we may feel ready to release the relationship, the other person, terrified of change, may adamantly hold on to it. Because of that fear of loss and discomfort, one partner will stop at nothing to block the ending of the relationship. However, this resistance causes more conflict than it solves, and prevents healing.

Divorce and separation can crumble our comfort zones, even if we are the person initiating it. For my client Barbara, the decision to end an almost fifty-year marriage didn't happen overnight; it was a process that occurred over decades of searching for herself and her soul's path. Over the years, Barbara noticed that her need for constant distraction in the form of entertainment, a new home, and an intense entrepreneurial business had increased, and little seemed to satisfy her anymore. Nothing could fill the void within her because she had strayed from loving and connecting to her true being. Although she had a strong belief in God, working on her spiritual relationship had become secondary to keeping her painful feelings at bay.

As Barbara and I worked together, she began to realize that she needed to reconnect with her spirit and focus on her relationship with herself. Like many women, Barbara had set aside herself and her needs for the needs of her husband. Even with her unwavering support, he resisted doing his

own spiritual work, and was content with the stagnating status quo of their relationship. After many years of this pattern, the trust, integrity, and intimacy were long gone, and the only element of the relationship that remained was the comfort zone of their daily routines.

Trusting herself and taking a courageous step, Barbara began to sit with her pain instead of escaping from it into distraction. Setting aside time every day for meditation and journaling, she confronted her suppressed feelings and began to release them. Looking inside herself for the truth, Barbara realized that it was time to let go of her marriage. She had left it spiritually a long time ago.

Breaking free of the comfort zone of her marriage and choosing to love herself was life-affirming for Barbara, and I assisted her in navigating this seismic shift with self-love and compassion. First, Barbara needed to become aware and examine her caretaking patterns with men and women, her feelings of unworthiness, and her lack of trust in herself to choose what was right for her. She also needed to unearth the origin of her lovelessness in order to finally create the life she desired.

It took tremendous courage for Barbara to look loss in the face, implode her comfortable existence, and face the future alone at nearly seventy years old, but she discovered that when she trusted herself and her connection to her divine source, there was no question that leaving her marriage was the right choice. Taking full accountability for her part in co-creating the relationship, she validated the purpose the marriage had served, and blessed her experience in it. Even though her husband disagreed with her choice, and resisted getting a divorce, Barbara was able to release her marriage with grace, love, and compassion.

**When we break free of our comfort zones and surrender our resistance and control, we tap into an unlimited source of positive energy and creativity, and begin to see our experiences from an expanded perspective.** From this “bird’s-eye view,” we can get new information about ourselves, our true desires, and our souls’ journeys.

This process of breaking free requires us to focus more on “being” than on “doing.” Accomplishments and achievements are wonderful, but if we are to live in a fully realized and authentic state, it is the light of our being, not the work of our hands that must shine forth beyond everything—for that is our connection to our divine source, and the basis for our full self-expression in life.

Giving ourselves permission to “just be” requires letting go of our preconceived mindsets and beliefs about how we should live, and following our hearts instead. Remember when we had twenty minutes for recess? The bell would ring, and for twenty precious minutes, time stood still and the universe of possibility opened up to us. As children, we yielded to this freedom of spirit, knowing that nothing else mattered. As adults, many of us feel we have lost the sense of spontaneity we had as children, when rules and routines were things to be ignored; instead, we feel resigned, overwhelmed, or exhausted by the challenging pace of life, and the endless tasks demanding our time and attention. As difficult as it may be to take time to be, we must give ourselves permission to do just that. We need to do the things that make our hearts sing and our inner beings come alive, for this provides vital awareness of our authentic selves, and enhances our ability to love ourselves, others, and life itself.

Because our authentic selves consist of pure love, there is no need to validate our existence through outside sources such as bosses, friends, or even our partners. Instead, we must give ourselves permission to focus on our inner selves, dance in the light, play with possibilities, and fully express who we are. Making such a spiritual covenant is essential for channeling spiritual information to guide our choices for well-being, abundance, and fulfillment. This agreement sets our spirit free from negative thought processes that bind us to our present circumstances, and clears the way for us to make discerning choices in alignment with our soul's journey.

We must never be intimidated by our potential for love and spiritual development. Instead, we must be courageous, and break free of our comfort zones so that, like the rubber duckies, we can trust the currents of life to carry us to a more purposeful and adventurous future.





*Releasing*  
ENERGY BLOCKS  
TO LOVE

“ *We are people who need to love,  
because love is the soul’s  
life. Love is simply creation’s  
greatest joy.* ”

—HAFIZ

**R**eleasing energy blocks opens us to the flow of love, and is an essential practice in being love.

If we want to progress in self-love, love of others, and love of the world, we must release anyone or anything that impedes the flow of love within us, and restore peace and harmony in all aspects of our lives. When we harbor resentment, worry excessively, become angry, or feel stressed, we block the flow of energy in our bodies, especially our heart centers, and diminish our ability to receive valuable spiritual information through our heart centers. Consequently, whenever there are energy blocks in the body (and especially when those blocks are produced by negative thoughts), we become prone to diseases of the mind, body, or spirit—including heart disease, weakening of the immune system, anxiety, and depression.

Like removing the kinks from a garden hose to maximize the flow of water, releasing energy blocks allows us to become progressively more open to the flow of love. As Robert Holden, PhD, says in his book, *Loveability: Knowing How to Love and Be Loved*, “Love is never difficult; it is only the blocks to love that appear to make love difficult.”<sup>2</sup>

A good way to release energy blocks is by “letting it be”—a spiritual practice highlighted in Paul McCartney’s inspirational song of the same title. Simply saying to ourselves, “Let it be,” informs our brains that we have entered a “no-judgment zone.” In this space, we can divest

ourselves of our attachment to a person or situation, and eliminate any associated negativity or resistance. Additionally, “letting it be” encourages compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance of our own and others’ soul journeys.

Letting it be goes beyond releasing judgment and resentment toward past experiences. It also allows us to trust the divine unfolding of our lives, make discerning choices that align with our soul’s path, and lead with our hearts as they whisper words of wisdom.

Letting it be also includes maintaining a healthy detachment from any expected result. Having expectations of ourselves, others, or situations can create energy blocks that interrupt the flow of love because expectations set us up for stress and disappointment. Moreover, attachments to specific results often prohibit the possibility of even better outcomes by keeping us locked within certain perimeters of expectation. Although our expectations may be positive, we nevertheless impede the flow of energy by focusing on specific outcomes instead of trusting that we will receive exactly what we need for our personal transformation at a particular time. By contrast, remaining detached from specific outcomes allows us to be in a state of expanded awareness in which we can more easily recognize the negative thoughts or reactions impeding our flow of love, as well as perceive our circumstances from the broader perspective of our soul’s journey.

In her book *Anatomy of the Spirit*, Caroline Myss describes how our thoughts generate a physiological response within our bodies, and how they affect other people and the environment in which we live. She explains: “Every thought you have had has traveled through your biological system and activated a physiological response. Some thoughts are like depth charges, causing a reaction throughout the body. A fear, for instance, activates every system of your body: your stomach tightens, your heart rate increases, and you may break into a sweat. A loving thought can relax your entire body.”<sup>3</sup>

Like motion sensors, our bodies alert us when we are experiencing an energy block. Such physical and emotional reactions alert us to pause, check in, and notice what needs to be healed. For instance, tightening in our chests, holding our breath, or clenching our jaws probably indicates that we are most likely trying to numb our pain. Emotional reactions such as anger, irritation, anxiety, blame, defensiveness, or attack do the same. Numbness is our way of blocking the pain of hurt, abandonment, and disappointment. When we dig deeper, we usually find that underneath these physical and emotional symptoms are feelings of lovelessness.

Here's another example: I know that when the pitch of my voice becomes higher, like a young girl's, I am experiencing an energy block relating to some past emotional issue. This physical reaction lets me know that I need to pause, open my heart, and check in with myself to discover what I am afraid of communicating, and why. When we ignore such cues, we forfeit opportunities to confront the underlying issues behind our energy blocks, and subsequently release them.

***“My experience with cancer inspired me to trust my connection to the divine source of love and realize that I am spiritually prepared to handle anything that comes my way, even an unexpected illness.”***

By elevating our energy to the higher vibration of love, we can elevate the vibrations in the cells in our bodies as well. You can do this by closing your eyes, placing a hand on the center of your chest, breathing deeply into your belly, and focusing your attention on your heart. Visualize the vibration of love as a continuous stream of positive energy flowing into you, through you, and out of you. Breathe out negative thoughts, emotions, and judgments about yourself with each exhalation.

During a recent radio interview, I was asked by the interviewer to share my personal journey and the aspects of my experience which changed my life. After checking just about every box on the list of life's most stressful events, I realized just how resilient the human spirit really is when we just let everything be. Even when challenged by breast cancer, I effectively participated in my own healing by letting it be, trusting myself, and co-creating my healing experience by acting as if my wellness had already manifested. From the perspective of this expanded awareness, I made a series of intentions and discerning choices that invited miracles of love and healing.

First, I created an energetic support team for wellness who loved me without judging, enabling, or interfering with my choices, whether or not they agreed with the healing path I had chosen. I compassionately detached from others (such as my original doctor, director of the Cleveland Clinic Breast Center, my father and stepmother, and several friends), because instead of supporting my healing choices they criticized them and tried to convince me to follow the traditional medical path that they thought was the right and only path.

Second, I released the energy blocks around my heart center and the deep-seated emotional patterns—especially self-consciousness, worthlessness, and shame—that had created them. When I listened to the voice of self-love within my heart over the voice of fear from my brain, I invited in miracles.

Third, I connected with the highest vibrational source for healing—love. Like creating a clean hard drive on a computer, through trans-meditation I elevated my vibrational frequency by opening my heart and visualizing light and love surrounding every cell in my breast tissue and throughout my body. I released all negative thoughts, and replaced them with loving affirmations, such as “I am a well-being,” “I know love because I am love,” and “I affirm life, love, and wellness.” These affirmations helped elevate my vibrational frequency to that of the energy of love, where transformational healing occurs.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, I *chose* to recover, affirming wellness with each thought, word, and choice I initiated, every day and night. In other words, I loved myself well. Today, when I participate in a Susan G. Komen event for breast cancer, I walk across the finish line as a “thrivor” rather than a “survivor.” The distinction for me is crystal clear. Reinforcing that I am a survivor would keep me energetically tied to my past physical experience, causing my cells to vibrate at a lower frequency, while reinforcing that I am a thrivor sustains a higher frequency of love energy and affirms that I have energetically broken with the past.

Ultimately, my healing experience was a miraculous manifestation of the transformative power of love. My experience with cancer inspired me to trust my connection to the divine source of love and realize that I am spiritually prepared to handle anything that comes my way, even an unexpected illness. The heart-based work I had done to heal myself and forgive my past brought me into a loving relationship with myself, while letting it be opened the space in my heart for love to reside.

Everything from our past can potentially lead to energy blocks. Most of us find it easier to react from personal history than to let go of the past and prepare for new possibilities. But unless we let the past go, we will have to continue dealing with a past that needs to be released.

Clearing the energy of the past is a healthy process akin to sloughing off dead skin cells. If left to accumulate, they would block the growth of new, healthy cells, and harm the overall function and beauty of the skin. Animals, birds, and plants also move through a regenerative clearing process—cycles of shedding, molting, or loss of leaves—as a part of their natural development. Similarly, as we peel away layers of the past, we develop a spiritual clarity that transforms our history and opens us to possibilities.

To release energy blocks and direct our creative energy toward shaping more loving and fulfilling lives, it is necessary to let everything from the past be—both the positive and negative, the things that we cherish and

draw strength from, as well as those no longer appropriate to our being. We must trust that anything with a negative pull will be released, and that the value from our positive experiences will linger within us.

To remain open to the flow of love, we must also release any current experiences or energies blocking the harmonic resonance in our lives. Engaging in energetic feng shui, we must clear our lives not only of outdated clothes and household items but also of negative people, harmful belief systems, and toxic environments. Whether such releases feel like a tsunami or a gentle wave, they can incite intense moments of self-discovery and personal transformation. If we have defined ourselves by our roles and are now considering ending a relationship or quitting a job, we may feel anxious, overwhelmed, and untethered, and begin to question who we are. Yet regardless of our situation we can release the past effectively by trusting ourselves and our connection to our source.

**With sheer vulnerability and true courage we must release anything that isn't aligned with our soul's journey. This allows us to celebrate life more in the light of our being than in the shadows of our ego.**

Every day we are presented with situations that challenge us to release energy blocks and open ourselves to the flow of love for improved health, enhanced well-being, and increased spiritual growth. When the flow of love remains open, we ultimately create this current of energy in our relationships and our connection to universal love in the world.

As love, we are the most transformative force in the universe. Therefore, if we want to awaken and truly connect to others, we must awaken and connect to ourselves. When we embrace our infinite loveliness and share it, we discover we are not separate, but connected through the flow of love to everyone and everything.



# PRACTICES

- 1 Seek creative outlets to channel the energy that is released when the heart center is opened. Journal, dance, or sing to direct the flow of your energies creatively. Be receptive to new experiences, ideas, and people outside your daily routine. Let go of any expected outcomes and welcome the enhanced love, joy, and play that streams into your life.
- 2 Deep, slow, intentional breathing will draw more oxygen into your body and release energy blocks. A regular breathing practice will help you remain clear on a daily basis, and release past blocks as well. While inhaling, breathe in love to yourself; when exhaling, breathe love out to others. Do this until your breath is rhythmic, and you feel calm and centered. Then, for at least a minute, let your energies expand outward in gratitude or compassion for yourself or someone else.
- 3 Practice "letting it be" by focusing on your own life instead of micromanaging others. Encourage yourself to live without judging present situations or resenting past ones.
- 4 Visualize yourself walking through life happy, enthusiastic, and fully alive. Write down this vision of your life as you see it now, as you hope it will be in six months, and how you would like it to be in five years. Then choose three steps you can take now toward manifesting your vision—and do them.

- 5 Practice giving yourself permission by doing one or both of the following activities:
  - (a) Tell yourself, “I give myself permission to \_\_\_\_\_.”
  - (b) Make a list of activities that bring you joy, then participate in one activity from the list. Say yes to new creative experiences that make you explore outside your comfort zones. Share an idea with a work colleague or a dream with a friend or partner.
  
- 6 Release negative energy after stressful days by taking a shower or bath to clear your energy field. Drink water to release toxins in the body. Engage in exercise and activities such as yoga, massage, acupuncture, or energy work to release energy blocks and open you to the flow of positive energy.
  
- 7 Use “Bless and release” as a daily mantra in your life. When any person or situation triggers negative emotions, bless them (or it) for bringing this unhealed part of yourself into your conscious awareness. Sit with and release whatever pain surfaced so it doesn’t become a stuck place or an energy block.

- 8 Create a sacred ritual to bless and release any person or situation. Possible rituals may include a private prayer service, the burning of items related to the person, the creation of a picture scrapbook or journal, or the designing of a collage that reflects your future intentions.
  
- 9 Practice mindfulness by connecting with nature. Nature grounds, balances, and heals us. Just being outside in nature will bring you into the present moment. Take time each day to go outdoors, if only for a few minutes, to elevate your mood, expand your imagination, and broaden your perspective on your life circumstances and those of others.

PART TWO

*Being*  
**LOVE**  
WITH  
OTHERS







## CHAPTER 4



*Attracting Love*  
BY  
BEING LOVE

“ *Those that go searching for love only make manifest their own lovelessness, and the loveless never find love, only the loving find love, and they never have to seek it.* ”

—D. H. LAWRENCE



**W**e attract love by being love—by opening our hearts and radiating love continuously. Seeking love, however, keeps us operating from our brains, which cannot generate the high vibration of energy that our hearts can. When we embody love as our divine essence, we no longer have to seek it. It comes to us.

Only upon realizing our natural ability to open our hearts to the flow of love, manifest the fullest expression of ourselves, and intimately share this elevated experience of life on all levels—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—can we begin to attract truly loving relationships. Revealing who we are, we connect intimately with others and open to the flow of universal love.

Being love with others is being *soulfully* seen, heard, and known. We are completely accepted for who we are even when the other person doesn't share our viewpoints, agree with our choices, or follow the same path. We recognize and respect each other as equals and not separate from the divine energy that connects us. We don't have to understand or hang out with everyone, or even like the choices others make; yet we can acknowledge the same need to love and be loved. We see every other human as a fellow being born of love and walking the path of love on earth along with us.

*Inviting In*  
LOVE AND  
CONNECTION

“ *You have to love yourself  
because no amount of love  
from others is enough to fill  
the yearning that your soul  
requires from you.* ”

—DODINSKY

**I**nviting love into our being allows us to experience our sacred connection to others and to humanity as a whole. When we are born, we temporarily forget our divine magnificence; consequently, we spend much of our lives trying to remember who we are. Before we uncover that remembrance, we spend much of our time and energy seeking out the inner connection which we crave on a soul level without even really understanding why. In other words, even before we remember what love really is, and where it comes from, we spiritually yearn to love and be loved.

In our state of “love blindness,” we tend to look for love in all the wrong places. Our society, which is rampant with lovelessness, not only reinforces our flawed views of love but encourages us to keep searching for it in the most unhealthy ways. We expect our Prince or Princess Charming to ride up on a white horse and make us feel secure, happy, and whole. We want to find our soul mate and have a “cosmic” connection, but rarely do we do the inner spiritual work required to attract and cultivate such a soul-hearted relationship—and when the object of our affection fails to live up to our fantasy, we feel betrayed and deprived. We think we have to seek or earn love; however, we cannot acquire something that already exists within us.

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112      Once we acknowledge love as our divine essence, we can more readily invite in love and connection through opening our hearts to the essence of others. And the more we emanate the energy from our hearts, the more love is generated and returned to us.

By inviting in love and connecting with someone on a soul level, we spiritually grow. The relationship becomes a portal to our own (and our partner's) transformation into more loving and fulfilled human beings. It is why we are here.

Our survival as a human species depends on our ability to invite in love and connect with others to create a world of compassion and peace. Clinical psychologist and relationship researcher Sue Johnson states, "Secure connection with loved ones helps us be open, responsive, and flexible, and that, in turn, makes us inclined to perceive the world as kinder, safer, and more malleable. It gives us the capacity to look outward, to see the broader universe, and take a more active role in it."<sup>1</sup> Thus, loving and connected relationships lead to a loving and more connected world.

**In every relationship, in every moment, we demonstrate love or fear.** The more we express love toward others, the more we see that we are lovable, and discover how to love more intimately. Being lovingly connected to others brings out the best in us, and allows us to emotionally and spiritually grow as individuals.

All relationships are opportunities to open and connect at the heart level. Relationships are the energetic collisions between our social and solitary natures. Unfortunately, many of us choose to remain alone and disconnected, convincing ourselves that we will never find another person with whom we can feel safe enough to reveal our authentic selves. In fact, we are living in a world of escalating isolation where more people are opting to live and be alone. As a whole, Western society—particularly American society—tends to focus on individual achievement and power over relationship and community. Unless balanced by the energy of love, this tendency toward self-involvement can create a downward spiral into a dangerous place of disconnection and detachment.

A deep, loving connection with another person offsets this experience of isolation since it brings both hearts into vibrational coherence as one energy source that interconnects with all living beings. It affirms that we

are not alone in the world, that although we may feel physically separated we are energetically connected through our hearts and souls. Through this connection of universal love, we find that we are never truly alone.

Our human need to be loved and connected is powerful and innately wired. When this need is not met, it produces emotional pain. Neuroscience shows that this need is reinforced by our brain chemistry. Research studies demonstrate that contact with a loving partner is a powerful buffer against stress, danger, and threat. Therefore, healthy relationships help us deal more positively with life's bumps, stressors, and even traumas.

Happy, healthy, and connected relationships are founded in physical, emotional, and spiritual connection. We have entered an “age of love” where love and connection have now become the foundation on which we commit to a partner. This goes far beyond choosing a partner primarily for survival reasons. In truth, we are soul-wired to bond because we need love and connection not only to survive, but to thrive. Sexual contact may entice us to mate for the ultimate survival of the species; but love and connection support our physical existence and enhance our spiritual growth. As poet Rainer Maria Rilke suggests, “Love consists in this: that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other.”<sup>2</sup>

Psychiatrist John Bowlby, an expert on attachment and bonding, defines attachment as a way of conceptualizing the propensity of human beings to make strong affectional bonds to significant others. Bowlby's theory explains the many forms of emotional distress to which undesired separation anxiety and loss give rise. He proposes that a lack of attachment or loss of a significant relationship, even an unhealthy or stressful one—disrupts bonds of love, comfort, and security.

We cannot underestimate the significance of love and connection in our lives. Feeling disconnected from one's spouse currently accounts for 70 percent of marital affairs among men and 40 percent among women. Affairs are a predictable way that we deal with our lovelessness, loneliness, and despair, and we often attract another person into our lives to serve our

need for an intimate connection. Yet one night stands and hook ups don't lead to secure love and belonging. On the contrary, intimate connection leads to passionate sex and long lasting love. Ultimately, all of us want to feel connected, validated, and, above all, that someone is there for us.

Although we need love and connection, today we are more distracted by technological forms of communication than ever before. Between our cell phones, the Internet, television, FaceTime, and social media, we are now devoting more time to looking at other people on our screens than we do interacting personally with them. Unfortunately, we remain emotionally disconnected from others because we hide behind these technological devices. This profound level of distraction and lack of emotional engagement keeps us from developing deeply connected relationships.

In my life, the pivotal moment of inviting in real love and connection came when I found the courage to let go of my second marriage and chose to love myself more than the codependent patterns that had held my relationship together. Sitting on the wobbly first step of my back deck on a cold spring day in March, I remember thinking, "I cannot compromise myself or my children any longer." It felt like my feet were on the ground anchoring me in my current life while the rest of me was spinning out of control into my future. At the same time, I felt depressed, having long been unhappy but having not allowed myself to feel the depth of my pain or make an alternative choice. Yet I knew I was compromising myself by continuing to play the role of caretaker, keeping everything together to make others happy.

*“Only when we let go of our human process and connect compassionately, heart to heart and soul to soul, can we experience the reality of being love with others.”*

For over nine years, I felt as if I had been in emotional and spiritual limbo, going through the motions in my second marriage while setting my own needs aside for those of others. I knew this place well, for I had lived here all my life: waiting for the other shoe to fall, waiting for things to get better, waiting for the courage to leave. I clung to my daily routines as a buoy so as not to slip into the sea of despair that threatened to engulf me. I knew I needed to embrace my pain and let it guide me, but I was too afraid to do so. I also knew that in choosing to make other people's lives wonderful I had temporarily forfeited my own fulfillment, along with my dream of genuine love and connection with myself and a true partner.

Lying on my bed, I was transported back to my living room on the night of my second husband's doctoral graduation party. I saw him standing, wearing a paper king's crown, beaming triumphantly as friends and family congratulated him on his accomplishment, while I watched from the shadows not as his queen, but as a servant to his dreams, as always.

I had deferred my life for his, in yet another self-sacrificial relationship. I had supported his dreams without asking for support of my own, since trying to fix the relationship made me feel worthwhile and in control. I had created a familiar scenario—anticipating that a relationship would complete me—but instead of bringing us closer, my patterns of behavior had led to a situation where we led parallel but separate lives linked only through children and the house.

Even with my underlying support, he resisted doing his own spiritual work. He was content with his dependence on me and the stagnant day-to-day routine of our relationship. In this graveyard of a marriage, trust, integrity, and intimacy were long gone; in their place grew a destructive kudzu vine of indifference that suppressed even discontent. I was living in passive coexistence.

From the perspective of my friends and family, my life appeared ideal. They saw a comfortable home, two well-adjusted children, and a marriage absent of external conflict. But what they observed was a facade. I tried to

make my marriage work by taking care of everything, a deception that was encouraged by family and friends. They supported me as long as I tried to keep the relationship alive even when it had already died. Instead of listening to my own heart, I deferred to everyone else and their idea of what was best for me. Afraid of disappointing them, I had avoided the choice to leave my marriage, a choice I knew my heart had already made years ago.

Even though I knew in my heart that my marriage was over, I tried to stick it out for my teenage son's benefit. I had already put him through the trauma of one divorce, and my heart couldn't bear to put him through another. My daughter, however, was witnessing my role as a caretaker in a codependent marriage. Did I really want this to be her model for future relationships? I felt as if I was in a no-win situation. Any choice I made—even if it was the choice to do nothing, and change nothing—would end up hurting someone.

Before I could let go of my second marriage, I had to first forgive the vow I had made to myself that I would never put my children through this experience. My heart was congested with feelings of disappointment, shame, and guilt for betraying them. Slowly, trusting myself and leaning into these layers, I sat with my pain instead of escaping from it into more distraction. I set aside time every day for meditation and journaling and faced my feelings “heart on” until they released. The more I released my feelings, the more I began to forgive myself for staying too long in another dysfunctional relationship and realized I had made the best choices possible at the time. Trusting myself and letting go, I finally made the choice to leave my marriage—a choice that originated from the intention my heart had made that early spring day on my deck steps.

To create the space for a genuine loving and connected relationship, I had to let go of the relationship I was in and release the toxic residue left in its wake. Even though I was terrified of being divorced again, I knew on some level I was inviting in an intense period of self-discovery and healing. Because I had defined myself by my roles as a wife, mother, and caretaker,



I felt untethered and uncertain, and questioned who I was and what I truly wanted. In letting go of my anger at myself and my ex-husband, and forgiving the disappointing loss of our relationship, I started to come out of the shadows of shame and let my tears wash away a lifetime of toxic residue. Like a cosmic cow catcher in front of a locomotive, I had to clear the track of anything that blocked the flow of love in my life. If I wanted to live a life of authenticity, I had to affirm that I was lovable and didn't need anyone's permission to be or express this love. And that, in turn, meant changing everything I knew about how to operate in relationship.

It is our nature to yearn for pure love and connection, yet we often stay in unhealthy relationships beyond their time and purpose out of fear of loneliness. We say such things to ourselves as “I know he loves me, even though he can't say it and can't show it,” or “He'll come around someday, and do the inner spiritual work.” Unfortunately, we are often seduced by such a pseudo-connection—especially when we are afraid of what true, authentic connection with a spiritual partner might really mean.

Developing deep connection with a true partner on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level is challenging for several reasons. First, most people are terrified of opening their hearts and connecting with others in an intimate way because they have been hurt, disappointed, or abandoned in the name of love. Instead, they hide behind a disguise, giving others what they think they want but still not feeling truly loved and connected. Next, many individuals confuse approval-seeking or people-pleasing for genuine love and connection, or think that trying to fix what's going on in another person's life will create love out of need. Finally, many people meet someone who appears better than the last person with whom they were in relationship, think “This is as good as it gets,” and settle, telling themselves they were lucky to find someone.

When we engage in these kinds of behaviors, we remain focused on our own egocentric concerns and insecurities. In other words, we're still trying to love from our brains, rather than being love. Only when we let go of our human process and connect compassionately, heart to heart and soul to soul, can we experience the reality of being love with others.

Dr. Robert Holden encourages us to see that, despite difficulties, real love is attainable. “When you know you are lovable and you remember your eternal loveliness, you are attractive in the highest sense ... Therefore, if you feel lovable, you attract loving relationships, because that's what you relate to. If you don't feel lovable, you attract something that isn't love because that's what you relate to.”<sup>3</sup>

**We create soul-hearted relationships by being love ourselves rather than going on a quest to find “the one,” and by holding ourselves fully accountable for the creational energy that we emit into the universe.** If our energy is toxic or negative, we will invite toxicity and negativity into our lives. On the other hand, if we radiate love and our authentic selves, we will attract pure love and connection with others.

We should not assume that there is only one soul mate for each person and we have to seek them out to be happy. Rather, there are thousands of soul-connections with whom we can interact over a lifetime. Upon encountering any person with whom we have such a connection, we instantly are drawn to them, and experience an energetic connection through our thoughts, feelings, and bodily responses. We may not see each other for long periods of time, but our bond remains forever. Soul mates appear in our lives to assist us with our soul's progression. They enhance our lives by providing insights, unconditional love, and spiritual assistance. Most importantly, we attract such soul-connected people into our lives by being our own soul mate, committed to doing the heart-centered spiritual work that it takes to stay true to our soul's journey.

Most of us have the capability to love someone; however, to love and connect with them on a heart and soul level takes it up a few spiritual notches. In my book, *Soul-Hearted Partnership*, I proposed that a soul-hearted partner is a soul mate with whom we develop and sustain intimacy not just at the soul level, but on all levels: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. While a soul mate is like a diamond in the rough with its sparkle of potential, a soul-hearted partner is a diamond that has been cut and polished to bring out its brilliance and placed in

a four-pronged setting of love, trust, intimacy, and full self-expression. All soul-hearted partners are soul mates; yet not all soul mates become soul-hearted partners. Some become lifelong best friends or inspirational guides; others fade out of our lives once they've bestowed the gifts they came to give us.

To live as soul mates with a heart and soul connection, both partners have to love unconditionally, trust unequivocally, and (as much as possible) relate to each other being-to-being. After years of therapeutic and spiritual work, I finally saw that the series of romantic relationships in which I had been involved did not constitute a string of personal failures but actually represented a spiritual progression toward creating a genuine loving and soul-connected relationship with myself and a true life partner. In my first marriage, I created a beautiful son and emerged with the qualities of self-love, compassion, and respect. In my second marriage, I satisfied my desire for intense spiritual growth; had opportunities to recognize and release my patterns of perfectionism, insecurity, self-sacrifice, caretaking, and control; and created an amazing daughter. Neither were "failed" relationships, but instead opportunities to transform myself and my life. Most significantly, I realized that my present marriage with my heart and soul-connected partner was the genuine relationship that had resulted from the experience of my previous marriages and my spiritual progression. In other words, my first marriage was for my son, my second marriage was for my daughter, and my present soul-hearted relationship was for me.

An intimate connection with a soul-hearted partner is based less on physical need than on mutual validation of who we are. It is a true gift to ourselves to connect with such a partner, as they amplify the love already present within us. The opening to love and connection that we can experience with such a partner is something for which all human beings strive.

**To attract such loving and connected relationships into our lives, we must first embody the love and connection we seek.** We do this by expressing genuine love in our every encounter so that the positive energy stream we generate makes each moment of our lives a loving meditation.

*Pure Love*  
IS WITHOUT  
CONDITIONS

“ *Do not seek the because—  
in love there is no because,  
no reason, no explanation, no  
solutions.* ”

—ANAÏS NIN

**E**xpressing love without conditions is key to transforming our relationships and our world. Unconditional love, a pure flow of love independent of external conditions, is generated through the heart, the link to our divine essence. Keeping an open heart sustains unconditional love in a conditional world.

When we love another person unconditionally, we love the essence of who they are, not their appearance or the superficial things they say or do. Nor are our feelings toward them altered by their vulnerabilities or imperfections. This expression of genuine love, which is a whole and complete energy, is based on a spiritual perspective of each individual as an aspect of divine essence. **When we love unconditionally, we recognize people's divinity underneath their appearance, personality traits, and behaviors.** In the glow of such love, our internal universe is illuminated and we see our light reflected in their faces. The last line of the musical *Les Miserables* expresses this kind of love: "To love another person is to see the face of God."<sup>4</sup> In such a state of grace, we experience an uninhibited flow of love energy. Such an exchange of loving energy is evident when a baby lights up as his parents enter the room, when a woman embraces her loved one at the airport, or when a dog wags its tail the moment its owner walks in the door. Each is not dependent on the other for love; rather, the other ignites love energy within them, activating a mutual exchange of unconditional love.

Unconditional love fills your heart, and then overflows; you can't contain it, and so you want to share it with others. When you share this

immeasurable reservoir of love with another, you unite your soul with that of the other person.

Unfortunately, most people's experience with love is conditional. Rarely do we learn in childhood how to love or be loved unconditionally. As children, we are dependent on caregivers for affection, so we are highly sensitive to how they express love. Depending on a caregiver as the source of love sets up the expectation that love comes from outside us instead of within us. Eventually we progress from family, friends, and school to career, marriage, and children still looking outside ourselves for love and connection. As adults, we come into contact daily with family members, friends, colleagues, and intimate partners who only know how to experience and express love conditionally—based on what we do, not who we truly are. Their experience of conditional love is reinforced by the success of their mate, the talents and achievements of their children, the status of their friends, or the size of their house. If their current relationship ends, they may immediately gravitate to another relationship, seeking external validation instead of recognizing themselves as the source of love.

Author Judith Viorst states in *Necessary Losses*, “Severe separations in early life leave emotional scars on the brain because they assault the essential human connection: The parent-child bond which teaches us that we are lovable. The parent-child bond which teaches us how to love. We cannot be whole human beings—indeed we may find it hard to be human—without the sustenance of this first attachment.”<sup>5</sup> Experiences of emotional nourishment occur early in life, and dysfunctional relationships with parents or caregivers can cripple healthy emotional growth, producing angry, detached, and narcissistic individuals who experience difficulty in intimately connecting to others.

Looking back on my own experience growing up, I realized that my parents loved me, but did not know how to love unconditionally. Growing up in homes where they were abused, neglected, and abandoned, they learned early on that love in the form of care, affection, and affirmation

came with a price—in both their cases, the need to conform to parental expectations. Having experienced only conditional love, my parents suffered their entire lives with feeling unlovable. Because they had never received unconditional love, they never learned how to give it.

A social myth that causes great harm to children later in life is that parental abuse and neglect can coexist with love. As bell hooks states, “One of the most important social myths we must debunk if we are to become a more loving culture is the one that teaches parents that abuse and neglect can coexist with love.”<sup>6</sup> Growing up with this mixed message in my home, I believed that abuse, disrespect, and punishment could live right beside love—so much so that when circumstances forced me to choose between abuse and the unknown, I chose to stay in the place of abuse.

One winter night after my brothers and I had gone to bed, I was awakened by my father and stepmother arguing. When they fought, my stepmother would become verbally and physically abusive. I heard my father yell that he was leaving and taking us to our grandparents’ home. Fearful of losing the only maternal affection I had known, I snuck downstairs and hid my father’s car keys in the bathroom toilet tank. Afraid of being caught, I quickly ran upstairs again, herded my brothers into my bedroom closet, and locked the bedroom door. When my father came to get us and realized we were hiding in the closet, he yelled at me to unlock the door. Scared, I pleaded with him to let us stay in our home. Like many abused children, I preferred staying in an abusive situation to risking not having any love at all. Tired of fighting, my father eventually gave up and went back downstairs. We never left that night, but it would be seven years before my stepmother died and the abuse finally stopped.

Many people who grow up with abuse and neglect disguised as love have difficulty giving and receiving love. When told they are loved, they react guardedly because they don’t trust that they are deserving of love. Fearful of being abandoned, hurt, or rejected, they close their hearts to receiving genuine love.

Growing up with my unpredictably neglectful and sometimes abusive caregivers, I constantly questioned whether I was lovable. In my late teens and early twenties, I attracted relationships based on conditional love because, for me, “being needed” was being loved.

Seeking love and connection outside myself, I yearned for a knight in shining armor, thinking he would fulfill my needs for security and nurturing. Therefore, when my high school sweetheart and best friend proposed marriage after I graduated from college, I considered him my prince. A supportive man whom I deeply respected and loved, he made my life feel safe and predictable, and I thought he would rescue me from the emptiness I felt inside myself and make me feel complete. But because of my unfulfilled need for security, nurturing, and genuine love, my patterns of abandonment, emotional dependency, and control continued to surface.

Afraid to be alone, I overrode an earlier instinct to break off the engagement and attend graduate school instead. Instead, I married him and we moved to North Carolina so he could attend law school. I put his needs first—postponing graduate school and taking a job as a special education teacher in a deprived, poverty-stricken school to support us.

I had habitually sacrificed my own needs to tend to those of others, with the assumption that no one would care for me if I did not care for them first. In such situations I felt valued, competent, and powerful—in other words, sufficiently distracted from my pain to be able to fool myself into thinking I had filled the void I felt inside. What I didn't realize was that everything I needed to fill the inner void was already inside me—a loving connection with myself and my divine Source.

In retrospect, I thought I had found real love in the first two men I married. Yet my desperate need to fill the void of lovelessness drove me into the arms of men who needed to be rescued; in turn, I sought any kind of closeness, worried that I would be abandoned.



At the time, making their lives wonderful made me feel temporarily secure and powerful; yet it also made me feel more alone and unlovable than ever before. The love I received was conditional love based on the patterns of codependency, control, and obligation, not the genuine love for which I yearned. I had unconsciously chosen partners with the hope of resolving my own issues of lovelessness and insecurity—and by the end of my second marriage, I knew that I would continue to recycle these patterns in my future relationships unless I did the transformational work to move beyond my emotional stuckness and into my divine power as love.

When we become involved in a relationship, we tend to choose a partner who can support our spiritual development and assist us in resolving our emotional issues. But unless we are aware of this opportunity for learning, we often find ourselves repeating the same behavioral patterns

that we are desperately trying to resolve. These patterns will recur continuously unless we recognize their source and do the spiritual work necessary to break free of them.

***“Following several years of therapy and spiritual work, I realized that confronting my lovelessness was the path to healing.”***

Following several years of therapy and spiritual work, I realized that confronting my lovelessness was the path to healing. It wasn't until I created an unconditionally loving relationship with myself that I would experience unconditional love with a partner. As Deepak

Chopra suggests in *The Path to Love*, “The aching need created by a lack of love can only be filled by learning anew to love and be loved. We all must discover for ourselves that love is a force as real as gravity, and that being upheld in love every day, every hour, every minute is not a fantasy—it is intended as our natural state.”<sup>7</sup>

Distinguishing unconditional love from conditional love in our relationships is not always easy. We experience a multitude of relationships throughout our lives that fulfill different needs and bring out diverse aspects of ourselves. Some relationships remain forever, while others come and go over a lifetime. Many of the relationships that dissolve are based on specific conditions, such as roles and circumstances, or on the need for sex, companionship, healing of body and spirit, or simply to relate to someone. While relationships based on need can nurture, heal, and soothe us, or instill confidence in our ability to give and receive love, they are often transitional and exist only for a short time. They can, however, offer support and stability for their short duration—as long as those involved are not using or abusing one another.

**Cultivating a relationship based on unconditional love, and not need, requires us to first operate as our own source of genuine love.** Only at this level of spiritual awareness can a true union of souls occur. In such relationships we experience an uninhibited connection that transcends our insecurities and imperfections. Even when our genuine loving partner discovers our deepest vulnerabilities, their love for us is constant. Such soul-hearted individuals are honest, trustworthy, and strive to do the deep inner work that allows them to spiritually grow with us.

One essential element in unconditionally loving relationships is the commitment to supporting the well-being of both individuals as well as the relationship itself. Nurturing our own well-being, and supporting another person's, are the greatest gifts we can give to anyone. We can discern whether a relationship supports our well-being by asking ourselves, “Does this person love, trust, and support me with integrity?” and “Do I feel good about myself when I am with this person?” Nurturing such soul-hearted relationships necessitates recognizing and releasing patterns that threaten to disrupt our well-being, thereby allowing us to become increasingly responsive to ourselves, our partner, and our relationships. It permits us to expand spiritually to fully express our authentic selves and use the flow of love to manifest our dreams.

Another significant element in unconditionally loving relationships is complete acceptance. We completely accept the other person, give them permission to follow their hearts and trust that they are on their spiritual path, no matter what it may look like at the time. We love without expectations, asserting our own agendas, or maintaining obligations. We refrain from judgment and criticism because we realize that we are all dealing with the physical and emotional circumstances we spiritually “signed up” for before we were born. Not knowing what our partner requires for his spiritual growth, we accept that he is co-creating the life situations he needs for his own soul's journey. Neither person believes the other is perfect; rather, there is complete acceptance of each other's being and life path.

Many of us find complete acceptance of another person difficult, especially when we let the irritations of daily life—such as the hair clogging the shower drain, the errand left undone, or the overdraft in the checking account—block the flow of love. Sometimes, we let these unimportant details get in the way, and forget that life presents us with a series of opportunities that lead to our own personal growth. Many times, changing our reaction to be more accepting of others also brings us closer to accepting ourselves.

Yet another essential element of an unconditionally loving relationship is freedom. As the poet Osho eloquently writes, “Love can never possess. Love is giving freedom to the other. Love is an unconditional gift, it is not a bargain.”<sup>8</sup> A relationship will wither and eventually dissolve unless both individuals are free to fully express themselves. This includes accepting each other's need for time alone, since personal space honors both the individual and the partnership, and create a healthy balance within the unified energy of the relationship. However, this does not give us license to do whatever we wish, whenever we wish, no matter the cost to the other person. If these thoughts even arise, we are being guided not by unconditional love but by narcissism.

Unlike conditional love, pure love both unites and differentiates. In unconditionally loving relationships, we do not take on the likes or dislikes of the other person; rather we appreciate and support their views and interests, including those that differ from our own. Many people mistakenly believe that they have to enjoy the same things or have the same interests as their partner. But in truth, we can be extensions of each other's energies without becoming a facsimile of the other person. It is only essential that there is alignment in our core values and life purposes, so that we can support our partners in moving forward toward mutual and individual goals.

Unconditional love is infinite, transcends all earthly conditions, and has no limitations—only divine potential. As Bryan Christopher poignantly states, “Light energy, used powerfully, expresses unconditional love in a conditional world.”<sup>9</sup> Channeling such a powerful force in our relationships, we learn to love beyond self and the other, and eventually experience the unconditional love of all beings.



FROM FALLING  
IN LOVE TO  
*Flowing in Love*

“ *When you are in the embrace, become the embrace. Become the kiss. Forget yourself so totally that you can say, ‘I am no more. Only love exists.’ Then the heart is not beating, but love is beating. Then the blood is not circulating, but love is circulating. Then the eyes are not seeing, love is seeing. Then hands are not moving to touch, love is moving to touch. Become love and enter everlasting life ... Lovers have known sometimes what saints have not known.* ”

—OSHO

**W**hen we fall in love, we get a glimpse of our lover's soul. When we flow in love, all impediments fall away, and their soul is all we see. To fall in love is magical; to flow in love is mystical. When we flow in love with a partner, we engage in the ultimate dance of soul-hearted partnership, sharing our joy, passion, and exuberance for life. The unceasing flow of love that we exude affects how we wake up in the morning, carry ourselves, handle disappointment, give and receive love, and sustain our soul connection.

Flowing in love with a partner takes a harmonious balance of giving and receiving love without expectations or conditions. Through the mutual exchange of genuine love, we become the energetic conduits for directing this flow of love to co-create our reality. When directed with intention, this powerful energy source becomes the catalyst for creating soul-hearted partnerships in our lives.

To experience such soul-hearted partnerships, we must evolve from falling in love to flowing in love. This is because the experience of “falling in love,” or infatuation, is temporary, whereas flowing in love is a constant state of grace. There is a widespread misconception that “falling in love” is love; yet it is only one of the many facets of love.

Marital therapist Gary Chapman, in *The Five Love Languages*, explains the temporary nature of falling in love in contrast to a more permanent sense of love as follows: “The emotional need for love, however, is not just a childhood phenomenon. The need follows us into adulthood and into

marriage. It is the center of our emotional desires. The ‘in love’ experience temporarily meets that need, but is inevitably a quick fix and . . . has a limited and predictable life span. After we come down from the high of the ‘in love’ obsession, the emotional need for love resurfaces because it is fundamental to our nature. We needed love before we ‘fell in love,’ and we will need it as long as we live.”<sup>10</sup>

**My model of flowing in love is a soul-hearted relationship, in which two or more individuals—whether as a couple, a family, friends, or an entire community—are connected heart to heart and soul to soul, and share an alchemy of love energy.** With each person operating at their utmost soul potential, contributing to the power of this stream, it flows unimpeded. The soul-hearted partners assist each other in growing spiritually and living in congruence with their souls’ journeys. In such a relationship, each individual is celebrated for who they truly are—a radiant soul on a dynamic spiritual journey. Not only do they have the freedom to pursue their passions, follow their hearts, and express their vulnerable selves, they also have the inspiration and support to do so, due to the increased energy available to them. With such energetic support, obstacles crumble, fears dissipate, and self-expression surges forth beyond anything they had ever imagined. Like popcorn, the kernels of their divine potential are able to burst forth through the nurturing of each other’s being.

Cultivating such soul-hearted relationships takes effort and a spiritual commitment by both partners. As a whole, relationships provide us with numerous opportunities for self-realization by inspiring us to expand our conscious awareness, address our vulnerabilities, and spiritually progress beyond what we can achieve alone.

When both partners are actively pursuing their own spiritual growth, they offer each other a commitment to be the best they can be. By recognizing and releasing the individual patterns and energy blocks that threaten to disrupt the positive flow of our energy, we become more self-realized and increasingly responsive to ourselves, our partner, and our relationship. The mantra for this kind of relationship is: “I am whole and complete in



myself, and I offer that to you.” Or as John Legend sings in “All of Me,” “Give your all to me, and I’ll give my all to you.”

**Partnerships that operate in the flow of love have a power beyond that of each individual partner.** Transformational artist Alex Grey states, “When two forces unite in love, a third power, a spiritual bridge, opens up to divine wisdom and guidance.”<sup>11</sup> Such a spiritual connection creates an energetic synergy in which the relationship can accomplish more than what would be achieved individually. As a result, through 100 percent of each partner’s energy and energy of the relationship, they can co-create circumstances that uplift and benefit others.

Most relationships occur because individuals feel incomplete and thus choose someone to complete them, a pursuit rooted in the belief that another person has what we lack or need. The idea of finding a partner to complete us is reinforced in our society through the message that we are nobody unless we have somebody. When partners give only 50 percent of their energies to a relationship, however, there is no chance for it to ever be whole so it eventually is depleted. The only way it can be truly complete is if both partners give 100 percent by first experiencing soul-hearted partnership with themselves and then join to co-create a soul-hearted partnership, based on an energetic integration that is more than the sum of its partners. Then each partner functions as a complete power source and takes full responsibility for contributing 100 percent of this creative energy to the relationship. As a soul energetic team, the two individuals produce an energetic integration that results in additional power.

We can better understand the dynamic of soul-hearted partnership by thinking of it as a triangle. Imagine yourself as one point, and your partner as another point. Draw a line connecting the two points. Then, draw two more lines connecting these two points—each representing an individual experience of love—to the third point of the triangle, which represents the shared experience of soul-hearted partnership. Like compound interest (which is based on the original principal plus any interest that

has accrued as the principal grows), soul-hearted partnership builds not only on 100 percent of each partner's energy but also on their combined energies. Sustaining such an energetic dynamic is key to enhancing life, both as an individual and as part of a couple.

My husband Doug and I began co-creating a relationship a few years after the unexpected death of Doug's first wife and the end of my second marriage. For Doug, entering into partnership with me required him to release and complete his past relationship. Rather than taking the time he needed to grieve his wife's death, however, he had suppressed his painful feelings and found a quick fix by embarking on a lifelong fantasy of exploring the Amazon River. While sitting alone for hours in a canoe, he was forced to confront his feelings of loss and sadness, but right after his return, his grieving was interrupted by caring for his dying mother.

Within the first six months of beginning a relationship with me, Doug purchased a house and began an extensive renovation project, which became a means for healing his painful past. While stripping away layers of paint and uncovering the structure's original, handcrafted woodwork, he was simultaneously peeling away his own layers of loss and revealing his true being.

During this period of intense transformation, Doug took the time and space he needed to release his grief and heal his past. Struggling with a profound sense of loss, he sometimes felt depressed and wanted to be alone. At first, his isolation triggered my pattern of abandonment and insecurity. Assuming he didn't want to spend time with me, I often reacted in fear by wanting to "cut and run" from the relationship before he could leave me. During these times, I felt tension in my chest and a shortness of breath, indicating anxiety. Yet whenever I felt such a physical or emotional reaction, it cued me to pause, release the tension by breathing deeply, and stay with the feelings until they were resolved. Through journaling and sitting with my vulnerability, I was able to listen to my heart to gain an understanding of the new information that I was being guided to see.

In these times of his purposeful solitude, I discovered how to support Doug, and trusted that if the relationship was right for me I would want to see him continue to transform—even if it meant without me. Through his self-healing process and my own, Doug used his grief as a springboard for spiritual growth.

While Doug was renovating his house, I completed projects I wanted to finish in my own home. As I spent time alone and with Doug, I learned to recognize and release subtle layers of my patterns of control and self-sacrifice. These patterns showed up in my need to convince Doug to permanently commit to our relationship so I could assuage my fear that he would abandon me if we didn't "close the deal." I also tried to do everything I could to make him happy, even when it meant not doing what I needed for myself. I learned that, in order to make "us" work, I had to let go of trying to rescue him and focus my attention on creating my own life. In such a state of healthy detachment, I could see that he was also building a loving and secure relationship with himself.

As I continued observing Doug taking responsibility for his grief, I witnessed him caring for his own needs by seeing a therapist and taking a sabbatical from teaching.

He directed his energies positively through working on his new house, traveling, and practicing meditation. Through his healing process he became more loving to himself, and forgave himself for any shortcomings he experienced in his relationships with his wife and mother. I noticed that we were growing both separately and together, participating in our own spiritual growth while at the same time nurturing a mutually supportive partnership.

***“These relationships present us with the opportunity to flow gracefully through life’s challenges every day instead of feeling anxious, unprepared, or flooded by a sense of futility.”***

As our journey reveals, soul-hearted partnership often evolves out of what may look like endings, but are actually new beginnings. The combined energies of both partners co-create a synergetic atmosphere of loving expansion, and their connection at the soul level allows them to be fully expressed as human beings.

Such soul-hearted partners are comets weaving their energies in an alignment of purpose, passion, and intimacy. Many of us have experienced being in soul alignment with a best friend or partner. In the midst of talking, dancing, or making love, we may have become transported into a creative flow that emanated from the coupling of our energy. Stringing together moment upon moment of such present-oriented experiences can inspire joy, creativity, and transformation.

These relationships present us with the opportunity to flow gracefully through life's challenges every day instead of feeling anxious, unprepared, or flooded by a sense of futility. In such relationships, we can lean on our partner to find emotional balance in the midst of distress, let go of our expectations, and "go with the flow." We can trust that they are there for us, fully present, and committed to magnifying their energies in creative support of the relationship.

The idea of flowing in love through challenges is beautifully illustrated by the wedding of my dear friends Karina and Daniel. A few days before the wedding, which was to be held outdoors, Karina called me, anxious about the intense heat that was predicted for their wedding day. Two weeks earlier she had called the manager of the venue and, concerned about the heat, asked if the celebration could be moved indoors into the wine cellar, but he had said it wasn't possible and the reception would have to be outside under a tent.

While speaking with Karina, I reminded her to release all fears of the wedding being less perfect than she expected and to trust herself and Daniel to co-create the experience just as it was meant to be. Just as a plane is guided into the air, Karina and Daniel, copilots with a divine

Source, began guiding their intention for a beautiful wedding into reality. They let go of their expectations, trusting that one moment would unfold perfectly into the next.

Watching a powerful thunderstorm roll in a few hours before the ceremony, they witnessed 50-mile-per-hour winds gusting through the reception site. They sighed in relief, thinking the weather would now be cooler for their guests. But soon the rain changed to hail that pummeled the pavement outside their hotel. Just when they thought it couldn't get any worse, an hour before the wedding the winery called and sent a picture of an oak tree that had cracked in half during the storm and landed on the pristine white tent covering the reception site. Upon receiving the news, instead of breaking into tears they roared with laughter. Moments later, they were told that the wedding celebration was being moved inside to the wine cellar, where they had wanted it all along. A series of coincidences had led ultimately to the fulfillment of their request for a change of location for the celebration.

Like shaking a snow globe and watching the flakes swirl downward, Karina and Daniel trusted the people involved and let go of their attachment to the desired outcome. Sustaining their sense of playfulness and flexibility opened up the flow of love, kept the focus of the day on their love for one another, and created an outcome beyond what they had thought possible.

What transforms an otherwise good relationship into a flowing-in-love, soul-hearted partnership is the willingness of both partners to love beyond any conditions, fully express themselves, spiritually grow, and share their energy to co-create a more fulfilling future for themselves and the world. As the twin flames of full self-expression merge in such a relationship, the partners collectively become a conduit for channeling this love energy into the world and, aware of their ability, to not only co-create their hearts' desires but also transcend any problems they may encounter along the way.

A helpful exercise for experiencing flowing in love is what I call “soul gazing.” To practice this exercise, sit or stand facing your partner and take a few deep breaths together. While inhaling and exhaling, gently cradle your partner’s hands and lovingly gaze into your partner’s eyes. As you sustain eye contact, open your heart and feel yourself transcending physical form. Now focus this energy heart-to-heart, release any thoughts interrupting the intimate exchange, and experience the flow of love from your heart center to your partner’s heart center. Such unspoken moments of soul access assist us in moving beyond thinking to being in the present moment with our partner.

This flow of love sources from within and expands through offering it to another. In truth, the only way to sustain the flow of love is to give it away. Only when we let go of the mindset that we deserve to receive love based on giving love can unconditional love flow freely in our lives. Many of us think that we can create a flow of love by forcing something to happen through sheer will or expectation, and are disappointed when it doesn’t produce the desired results. (For example, when we push the person we are dating to commit to a relationship when they’re not ready, and then find out later that the relationship wasn’t right for us after all.) Although our intentions may be good, this attitude of “pushiness” actually blocks the flow of love due to our focus on outcome rather than on the sharing of energies heart-to-heart.

When we have difficulty divesting ourselves of expectations, we need to look within to find the root of our inability to give and receive unconditionally. Checking in with ourselves when giving, we might ask, “Is there something I hope to receive in return?” or “When I give a gift, pay a bill, or offer assistance, do I do it without any conditions or restrictions?” When receiving, we might ask ourselves, “Do I have difficulty receiving love in the form of kindness, compliments, or gifts?” Once we are able to give and receive love beyond expectation—give for the sake of giving, share for the sake of sharing, and love for the sake of loving, with no strings attached—the flow of love is restored.

**To give love more generously, we have to receive love more graciously. This mutual exchange of loving energy creates an abundance of all things good.** To attract abundance, we have to let go of our desire to be in control and trust that, while like inevitably attracts like, it does so in keeping with its own divine timing. Our task is simply to sustain the flow of love without conditions. When we do this, the many blessings and benefits of love are conferred upon us—among them the potential to manifest our dreams.

# PRACTICES

- 1 Evaluate your current relationships to see if they are appropriate for your spiritual development at this time in your life. What unresolved issues are your relationships showing you about yourself? Do your relationships support you in your spiritual growth? Are they assisting you in creating the life you desire?
- 2 Begin a new relationship (whether it be a romance, friendship, or otherwise) that is meaningful, and let go of any that no longer support your personal transformation. Let yourself be vulnerable with this person so you can emotionally and spiritually grow.
- 3 Create an energetic support team consisting of people who love, support, listen to, and encourage you to embrace your vulnerabilities without judging, enabling, or commiserating. Evaluate your relationships to see who's on your energetic support team by asking yourself, "Who unconditionally supports me to spiritually grow and reach my fullest potential? Who is trustworthy, has integrity, and is impeccable with their word? Who accepts me for who I am, but gives loving feedback when asked?"
- 4 Open your heart and visualize your soul-hearted partner(s). To reinforce your image, share it with your energetic support team or write about it, refining the vision as you gain more information.



- 5 Let every thought resonate with an intention of love to support yourself and others without conditions or expectations. Catch or change any negative thoughts as soon as you become aware of them, and replace them with positive ones, even if you are angry or upset.
- 6 As you move through your day, sustain an open heart and extend love to whomever you meet. Recite an affirmation to yourself such as “I am love,” or say “Namaste” or “Bless and release” to dissolve negative energy emanating from such situations.
- 7 Practice “soul gazing” by facing your partner, taking a few deep breaths together, gently cradling your partner’s hands, and lovingly gazing into your partner’s eyes. Pay attention to the loving connection between your heart and your partner’s heart. As you sustain an open heart, tell them you love them and notice the sensations that you feel, such as a sense of inner peace and spiritual attunement with them.
- 8 Create a special ritual for deepening your connection with your partner, such as a weekly date night or private retreat. Check into a lovely hotel or simply stay home for a day or weekend with your favorite indulgences available, such as wine, food, and bubble bath or massage oil. Let the retreat activities unfold spontaneously.



## CHAPTER 5



## THE GIFT OF *Transparency*

“ *Love wishes to be known,  
completely understood and  
shared. It has no secret;  
nothing that it would keep  
apart and hide.* ”

—A COURSE IN MIRACLES

**U**nconditionally loving relationships provide the gift of transparency, a sacred space in which we can be truly seen and heard. Receiving this gift, we feel empowered to openly share our ideas, dreams, and vulnerabilities, reveal our truths, and follow our souls' paths.

Opening our hearts and souls to other people in these ways deepens love and trust, and cultivates the intimate connections we desire. It also allows the negative patterns which naturally show up for us in exclusive relationships to be transformed. Encouraging one another to reveal and accept each other's vulnerabilities helps create an energetically safe haven of love.



CREATING A  
*Safe Haven*  
OF LOVE

“ *Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage.* ”

—LAO TZU

An energetically safe haven of love is an environment in which we feel free to express ourselves, knowing that our hopes, dreams, and imperfections will not be judged or criticized, but accepted. Creating such an environment requires each person in the relationship to respect the other as an equal. Relationships work best in an atmosphere of equality, where there is no hierarchy, power differential, or need to take control on a regular basis. In an unequal relationship, in which one person feels a need to dominate the other, both are more focused on being right or more powerful than on supporting each other's well-being and spiritual growth. We see this dynamic at play when one person tells the other what to think, feel, or choose, and the other person becomes passively dependent on them for making decisions, deferring to them without knowing they are operating out of fear. An energetically safe haven of love supports a state of openheartedness in which both parties can expose not only their vulnerabilities but also their authentic selves. Such healthy relationships allow us to venture into deeper intimacy and feel acknowledged for who we truly are.

**Creating a safe haven of love with another person also requires loving ourselves without qualification.** When we operate out of self-love, and thus feel inherently worthy of love, we become our own safe haven, free to fully express who we are when interacting with friends, colleagues, and our partner. Feeling secure within ourselves and putting our heart “out there” in turn supports others to step into the space of vulnerability with us.

To do this, we start by acknowledging the other person with loving statements, such as “I love you” or “I’m here for you.” This sets the tone for creating loving sacred space where they feel accepted and safe. People are more likely to be open and vulnerable if we share our own vulnerability, listen well, and remain fully present.

For example, suppose your friend has been in an unhealthy relationship, and although you may feel that a change would be best, instead you listen, offer your point of view if asked, and instead of reacting, actively reinforce your friend’s ability to trust themselves and resolve the situation, without judgment or attachment to any outcome. In such interactions, we support our friend through holding the space of unconditional love while at the same time giving them the freedom and support to take in the information being presented to them and to make their own choices.

To sustain a safe haven of love, we must establish healthy energetic boundaries. All our relationships are energetic exchanges—opportunities to become a conduit for love energy. With healthy energetic boundaries in place, the flow of love is growth-promoting, first for ourselves and then for others. On the other hand, with unhealthy energetic boundaries in place, or none at all, we can easily exhaust ourselves of energy or inadvertently take on the toxic energies of others, outcomes that impede growth and damage relationships.

**In attempting to sustain a safe haven of love, it is therefore important to remain aware that others can take advantage of that safe haven and become dependent on us in unhealthy ways.** For instance, I realized early in my life that people found me to be an energetic safe haven and, as a result, began telling me their problems. After a while, they became dependent on me to sustain the energy in the relationship. As for me, having cast myself in the role of rescuer and energetic power center, I became increasingly depleted, unable to generate the physical, emotional, and spiritual support these relationships needed. As a highly sensitive person, I began to lose myself while assisting others, and took on their toxic energies. I knew then that to continue doing therapeutic work



with others I had to learn to establish healthy energetic boundaries and engage in compassionate self-care.

The best way to establish healthy energetic boundaries with people who drain us physically or emotionally is to disengage from the “hook” of their negative patterns. We feel drained because, like a laser, such people have zeroed in on our vulnerabilities and then used our reactions to bring power and energy to themselves. To disengage from such patterns, we need to become aware of our vulnerabilities and mindful of the people or situations triggering our emotional reactions. Then, we must release the vulnerabilities privately, or with a trusted friend, before re-exposing ourselves to another potentially vulnerable situation.

One way to release your vulnerable feelings is to write them in a journal until you feel a cleansing release of emotion. When you are ready to share anything that is toxic, be considerate of your friend or partner by asking if it is a good time to vent, so they can prepare emotionally for having an intimate conversation.

Clarify expectations about roles and needs before communicating. Preface verbal communication by saying you want your friend or partner to function more as a sounding board than an advisor, or you want “permission to speak freely about a situation” that has been troubling you. Clear announcements of your expectations can minimize the likelihood of judging, opening the way for supportive listening and empathy. If it becomes difficult for your friend or partner to continue listening, pause and table the discussion until later. Resume when both of you are calm and ready to listen.

Finally, check in with your friend or partner after clearing any reactions so you can both process the communication. It is helpful to ask questions such as “What is my reaction helping me see about myself or the other person? What is the source of my reaction? Why did I react to the situation in this particular way?” Such questions can jump-start a release of unresolved pain, patterns, or grievances followed by a healthy discussion.

Establishing healthy energetic boundaries with those we love is not always easy because we are highly sensitive to the “emotional pull” they have on our heart centers. Wanting their happiness perhaps more than they themselves want it, we can become so involved in trying to generate it for them that the effort takes a toll on us physically, emotionally, and spiritually. At its best, the resulting energetic drain makes us vulnerable to feelings of “compassion fatigue.” At its worst, it can stress our heart centers, resulting in exhaustion, depression, or medical conditions such as increased blood pressure or cardiac disease.

Establishing healthy energetic boundaries with more casual friends, associates, coworkers, and even strangers is just as important. In such relationships it is common to feel something akin to osmosis, the movement of molecules across a permeable cell membrane. Some highly

***“The antidote for shame, blame, and feelings of unworthiness is to openly embrace our vulnerabilities and share our feelings with someone we love and trust so we transform ourselves and our relationships.”***

sensitive individuals struggle to keep their energy from bleeding into the energy fields of people around them, or strive to prevent other people's energy from infiltrating their energy field. Most “sensitives” have felt ourselves taking on the emotions of others as if they were our own, or being sucked dry of energy in the presence of “energy bullies.”

If there are toxic people around us on a consistent basis (for example, if they are our friends, family members, or coworkers), their negativity can be like a slow-moving infection, affecting us more and more with each interaction. For many of us, this can bring on disease by weakening our defenses. Even if the negative energy created by others in our lives is at a very low level, our health and longevity can be affected by being closed off to the abundance of love offered to us from so many other sources.

Reacting to any person by getting upset or angry only entrenches us further in the unhealthy interaction. Only by pausing, opening our hearts, and becoming aware can we notice the vulnerabilities that have hooked us into such toxic situations. Although we are solely accountable for our reactions, the more we set healthy energetic boundaries, the less vulnerable we will be to the negativity of others, and the more proactive our responses will be.

The long-term consequences of engaging in relationships without healthy energetic boundaries can be pronounced. Many people, for example, start out in loving relationships, or professional or casual ones, as healthy caregivers. But if they are attracted to a “victim”—someone who needs to be taken care of—and do not create healthy energetic boundaries, they may end up taking care of the person without receiving much in return. A caregiver who then begins to take responsibility for the victim's life fosters the victim's chronic dependency, along with other enabling behaviors. When a caretaker enables a victim, they disable them from caring for themselves. In such circumstances, when there is no positive exchange of energy within the relationship, caregivers can become resentful and controlling caretakers.

Often, women, because of their relationship-oriented nature, are called upon to be caregivers at the cost of themselves since they frequently care for children and the elderly. Historically, the main roles of women in society have been those of nurturers and caregivers. In truth, a woman's desire for connection is at once a fundamental strength, essential for the advancement of society, and the inevitable source of many common problems.

If you are a caregiver who has slipped into the role of self-sacrificing caretaker, you may not at first be aware of the shift. You will know things have changed if you feel a need to be needed, or to fix or rescue a person. You may also notice that you have been using your role as caregiver to distract yourself from your own insecurities and vulnerabilities. For a brief time, as a caretaker, you may feel more secure, powerful, and in control of

your life—but ultimately, this false sense of confidence only prevents you from caring for yourself in a healthy way.

Just realizing that our energies are as important as those of our loved ones, family, friends, and coworkers can encourage us to develop a loving relationship with ourselves and nurture it through the creation of healthy energetic boundaries. In honoring our needs for personal time and engaging in activities that restore and inspire us, we acquire more vitality and stamina to energetically serve others.

Sustaining an energetically safe haven of love in any relationship requires us to not only establish healthy energetic boundaries, but to heal ourselves of shame. Shame is toxic to relationships because it creates resistance to transparency, thus inhibiting intimacy and, ultimately, leading to disconnection. Shame is reflected in such behavioral patterns as perfectionism, control, people-pleasing, approval-seeking, and addictions, all of which can immediately undermine any type of relationship.

When we continually experience feelings of shame, whatever we do or achieve in our lives is never enough to satisfy us. Our fear of “not being good enough” shows up in the patterns of right/wrong, good/bad, and win/lose, some of the most destructive patterns in relationships. Many times we say to ourselves, “If only I were more successful/rich/pretty/smart/skinny, I wouldn't feel emotional pain and disappointment.” Ironically, the feeling of shame is often more painful to us than whatever we are ashamed of. Inevitably, it fosters a belief that we are unworthy of love.

Since shame is not a feeling we share easily with others, it also makes it impossible to sustain an energetically safe haven of love, because it obstructs personal transparency. When we feel uncomfortable sharing our vulnerabilities, we hide them—not only from others, but from ourselves as well. Rather than take responsibility for our choices, we become defensive and blame others for them.

Blame is typically the go-to reaction when a person feels insecure or unworthy of love. When we feel painfully uncomfortable, we are more likely to take things to heart, and then blame or attack others—a reaction that follows because we have automatically assumed that we are unlovable, not good enough, or that there is something wrong with us. However, blame only temporarily relieves our discomfort. Since it keeps us from intimately sharing our vulnerabilities, it ultimately causes more shame.

For years, I blamed my feelings of unworthiness on my childhood experiences. “If only I had been raised in a safe and loving environment, with parents who had been aware of their dysfunctional behaviors and engaged in changing them,” I would think, “my life would be different.” Blame was an easy way for me to displace my pain onto my parents. Yet it did nothing to shift my life in any positive way, and only served to solidify my anger, resentment, and disappointment in myself and my circumstances.

Blame and shame serve no real purpose. They close off vital love energy, and perpetuate toxicity instead of well-being. The negative patterns that ignite these reactions reinforce the message that we are inherently unworthy of love. The antidote for shame, blame, and feelings of unworthiness is to openly embrace our vulnerabilities and share our feelings with someone we love and trust so we transform ourselves and our relationships. This gift of transparency builds resilience to our negative feelings and helps us create a safe haven of love in which we can bare our souls. When we experience others as safe and caring, we take more risks, share our vulnerabilities, and are less reactive.

Listening to another person's truth without judgment or criticism invites them to be transparent. To nurture an energetically safe haven, we should listen responsively, and accept and honor their experience. We need not, and cannot, always agree with them. After all, much as we may try to walk in another's shoes, see what they see, or feel what they feel, we can never have another person's experience.

**When we listen open-heartedly to someone without judgment, we simply witness what is true for them and, in the process, create a loving environment for healing.**

In addition, we must accept and honor the experiences of others without taking them personally or trying to change them. Trust that others are following their own spiritual paths, no matter what it may look like at the time. Not knowing what they require for their personal growth, accept that they are co-creating life situations for their growth to happen, in the way that is best aligned with their soul's path.

Not taking anything personally is the second agreement in *The Four Agreements* by Don Miguel Ruiz, who states that we take what people say or do to heart because we think that it's about us, but it's really about them. As Ruiz explains, "When we really see other people as they are without taking it personally, we can never be hurt by what they say or do."<sup>1</sup> Holding up this mirror of love requires that we remain fully present, open our hearts, and completely accept another's experience.

We all yearn for an energetically safe haven of love in which we can show up as we are and not be questioned. In such an environment, each person feels valued, respected, and celebrated enough to participate in the dance of human differences. It is in this space that we grow, love, and commune spiritually.



# PLANTING *Seeds of Trust*

“ *Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.* ”

—STEPHEN COVEY



**T**o plant seeds of trust in a relationship, we have to be accountable for our thoughts, words, and choices in life. That is, we have to be “responsible”—able to respond to events in our lives, instead of reacting to them. Being responsible for ourselves also means being aware of our negative patterns, the dynamics of our current relationships, and our intentions for the future.

Trust is at the core of our spiritual progression, and lays the groundwork for all loving, intimate relationships. When we are uninhibited by insecurity, our full self-expression—including our willingness to share ourselves with others—is supported. Cultivating such trust requires accepting ourselves for who we are, the other person for who they are, and the relationship for what it is in the present moment.

Mutual trust forms the foundation of intimacy. With mutual trust in place, we know the other person is always there, loving and nurturing, and will respond when needed. As a result, we draw strength and solace from the relationship without constantly having to question or evaluate it. We can be vulnerable and know that we are loved and cherished. Mutual trust keeps us secure in our choices and those of our partner.

Most human beings have little experience with trust. In fact, we often allow daily events to validate our feelings of separateness and our need to be on guard. Because we see ourselves as isolated beings, we perceive everything as a potential danger and build defenses that we believe will guarantee our physical survival—so much so that we may actively avoid

anyone or anything that challenges our fear-based comfort zones. Moreover, we live in a fearful world where we are constantly looking over our shoulders, walking on eggshells around people, and checking if our actions have made someone angry or displeased. We are told to avoid pain at all costs, make sure our coworkers do not get ahead of us, take precautions against getting sick, and avoid being vulnerable with others because they might hurt or reject us. We even cling to the false belief that holding on tightly to everyone and everything will ensure that we are secure.

In a world rife with such fears, it's no wonder we enter into relationships with our guard up and our trust down.

To diminish our fears of inadequacy or insecurity, we must let down our guard by removing our ego-clad armor. Once undefended, we can speak our truth and thus plant seeds of trust to strengthen our relationships. As bell hooks states, "Widespread cultural acceptance of lying is a primary reason many of us will never know love."<sup>2</sup> Dishonesty keeps us stuck in secrecy, silence, and shame, inhibiting us from revealing our vulnerabilities. It also leads to duplicitous behavior.

We have all experienced someone being kind to us one minute and dismissive or mean the next, making us feel loved one day and rejected the next. Such duplicitous behavior creates unpredictability in relationships, keeping us anxiously waiting for the love rug to be pulled out from under us.

Such was the case for Lori, whose fear of abandonment began at age ten when her parents divorced and her father moved away. Throughout her life, Lori's fear of abandonment affected all of her relationships, causing her to either keep people at arm's length or attach to them too tightly.

After their first year of marriage, Lori and Sean had difficulty establishing trust and a deep level of intimacy because they were afraid to be open and honest with each other. While working with them, I observed that Lori's fear of abandonment caused her to withhold her deepest feelings

from Sean. She also felt inhibited about revealing her vulnerabilities, fearful that he would discover her faults and leave her, so she shared with him only her superficial thoughts and feelings. She hesitated to rock the boat, even when it meant taking all the blame for their unresolved issues and compromising her sense of self—but she did not think twice about attempting to control his every move.

Sean felt smothered by Lori's fear-based patterns and often overreacted by taking her behavior personally, getting upset, and becoming emotionally detached when she did share her feelings. His own fear of being vulnerable exacerbated his emotional withdrawal, convincing him that he could not receive the love he wanted in the relationship. Having grown up with a father who was never there for him and a mother who was mentally ill, he had learned early on to close off his heart to avoid disappointment and despair. Later, his growing sense of insecurity caused him to withdraw from people and situations before he could be denied love.

Eventually, as Sean became better able to enter into intimate conversations without pulling away from Lori, he learned to face the source of his insecurity and to trust her. At about the same time, Lori began to realize that when Sean stepped back to explore his feelings and gain clarity, he was not necessarily detaching from her. She then practiced staying more present with him and revealing her deeper feelings when she felt like avoiding them. Consequently, she began to feel secure enough to express her vulnerable self without worrying about losing Sean and thus being overly possessive of him.

As illustrated by Lori and Sean, when both partners have a fear of abandonment and loss of love, one partner's pattern can trigger that of the other, resulting in both partners guarding the entrances to their hearts and holding themselves back, which in turn inhibits emotional intimacy. To develop such intimacy and open the flow of love between them, both partners need to build mutual trust, release their vice grip on the relationship, and surrender their hearts.

Speaking one's truth often conflicts with cultural expectations. Current research indicates that the United States population has been lying increasingly, so much so that dishonesty has become the nation's new norm. Advertising tells us, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." Magazines and movies promote ways to reel in a man in ten days without telling the truth. Online dating sites post false profiles. We as a population have become so habituated to lying that we have undermined our ability to trust in ourselves, our relationships, and our world.

**Many of us also have difficulty speaking our truth out of fear of hurting others' feelings or displeasing those whose opinions matter to us. But adopting false masks or roles to please others at the expense of our authenticity gets us into self-defeating situations.** Even something as innocuous as inventing an excuse not to accept an invitation to an event that doesn't interest us, instead of simply declining, feeds patterns of obligation, approval seeking, and pain avoidance.

The feeling that it is unsafe to speak our truth usually begins early in life and intensifies over time. For example, young adolescent girls, eager to blend into the dominant culture, frequently repress their voices and yield to those of the media and their peers. They silence their voices so as not to cause harm or hurt others, but also because of an underlying fear that their voices will not be heard.

As children, many of us were taught by our caregivers to value honesty, only to observe that those same caregivers, and other adults in our lives, rarely practiced what they preached. As a child, I was told to tell the truth—and yet, the truth was not what the adults in my life really wanted to hear. In fact, I was often punished when I spoke my truth. Instead, I split off parts of myself, tucked them away inside me, and stopped being honest.

Like most children growing up in conditionally loving homes, I faced an unconscionable choice—to be authentic and honest, or to be conditionally loved. When I chose to be honest, I experienced abandonment; when I

chose conditional love, I abandoned myself. I was expected to put people at ease, even if it meant being dishonest with myself. Therefore, I often held back my truth so that I did not upset or displease anyone. I dumbed down my intellect so that I would not be perceived as smart. To fit in with my peers, I even dismissed my creative ideas.

The resulting loss of my voice and, with it, my sense of worthiness, was unbearable, but I was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about it. Mary Pipher, PhD, in her ground-breaking book, *Reviving Ophelia*, observes, "Without help, the loss of wholeness, self-confidence, and self-direction can last well into adulthood."<sup>3</sup> She further asserts that the same issues which feel overwhelming to adolescent girls are still present in their adult lives, suggesting that such fragmentation creates a crisis of the soul that cannot simply be "outgrown."

When we are dishonest in our relationships, we evade accountability for our choices. On the other hand, when we align our thoughts, words, and actions with the powerful flow of love within us, we stay true to our authentic selves and make discerning choices. **Like stepping stones across a stream, authenticity comes from making a series of impeccable, heart-aligned choices every day.** Many situations entice us to compromise honesty, even when we consider it a core value. For example, I once had a heart-to-heart conversation with a teenage client, Mary. She had told several lies to her parents in order to cover up a series of self-destructive choices she had made with her current boyfriend.

As soon as Mary walked into my office, I could see shame and guilt written all over her face. The moment she sat down, Mary burst into tears. Stuttering, she kept referring to this poor choice she had made; eventually, she shared that she had sent a nude photo of herself to her boyfriend over the internet. Through her sobs, she said, "He said if I loved him I would do it, but I didn't think about the photo going viral. Now, everybody knows about it, even our friends at school. His mother even saw it when she opened his computer!"

I listened until her sob subsided, being fully present with her vulnerability. When she paused, I said, lovingly, “Mary, we all make choices that we wish we could undo. Did you feel like your boyfriend was going to leave or reject you if you didn’t send him a nude photo?” She nodded, looking down at the floor.

I asked her to look at me. “You are a strong, competent, and loving young woman. You don’t need to make risky choices to please anyone.”

“But what if he’s the only boy who will ever love me?” Mary cried.

Feeling my own eyes fill with compassionate tears, I answered, “This pattern seems to come up when you feel anxious or insecure, especially in your relationships with men. We can work on arresting this pattern so you stay true to yourself in future relationships. I want you to realize that dishonesty and irresponsibility compromise yourself, your truth and your integrity, and are out of alignment with your core values.”

Ultimately, Mary’s personal integrity was strengthened as she learned to trust herself and remain in alignment with her own truth.

Personal integrity supports a foundation of trust. Integrity is the strength to act on the wisdom of our hearts, and speak our truth so we are in alignment with our authentic selves. Honesty is speaking our truth to others.

Sometimes, we forget how powerful our words are, and speak unconsciously or make promises with no intention of keeping them. This leads to distrust in our relationships. Unspoken and spoken words are among the most powerful energetic forces we have for co-creating our reality. When we express love in all of our interactions, we are being impeccable with our word. Our words reflect who we are; and when we speak our truth and keep our word, we are seen by others as trustworthy.

It is also true that, even when we speak our truth in a clear, loving way, the other person may not hear or accept it. When this occurs, we must realize that we cannot create, control, or take responsibility for the feelings and actions of others. As long as we have acted in a fully integrous and honest way, in alignment with our authentic self, we have done our part in opening an avenue of trust.

When we find ourselves in a situation where we have broken trust and slipped out of alignment with our core values, we need to ask ourselves what we are afraid of bringing into the light. Then we can simply admit the error, make amends quickly, and focus on a new intention to be more honest with ourselves and others in the future.

Being honest takes courage—the courage to reveal our authentic selves, including our vulnerabilities, no matter what. Because fear is one of our major energy blocks, it takes courage to penetrate it and delve deep within our hearts to share our truth with others. This initiates heartfelt communication and builds intimacy in any relationship. When we plant seeds of trust and live a life of honesty and integrity, the groundwork is in place for us to develop intimate relationships that will support our future creativity and fulfillment.

# *Revealing Ourselves* TO OTHERS

“ *As love grows in you, beauty grows too. For love is the beauty of the soul.* ”

—ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO



Revealing ourselves to a partner, beloved friend, or family member allows us to forge physically, emotionally, and spiritually intimate relationships. It creates an openness at the heart and soul level that supports being uninhibited in a sacred space of loving acceptance.

When we expose intimate dimensions of ourselves, we discover how to love and are loved more deeply. As John Welwood shares in his book, *Love and Awakening*, “When we reveal ourselves to our partner and find that this brings healing rather than harm, we make an important discovery—that intimate relationships can provide a sanctuary from the world of facades, a sacred space where we can be ourselves, as we are. This kind of unmasking—speaking our truth, sharing our inner struggle, and revealing our raw edges—is sacred activity which allows two souls to meet and touch more deeply.”<sup>4</sup> The gift of transparency requires revealing our deepest vulnerabilities as an integral part of creating intimate relationships. When we reveal these vulnerabilities, the impenetrable protective barriers we have erected over our hearts are let down and we are able to unreservedly communicate with the other person. This emotional freedom is the path to cultivating healthy, meaningful, and soul-hearted relationships.

We all have innate soul potential, and a loving partner or beloved friend can be the catalyst for realizing that potential. To reveal who we are to them, we have to allow ourselves to be seen and accepted, perhaps for the first time in our conscious lives. This kind of deep communication

is modeled in the movie *Avatar* by the indigenous Na'vi people, who commune with each other by gazing into each other's eyes, opening their hearts, and lovingly expressing, "I see you." (In other words, "I witness your soul.") Seeing each other through the eyes of their hearts, they share their innermost selves in a supportive environment of love, compassion, and acceptance.

Unfortunately, amidst the complexities of modern life, heartfelt communication with another person can be difficult, especially when we are feeling stressed, misunderstood, or alienated. It can also be challenging when a person has freely expressed herself in the past, only to have a friend, co-worker, or partner react negatively, causing her to feel like an arrow has pierced her heart. Such experiences support the fear some people have that they are communicating on a different level than those around them, and there is no true intimacy to be found with anyone. Experiencing rejection and hurt, they may retreat further into themselves, feeling even more afraid to reveal their vulnerabilities.

When communication with another person becomes difficult, creating a support system based on unconditional love—an energetic support team—is essential for mustering the courage to reveal our authentic selves. An energetic support team provides a secure place for us to be vulnerable, examine ourselves, and transform our lives.

Becoming pregnant unexpectedly at the age of twenty-five forced me to confront years of unresolved pain. I had buried my feelings of anger, hurt, and sadness deep inside me—but on this spring day in 1983, I couldn't suppress it any longer.

I carefully placed the plastic stick on the sink, set the timer, and waited. Nervous thoughts ricocheted through my mind. Had I followed the directions exactly? Had I set the timer correctly?

Did I really want to know the result?

Clutching my abdomen, I knelt beside the sink and prayed for a miracle. “Please God, I’m not ready to be pregnant. I don’t know how to be a good mother. I need more time!”

Yet, in my heart, I knew it was too late for prayers.

The timer went off, startling me. I took a deep breath to quell the panic mounting within, and picked up the plastic stick that would determine my future. The result window showed two blue lines.

“Why now?” I cried. “Why was this happening to me?”

Dizzy, I clutched the edge of the sink. The stick fell to the floor—and I followed, crumpling into a heap on the cold tile. The mere thought of bringing a child into this world unleashed a wave of unresolved grief that I couldn’t suppress. I was terrified: terrified that I might repeat my mother’s legacy, abandon my unborn child, or lose myself. The feelings of loss and desolation were so deep, and so overwhelming, that I thought I would rather die on that floor than face motherhood.

I know now that, up to that point, I had been avoiding my life. I was going through the motions, doing what I thought everyone needed me to do, watching the seconds tick by on the wall clock while I waited, outside myself, for something to happen. But in that moment, faced with the awesome responsibility of becoming a mother, I emerged all at once as if from a coma.

Faced with so much pain, I wanted to run away and pretend I wasn’t pregnant; yet, at the same time, I didn’t want to abandon my child like I had been abandoned.

Finally, I mustered the courage to call my best friend in North Carolina, a member of my energetic support team. When she picked up the phone, I choked back the sobs that were welling up in my chest and asked her if she had time to talk.

“Of course,” she said hearing the distress in my voice.

Holding my breath tightly, as if exhaling would break me, I whispered, “I’m pregnant.”

I heard my friend let out a sigh on the other end of the phone. It was like receiving permission to let go. I blubbered through my shame and guilt for not being ecstatically happy. She listened without interrupting me, fully present, for what seemed like forever.

I finally paused and gave her an opening to respond. First, she acknowledged how much she loved me, and reiterated that she supported me no matter what. As we talked through my terror of repeating my

**“Upon recognizing that we are loving energy, we can drop our masks, let go of the facades, and allow our souls to be seen by those closest to us.”**

mother’s legacy of abandonment, my friend lovingly offered a new perspective without judgment and with the utmost compassion. “You are not your mother, Deb, and you will make different choices,” she told me. “And it’s okay to feel terrified, and question whether or not you even want to be a mother. Being a mother is scary even when you are certain of your choice. You’re going to get through this—and I’m going to be with you every step of the way.”

After I had taken the plunge into the void of my vulnerability, my friend opened her heart in compassion and shared her own fears about being a mother. As a result of our conversation, I realized that if I was going to bring a life into the world, I had to continue to resolve the pain that had prevented me from living. I had to become the mother I’d never had.

My pregnancy, and the feelings it triggered, resuscitated me like a pair of electrical paddles. It brought me back to life—but it wasn’t easy. In fact, it

broke open every aspect of me that wasn't whole. But in such an exposed state, I was finally receptive to the idea of healing my unresolved past, instead of simply shunting it aside to survive day-to-day.

When we are facing personal challenges and need to practice self-compassion, it can be very helpful and healing to share our vulnerabilities, if not with our partner then with someone else who can hold the sacred space of unconditional love—ideally, someone from our energetic support team who is compassionate and embraces us regardless of our strengths and struggles. This person *must* be someone with whom we can communicate our deepest feelings without fear of judgment or retaliation.

However, exposing raw feelings is not easy, even with someone we trust. It entails being consciously aware of our emotions, and mustering the courage to articulate them. Before diving in, we should take the time to ask ourselves, “What am I feeling or needing right now, either alone or with this person?” and “Do I feel safe and accepted when I'm with them?” Only after evaluating the situation and determining that we can trust this person should we practice expressing our feelings with them.

Even so, revealing our intimate feelings can be uncomfortable at first because it requires us to confront ourselves as we truly are. We have to be courageous enough to delve deep inside and express our authentic selves rather than the behavioral patterns or roles we exhibit every day, and we have to exercise self-compassion to transcend the accompanying fear or shame without feeling crushed. Upon recognizing that we are loving energy, we can drop our masks, let go of the facades, and allow our souls to be seen by those closest to us.

When we reveal ourselves to a partner or member of our energetic support team, we strengthen both our inner selves and the relationship. Fear fades, self-consciousness dissipates, and ego dissolves. In such heightened intimacy there arises mutual respect, responsibility for nurturing each other and the relationship, as well as assuredness that we

are being spiritually expanded, not compromised. In response, we feel free to express ourselves without fear of censorship, realizing that we are being fully accepted.

**In a setting of compassion and love, sharing our vulnerabilities, such as feelings of fear, shame, and unworthiness, diminishes the power they have over us.** We are then able to release them, after which we feel unburdened, for our problems are dissolved and our spirits are free. This leads to a union of soul magnitude.

The following example illustrates how a climate of love and compassion invites expressions of vulnerability capable of immediately enhancing intimacy between partners. My partner Doug recently sensed a decrease in our physical and emotional intimacy as I began increasing the time and focus invested in writing this book. Concerned that our energies were moving out of alignment, he decided to share his observation with me so we could bring our partnership back into balance. During a calm and intimate moment, he lovingly asked me for “permission to speak freely.” Because he had opened a dialogue without blame or attack, I felt safe experiencing the emotions that emerged and making the intention to remain empathic and listen responsively to his point of view without withdrawing or defending myself.

Doug then brought up his insecurity about the infrequency of our sexual intimacy. Using “I” statements, he communicated his need to be more intimate and feel more connected to me. He also expressed a need to know that he was still attractive to me and that I remained interested in him sexually.

Opening my heart, I took in his words. Although Doug’s statements had triggered my fear of rejection and abandonment, I stayed emotionally present and engaged with him. Listening responsively, I validated his experience with compassion and responded honestly, even though his view differed from my own. His supportive feedback gave me the impetus to look at the possibility that I had been directing most of my energy to

fulfilling my own needs, which was throwing our partnership off balance. While still remaining true to myself, I became receptive to adjusting my priorities and sharing more of my time and energy with him. This, in turn, inspired him to let go of the idea that our intimacy needed to be primarily sexual, and agree to explore more innovative ways to sustain emotional intimacy. Consequently, Doug received more physical and emotional care from me and gave me more attention and nurturing. Making these adjustments renewed the energetic flow of our partnership.

In revealing ourselves to our partner, we must communicate from our hearts. We must trust our own experiences and be aware of our own feelings, needs, and desires, so that we articulate them lovingly and ask clearly for the necessary support. For example, we can ask ourselves, "What am I feeling right now that I need to communicate to this person?" Then, if our partner is open and willing, we can share what we are feeling and thereby clear behavioral patterns that have surfaced.

It is also important to recognize any changes we are experiencing as these are likely to cause unexpected patterns to surface. For instance, information signaling an ensuing life transition or realization of a dream can trigger the emergence of a negative pattern, which often occurs due to the increased vulnerability that is present while fulfilling our soul's potential. In such situations, we can acknowledge to our partner that we are experiencing a shift, channel our energies through our hearts, and communicate our vulnerability openly and honestly.

Healthy and happy relationships are transparent relationships. Most of us desire such relationships in which we can be transparent and reveal our authentic selves to others. Fostering such relationships takes trust and courage, which arises when we know that we are worthy of love. Spurred on by courage, we reveal ourselves to others because we trust that fear of rejection or hurt can no longer diminish our sense of worthiness. **Opening up and speaking our truth lays a secure foundation for heightened intimacy.**

# PRACTICES

- 1 Create an energetically safe haven of love with a friend or partner that supports you to venture into deeper intimacy and reveal your vulnerabilities. First, remain fully present by maintaining eye contact, listening without interruption, and refraining from offering opinions and advice. Respond to their sharing by repeating back to them what you heard them say. Even when you become uncomfortable, keep your heart open, and lovingly accept them and their experiences. Allow whatever feelings to come up with no judgment or investment in a particular outcome, permitting them to let down their guard, open their heart, and allow their vulnerabilities to surface.
- 2 Surround yourself and spend more time with positive people who listen well, respond meaningfully, and accept your point of view even if they disagree or make different choices. Make note of who these people are, and where they fit into your life.
- 3 Take an inventory of the people in your life who are potential energy drainers. Make a list of all of your key family members, friends, and coworkers, and put a check mark or slash next to their name if they have an adverse energetic effect on you when you are in their company, on the phone with them, or exchanging e-mails or text messages.



- 4 Pay attention to what is going on in your life at any given moment. Observe your thoughts with compassionate detachment, and acknowledge your feelings by saying, for instance, “I feel anxious or fearful,” “I feel confused,” or, “I am acting in an insecure way.”
- 5 Keep a relationship journal in which you practice being vulnerable and speaking your truth with a trusted friend or partner. Write about your vulnerabilities, or issues that are hard to discuss aloud, and ask your partner to do the same. Then, when you are both ready, read your passages to each other and have an openhearted discussion. Even though you may feel uncomfortable revealing your fears, desires, strengths, and weaknesses, show trust in yourself and your partner by freely expressing your concerns. Listen to your partner’s responses without judgment or interruption, and be open to supportive feedback. Then, repeat the exercise, reversing roles.
- 6 Practice giving and receiving supportive feedback with others. Start by focusing on minor issues and progress to major ones. Use initial statements such as, “Are you open right now to my feedback?” “May I suggest?” or, “Do I have permission to speak freely?”
- 7 Practice recognizing and releasing patterns with your friend or partner. Be aware of cues, such as bickering and blaming, which indicate that a pattern has surfaced. Use a code word or phrase, such as “Stop,” “Break,” or “Time out,” to alert each other to the emergence of a trigger that could cause an argument. Set aside time to discuss the issue without interruption, listening fully to each other’s point of view.

- 8 Practice compassionate detachment by opening your heart while disengaging from others' unhealthy processes. For example, when someone wants to vent their feelings with you, be aware if you are vulnerable to absorbing negative energy. If you are, excuse yourself from the situation, hang up the phone, or postpone the conversation until later. If the person tries to resume the same unhealthy conversation during your next exchange, disengage again.
  
- 9 Before engaging in a potentially vulnerable interaction, breathe deeply, open your heart, and release all attachment to the person or situation, thereby establishing a healthy separation. Refrain from taking on anyone else's negative energies, giving unsolicited advice, or trying to fix the situation.





## CHAPTER 6



# THE PINNACLE OF *Intimacy*

“ *As you consider going into a relationship, look deeply into your heart and mind to discover your level of commitment to the other person’s well-being.* ”

—KEN KEYES, JR.

**R**evealing our vulnerabilities with a beloved other leads to heightened intimacy. Within such a union of souls, we feel safe enough to soften our defenses since there is no need for protection, and no battle to be fought—only love and acceptance. We allow ourselves to rest in the refuge of our partner's being. In such relationships, there is a spiritually elevated sense of responsibility, for we are doing more than holding someone's hand; we are holding sacred space for their soul.



THE SHARED  
*Language*  
OF LOVE

“ *There are two types of language in the world: the language of the intellect and the language of the heart.* ”

—AMMA



Sharing a language of love is exchanging divine energy with another. It connects us, heart and soul, and aligns our hearts with those in whom we recognize ourselves.

Sharing a language of love is one way to engage in open and honest communication, and heighten physical, emotional, and spiritual intimacy in our relationships. The language most universally shared is that of the heart, through which it takes only the love-light in our eyes or the elevated vibration of our voice to create a soulful connection with someone.

The primary element in a shared language of love is our divine presence. When we are truly present with another person, not distracted or guarded, we open a portal of loving energy that facilitates communication and healing. In her book, *The Charisma Myth*, Olivia Fox Cabane defines presence as "... having a moment-to-moment awareness of what's happening. It means paying attention to what's going on rather than being caught up in your own thoughts."<sup>1</sup> Looking deeply into another person's eyes, giving them our undivided attention, and listening with an open heart are all elements of being present. Our divine presence, more than any other aspect of a shared language of love, answers the basic connection question, "Is that person there for me?" It is in this sacred space of presence that intimacy unfolds.

We've all encountered people who are not present, and who have difficulty staying focused. We've all had the experience of talking with someone who seemed to be somewhere else, making us feel like we weren't important to them. To be fully present, we have to show up with our entire being. When we do, we experience an overwhelming sense of joy and contentment, with no yearning, aching, dissatisfaction, or neediness within us to distract us from what is happening in the now.

When we encounter a person who projects presence, we may sense a surge of electric current moving through us, feel physically and emotionally at ease in their company as if we have known them for ages, and realize that they have struck a deep chord within our hearts.

To have presence with someone, we must avoid making assumptions, which are likely to break the flow of intimacy. Making assumptions and jumping to conclusions—behavioral patterns rooted in insecurity—shift the focus of conversation from the present to the past or future, and leads to defensiveness and blame. Rather than make assumptions, which is a setup for disappointment, it is far more loving to listen without interruption and ask questions to gain clarity.

To be present with someone we must also refrain from creating stories about our circumstances and instead simply share our experiences. When feeling the need to control everyone and everything, it can be tempting to wrap, like a ball of twine, strand after strand of stories about the past, thinking they reflect who we are. However, they only reinforce our fear-based patterns. We can choose to stop such a pattern, however, and shift our focus to the perspective of our soul, seeing ourselves as the magnificent beings we truly are.

Further, to have presence with another person requires paying attention to what's going on with them rather than being caught up in our own thoughts and feelings. We can do this by meeting people with a loving gaze and seeing beneath the masks they wear and the facades they create to witness their soul. Even if they don't acknowledge it right away, they

will feel listened to and valued.

Another important element in a shared language of love is affirmations. We can practice affirmations with our partner by beginning each morning with words of gratitude for him or her, confirming the sacredness of the bond, and sharing intentions for the day ahead. Periodically throughout the day, we can affirm our connection to our partner through spontaneous calls, e-mails, or text messages to say, "I love you" or "I am thinking of you." It's always the right time to tell our partner that we love them—not because we are afraid to lose them, but because they are here now. Affirming an intimate relationship on a daily basis circulates love between partners and deepens their bond.

It's also important to affirm, through verbal acknowledgment, friends, family members, coworkers, and even strangers. For instance, when we are introduced to someone, the first question we ask might be "Who are you?" instead of the more usual "What do you do?" Beginning every interaction with an affirmation of the other person's being that indicates "I see you," "I hear you," or "I'm here for you," can transform our relationships and our world.

In the same way, words of affirmation from others can be the wind beneath our wings when we are venturing into uncharted territory or following our passions. For example, when I was trying to write my first book, loving words from Doug gave me the courage to take the first step.

Since childhood, I have enjoyed writing. In high school, I wrote poetry, and kept a journal of my creative writing. Although I chose a different career path, I never lost my interest in writing. For over eleven years, and with many pauses to finish my doctorate, raise my children, and work full-time as a psychologist, I worked on my first book. When I felt complete with it, I was inspired to submit a proposal to about twenty-five agents and publishers. After receiving rejection letters from all of them, I felt deflated, and stopped submitting proposals for a long time.

Several years after Doug and I were married, he started receiving the weekly articles I wrote for my newsletter. After reading several over the span of a few weeks, he asked me if I was ever going to finish my book. I replied, “I’m not sure I’m writer material.” I went on to explain that I was afraid of being rejected again.

He listened without interruption, and then said in a heartfelt way, “If you decide to pursue your writing, I know you will be a success. One of the things I love about you is your courage and persistence.”

After hearing this encouragement, I began to write about all sorts of subjects—the weather, my sleeping cat, and my two children—in the wee hours of the morning, with a lit candle and a cup of coffee at hand. Buoyed by Doug’s affirmation of my being, I bravely ventured outside my comfort zone to write about the transformative, heart-based coaching I did with clients. Before I realized it, I was writing about soul-hearted partnerships, which would become the topic and title of my first book.

Doug and the rest of my energetic support team continued to affirm my being every step of the way. Whenever I felt insecure and in need of affirmation, they cheered me on. But it was Doug’s first words which inspired me to take my first leap into the arduous process of writing, and independently publishing, my book. Reciprocally, when Doug decided that he wanted to study French, and possibly teach English abroad, I supported his passion for learning, motivated him to check out all the possibilities, and offered feedback that gave him the courage to take his first step.

***“Our capacity for honoring another person’s perspective enhances our understanding, and paves the road for expression of empathy and ultimately forgiveness.”***

Through verbal and nonverbal affirmations, we can compassionately communicate to another person: “I know you can do it,” “I’m with you all the way,” and “I’m here for you.” Such reassuring affirmations underscore that we love and believe in this person and are committed to supporting the expression of their soul’s potential. This can unleash the unfulfilled potential within them, assist them in moving beyond their fear and insecurity, inspire courage, and nurture their spiritual transformation.

A shared language of love can be thought of as compassionate communication using positive words and gestures. Japanese scientist Dr. Masaru Emoto is widely known for his work on how positive and negative energies affect the shapes of crystals formed by water. He states in his book, *The Hidden Messages In Water*, “The vibration of good words has a positive effect on our world, whereas the vibration from negative words has the power to destroy.”<sup>2</sup> **Appreciation is one of the languages of universal love.**

Other studies show that feeling appreciated is one of our deepest emotional needs. Gratitude for the positive, supportive words and actions of another person opens us, in turn, to feelings of love, vulnerability, and intimacy. Therefore, we can honor our partner by expressing appreciation and gratitude for their being as part of our shared language of love. For example, even though we don’t expect our partner to bring us coffee in the morning, make dinner, or clean up the kitchen, we can be spontaneously appreciative when we see he has done such tasks. We might say, “I appreciate that you think of me when you bring me that morning cup of coffee.” Or, “You realized how tired I was after work, and it was thoughtful of you to make dinner,” Or simply, “Thank you for cleaning the kitchen.” Expressing gratitude, especially for the little things that occur each day, contributes significantly to a shared language of love, and heightens intimacy. In other words, the little things do, in fact, make all the difference.

Such a practice of compassionate communication can free us from falling into negative patterns, and make any relationship more loving. For instance, rather than saying, “Leave me alone,” which can feel harsh

and dismissive, we can say, “Let me be.” This clearer phrase alerts the other person in a loving way that you would like some personal space. Similarly, instead of telling someone we hate them, we can communicate that we love them, but their behavior is unacceptable or hurts our feelings.

A shared language of love requires accepting another person's viewpoint even when it differs from our own. Our capacity for honoring another person's perspective enhances our understanding, and paves the road for expression of empathy and ultimately forgiveness. We can communicate acceptance of our partner's viewpoint by saying, “Wow, what an interesting point of view,” “I never looked at it quite that way,” or “Can you tell me more about this?” Repeating what we hear back to them and giving genuine responses shows we value their experience.

A shared language of love also depends on partners listening more responsively and speaking less reactively. One of the chief barriers to intimacy is that we often listen to reply rather than to understand. The average person listens for only a few seconds before interrupting—but people tend to be more open to conversing if their partner listens well, responds meaningfully (without composing responses or seeking reassurance) and supports their needs.

When working with couples, I often find that if one person has difficulty listening, the other has trouble articulating, or even knowing, what they want; instead, they complain about what the other person is failing to give them, and become demanding. Engaging in a shared language of love requires that we take turns listening to each other with respect, non-judgment, and acceptance, without interruption.

Sharing a language of love also requires paying attention not only to what we say but to how we say it. In other words, we must ensure that our words are spoken with kindness and gentleness. The words “I love you” are an energetic intention that love is present. For best results, our intention and tone should be consistent with our words. (For example, “I love you” has a much different meaning than “I *love* you?”) It is equally important to give

our partner feedback when their voice sounds critical, harsh, or self-righteous, or when they make a mean-spirited comment. At such times, we can share hurt and even anger with compassion as an expression of love.

Further, in sharing a language of love, it is important to make requests rather than demands. “Requests give direction to love, but demands stop the flow of love,”<sup>3</sup> writes author Gary Chapman. When we demand something from our partner, we shift from an equal partnership to a hierarchical one. To develop an equal-opportunity partnership, we must know our wants and desires, and ask respectfully for what we need. For example, we can make a request of our partner such as: “Could you find time to mow the lawn today?” “It would be helpful to me if you could pick up the kids from school,” or “I would appreciate it if you made my favorite chicken pot pie tonight for dinner.” The way in which we express our needs and desires is critical to sustaining a flow of loving energy in the relationship.

Finally, in sharing a language of love, it is important to avoid using language that may trigger the eruption of our partner’s negative patterns. Harsh generalizations such as “You always ...” or “You never ...” undermine open, honest discussion and obstruct the flow of love. “I” statements such as “I observed,” “I sensed,” or “I felt ... when you said,” will more effectively alert our partner to a pattern they need to address. “I” statements also help us communicate our feelings in a compassionate way.

When we open our hearts and speak from a reservoir of love, its vibration permeates our words, influences our tone of voice, and infuses our nonverbal expressions, making them easier to welcome and accept. Sharing a language of love allows us to be soulfully present with a partner or friend in a safe, supportive setting, and sets the stage for heightened intimacy as well as emotional and spiritual development.

THE ENDURING  
*Power*  
OF KINDNESS  
AND COMPASSION

“ *Kindness is the light that  
dissolves all walls between  
souls, families, and nations.* ”

—PARAMAHANSA  
YOGANANDA



**K**indness and compassion are powerful dimensions of love. **When we open our hearts in kindness and compassion, anxiety, depression, and fear dissipate, as they cannot coexist with the energy of love.** In generating kindness and compassion, we not only experience but also sustain unconditional love for ourselves and others.

The more kind and compassionate we are to ourselves, the more kind and compassionate we can be toward others. The inverse is also true. Many of us are so busy wanting to be loved that we fail to see where we can give love—but it is in *giving* love through kindness and compassion to others that we receive the benefits of kindness and compassion ourselves. As the German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, wrote: “This is the miracle to those who really love. The more they give, the more they possess.”<sup>4</sup>

In order to give kindness and compassion in the form of care, support, or assistance with an open heart, we must learn to *receive* these actions with an open heart. Creating a harmonious flow of love requires that we give and receive without expectations, conditions, or obligations.

Research shows that acts of kindness and compassion promote longevity and well-being. In a recent study in 2009 by David Johnson at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, half the participants were asked to take part in a loving-kindness meditation each week for six weeks, while the other half were assigned to a control group. Participants taking part in the loving-kindness meditation practice, compared to those in the control group, had increased positive emotions as well as

increased vagal tone due to activity of the vagus nerve (our longest cranial nerve). Better vagal tone indicates better overall health, and better heart health in particular. The study results suggest that the positive emotions of kindness and compassion, in addition to positive social connections, significantly benefit a person's health and well-being. This means that to sustain our health and enhance our chances of achieving longevity, we have to override assaults on our immune systems resulting from negative emotions such as anger and resentment.

Acts of kindness and compassion don't just nurture us, they also nurture relationships, especially with our partners. For instance, if you see that your partner is overly stressed at work and could use a break from getting up early in the morning with the new baby, you might rise early for a while to get them that much-needed break without any expectation that they will reciprocate later. Or your partner, noticing that you have been struggling with the completion of a creative project, might make a date for the two of you to go to one of your favorite places, draw you a warm bath, or offer to be a sounding board while you clear your feelings of insecurity.

Other acts of compassion and care might include making a special meal with your partner in mind, leaving lovingly-worded Post-it love notes on the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror, booking a self-care retreat for the two of you, or unexpectedly arranging for an amazing adventure.

Demonstrations of kindness and compassion also include physical touch. We live in a society so frightened of touch that we no longer let kindergarten teachers hug their students. We are suffering from a touch deficiency, which is all the more reason to offer our partner healing through touch—by putting our hand on theirs, holding them in our arms, giving them a massage, or placing our hand over their heart when they are experiencing emotional trauma. Such random acts of kindness must be performed free of expectation and obligation, with the understanding that the love they generate comes back to us and the relationship exponentially.

Practicing kindness and compassion shows us a broader, more spiritual perspective on life. It opens up the intimate space of relationship so we can connect with the expanded dimension of our being, and the being of our partner. The practice of compassion involves empathy, which leads to a relationship between equals, rather than sympathy, which leads to a hierarchical relationship in which one person feels sorry for the other.

To be empathic toward others, even those who are mean, deceitful, or hurtful, requires that we open our hearts and feel compassion for ourselves, dissolving the walls we have erected around our hearts for self-protection. Vulnerability lays the groundwork for empathy. Science has demonstrated that humanity is united by empathy, a phenomenon

*“We are suffering from a touch deficiency, which is all the more reason to offer our partner healing through touch.”*

that has been observed in children as young as one year of age. Research shows that, when we feel compassion, the most sophisticated thought centers in our brains light up, indicating that we are hardwired to be compassionate toward others. Compassion brings our brain into harmony with the vibration of love from our heart center. Therefore, the more compassionate we are with ourselves, the more our capacity for empathy increases so we can

respond to the emotional needs of others.

Being compassionate toward others, however, does not require us to engage in any unhealthy physical or emotional experiences they may be having. In fact, compassion requires that we remove ourselves from their physical process, and instead support from a place where we feel stable and empowered. We can communicate that we love a person while still refusing to play a part in their drama. For instance, when someone wants to vent about a particular issue, we can listen with an open heart but still

refrain from taking on their negativity, giving unsolicited advice, or trying to fix the situation. This allows us to provide loving support yet remain calm, nonreactive, and non-judgmental.

Empathy is compassion in action. When someone is stuck in a dark hole, empathy is empowering them by offering a hand, and supporting them while they find a way to get themselves out. By contrast, sympathy is jumping into the dark hole with them and commiserating about how bad it is in the hole.

To protect your sensitive being and hold the space of love, you can practice these five steps of compassionate detachment.

**Retreat:** If you've ever attended a gathering or shared an office with an energy bully, you may have felt your eyes get heavy, sleepy, or dry; noticed your mood shifting from positive to negative; or suddenly become irritated or agitated. It's important when you feel these symptoms that you pause, check in with yourself, and give yourself permission to remove yourself from the situation as soon as possible. You can get some fresh air, tell the person you will call them back, or drift over to mingle with people who give off positive energy. You can radiate love from a distance without losing yourself. Notice how this practice beneficially affects your physical and emotional well-being.

**Re-evaluate:** When encountering negativity, ask yourself, "How can this interaction with this person help me spiritually grow?" or "What is this person or situation showing me about myself?" Every exchange in life—good, bad, or neutral—is an opportunity to become free of your fear-based patterns and self-sabotaging behaviors, and open your heart in love.

**Restore:** After any negative encounter or situation, it's crucial that you detox the lower vibrational energies you have absorbed. Taking deep cleansing breaths, showering, and spending time in nature are simple ways to clear your energy system. All of these will ground you

and bring you back into energetic balance and resonance.

**Raise:** Raise your energy vibration by opening your heart and surrounding the person or situation in love. Love brings you into non-resonance with lower vibrations, and you can radiate love from a distance without compromising your own energies. As a conduit of love, you can strive to see “negative Nellies” as catalysts to elevate your energy and engage your highest self.

**Re-enter:** When you re-enter the negative environment, do so slowly, with loving intent, and conscious awareness as to which of your buttons are likely to be pushed again. Make sure you are fully centered. Use the “broken record technique,” which is repeating a neutral statement to reduce any emotional volatility. Keep your interactions short and sweet, end conversations swiftly and with compassion, and lessen the time and duration you spend in toxic situations.

It is possible to be compassionate and accepting of another person while still holding that person accountable for their behavior. One of the barriers to practicing compassionate detachment is the fear of setting boundaries and holding people accountable. Not holding them accountable for their unhealthy choices, however, actually impedes their capability to help themselves and spiritually grow.

In reality, when we set healthy energetic boundaries and hold others accountable for their choices, we become more loving, compassionate people. **When we take full responsibility for every choice in our lives, we cannot be a victim, only a creator.** Above all, when we set compassionate boundaries, we love and value ourselves by showing others how we wish to be treated. Then we can be response-able even in the most challenging circumstances, and attract everyone and everything we need to manifest a more fulfilling reality.

Separating our reactions from someone else's gives us the detachment we need to stop taking their reactions personally or blaming them for

ours. One way to remain compassionate and responsive is to remind ourselves that the other person is going through their own process of self-discovery, which likely has nothing to do with us. We must trust that they are on their own soul's journey, and are creating the scenarios they need to spiritually transform.

**Sustaining healthy energetic boundaries increases our ability to infuse difficult situations with positive energy—and ultimately, to transform them.** In choosing to respond rather than react, we can diffuse a negative situation and create a neutral space in which the other person doesn't have anything to come up against. Without something to react to, they are more likely to calm down and even become aware of their own reaction. Providing them with a mirror of love in which to see themselves helps them gain awareness of their behaviors. Thus, holding them accountable for their actions actually opens the possibility for unconditionally loving interactions with them in the future.

An additional benefit of showing kindness and compassion to others for their self-discoveries is that whenever such people come into our lives, they also reveal something about ourselves that we need to either release or transform. So when we fear getting hooked into any person's negative patterns we can also observe ourselves to discover our own possible negative patterns related to the exchange. Then we can compassionately bless the person and release the situation to resolve on its own.

Practicing compassionate detachment gives us the power to transcend anyone or anything that doesn't originate from the energy of love. In a recent phone call with her stepmother, Anne, my client Hallie noticed that her stepmother engaged in the patterns of right/wrong, righteous indignation, and resentment upon realizing that her grandson had eloped prior to his planned wedding celebration and hadn't shared the news with her. Having difficulty accepting his point of view and his choice, Anne decided that she would not attend the planned wedding celebration.

Hallie and her husband were to meet her father and stepmother for lunch following this phone call and her decision. Checking in with herself, she noticed that she was anxious about the upcoming meeting, which alerted her to her vulnerability. Knowing that her negative patterns were likely to surface at lunch, Hallie tried to create a compassionate space and at the same time diffuse a potentially volatile situation by suggesting that she and Anne have lunch in a public place and with a specific time limit. On the drive to the restaurant, she shared her vulnerability with her husband and asked for his support.

Within the first few minutes of their lunch, Hallie became aware of Anne's rising irritation that they had not touched on the subject of the elopement. Hallie took several deep breaths and affirmed her intention to offer Anne

**“Practicing kindness and compassion is essential to living in alignment with love.”**

compassion yet detach from the situation. As soon as Anne brought up the subject, Hallie was prepared to respond in a clear and loving way rather than react. She purposely softened her voice and spoke from her heart, “I know that you may feel hurt by Matt's decision. If you need to share this with him, I suggest that you call and talk to him.” Anne, in turn, raised her voice and began defending her position, blaming Matt for not sharing the news with

her right away and saying that his choice to elope was wrong. Hallie once again said lovingly and clearly, “I honor your choice not to attend Matt's celebration; however, I'm not going to discuss it at this time and in this way.” Sustaining the energy to remain calm and compassionate, Hallie removed herself from the escalating situation by going to the restroom.

Upon her return to the table, Anne immediately began blaming Hallie for her feelings of being rejected by the family. Setting more healthy

energetic boundaries, Hallie suggested that they have this conversation at another time and in a more suitable place—yet Anne’s rhetoric continued to escalate out of control.

At last, Hallie chose to remove herself from the no-win situation. She got up from the table, went outside, and sat in her car. There, for about ten minutes, she took deep breaths and opened her heart in loving compassion. Withholding judgment, she blessed Anne, while at the same time releasing the hurt and disappointment surfacing within her.

Hallie’s husband quickly paid the bill, and he and her father also left the restaurant. With no one left to engage with, Anne eventually came out to the car and apologized.

When we open our hearts, withhold judgment, and remain nonreactive, we experience situations from a spiritually elevated perspective; this gives us detachment as well as the capacity to feel compassion for even those who deceive or hurt us. “A truly compassionate attitude toward others does not change even if they behave negatively or hurt you,”<sup>5</sup> says His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Showing compassion for others’ struggles and suffering allows us to discover valuable information that may alter our perspective on their plight. For instance, instead of judging a person who neglected or abused us as a child, we can investigate how they, too, may have been neglected or abused, and compassionately love the child they were when they were hurt like us. Profound compassion opens our hearts to empathy, forgiveness, and love, even to perfect strangers.

**Practicing kindness and compassion is essential to living in alignment with love. Making loving choices every day is even more important than saying “I love you” every day.** Acts of kindness and compassion do speak louder than loving words.





# THE FLOW OF *Forgiveness*

“ *If we want freedom and peace  
and the experience of love and  
being loved, we must let go and  
forgive.* ”

—ERIC BUTTERWORTH

**G**enerating a mutual flow of forgiveness renews connection, enhances the sharing of vulnerabilities, and heightens intimacy in our relationships. It is at the core of every soul-hearted relationship, and is an essential dimension of being love.

Forgiveness is the willingness to let go of any resentment, judgment, or grievance toward someone who has injured us. It has two essential parts: a release of negative feelings previously held toward the person who has offended us, and an engagement in positive feelings toward that person.

Since we all engage in human interactions on a daily basis, relationship injuries are unavoidable. Forgiveness is a powerful way to heal such injuries. Even though this practice has been encouraged in religious tradition for years, today it is increasingly discussed in the mainstream global media as a means for facilitating healing and peace. Forgiving a person for harm they caused us—and, likewise, making amends for hurting someone—are positive acts that can sustain loving relationships and deter alienation and loneliness.

Research on forgiveness suggests that, because it helps us sustain our connectedness with others, it has considerable physical and mental health benefits. Forgiveness also promotes our well-being because it encourages the release of negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, or the desire for revenge.

**The act of blessing and releasing a person or situation assists us in letting go of our past, appreciating the present more fully, and orienting us toward the future.**

Following is one couple's approach to forgiveness following a relationship injury precipitated by a deep breach of trust.

My client David was devastated by his wife Nancy's affair. Over the course of several counseling sessions, I encouraged him to practice forgiveness through courageously communicating his pain to Nancy. Using the

*“Forgiving someone does not require us to trust that person again; rather, trust is a gift we give someone who has earned it.”*

tools of self-disclosure, responsive listening, and accountability, David began to share his pain using “I” statements instead of blaming, lashing out, or berating Nancy's character in anger or hurt.

I coached Nancy to stay centered and emotionally nonreactive by not taking David's feelings personally, listening responsively, and compassionately tuning in to his

hurt and sense of betrayal while avoiding getting stuck in defensiveness or denial. I guided her to open her heart, be present and compassionate with him, and acknowledge that what mattered right now were David's feelings, not the event itself. After he had released his anger and hurt, they could begin to explore what led to the affair, recognizing that it was a co-created experience in which they had both participated on all levels.

Once David felt heard and validated, I suggested that he articulate what he needed from Nancy regarding the injury. Still a little shaky and confused with how to proceed, he haltingly asked her to consider his need for more connection and intimacy. Hearing his expression of vulnerability prompted Nancy to soften her heart, respond with accountability, and apologize with sincerity.

Although David and Nancy still had a long way to go in healing their relationship, by creating such a safe environment, they could help each other heal and grow spiritually. Through mutual forgiveness, they created a new “version” of the affair that went beyond the affair itself, and encompassed the core issues of trust and intimacy. Even though, in the end, they chose to separate, their updated story included a way to heal their hurt and establish a new relationship based on unconditional love.

Forgiveness is often facilitated when we gain a broader, more spiritual perspective on a situation that has caused us pain, and affirm the underlying essence of the people involved. By doing this, we recognize that the love within the other person is there within us as well—the essence of who we really are. Forgiveness also allows us to confront conflict, betrayal, and disappointment in a way that is love-affirming and healthy. Above all, forgiveness addresses the ultimate source of these negative emotions, not just the outward symptoms.

Many people have difficulty with the concept of forgiveness because they think they are letting someone off the hook for hurtful or harmful behavior. However, offering forgiveness does not condone or accept a hurtful action; on the contrary, forgiveness acknowledges the wrongdoing and holds the person fully accountable for it. Moreover, forgiving someone does not require us to trust that person again; rather, trust is a gift we give someone who has earned it. It simply provides us with a way to permanently free ourselves from negative emotions which are tied to past events, and release any ideas about who we are that are tied to those events and emotions. If we are love, we cannot be the sum of our past experiences. Forgiveness acknowledges this and allows us to move on, unencumbered.

One of the most challenging experiences for me to forgive was my mother's desertion of us when we were children. This journey of forgiveness lasted for much of my adult life, and finally culminated in January of 2013, when my brother Jim began researching the genealogy of our family of origin. Although I had conducted a year-long search for my mother while in my late

twenties, I never found her, and thus never got the physical closure I desired. During his research, Jim discovered that our mother had applied for a marriage license in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1968—two years after she escaped from the mental health facility where she'd been taken after her suicide attempt. Cautiously, we began to hope that we might still find her alive.

To better pursue this new lead, I asked a friend, Michael, and his partner, Dan, a genealogy expert, to assist me in locating my mother's marriage license. Michael went to the Cuyahoga County Courthouse on my behalf since he was familiar with the processes to obtain such documents. When I saw my mother's name on the page, memories flashed before me like a home movie: the summer pool parties she threw for my birthdays, the brown and white spotted cow costume she made me for Halloween, the wedding picture with her in her army dress uniform ... And my last memory of her, watching through the window of my father's car as she was driven away in the ambulance.

Michael ran my mother's birthdate, social security number, and last known address through a "people-finder" website, which projected that she might still be alive. Given her known history of drug abuse and mental illness, I was skeptical, yet my hope was still strong. I remembered feeling drawn to move to Cleveland in 1983, the same place my mother had applied for her marriage license, years after her disappearance. Had I been tracing her energetic footsteps, unaware?

Armed with this new information, Michael and I searched military records, but learned that a fire at the facility where her records were kept had destroyed them. We also learned that her mental health records at the psychiatric institution where she had been a patient had been sealed by the state of Pennsylvania when the facility closed.

Despite these setbacks, we persisted. While Googling alternate spellings of my mother's last names, Michael found a misspelling of my mother's married name—"Skagal" instead of "Skacal"—which led him to a military cemetery at Fort Collins, Colorado. Ultimately, we found a picture of a

grave marker on which was written the same first name, middle initial, birthdate, enlistment date, and military rank as those of my mother. Further verification through the Social Security Office substantiated each piece of information I shared, and confirmed that the burial site was definitely my mother's. She had died on November 4, 1969.

I felt like a door had been slammed shut. Grief engulfed me. I knew for certain now that I would never see her again. I would never be able to ask her the questions that had haunted me for so many years. But alongside the grief was an overwhelming relief. The reason we hadn't been reunited was because she had been dead all these years, not because she hadn't wanted to see me.

Before I experienced this closure, I carried around feelings of hurt, sadness, and abandonment like an anvil pressing down on my heart. Some days, this weight made it difficult to breathe, let alone love myself, create healthy relationships, or follow my dreams.

Since discovering that my mom is no longer living, I've been relieved of that burden of "what if." When I imagine her sitting here next to me, I no longer feel any anger or hurt toward her—only love, and a sense of peace. Through loving and letting her go, I can forgive myself for being a motherless daughter. I no longer feel disappointment in my mother's choices or the limitations of her love, because I have compassion for her traumatic life and the love she never received. Experiencing her in a more positive light has brought me into a state of grace, where I am able to accept what is and forgive what isn't.

Getting to this place of compassion was a journey in and of itself. Investigating my mother's traumatic life helped me see her not as a heartless mother who abandoned her children, but as a scared and insecure young woman who had been abandoned by her own parents.

After learning that my mother had passed away, I took a road trip to the run-down apartment in Pittsburgh where I had last lived with her. I had

with me a miniature time capsule, a coffee can containing a photograph that captured my essence at age eight, the year my mother had left me, along with a letter I'd written to that little girl expressing my unconditional love for her.

I buried the coffee can and its ritual objects in the backyard of the apartment building, to symbolize the clearing of a lifetime's unresolved grief and loss relating to my mother. By releasing patterns and forgiving the past, I acknowledged both who I was then, and who I had become.

The heart-based practice of forgiveness is one that I continue to use every day and in every aspect of my life. I know now that my relationship with

my mother served a purpose in my life—and in that knowledge, I am able to finally find closure.

***“The more we  
open our hearts  
in compassion,  
the more we can  
forgive.”***

It is important to realize that forgiveness takes time and effort, and may not alleviate all the pain and suffering at once. For instance, it has taken decades of forgiveness practice to let go of all the residual feelings I had with my mom. I start-

ed journaling in my late twenties to release my unresolved feelings and open up a dialogue with her. I wrote letters to her, vacillating between unleashed anger and hurt and open-hearted forgiveness. I never mailed them, in part because, at the time, I had no idea where she was or how to find her.

Even into my late forties, I continued to unearth layers of pain. In instances where my hurt, disappointment, or sadness resurfaced, it became necessary to repeat the practice to clear these subtle layers. I knew I had finally forgiven my mom when I could think of her without experiencing any negative reaction.



In my situation, I had to release my pain without any response or assistance from my mother. But in many situations—especially in intimate, soul-hearted relationships—a mutual flow of forgiveness can be generated.

Generating a mutual flow of forgiveness requires one party to release their negative emotions (such as anger, hurt, and resentment), and the other party to respond with empathy, which includes feelings of warmth and connection toward the other person. Some research suggests that empathy is the essential component to forgiving someone or something because it requires us to act on our compassion. To generate a mutual flow of forgiveness, and thus avoid undermining the relationship's future, it is also necessary to avoid bringing into the present the failures or mistakes of the past. We cannot erase the past, but we can accept it as history. Once we have acknowledged our shortcoming, failure, or mistake, have asked for and received forgiveness from someone, and that person has offered forgiveness, the event should be put to rest.

The more we open our hearts in compassion, the more we can forgive. This idea hit home for me recently when I was finally able to put my first marriage to rest and spiritually complete my relationship with my son's father. Twenty-two years after Tom and I divorced, he invited me to breakfast without first telling me why he wanted to meet. I graciously accepted his invitation. As we were sitting at the table reflecting on the many accomplishments of our son, Tom gazed at me, took a deep breath, and said, "The main reason I wanted to meet today was to share with you that I'm an alcoholic." He proceeded to tell me that he had completed a chemical dependency treatment program and now wanted to make amends for not having been present in our relationship, as well as take full responsibility for his part in our breakup.

Stunned by his honesty and sincerity, I suddenly became aware of residual feelings of hurt within me. Releasing them, I forgave him for his lack of accountability all these years, and together we forgave the past. This experience showed me that it is never too late to forgive and release the past.

**Forgiveness as a spiritual practice is an act of love in which we focus energy through our heart center, and bless and release anything that does not align with who we truly are.** The heart becomes an energetic clearinghouse that transforms grievance and resentment into love and compassion, and dissolves any emotional injury attached to the person or situation. By forgiving, and truly letting go, we make the past powerless over our lives.

In order to practice genuine forgiveness, we must refrain from bringing up past failures or keeping a scorecard of grievances. In instances of pseudo-forgiveness, events are forgiven on the surface, but one or both parties still harbor resentment. Despite thinking that they have resolved the issue, the couple may find that the issue comes up again and again as time passes. Allowing such a cycle of resentment to continue forces one partner to continually relive the transgression and both to remain stuck in their negative emotions. This fosters negativity, binds the relationship in dysfunctional patterns, and impedes movement toward true forgiveness and letting go.

Once we declare that we are complete with an issue, we need to take a moment and check in with ourselves. If we are not complete, then we must be honest and ask for more time to work through it. Above all, once we and our partner have agreed that we are complete with the issue, we need to honor this agreement and not use the issue to fuel later arguments. Forgiving any grievance as soon as possible keeps the relationship continuously evolving, and ensures that both partners' energies are available for creational use.

A few years ago, my husband Doug and I were discussing a financial issue that had just come up for us. During the discussion, he reminded me of a hurtful comment I had made months earlier. We had resolved the issue—or so I thought—and hearing the comment in this context completely knocked the wind out of me. As we worked through the situation, Doug revealed that he had not been complete with our earlier issue, and was

still harboring resentment, which came bubbling to the surface during this new argument.

This time, we forgave each other fully, put the issue to rest for good, and agreed that it would not get in the way of our communication again. The experience reinforced for me, once again, the importance of resolving issues as soon as possible in order to move forward and build trust again.

To prevent prolonged grievances, we must make forgiveness a daily practice. It gives us a greater sense of freedom to express ourselves fully and create fresh possibilities for the future without fear of injuring the relationship. Through the daily practice of mutual forgiveness, partners can help each other heal and grow spiritually. Like the fresh vegetation that emerges from the ashes of a forest fire, we can create a new form of relationship each time we relinquish an old grievance, resentment, or past hurt.

Ultimately, there is no hurt that cannot be transformed by forgiveness. And the more we forgive ourselves the easier it is to forgive others. To forgive takes an open heart, loving compassion, and a detachment from specific outcomes. The greater outcome is widely recognized: acts of forgiveness free us from the past and sever the flow of negative energy toward others so that positive energy is returned to us, creating space in our hearts to love and be loved.

Being love with others gives purpose and meaning to life. Our relationships provide us with the most significant opportunities for self-realization and transformation, and assist us in spiritually progressing beyond what we could ever achieve alone. **With pure love as our foundation, we can attract even more love to us in the form of unconditionally loving relationships.**

# PRACTICES

- 1* Clarify expectations about roles and needs before sharing your vulnerable communications. For example, let your partner know that you want him or her to function more as a sounding board than an advisor, or state that you want permission to speak freely about a situation that has been troubling you. Clear announcements of your expectations minimize your partner's likelihood of judging, and open the way for supportive listening and empathy. If it becomes difficult for your partner to continue listening, pause and table the discussion until later. Resume when both of you are calm and ready to listen.
- 2* Begin each day in gratitude with your partner, aware that there are challenges ahead but trusting that you will not be given more than you can handle. Visualize an image of the best your lives have ever been, and set an intention to make them even better no matter what has happened in your past.
- 3* Practice at least one random act of kindness every day, such as shoveling the snow from your neighbor's sidewalk, paying a stranger's toll, or letting the person behind you in line at the grocery store go first. Notice how these small acts of kindness open your heart and generate more love in your life.

- 4 Practice compassion by opening to the love flowing through you and then radiating loving compassion toward another person. While sitting quietly in meditation, place your hand on your heart and visualize a pearl of white light in the center of your chest. Allow this light to expand outward and into a radiant cord of light connecting your heart with theirs. Now consciously direct love toward them for their highest good. Feel the energy flow as it comes back to you through your heart.
- 5 Work toward creating a mutual flow of forgiveness in a close relationship by not holding on to past grievances and hurts. Consciously refrain from bringing up a friend's or partner's past mistakes when interacting with them in the present.
- 6 When you want to forgive someone or something, imagine the person's patterns or the situation in pink light (such as pink bubbles, pink clouds, or pink cotton candy) while at the same time visualizing yourself and the other person bathed in radiant white light. This practice seals the physical negativity away from you because the vibration of pink light governs the physical universe.
- 7 Here are journal questions to facilitate forgiveness.
  - Where in your life do you have unfinished business?
  - What questions arise for you about this person or situation? How do they help you or hold you back?
  - How can you forgive those in your life who have hurt you, intentionally or unintentionally?

PART THREE

*Being*  
**LOVE**  
IN THE  
WORLD







# CHAPTER 7





# *The Soul* OF LOVE

“*Forget the nonsense of there  
and here, race, nation, religion,  
starting point, and destination.  
You are soul, and you are love.*”

—RUMI

**W**e are here to activate our soul potential by living true to our essence as loving beings of light. By expressing unconditional love in the world, and acknowledging this love in others, our collective consciousness can expand beyond the boundaries of thought and the limits of physical existence.

Being love in the world means experiencing ourselves and all living beings as one energy. This luminous power connects, and pulses through, everyone and everything. In order to truly feel and know this, we must incorporate love into every facet of our lives, and become ambassadors of love in our relationships, families, and communities. As we inspire others through our love, we begin to create a global climate of love, where all living beings can continually express their soul's purpose and their own unique reflection of universal love energy.



# SHIFTING OUR CONSCIOUSNESS TO *Universal Love*

“ *We do not become healers. We came as healers.  
We are. Some of us are still catching up to what we are.*

*We do not become storytellers. We came as carriers of stories.  
We and our ancestors actually lived. We are.  
Some of us are still catching up to what we are.*

*We do not become artists. We came as artists. We are.  
Some of us are still catching up to what we are.  
We do not become writers, dancers, musicians, helpers, peacemakers.  
We came as such. We are.  
Some of us are still catching up to what we are.*

*We do not learn to love in this sense.  
We came as Love. We are Love.  
Some of us are still catching up to who we truly are.* ”

—CLARISSA PINKOLA ESTES

Currently, humanity is creating a spiritual shift in consciousness to universal love. This process is opening our heart centers in connection with our souls like never before, and facilitating personal and global transformation.

For human civilization to not only survive but to evolve spiritually, we must expand our consciousness to love. Universal love is the answer to healing the suffering of humanity and bringing peace to an otherwise troubled world. We possess the soul power to circulate love into every corner of our world. As more and more of us discover this truth, and fully embrace and express our true nature as love, this paradigm shift is accelerating rapidly. Collectively, we are shifting our focus from *falling* in love—focusing our energies on one person or thing—to *flowing* in love, and being able to focus love on everyone and everything. This universal love is a divine, sustainable energy source that illuminates our entire being through our hearts. This global transformation is expanding our human consciousness beyond the confines of our minds and the conditions of the physical world, and bringing our hearts into loving coherence as one energy source.

Over the last twenty-five years, there has been increased excitement about these energetic changes in the world. Some mystics, seers, and prophets have foreseen a new age characterized by a profound shift in our consciousness to love; others have speculated about such a time being the end of the world. Whatever our perspective may be, such a

transformational shift is having substantial effects worldwide. On an international level, we are experiencing devastating climate changes, stock market volatility, geopolitical turmoil, and terrorist attacks. On a personal level, we are struggling with health, financial, work, and relationship issues while also experiencing compassion fatigue, energy drains, and deep-seated vulnerability. The chaos of our times is a reflection of a profound and intense time of transformation. Marianne Williamson writes about this intense time of transformation, “The chaos of our times is a reflection of a profound and inexorable reorientation of the human mind. This explosion is coming from the deepest levels of the psyche; it is not orderly; and no amount of tight, repressive force can contain it.”<sup>1</sup>

We must not succumb to the belief that there is an evil force in the world with the power to triumph over love. We cannot allow acts of violence such as terrorist attacks, school shootings, or ethnic wars to deter us from living as beacons of compassion, peace, and love. On the contrary, we must trust that love is always the answer and prevails even in the most unconscionable and devastating circumstances.

Many contemporary thinkers propose that instead of viewing this as a cataclysmic time, we see it as a beneficial time of opportunity to shift our consciousness to universal love, which can increase the power available to us for spiritual transformation and the advancement of humanity—provided we realize how to consciously wield that power.

Amidst the chaos in the world and the turmoil in our lives, we must focus our energies through our heart centers, and work to dissolve our ego. It is our ego-centeredness which has given rise to, and reinforces, our basic fear that we are not lovable. When we identify with fear instead of love, we feel disconnected from the source of who we are, alone and separate from the rest of humanity. Just like a droplet of water is not separate from the ocean, we are not separate from the infinite energy we share with our fellow beings. The process of heart centering, however, will resolve our lovelessness, and bring us into vibrational coherence as universal love.

For our physical survival and spiritual growth as human beings, it is imperative that we move from an ego-centered consciousness to a global consciousness of universal love. This time is about dissolving the ego structures we have used to perpetuate fear, greed, narcissism, and negativity. For instance, we are clearly observing a breakdown of political, educational, financial, social, environmental, medical, and religious structures that have been abused through a corruption of power and need to be released so healthier, positive forms can emerge. In fact, the decline of these structures, which are built on typically patriarchal foundations, is now reorienting us to a new balance of masculine and feminine energies. This process is necessary for human transformation. We are leaving a material age where greed and fear have ruled, and entering a creational age that focuses on the power of universal love.

Here is an example of the power of universal love in action when implementing a co-creational model of feminine, collaborative, heart-centered business practices. The book, *Inspiration for a Woman's Soul: Choosing Happiness* (of which I am one of twenty-seven inspiring authors), attracted over 150 female visionaries who joined their intentions, synergized their powerful energies, and made the authentic choice to co-create an anthology of women's stories that went viral and climbed the best-seller charts within the first two hours of its launch. Divinely guided by a communal intention of love and service, we came together as soul-hearted partners with the mission to share our messages of hope, healing, and happiness. We did this by checking our egos at the door, and assisting each other by blogging, sharing posts on social media, and spreading the word through our personal platforms and outlets. As conscious *evolutionaries of love*, we connected to and harnessed the power of universal love—and, in the process, proved that anything is possible. **Women, as an energy source, must take the lead to transform our world to a consciousness of love, harmony, and peace.**

The more we connect with the power of universal love, the more we can become fully realized as one creational energy, a communal consciousness, and a universal heart. The innate power of love transcends

categories of gender, culture, race, and religion, becoming greater than the energy of each individual. As a result, this universal flow of energy keeps expanding in all directions until our whole life experience becomes infused with love.

The evolution of humanity has brought us to the pinnacle of our spiritual development to date. Our human transformation is breaking fixed physical patterns, and opening us to the new information we need in order to complete our spiritual evolutionary processes. In the past, spiritual beings such as Christ, Mohammed, and Buddha have come into this reality emitting a higher level of vibration, and have broken through these fixed conditions. They sourced their vibrational energy from light, and overrode the energetic system of their time. Now, for the first time, “humanity is becoming aware of the presence of light energy here, not only because of the way things appear but especially because of an internal purification process taking place. This awakening, while uncomfortable and unsettling, is part of our spiritual evolution and the beginning of a more positive and productive use of light energy,”<sup>2</sup> states Bryan Christopher. In other words, we are moving beyond a predetermined cause-and-effect physical system into a higher vibration of light, love, and creation.

*“The healing of suffering begins with each one of us making the choice to heal our lovelessness and adopt a personal creed of universal love.”*

Before we can experience this new paradigm of universal love, we must recognize that one level of our human consciousness is saturated with suffering, and needs purification. In recent years, human consciousness has been weighted down by pain and sorrow; this has taken a physical, emotional, and spiritual toll on us in the form of illness. The increase in illness on a global scale, specifically heart disease, cancer, and autoim-



mune conditions, has skyrocketed. Additionally, mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and addiction have become the new normal. In the United States alone, the use of anti-anxiety drugs is up by 30 percent from just ten years ago, and one in five Americans takes at least one medication for depression. In fact, we are more ill, anxious, depressed, addicted, and medicated than any other society in recorded history. In order to move forward with the next stage of our spiritual evolution, we must realize that we can no longer only treat the symptoms of the diseases that plague us, but must address the root of the problem—the increasing lack of emotional and spiritual connection, and misalignment of physical, emotional, and spiritual energy systems.

Yet amidst the deluge of diseases, catastrophes, and turmoil, we are being given the information and tools we need to purge that negative energy, and create a new landscape of love from the inside out. Although this energetic clearing may appear negative, it actually reflects the positive emergence of love energy from within.

Until this shift in our consciousness to universal love is completed, though, human suffering will continue. When we are out of energetic alignment, we experience physical or emotional illness, but healing through love aligns and integrates our physical, emotional, and spiritual energy systems, resulting in wholeness of being. When we embrace love as the means to cease our perpetual suffering and stop the breakdown of our bodies, minds, and spirits, we will witness the universal healing of humanity.

The healing of suffering begins with each one of us making the choice to heal our lovelessness and adopt a personal creed of universal love. Once we do this for ourselves, we are called upon to become compassionate healers for others, and commit to eradicating fear, suffering, and negativity without sacrificing ourselves in the process.

We are here to love, to be love, and to serve; yet, our service must be a healthy energetic exchange in which we are conduits of love energy. This

mutual circulation of energy results in making our needs as important as another person's. Just as self-care is necessary in a soul-hearted partnership, providing for our own needs will ensure that we have the resources to care for others in the world.

Our service at this time is to create a global initiative of love for humanity. Within every human being, whether they are conscious of it or not, lives an awareness that they are more expansive than the small-minded identity they have displayed in the past. Carl Sagan poignantly wrote, "Once we overcome our fear of being tiny, we find ourselves on the threshold of a vast and awesome universe that utterly dwarfs—in time, in space, and in potential—the tidy anthropocentric proscenium of our ancestors."<sup>3</sup> Love is in every atom of our being. Within each of us is a divine universe, which we must recognize for the evolution of universal love to occur.

Unfortunately, most of us do not understand that we are being asked to serve in this way, and therefore succumb to illness and misery rather than shifting to the higher level of vibration needed to become a compassionate healer on the planet. But it is now time for us to cease our suffering and be true to our essence as beings of light and love.

The secret to transforming ourselves so we can be of service to humanity is to free ourselves of the ego—the physical, time-oriented projection of self. Although we can still experience our individuality, we must dissolve our personal identity and sense of separateness in order to experience a oneness of energy as the manifestation of pure love in human form. In this open state of genuine love, we will experience levels of spiritual awareness beyond the limitations of our ego, thought processes, and societal structures. We will begin to see ourselves as the ultimate source of our being. We can observe our thoughts, but rather than react to them, we can operate from a broader, more universal perspective. At the physical level, it may appear that we are doing the thinking; yet, on a spiritual level, the mind is just another facet of the physical body we inhabit. We can allow the higher aspects of ourselves to become consciously aware of our thoughts. We will still have experiences in which we use thought

processes, but we will also increasingly experience information entering our conscious awareness seemingly out of nowhere. Such intuited information allows the voice of our spirits to guide us, rather than our past mindsets. Such inner wisdom coming through our hearts overrides thought patterns and their frequent negativity. In effect, to assist the shift in consciousness to universal love, we are being asked to experience ourselves as an infinite energy source of love, rather than as individual beings invested in the physical world.

This shift in consciousness to love takes us to a place so expansive that being love, and being in service to love, transports us out of our bodies and beyond our identities—even beyond our humanness.

Just as gaining awareness of our authentic selves as love can help end our suffering, so can shifting our focus from personal to universal love heal humanity. Humanity's progression to universal love goes beyond the specifics of different races, cultures, and religions to our essence as spiritual beings. Global transformation will occur when the majority of human beings connect to their heart and soul, and channel love through them into the world.

A  
*Global Climate*  
OF LOVE

“ *What if our religion was each other? If our practice was our life? If prayer, our words? What if the temple was the Earth? If forests were our church? If holy water—the rivers, lakes, and oceans? What if meditation was our relationships? If the Teacher was self-knowledge? If love was the center of our being?* ”

—GANGA WHITE

**T**o create a global climate of love, we have to start by establishing an environment of *compassionate community* in our workplaces, schools, and homes. This requires building a safe and nurturing environment where people can embrace and express their vulnerabilities, giving the gift of transparency to others, and supporting them without judgment. Even though we often associate vulnerabilities with emotions related to fear or pain, they are also at the core of our positive emotions related to love, joy, and compassion. Without absolute vulnerability, we cannot experience the depth of such emotions, which enhance our relationships with others and our experiences of life.

Unfortunately, we have grown up in a society where few people consider vulnerability an asset. Many of us were raised in families, attended schools, or worked in environments where being vulnerable was a sign of weakness or failure. We've been taught to hide our imperfections and to avoid anything that makes us feel uncomfortable. When showing vulnerability, we were likely told: "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about," "Boys don't cry," or "Suck it up." For this reason, we are terrified to connect with ourselves or others in a real and tender way. The adoption of such shame-based mindsets, which promote feelings of unworthiness, is undermining the culture of love in our society and throughout the world. This needs to change if we want our children to lead connected, compassionate, and creative lives—but first, we have to be courageous enough to reveal our own vulnerabilities. This will create a global climate of love in which our children can be themselves.

We want to see that children are born into homes and go to schools where they are accepted and loved. Yet, love is not present if the parents and teachers who care for our children don't love themselves (and therefore don't know how to love others unconditionally). Although the majority of children are raised in homes where there is adequate physical care, many still lack real love and connection.

Regardless of class, race, and gender, many families still operate in a climate where chaos, neglect, abuse, and shame take the place of—or even masquerade as—love. Many children in the United States experience shame and lovelessness. This is an unacceptable situation in a country with so many resources. We direct copious amounts of national resources to victims of terrorism overseas when our children, too, are victims of a more subtle, but still destructive, terrorism: shame terrorism. Incidents involving shame that occur early in childhood can negatively impact these boys and girls throughout the rest of their lives.

There were many incidents in my childhood when I experienced shame, and its sidekick, humiliation. I sensed the whispers and snickering before I heard the cruel comments from the boys sitting behind me in homeroom. A wave of humiliation flooded over me as I pretended not to notice; yet, I felt my face flush, giving me away. I quickly put my head down on my desk and tried to cover my face and the tears that were filling my eyes. With my heart pounding inside my chest like a sledgehammer, I anxiously prayed for the bell to ring, hoping these bullies wouldn't follow me to my next class.

I had just moved that summer and started the eighth grade in yet another new school—the sixth one in eight years. Starting a new school didn't bother me anymore; in fact, it had become an expected routine. I knew how to make friends, adjust to the prescribed curriculum, and ultimately survive—but this time, it felt different. It was as if I were simultaneously acting in and directing a movie. Focusing on my scripted lines, I felt insecure and awkward, like an alien in my own body.

I had been a tomboy since I could remember. Until eighth grade, I had thoroughly enjoyed participating in sports such as basketball, baseball, and hockey. I was comfortable with my athletic body, and even traded baseball cards, played kickball in the alley, and participated in a fantasy baseball league with the boys in my neighborhood. However, my body had finally begun to develop, and boys had begun to notice. For

the first time, I felt self-conscious about the way I looked—and the more self-conscious I became, the more I lost my confidence. As shame became a daily companion, I became withdrawn and depressed.

***“We all need one another for transformation, and this requires creating a global climate of love.”***

Throughout my adolescence, my choices reflected this disassociation from myself and my body. I stopped playing sports and swimming at the local pool because these activities drew attention to my body. I refused to wear a bathing suit or anything remotely revealing, and instead chose loose-fitting clothes that hid my developing body.

In high school, I did my best to make myself invisible. Although I longed to become a doctor, I fell into a downward shame spiral academically. By my senior year, my confidence in my academic abilities was so lacking that I was ashamed to apply to prestigious colleges. In college, I talked myself out of applying to medical school, and abandoned my dream of becoming a doctor.

During this turbulent period in my life, I had little, if any, feminine guidance. My birth mother had disappeared; my stepmother was in an unreachable state of paranoid schizophrenia, and my two older stepsisters compounded my shame by stealing my bras to show to their boyfriends. My home was not a safe place for me to express my feelings of hurt and

humiliation, and I didn't know how to create an energetically safe haven outside of my living situation.

**Without a safe environment in which to embrace their vulnerabilities, most children will not learn how to express their authentic selves.**

Children look to their parents and caregivers to mirror the love that they are; therefore, if we want our children to feel loved, connected, and worthy, we must treat our homes as sanctuaries—energetically safe spaces where they can express themselves fully, and experience the feeling that they are lovable just the way they are. It is much easier for them to develop self-love when they are surrounded by unconditionally loving, accepting, respecting, caring, and trustworthy role models who are not afraid to look at their own imperfections and spiritually grow. As parents, creating such a climate of love requires us to be champions of vulnerability. We must feel worthy and lovable, and accept our own imperfections and weaknesses fully, if we want to teach our children that they are worthy and lovable. In other words, we have to walk our talk of self-love and worthiness.

Findings from my (1993) dissertation study on the effect of “A Group Psychotherapeutic Model for Mothers of Children At-Risk for Emotional Problems” demonstrated that creating a safe and nurturing therapeutic environment where women could be vulnerable motivated them to be more loving and emotionally connected with their children. Disclosing their vulnerabilities allowed them to connect to other mothers in the group and increased their collective sense of trust, self-compassion, and worthiness. Furthermore, releasing their pain opened up more emotional energy, which in turn prompted them to release their dysfunctional parenting patterns and implement positive changes in their interactions with their children and other family members.

What I gleaned from conducting women's groups and coaching clients over the course of many years is that each person's soul journey is unique, yet highly dependent on the genuine love, support, and connection with others. We all need one another for transformation, and this requires creating a global climate of love.



A climate of shame rather than love in school or a workplace where performance is measured against a set of norms is equally damaging. Such comparison highlights weaknesses or failures instead of nurturing abilities, love-based values, and soul potential. For example, many of us can remember having our test scores or grades announced publicly, or being told at a staff meeting, in front of our peers, that we had a poor evaluation. Being publicly humiliated damages our sense of worthiness and, worse yet, crushes our spirit.

A climate of shame also negatively affects productivity, leads to disengagement, and threatens creativity, innovation, and learning. To explore creative ideas or solutions to a problem, for instance, we must feel engaged in what we are doing, while feeling shamed causes us to become disengaged and disinterested. Ultimately, when we are afraid to share our ideas, the qualities of spontaneity, flexibility, and playfulness that lead to creativity dwindle and become crippled. Many of us have written poetry, painted a picture, or recorded music in secrecy because shame choked off our voices.

No school or workplace can function well outside a climate of love, which is why heart-centered educational and work practices are so important. We must not only teach our children information, but also gratitude and compassion. We can assist them in developing inner wisdom, cultivating self-esteem, and following their hearts. This requires encouraging children to seek answers to their spiritual questions from within, be passionate and open-hearted, and trust their experiences. Most of all, we must raise our children to know that they are co-creators of their realities, and that we are all one energy in love.

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama alludes to the importance of heart-centered education when he says, "Change in the world comes from individuals, from the inner peace in individual hearts. Just as ripples spread out when a single pebble is dropped into water, the actions of individuals can have far-reaching effects."<sup>4</sup>

Creating a global climate of love is also necessary for promoting feelings of equality instead of inequality, and inclusion instead of exclusion. Inequality and exclusion derive directly from fear, shame, and jealousy. We live in a competitive culture where we are constantly comparing and judging one another, using words such as *better*, *worse*, *right*, *wrong*, *good*, and *bad*, all of which promote feelings of unworthiness, insecurity, separateness, and alienation.

Creating a global climate of love can help change these conditions. When we transcend polarity, we experience universality. It's time we gave up the archaic system where one side wins while the other side loses. We need to support cooperation and collaboration instead of competition. **Creating a more loving and peaceful world requires heart-centered education, founded on compassion, gratitude, patience, tolerance, and forgiveness.**

Our society's obsessive use of the Internet and social media reinforces feelings of shame. We share photos of our living rooms, professional accomplishments, and even the number of friends we have on Facebook, reflecting our scarcity mentality and fear of not being seen or valued. We'll even exclaim, when someone shares their vacation pictures, relationship status, or new car, "Boy, you have the life!"

Comparing ourselves to others, or to a societal standard, can incite jealousy and insecurity, causing us to worry about whether we appear sufficiently smart, beautiful, or competent. Many of us compare ourselves with celebrities or models, comparisons founded on expectations that are impossible to achieve. Tragically, this often leads to our giving up on transforming ourselves, because we believe that, no matter what we do, we can never be good enough.

To transform these environments of shame that lead to loss of personal development, productivity, and well-being, we must adopt alternative inspirational strategies that encourage an environment conducive to embracing vulnerabilities and support a climate of love. Encouraging

resilience toward shame is the first step in establishing a more creative and connected life. It is critical that our leaders in politics, work, education, and society as a whole encourage engagement over disconnection and vulnerability over shame.

Shame culture permeates almost every home, school, and workplace, but it can be transformed if we are encouraged to embrace our vulnerabilities. As the popular song by Jill Jackson Miller and Sy Miller says, “Let there be peace on Earth, and let it begin with me.” For there to be peace in our world, we have to be courageous enough to open our hearts, reveal our truths, and take responsibility for them both. Vulnerability must become our peace practice.

I look forward to a day where we celebrate the importance of vulnerability to a loving world. When we learn to embrace our vulnerabilities and become resilient to shame, we can transfer these core values to our families, schools, and workplaces, creating a climate of love locally and globally. Such a communal climate of love is at the heart and soul of a benevolent, compassionate, and consciously evolving world. It supports a higher vibration of *transcendent love* in which we can transform each other and spiritually progress as individuals, and as an international community. In this state of collective heart coherence, we will see our light reflected in the faces of all of our fellow human beings.

A global climate of love can heal a loveless world.

*Transcending*  
FEAR, ANGER,  
AND NEGATIVITY

“ *Your entire life has unfolded  
for your heart's ascension to  
love.*

—BRYANT MCGILL

”

**T**o facilitate a shift in our current consciousness, we must transcend fear, anger, and negativity, and ascend to the soul of love. We can do this by learning how to avoid reacting from these emotions, and instead connect to a higher power or divine Source (whatever that means to us) through our hearts. Most of us feel adrift and detached, having lost our spiritual compass and any kind of higher guidance. We tend to wander aimlessly through life, waiting for someone to define our purpose or something to fill the spiritual void we experience. Thus we try to shift the burden of responsibility for our spiritual awakening onto others, and do not acknowledge the innate power we have to create it for ourselves. From the time we are born, we acquire, model, and develop attitudes, mindsets, and behaviors that have nothing to do with the divine energy of love that we are.

If we are going to transform our world to one of peace and harmony, we must recognize that we are our own power source, and channel love to help cultivate these universal core values. Our true power originates from within, and initiates our reality. As co-creators, we can wield this power to make soul-hearted rather than self-centered choices, and stop relinquishing our power to others or our external circumstances. When we trust our divine connection to Source, and are aware of love flowing through us, we are able to channel it to support the fullest expression of ourselves, others, and our planet.

Our evolution from lives based on fear, anger, and negativity to lives based on universal love requires us to view life through the lens of a higher

awareness, and to be in tune with the voice of Spirit. It's also imperative that we become aware of our past self-destructive patterns so we can make more positive choices for ourselves, as well as for the higher good of humanity, when we encounter "triggering" situations. Like a periscope in a submarine, we must lift our gaze out of the shadowy aspects of human consciousness and obtain a more elevated, spiritual perspective. We must be clear that we are, first and foremost, spiritual beings navigating the sea of human processes, and we must trust that love has the power to open our hearts, raise our vibration, and dissolve negativity. When we act from this perspective, we transcend positions of good/bad, win/lose, and right/wrong, and recognize that our goal is not to fight those who have fear-based polarized patterns, but rather to join in sacred community with those who have already committed their lives to love.

We also must take responsibility for making more discerning choices. Recognizing that we are accountable for our lives through our choices can result in a tremendous shift in our consciousness over time. When we realize how every choice we make today defines our future and affects the future of our world, and remember that every choice we

make either adds to or detracts from the overall quality of our lives and the world in which we live, we must, by necessity, make more impeccable choices in all areas of our lives.

*“If we are going to transform our world to one of peace and harmony, we must recognize that we are our own power source, and channel love to help cultivate these universal core values.”*

When we begin to be more discerning in our choices, we often are faced with the need to release certain feelings, patterns, people, and situations that are no longer appropriate in our lives. In other words, we must choose what spiritually aligns with us, and what does not. We have a choice in each moment to listen to someone else, our past mindsets, or our own

hearts. Each choice we make from our hearts brings our brains and bodies into coherence with the flow of love. This shift is about more than just positive thinking: it is about soul-hearted living, and manifesting wellness for ourselves on a constant basis. **When love is flowing through us, we are powerful enough to envision and create whatever is necessary for us to feel fully self-expressed.**

Sometimes, in order to assist someone we love, we are asked to step into a situation that is immersed in fear, drama, or negativity that has nothing to do with our energies or choices. We are called to transcend such negative energy and hold the sacred space for the vibration of love to prevail.

The CEO of her own marketing company, my friend Laura was immersed in several major projects—and just eight days away from launching a whole new division—when her world was shaken. That day, her daughter Natalie called to tell her that she had just broken up with her fiancé, canceled the upcoming wedding, and now needed to find a new home for herself and her young child.

Hearing the news, Laura felt like she had just entered an energy vortex. In the space of five minutes, she had gone from totally focused to spinning out of control. Taking a deep breath, she considered the impact that her choices would have on her highly sensitive three-year-old granddaughter, and immediately sprung into “mama bear” mode.

Laura wanted to not only support her daughter through this difficult separation process, but also to energetically protect her daughter and her exceptionally empathic granddaughter. As a spiritual midwife for her creative projects, Laura was accustomed to holding sacred space for her efforts to be birthed into the world. Now, as a soul guardian for her loved ones, she knew she had to cast her energetic love net out even further, and create an even bigger space for her daughter, granddaughter, and the father of her granddaughter to move through this situation with ease and clarity.

Sustaining the divine space for this much energy, and supporting this many people, took a toll on Laura. She came down with a severe upper respiratory infection while in the midst of her company's launch. This wasn't a sign of illness, however; it was a sign of wellness! In order for her to be such an expansive sacred container, Laura's body had to purge any negative energy that she had absorbed. This spiritual release was necessary to continue to energetically support herself, her clients, and most of all, her family.

Even while feeling physically and emotionally worn down, Laura continued to serve her clients and her family with love and compassion. Yet, it was becoming harder to stay balanced while she herself struggled with anxiety and concern for what would happen to her loved ones. After she broke down sobbing while working on a marketing project, Laura discovered that she could no longer contain the pain that kept rushing to the surface. She judged herself harshly for not holding it together. "I'm a spiritual warrior," she said. "I'm supposed to trust and stay centered. I'm Ms. Positivity."

At last, Laura decided it was time to call in her energetic support team. She gave herself permission to share her struggle with me. Holding the space of pure love and validating her experience, I said, "Be gentle with yourself. You are emotionally and spiritually stepping in front of the negative energy that is coming at your daughter and granddaughter. Like a divine shield, you are protecting them from everything that's coming at them. You are their 'soul guardian angel!'"

Instantly, Laura knew that her internal geography had shifted, and reset her energies. After receiving this reminder of her own truth, she pronounced, "I'm not weak, I'm vulnerable. I am a spiritual warrior, and I'm choosing to protect my daughter and granddaughter. This is what many of us do for our families."

Several weeks later, she and husband helped move their daughter and granddaughter out of their old house. Before closing the door, she left



a card on the kitchen counter for her daughter's fiancé. In the card, she and her husband spoke from their hearts, acknowledging their love for him and their gratitude for his part in bringing their granddaughter into the world.

Unbeknownst to them, this simple act of loving-compassion would soften his heart and break down the walls of fear and hurt.

As Laura sat outside the courtroom with her daughter, waiting for the custody hearing to begin, she locked eyes with her daughter's former partner. He looked back at her and quietly said, "Thank you for the card." In that moment, instead of projecting fear, she emanated love back to him from her heart.

They were called into the courtroom moments later. Laura whispered to her daughter that she was beaming love to everyone including the judge, lawyers, and both families. They high-fived, and walked into the courtroom together. As Laura went through the doorway, she visualized her energy field as so expansive that she had to duck under the lintel.

From the moment she walked into the courtroom, a place typically steeped in negativity, Laura filled the space with love. By opening her heart and focusing on love, she held the divine space for love to shift fear and negativity for the highest and best good of all.

Her efforts made all the difference in the outcome of the hearing. Positive resolutions were found to what could have been a custody battle. In the end, it was a win-win for everyone involved, especially her precious daughter and granddaughter. After the hearing was over, the opposing attorney came up to Laura and said, "In all the years I've been practicing, I've never witnessed such radiating love in a place usually absent of it." Love transcends fear every time.

**When we are ready to transcend fear, anger, and negativity, and tap into universal love, the first step is to release ourselves from suffering**

**so we can channel the energy of love through our hearts.** To clear our fear of lovelessness, we must let go of all that we hold on to from our past. Everything from our past, especially our thoughts, can potentially create energy blocks that interfere with the stream of love we need. To progress spiritually, we must let go of the positive as well as the negative, the things from which we draw strength as well as those that drag us down. When we are no longer holding on to anything, we can fully trust Spirit to guide the flow of our lives, and so will be born again in an even more magnificent expression.

We will not get more value out of life by trying to hold on to all that we have collected. The moment we form a thought about something, the event is already past. Since the present moment is all there is, we must celebrate whatever our reality is, and release it as soon as possible. This means no longer acting out of the past patterns, mindsets, and structures we have adopted from society, family, school, or religion, and no longer allowing ourselves to be guided by our perceptions of cause and effect. Such patterned conditioning has been ingrained in us at every level in such thoughts as, “If I develop cancer, I will die,” “If I’m a good person, I am lovable,” and, “If I’m following the rules, nothing will happen to me.”

When we focus on cause and effect at the physical, emotional, and spiritual levels, we act predictably, limiting our lives to prescribed results and leaving no room for change. Such fixed behavioral patterns are inappropriate to our evolving consciousness. We must let go of any expectations of how life *should* be, in order to experience how life *can* be.

To let go of the past, and retain no investment in anyone or anything—no ego, personality, or identity—can be terrifying unless we trust that our being exists beyond the physical self. Then, once we let go of everything, attach to nothing, and have no expectations, we can operate in the world as we truly are: divine manifestations of the source of creation.

After we let go of the past and claim our power as creational beings, the next step is to establish trust in ourselves. To do so, we must trust

ourselves as channels of spiritual information. That is, we must trust that we know in each moment what is appropriate for us on every level. Such trust transports us beyond our mindsets, religion, or any belief system. To validate that we are a channel of spiritual information, we must open our hearts and listen to our spirits. The more we listen to the voices of our spirits, the more spiritual information we receive.

By attuning to our spirits, we can see what does not work in our lives. We can see the futility of trying to “fix” things, and the importance of moving in new directions. Instead of reacting from fear, anger, or negativity, we are able to confront any challenge with grace, ease, and responsiveness.

Transcending fear, anger, and negativity can be challenging when we are constantly bombarded with negative words, messages, and images. All we have to do is turn on the television, read the newspaper, or surf the Internet to encounter negativity. We may even find ourselves addicted to the incessant drama of the world, if not our own negative processes. Additionally, we reinforce this negativity when we commiserate with friends, family, and coworkers who drain our positive energy. “Misery loves company,” as it is said, and all it takes to empower negativity is more negativity.

One way to transcend negativity is by practicing compassionate detachment. We can do this by opening our hearts in compassion while avoiding getting caught up in the suffering of everyday life. This requires focusing our energies on the positive aspects of our lives, and trusting that each of us has the power to transcend anything that blocks our spiritual path. It also requires staying grounded and steady in our choices as we release anyone or anything that no longer serves us, making way for a better life.

**We must create energetic boundaries so that we are not sucked into the whirlwind of anger, fear, and negativity that may be swirling around us.** Because we tune in energetically to our environment, we have to be discerning about the people we spend time with and the environments

we inhabit, and carefully consider where we live, work, and spend most of our time.

Another way to transcend fear, anger, and negativity is by letting things be, without resisting or avoiding the changes. To do this, we need to follow our hearts and move through each day without trying to control events. When we give way to the need to control, we give away our self-control. Therefore, it is necessary to soften our positions, trust ourselves to create positive intentions, and make discerning choices.

We, as human beings, are called to create a global initiative of love for humanity. The toxic cloud of negativity can no longer hang over the planet like a suffocating blanket of pollution. To transcend this dark cloud of unenlightened, unconscious thinking, we must invite each person to become a drop in the vast ocean of love by taking responsibility for their choices, clearing energy blocks, and practicing daily gratitude, compassion, and forgiveness. By our collective participation in this internal work, we will transcend fear, anger, and negativity, and create a *soul-ution*—a conscious evolution to the soul of love.

# PRACTICES

- 1 Soften your positions and opinions so that you support universal love rather than being for or against a particular issue. When you communicate your views, do so respectfully and in an open-hearted way. Hold sacred space for the people you speak with to ask questions and offer their point of view.
- 2 Engage in mindfulness meditation: For a few minutes each day, tune inward, center yourself, open your heart, and be present to reinforce universal love. Share your mindfulness practice with others.
- 3 Shifting to love consciousness can be as easy as giving someone a gift. A favorite book, a ticket to a spiritual workshop, or a journal can inspire their curiosity and prompt them to reflect on their own soul's journey.
- 4 Invite people to join you in attending a ceremony or ritual. The experience may touch them in a profound way or introduce them to a new spiritual path. For example, I invite my neighbors and friends to join me in celebrating the winter solstice. As soon as the first star is out, we gather around the fireplace and take time to reflect and write the things we want to let go of this year and the things we want to bring into our life. We share our intentions with each other and place them in the fire. Then we move into quiet meditation to support our intentions.

- 5 Know that you are love, so everything you positively intend is possible. Express an intention to love yourself and your fellow human beings. “I am in love, at one, and at peace with myself, the earth, the universe and all my fellow beings. I create and live well as a channel of love. All that I am, do, and express returns to me as love.” Keep repeating the intention throughout the day until you feel your negative emotions dissipate.
- 6 Transcend challenging situations by imagining being in a hovercraft gliding over water or being aloft in an airplane looking at the ground. Viewing your circumstances from a broader, more spiritual perspective helps you perceive them as opportunities for self-healing and spiritual growth.
- 7 Introduce your friends and family to conscious living in a lighthearted and joyful way. Show them how to eat consciously by serving delicious organic recipes at get-togethers, ask them to volunteer with you, or talk with them about how you feel spiritually aware and connected to the universe.
- 8 Become aware of daily experiences that inspire you, create joy, or make your heart sing. Record these experiences in a journal, notice the elements contributing to them, and let these guide the choices you make.
- 9 Invent celebratory activities that make you laugh and play with joyful abandon, such as taking dance lessons, snorkeling, riding bicycles, or traveling to cultivate lightheartedness.





# CHAPTER 8





BECOME AN  
AMBASSADOR OF  
*Love*

“ *The means to gain happiness is to throw out from oneself like a spider in all directions an adhesive web of love and to catch in it all that comes in.* ”

—LEO TOLSTOY

**B**eing an ambassador of love means broadcasting love in all interactions with others for our own benefit and that of humanity. Love must be the motivation for everything we think, say, and do. Using our power as beings of love helps us reach our fullest soul potential and inspires others to reach theirs, thereby making the world a better place.

Being an ambassador of love is making love to life in every moment through whatever the universe presents to us.



MAKING  
DISCERNING CHOICES  
INSPIRED BY  
*Universal Love*

“ *Be universal in your love.  
You will see the universe to be  
a picture of your own being.* ”

—SRI CHINMOY

**M**aking discerning choices inspired by universal love leads to actions based on a broader spiritual perspective, and prepares the way for loving relationships with ourselves, others, and the world. As the transformative energy of love in today's world continues to shift human consciousness, we are being guided away from choices that prevent us from loving ourselves and others. Choices inspired by lower vibrational frequencies originating from fear, negativity, and stress result in suffering, imbalance, and disease.

Even though many people think they are making choices based on a positive outlook—such as choosing “good” over “evil,” or “right” over “wrong,” their options have usually been limited by egos that see the world as polarized. When we make discerning choices inspired by universal love, on the other hand, we are propelled beyond such polarities, and beyond the egos which created them, into a more universal, encompassing, and loving worldview.

Most people do not realize that, even before birth, we make spiritual choices based on universal love, thereby co-creating our lives after birth and impacting other choices we make during our lives. The spiritual choices we make before we are born—such as choosing our body, gender, parents, and circumstances—impact our lives. Knowing that we are responsible for these prior choices can shift our consciousness and affect our current choices while living on Earth. The conscious awareness that we made such choices before we were born empowers us to make choices during our lives that, guided by Spirit and inspired by universal

love, help us shift to a higher vibrational frequency, and perceive our life circumstances from a more spiritual perspective.

Currently, our spiritual development has evolved to the point where we are taking more responsibility for our choices. We are finally recognizing that we have the ability to consciously co-create our reality instead of relinquishing that power to others, our circumstances, or shirk our responsibility to make conscious choices by leaving it “in God’s hands.” When we operate as the source of love, we can make enlightened choices that are not bound by gender, culture, or the dictates of others, and thus live more authentically and move in accordance with a universal perspective, one focused on what’s best for our world as a whole.

Today, young people, who are increasingly making choices outside of narrow cultural norms and more in line with a universal viewpoint, are expressing themselves more authentically than in previous generations. For example, I recently attended my son’s wedding celebration, which differed significantly from most traditional celebrations. First, my son and his fiancée chose to be married in Baltimore, Maryland, because at the time Maryland was one of the few states supporting marriage equality. In an unconventional ceremony at the American Visionary Art Museum, they were married by a close friend in an outdoor sculpture garden surrounded by spiritual works of art. They chose readings and wrote vows reflecting genuine aspects of themselves, and lovingly spoke them aloud to each other. The bride wore a sparkly purple dress and, during the reception, donned her roller derby skates and glided around the dance floor with her teammates. There was no cake cutting, bouquet throwing, or traditional dances with either the parents or attendants. Central to the event was a celebration of sacred community in which everyone danced with one another—men with men, women with women, and men with women—in a spontaneous and free-spirited way. This celebration was truly an expression of the newlyweds’ authentic selves and inspired by universal love.

For many of us, making choices can be confusing, if not overwhelming. Our brains store so many prescriptions of what we “should” do that selecting only those in alignment with our hearts can be baffling. Being creatures of habit, we often make choices based on routines or patterns instead of on what truly resonates with our souls. Living in this way, our energy stagnates. We feel uninspired and stuck. A heaviness permeates our choices, and fear of change impedes our creativity. Fearful that we will make a wrong choice, we may become paralyzed and avoid choosing altogether. However, not making a choice out of fear or insecurity is still, in fact, making a choice; when we do this, we are simply choosing to let external events, other people, or blind chance dictate our experience. If we desire to move forward spiritually, we cannot let such fears keep us from making the most choices that most support our well-being. **Only when we begin making discerning choices inspired by universal love instead of personal fear do we feel like creators of our lives in sync with all of life.**

Universal love frees us to make distinctive choices beyond the options presented through limited mindsets. With love, such enlightened choices, however challenging, are not daunting; if we feel connected to our love source, we know we are well-equipped to handle any situation. We can trust that we have created the support and opportunities we need to transform our lives for the better.

Last fall, I spent several days with my best friend Debbie in Sunset Beach, North Carolina. On Saturday, we took a stroll on the beach with the intent of beachcombing. My friend desired a sand dollar to place in a healing fishing net she was creating. I, on the other hand, wanted a sand dollar to support my intention of abundance for myself and others.

While beachcombing with these requests to the universe, we sorted through myriad shells. Each time Debbie or I picked up a shell, we examined it, and decided if it resonated with our intention. We kept those that aligned with our hearts, and returned the others to the sea.

As we meandered along the beach, a swath of exquisite shells washed up at our feet—including a perfect, whole sand dollar. Excited, I picked it up and placed it in my pocket to protect it.

A little later, we celebrated our rare finds with some yoga sun salutations on the beach, during which I forgot about the delicate sand dollar in my pocket. A few downward dogs later, I reached in my pocket to find my sand dollar in crumbs. Instead of becoming upset or angry, however, I blessed and released the sand dollar, along with everything else in my life that no longer served me, and simply trusted that the outcome was for the best.

Turning toward home, we took divergent paths along the beach. At about the halfway point, Debbie walked toward the sand, while I headed toward the surf, each of us drawn to something we intuitively sensed. Simultaneously calling each other's names, we saw that we were each holding up an exquisite sand dollar.

Like combing the beach for sand dollars, we have to carefully and discriminately sort through the myriad possibilities in front of us before making a decisive choice. We can select the possibilities that align with our hearts, and with a greater good. Then, we can let go of the rest.

***“When our choices are supported by love, we create a continuous flow of positive energy that can move us away from negative energies and toward realizing our dreams.”***

A simple technique for taking inspired action is to keep following the path we are on as long as things are moving smoothly. When things aren't going so well, we can stop, assess the situation, listen to our hearts, and choose a different path. When doors open easily, we know we are being guided by Spirit—but when we keep banging our head against the same closed door, we must pause, reflect, and go to where the doors open without a struggle.



If we feel anxiety during any decision-making process, we should pause, open our hearts, and breathe deeply. This “time out” will put us back in touch with Spirit, enabling us to respond to the situation without reacting and make the best possible choice with the knowledge and guidance we have at that moment.

It is also helpful to act on intuitive hunches without overthinking, as intuition stems from the heart and Spirit. We can assess the inspiration motivating such choices by asking ourselves questions like: “What part of me is motivating this choice?” “What is the best use of my time and energy right now?” “What choice feels right for me at this particular time?” “What supports my well-being and the greater good?” or, “In what direction do I feel drawn?”

In addition, we must let go of any need to make the “perfect” choice. For many of us, the pattern of perfectionism keeps us from making any choice at all. When fearful of making a wrong choice, it is important to remember that we can always choose again.

Finally, we must not judge ourselves for having made a wrong choice. We should instead view so-called mistakes as opportunities for transformation, steering us in new directions and enabling us to eliminate negative energy and enhance our understanding of what resonates with our heart centers.

Although making discerning choices inspired by universal love does not necessarily help us avoid contact with the unwanted energies or influences of others, it does enable us to more quickly remove ourselves from negative situations. When our choices are supported by love, we create a continuous flow of positive energy that can move us away from negative energies and toward realizing our dreams.

If we become discouraged by the slowness with which we are realizing our dreams, we must remember that making discerning choices inspired by love is about divine timing, not human timing.

**Divine timing, or synchronicity, occurs when we let go of fear and impatience, declare our intentions, and allow the universe to co-create with us according to a spiritually elevated timetable.** During such heightened experiences, we become a conduit for spiritual information, capable of ascertaining the most appropriate and timely choices and when to implement them.

On her way to my office, one of my clients, Karen, was delayed by a series of events seemingly based on divine timing. She left me a message saying that she would be late. Trusting my intuition to call her, I left her a message, saying, “Karen, trust yourself and take your time.” I then blessed her in light and held the space for her to travel well.

Thirty minutes later she arrived, visibly shaken. She explained that, as she had been leaving work for her appointment, several people stopped to talk with her, slowing her pace. Once in her car, she had sworn impatiently each time she got stopped at a traffic light, or stuck behind a pokey driver.

Then, as the light turned green at a familiar intersection, she had inexplicably paused before proceeding. At that moment, a black sedan sped through the intersection, collided with a tree, and careened into a car coming from the opposite direction.

As if in slow motion, Karen noticed the black car speeding toward her. Miraculously, she was able to swerve to avoid being hit. As she pulled over to the curb to assist the victims, she was intensely aware of how different the scene would have been had she been sideswiped by the speeding sedan.

Karen's pause before driving through the intersection saved her life and the lives of others. While negotiating this series of events, Karen listened to her heart and followed the guidance of her spirit. By shifting to a less hurried pace, as she had done at the intersection, she was better able to access the guidance of her spirit through her heart, and assimilate the information she needed to make her most discerning choice.

We may never know why we make a wrong turn, get behind a slow driver, or pick up the phone and say to a friend something we have never said before. Yet we have to trust ourselves in connection with Source and accept that everything is unfolding optimally. We must always trust our first gut instinct. When we sense or feel something's right at that moment, it usually is. If we have a doubt, then there is no doubt. The voice of Spirit acts in straightforward ways so we can recognize the signs it offers.

To make discerning choices that impact us beneficially, we must trust that there is a spiritual purpose to the timing of events in our lives, even when they seem like random coincidences. The occurrence of coincidental events shows us that the universe is conspiring with us. **When we trust divine timing rather than human timing, things go more smoothly than we could ever imagine.** For instance, when we let go of our frustration at roadblocks or the logistics required to achieve our goals, we may discover that the slower pace has allowed us to spend more time in the present enjoying precious moments, or notice a particular detail that may become important later.

There is always more to our lives than we consciously register. In making discerning choices inspired by universal love, we become masters of our destiny, trusting that our lives are unfolding in the best way possible to realize our dreams, and support the dreams of others and the betterment of humanity.

# *Spiritual* RESILIENCE

“ *Tapping into the potential of your spirit is what enables us to manifest miracles.* ”

— DEEPAK CHOPRA

**O**ur spiritual resilience makes it possible not only to endure hardship and suffering, but to use any challenging situation for spiritual growth and transcend even the most devastating circumstances in our lives. When we can rise above whatever is happening in our lives, we increase our compassion for others.

Spiritual resilience involves connecting to a divine energy source greater than ourselves. The spirit, a vital link between the physical plane and the soul, interacts with and animates an otherwise lifeless existence. It is the channel of information which expresses through our hearts and guides our lives. Put simply, when we are in tune with our spirits, we feel more alive.

Spiritual resilience was natural to us as young children. Open and optimistic, we trusted our innate ability to transcend physical circumstances because we knew our truth through our open hearts regardless of those circumstances. However, as we began concerning ourselves more and more with the mundane events of daily life, we lost both the connection to our spirits and the trust that we could rise above difficult situations. As a result, life became problematic, and we started feeling stuck and depressed.

**When we tap our spiritual resilience, we gain the perspective to accept any situation, no matter how difficult or painful, as an opportunity for personal transformation.** We trust that our spirit is stronger than any situation we can face, and view problems as stepping-stones for change

rather than merely as obstacles. This helps us remain open and flexible as daily events unfold. When we are caught in a traffic jam, receive an unwanted call from our boss, hear that the stock market has taken a downturn, or discover we have a life-threatening illness, we can pause, breathe deeply, and remain spiritually detached from the outcome. As a channel of spiritual information, we recognize the responsibility we have for creating our reality, while simultaneously giving ourselves the freedom to invite miracles into our lives.

On a chilly, gray spring day, I sat on the edge of the examining table in my oncologist's office, gazing out the window and trying to soothe the terror that was rising within me. As I felt the crackly tissue paper gown graze my breasts, I was jolted back into reality—a reality I had never imagined.

My doctor came into the room and, with little small talk, shared the results of my suspicious mammogram: a small area of calcification on my right breast. I took a breath. No, I could never have imagined this, but it was real.

After a series of follow-up mammograms, an ultrasound, and a needle biopsy, I was diagnosed with invasive ductal breast cancer.

After weathering my challenging childhood, two divorces, single parenting, and child sexual abuse, I had learned to bounce back quickly from difficult situations and devastating circumstances. However, the diagnosis of breast cancer rocked my world more than anything I had ever experienced before, because of my underlying fear: that my children would lose me like I lost my own mother.

Like resuscitation paddles jump-start the human heart back to life, the sheer vulnerability I felt after that diagnosis shocked me out of my complacency. My world turned topsy-turvy overnight. Still, I trusted that a path of transformation was being laid for me, and I knew that, when I am in touch with the guidance of Spirit, I am highly resilient.

Realizing that I was accountable for the flow of energy between my mind, body, and spirit, I shifted from reaction to responsibility. It took focused awareness to capture the negative thoughts, feelings, and patterns I engaged in every day and consciously replace them with positive, supportive, and loving ones—but, bit by bit, I did it.

When my head asked, “Who will take care of my children if something happens to me?” my heart would answer, “Your children have a loving support system around them.” When my head asked, “What if I die?” my heart reassured me, “You will continue your spiritual progression out of

**“Where love is present, there are always miracles.”**

body.” And when my head asked, “What if I lose my breasts?” my heart answered, “You are beautiful, with or without your breasts.” I also reinforced to myself, “This is an opportunity for transformation,” and “You are strong enough to handle this.”

Through releasing the shame-based thoughts that had created these energy blocks, especially around my heart center, I opened my heart to self-love and compassion for healing. The more I connected with my feminine energy, the more I appreciated and accepted it as a strength, not a liability.

As I reviewed and revised my life's script, I tossed out old mindsets, beliefs, and attachments to anyone or anything that no longer spiritually served me. The more I connected to my spirit through my heart, the more my choices became clear and inspired by love. At times I felt like a tuning fork that had been struck; as I sang out my new tone, I set in motion a higher vibrational energy to bring about a miracle of healing.

Recognizing that I had the power within me to invite miracles unleashed a force of love upon the dis-ease trying to take up residence in my body. “What is not love is always fear, and nothing else,”<sup>1</sup> suggests *A Course in Miracles*.

**Where love is present, there are always miracles.** While many of us are reluctant to apply the word *miracle* to ourselves, this reluctance only diminishes the power of love that we source through us. Conversely, we believe that angry, ass-kicking sentiments such as “waging war on cancer” and “kicking cancer’s ass” give us power over a relentless disease, but they only deplete our healing power. The cells in our bodies react to negative energy, which further compromises our immune system. Harnessing the energy of love through my heart like the light streams in the movie *Ghostbusters*, I directed it to surround every cell in my body with the intention of dissolving energy blocks and promoting healing beyond the predetermined results my doctor had given me. Ultimately, this made me aware of the power we have for healing ourselves and, by our example, becoming ambassadors of love to others.

Almost ten years after being diagnosed with breast cancer, I am reminded daily of our spiritual ability to make discriminating choices that dramatically alter our life paths, open us to transformation, and manifest realities beyond anything we ever thought possible. Initiated by our intent, ignited by our energy, and co-created with Source, such choices take us beyond thoughts, beliefs, and physical conditions to an expanded perspective of life that allows us to subsequently become ambassadors of love to others.

Sometimes such spiritually-directed choices can cause our family and friends to question our sanity. I was surprised at how some of the people in my life tried to convince me to follow a traditional medical path, but instead of getting angry at what could have been perceived by their lack of faith in my judgment, I allowed their views to compassionately remind me how afraid people become when they think they will lose someone they love. Although my husband was anxious regarding my choices and didn’t necessarily hold with my holistic point of view, he was a steadfast partner and supported my choices throughout this experience. I knew that, in order to heal, I had to crash the old hard drive of my brain—the part of my thinking that stored old programs—and create a clean, new



operating system. Once rebooted with fresh spiritual information, I was able to transform my body and invite in a miracle of healing.

Miracles occur when we expand our conscious awareness and sustain a flow of positive energy regardless of our circumstances. While expanding our conscious awareness, we witness the core of our being from a spiritual viewpoint determined by the integration of head and heart perspectives. Such integration offers us insight about ourselves and our relationships, as well as the opportunity to be a creative channel for love energy to flow through us and manifest positive outcomes for others.

**When we stop controlling our lives and trust the unfolding that occurs, we live in harmony with the universe and are in a better position to be ambassadors of love.** Using metaphors of a hawk and the wind, Gary Zukav says the following about control versus unfolding. “The journey of a hawk depends on both the hawk and the wind. Sometimes the wind takes the hawk where it wants to go, and sometimes it doesn't. When it doesn't, the hawk doesn't mind. Either way, they ride the wind. They do the best they can, and then they let the wind take them where they need to go. The wind is your life. It is all the things that happen between the time you are born and the time you go home. Elegant spirits don't know what will come up next, the same way that hawks don't know which way the wind will blow next. This doesn't bother them because they don't try to control their lives any more than hawks try to control the wind.”<sup>2</sup>

At times, we may feel frustrated or disappointed when life doesn't go the way we think it should. As a result, we become rigid and methodical, and try to micromanage every situation—which, of course, only makes things worse. Rather than attempting to control events through sheer force of will, we must align ourselves with the energy that flows through our hearts. Like a surfer riding a huge wave, once we tune in to the experience, breathe deeply, and relax rather than resist, we can move smoothly through any wave. With awareness, balance, and flexibility, we can keep from falling off our board and being caught in the undertow of negativity.

When we surrender to the guidance of Spirit, we remain open and resilient, trusting that any challenge we encounter will help transform us into an ambassador of love.

Research suggests that such people who are spiritually resilient are resourceful, have better problem-solving skills, and are more likely to seek assistance when they face a challenge. Since they are usually more connected to others such as family and friends, they cultivate a positive energetic support network. Most of all, people who tap their spiritual resilience realize that every person has a unique journey, and therefore it is pointless to compare their soul's path with that of others. As long as they are spiritually growing, they know they are following their own trajectory toward personal transformation.

Spiritual resiliency requires us to choose love over negative processes that demean us. And while we may not be able to control other people or our circumstances, we can choose how we perceive them. Tapping our spiritual resilience also asks us to trust our connection to our source of creation; this ignites our intention, which, in turn, allows us to see more possibilities, and then make more discerning choices that will benefit us in the future. **When we trust ourselves and our divine Source for co-creating our life experiences, we act as copilots with this Source in manifesting our intentions while letting go of expectations, outcomes, or preconceived plans.**

Spiritual resiliency is the foundation for being love, happiness, and peace in the world. The more we tune in to the guidance of our spirits, the more we are led to a spiritually attuned life. Because the inner wisdom provided by Spirit helps us to surmount daily problems, we waste less time and energy being anxious about life's difficulties. The guidance of our spirits also allows us to respond rather than react to events, giving us greater peace of mind. And the guidance of our spirits lifts us up and out of our physical circumstances, giving us the enhanced perspective necessary to not only be masters of our destiny but ambassadors of love to others.



TRAVELING AS  
*Ambassadors*  
OF LOVE

“ *It is love alone that leads to right action.*

*What brings order in the world is to love and let love do what it will.* ”

—KRISHNAMURTI

Whether we are going abroad or down the street, we can travel as ambassadors of love.

Travel essentially means stepping outside of our familiar habits and cultural comfort zones to expand beyond any perceived limits. Our hearts and spirits can transport us, not only when we take a trip, but also when we take a class, explore a new career, start a new hobby, or introduce ourselves to a stranger. **We can travel as an ambassador of love by choosing to love unconditionally in every moment, radiating beams of love each step of the way.** By blessing whatever space we occupy with our divine presence, we become an emanating field of love to others and our world.

Traveling as love ambassadors, we can make the places through which we move—our homes, workplaces, villages, or countries—better by our caring thoughts and positive energies. Even a radiant smile can change someone's day. As Ram Dass said, "I would like my life to be a statement of compassion—and where it isn't, that's where my work lies."<sup>3</sup> Taking these words to heart, when friends, family, or strangers visit, I prepare their favorite foods, fill the guest room with flowers, and put beautiful linens on the bed, along with a welcome note to let them know they are appreciated. Through such acts of compassion, I transform my home into a loving, sacred space.

In the midst of our chaotic world, we can travel as ambassadors of love by energetically creating peace, initiating love, and silently inviting others to meet us in that space. For instance, at the family dinner table or a party,

we can practice drawing people into a loving space by softening our gazes, quieting our voices, and slowing down the pace at which we move and speak. Even in silence, we can offer ourselves to another by opening our hearts and soulfully connecting to them.

We can prepare for a day of traveling as an ambassador of love by waking up in the morning with the intention to sow seeds of love everywhere we go. This can mean something as small as taking a moment to be grateful for a smile from a stranger, or for the people who built the cars we drive. As we move through the day, we can maintain an open heart and express unconditional love no matter where we are, who we are with, or what we are doing. Keeping our thoughts non-judgmental, our words kind, and our choices compassionate, we create a sense of universal love and spiritual attunement with everyone and everything.

Through such energetic exchanges of love, we realize that we have an infinite amount of creational energy to share, and an untapped soul potential to manifest whatever we need or desire. Acknowledging the blessings we already have in life helps shift our mindset of scarcity and opens us to intentions of abundance. Such energetic exchanges of love generate more positive energy and multiply exponentially when our intentions are aligned for a greater good.

Every thought, feeling, word, and action you put forth is a memo to the universe. The invisible vibration of energy connects you to everyone and everything. In other words, you keep loving, positive energy in circulation by what you think, feel, say, and do, and the universe conspires with you. As a result of this spiritual law of circulation, you naturally project love out into the world.

We can also travel as an ambassador of love when we go abroad, both with our partner or travel companion and with everyone we meet overseas. Each year on our wedding anniversary, Doug and I travel to some destination with spiritual connections to enter into a new sacred covenant with each other. This annual celebration provides an opportunity to reflect on the

**“Acknowledging the blessings we already have in life helps shift our mindset of scarcity and opens us to intentions of abundance.”**

previous year, spiritually connect, and prepare our intentions for the coming year. We talk about changes that have occurred over the past year, what the highs and lows have been, and what the theme of our love story will be in the future.

When Doug and I travel, we play with passion. One of our favorite experiences took place in Paris when we danced under the stars, and sang silly songs in the courtyard of the Louvre. Unconcerned with what

others thought or said, we were making love with all of life. Each moment was more expansive than the next as our hearts were joined in love. As we let go of any agenda and allowed our hearts to guide our journey, we felt more open and in tune with all that we witnessed. Everything spoke to us in a language that our brains didn't comprehend, but our hearts did.

We also witnessed the power of universal love, not in the moonlit cobblestone streets, romantic outdoor cafés, or the sparkling Eiffel Tower, but in the locks of love that adorned the *Pont des Arts*, the bridge connecting the Louvre to the Left Bank. Placed by people as symbols of their love, such locks now appear not only in Paris but also in New York City and such countries as Belgium, Germany, and Japan. Surely if we all sent the energy of universal love out into the world with the same intention as these love locks, we would create a continuous flow of love in every city in the world.

Another example of traveling as ambassadors of love occurred when Doug and I visited Egypt two months after its revolution in 2009. There we witnessed how, despite limited media access, financial resources, and organization, the people had expressed their passion through social media and the Internet and begun a widespread revolution.

From the moment we made the choice to travel, we opened up to a positive flow of energy that guided us on the journey. Letting go of agendas and simply trusting the unfolding led to a series of spontaneous experiences, including having one of Egypt's highest Muslim clerics personally chant for us.

While visiting one of the oldest mosques in Cairo and quietly observing that there were few tourist groups at this spiritual site, we took off our shoes and I wrapped a scarf around my head and shoulders. Seeing us approach the front altar, the Muslim cleric came out of his office with his hand extended to greet us, asked who we were and where we were from, and then signaled us to follow him to a beautifully tiled and illuminated sanctuary. Then he pointed up at the Arabic inscription from the Koran that encircled the ceiling and began to melodically chant the words. Stunned by the experience, we opened our hearts to his spiritual message of peace that filled the space with love. Once he finished, he took both our hands in his and said, "Most Americans react in fear when they hear Arabic words. But Islam is a religion of love." And then, in the most gentle voice, he gracefully blessed us.

The next day, we entered the Great Pyramid with the intent of repeating our marriage vows at the top in the royal burial chamber. As we climbed the narrow, steep stairs leading to the apex of the pyramid, Doug had to overcome his fear of heights and I had to let go of my fear of enclosed spaces. As we reached the top, we realized that we were the only ones in the burial chamber of the Great Pyramid except a guard. We held hands, gazed into each other's eyes, and renewed our vows of soul-hearted partnership.

I spoke to Doug first, saying, "I am asking you to give up holding back any part of yourself. I am asking you to fully participate in our relationship and in life without reservation and to be uninhibited. I am asking you for the deepest level of love, trust, and intimacy. I want you to see me as the beloved partner you have always wanted and to live your life with no excuses and no regrets."



As Doug was about to speak his vows to me, the guard came over to us and placed his hands on ours. When Doug finished, the guard joined in, blessing the union of our hearts in Arabic.

A final experience in Egypt traveling as an ambassador of love occurred when, from across a congested street in the center of Cairo, a little Egyptian girl, who was walking with her mother, locked eyes soulfully with me. Even though I will never see this girl again, I will always remember the powerful connection we shared—a soul connection that left a lasting impression on my heart. Such moments of shared love while traveling as an ambassador of love take us beyond our thoughts, into our hearts and souls. It has been said that ancient Egyptians believed that the stars in our eyes are reflections of the stars in the sky. When I looked into this child's eyes, I knew it was true, because the light in her recognized the light in me.

By being open, flexible, and trusting the flow of love while in Egypt, we experienced more than the great pyramids, temples, and ancient wonders. We were constantly aware of channeling love into every interaction and leaving every space better for having been there. By releasing all expectations and trusting the flow of our energies, even when it seemed like things weren't going our way, we manifested our intention better than we could have dreamed.

“Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope,”<sup>4</sup> wrote poet Maya Angelou. Too many people around the world feel helpless and hopeless in their unhappy lives. By traveling as an ambassador of love in the world, we can be a beacon of hope. We do not need to perpetuate cultural pessimism or negativity. We can shift our perception, see the possibilities within people, and mirror back to them the love we see. When we transfuse someone with love and hope, we heal and empower them.

One of the most significant ways to promote universal love is to learn about other people's cultures and religious traditions, as Doug and I did

in Egypt. We must let go of the ego-driven agendas and self-righteous positions that lead us to believe that we are separate from the rest of humanity, and instead widen our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures. The more we see ourselves as one in universal love, the more we will dissolve abuse, racism, sexism, religious intolerance, and ethnocentrism. Traveling as ambassadors of love has transported Doug and I beyond our own lives, and made us more tolerant of other people's cultures and religious traditions.

We are in the midst of a harmonic convergence of love that will change our world. When we share our abundance of love, time, and energy with strangers, it helps them feel worthy—and because too many people feel worthless, such kindness and generosity heals. Then, too, when banishing self-imposed limits and arbitrary barriers, we realize that there is nothing we cannot co-create, experience, and express. Traveling as ambassadors of love, our light, when directed positively, can help bring love, peace, and goodness to all people regardless of culture, country, or circumstances.

# PRACTICES

- 1 To make discerning choices, listen to your heart instead of your brain. If anyone or anything does not feel aligned with your authentic self, trust your intuition and change the situation as soon as possible. The voice of Spirit will be loving and kind, and will guide you without judgment. It will provide an expanded view on your choices, and is present-oriented. It whispers, “I know” instead of “I think,” “I trust” instead of “I believe,” and “I create” instead of “I wait.”
- 2 Declare an intention clearly, and then make conscious choices to manifest it. Select words or phrases that represent your intention, write the intention on a Post-it note, and place it wherever you will notice it. Each time you see the intention, put light energy around it and affirm it to yourself. Then, when you are given the opportunity in your life, make the discerning choices that will manifest it.
- 3 Accept responsibility for co-creating your reality by staying aligned with your intent and ensuring that your choices will serve you well. This you can do by asking yourself in advance, “Am I making the best choice with the information I have right now?” and “Is this the best use of my time and energy?”
- 4 Affirm your connection with universal love by repeating the following affirmations: “I express my fullest self so others can benefit,” “I sow seeds of light wherever I go, leaving it a better place for having been there,” “I trust that I am the co-creator of

my life," "I embody light and love," "I know and trust who I am," and "I celebrate life, express unconditional love, and sustain my well-being."

- 5 Practice "Silence in Motion" meditation: Make eye contact and use all means of nonverbal communication to connect with someone without speaking. Smile, open your heart, and beam love energy toward them.
- 6 Practice including instead of excluding. Include others in your play, remaining unattached to acting in a certain way or coveting a particular time or experience.
- 7 Take advantage of every opportunity, whether nearby or far away, to travel as an ambassador of love by interacting compassionately with people you meet. By acknowledging the inherent worth in everyone you encounter, you model for them how to value the worth in others. To encourage people to respect others is to respect them first.
- 8 Consciously choose what you allow into your energy field. The media bombards us with fear and negativity, so be discriminating about what you read, view, and listen to.
- 9 Become a positive source of inspiration for others. Express yourself and embrace life without reservation. By simply being yourself, you can help the people in your life see how one person can make a difference by being a living example of consciousness.





## CHAPTER 9



TRANSFORMING  
THE WORLD  
THROUGH  
*Love*

“ *Love is the greatest power on earth. It conquers all things.* ”

— PEACE PILGRIM



**F**or our world as we know it to survive, we must become illuminating threads of light and love connecting the tapestry of humanity. Every person is being called to circulate love as a healing energy within themselves, with others, and in the world. In fact, our greatest challenge is to accept our extraordinary power as love and channel it to make the world a better place. To do this, we must shift from an ego-driven life to a soul-given one, elevating our consciousness to the vibration of universal love to transform the world.



# CULTIVATING *Lightheartedness*

“ *Love is not something that just happens to you: it is a certain special way of being alive.* ”

—THOMAS MERTON

*I*n cultivating lightheartedness, we ensure our capacity to create and sustain joy, find peace in times of turmoil, and respond rather than react to life's challenges. When we exhibit the qualities of lightheartedness—such as playfulness, humor, flexibility, and spontaneity—our lives seem brighter, and we increase our desire and ability to uplift the lives of others. This occurs because these ebullient qualities are expressions of a soul-hearted life.

Children are our best teachers for cultivating love and lightheartedness because they infuse their daily lives with it. When we observe children at play, openhearted and present, we see them as conduits of love, delighting in the beauty of life. We, too, knew lightheartedness as children, especially when we splashed in puddles after a warm rain, chased fireflies on warm summer evenings, or built forts or fairy altars in our backyards. We paid attention to the ordinary which made life extraordinary. We immersed ourselves in experiences that made our hearts sing.

Unfortunately, as adults we are more inhibited about expressing ourselves freely, sensing that society frowns upon adults being spontaneous and playful. We fear that, if we follow our hearts and express our free-spirited natures, we will be seen as irresponsible or immature. It is hard to move past limiting beliefs such as “There's too much work to do, and no time for play,” “Playing is a waste of time and unproductive,” or “Play is only for children.” Such negative beliefs squelch our spirits and suck the life-force energy out of us. As a result, many of us have lost our sense of life as a mysterious adventure to be embraced and enjoyed.

Playfulness is essential to cultivating lightheartedness. Being playful naturally liberates the mind, opens the heart, and lifts the spirit. In this state of pure *being*, we feel free to channel our energies to expand beyond any limitation. In his book *Play*, researcher Dr. Stuart Brown suggests that play positively influences the brain, fosters compassion, and awakens the core of creativity. He also contends that play is vital to well-being. As much as we value work over play in our competitive culture of productivity, Dr. Brown states that “the opposite of play is not work—the opposite of play is depression.”<sup>1</sup> His research concurs with other significant findings in biology, neurology, and psychology, confirming that our biologically programmed need for play can transform our work, assist us with problem solving, stimulate a sense of spiritual expansiveness, and inspire the creative process.

**Playfulness is essential to activating our soul potential, as well as sustaining joy and satisfaction with work—so much so that creative work cannot exist without play.** This is why creative work environments in companies such as Google and Facebook are increasingly play-based. Such companies have realized that a climate of playfulness fosters imagination, creativity and productivity. Work environments that promote mediocrity, rigidity, and stagnation are being challenged primarily by young people who are no longer bound by old dictates like “Keep your nose to the grindstone” or “Work can’t be fun.”

Even as a young child, I had difficulty letting myself play. While other children in my third grade class squirmed in their seats in anticipation of recess, I dreaded the awful, unstructured time when I was forced to wander the playground lost and alone. Having to grow up quickly and take care of my two younger brothers early in life arrested my sense of playfulness and free-spiritedness. While everyone else played jump rope and four-square, or huddled in giggling groups, I worried about what to make for dinner, whether to give my brothers a bath that night, and how to stop my mom from getting high. I had neither the time nor the energy for play. Constantly locked in survival mode, I took myself and life seriously.

It took watching my own children play to remind me that I, too, knew joy as a child. Through imitating their joy and imagination, I learned how to be playful once again. They reintroduced me to the wonders of stargazing, the glee of chasing butterflies, and the timelessness of a summer day. Playing with them, I spent more time outdoors, hiking through the woods, and communing with nature.

Through the natural world, I connected with what I now know is my spirit, and realized that it never really disappeared. As a result, I have experienced a spiritual connectedness with all living things and with a power greater than myself, which has been my lifeline in times of distress and despair.

As adults, it is important to take time to simply play, have fun, and celebrate being. We can do this with ourselves, our partner, family, or friends. Engaging in playtime is challenging in a culture that values doing over being and productivity over creativity. In our society, it's easy to believe that we are connecting with our partner while doing the laundry, or bonding with our children while driving them to soccer practice. Yet our obsessive focus on doing rather than being short circuits valuable energy and keeps us running in circles on the track of life. Only by becoming more present can we restore the balance of energies needed to sustain our relationships, deepen intimacy, and live in the flow of love. While engrossed in creative play, we feel connected, distractions disappear, and we live in the moment. Stringing together such moments of present-oriented experiences brings joy and inspiration.

Lightheartedness is also crucial in healing. Research shows that laughter lowers blood pressure, increases vascular blood flow, and reduces stress, which, in turn, reduces anxiety and depression. In fact, Norman Cousins, adjunct professor and researcher at UCLA, documented the healing power of laughter in *Anatomy of an Illness*. Told that he had little chance of surviving a fatal disease, Cousins developed a healing program that focused on a positive perspective, love, faith, hope, and laughter. He discovered that even ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had a healing

effect on his body. Most importantly, when we laugh with others, we share a sense of connectedness which likewise assists in healing.

Laughter that assists us in communing with others in a soul-hearted way is what I call *soul laughter*. Soul laughter lets us share our vulnerabilities with others, and communicates our loving presence without spoken words. Such soul giggles strengthen our connection to others.

Cultivating lightheartedness through laughter and play also assists us in obtaining a more buoyant perspective on our lives, and teaches us to assess situations with healthy detachment. Nearly every experience we have, no matter how trivial—an impatient driver who cuts us off in traffic, an irritable salesperson at the checkout, or a downpour that drenches us to the bone—can be viewed as humorous, as well as an opportunity to discover more about ourselves.

As I was preparing for a book signing in Ann Arbor, Michigan, I received an e-mail notifying me that a shipment of books I had sent to a distributor had arrived damaged and covered in oil. They needed the shipment “yesterday,” so I quickly packed another box of books and this time sent them via UPS instead

of the US Postal Service, and remembered to insure them. I arrived home in time to meet my dad, who was traveling with me to Ann Arbor. When I opened the back door to greet him, my feisty golden retriever, Cammi, dashed out, having decided this would be a great time to explore the neighborhood. As I chased her through several backyards, she gleefully fled from me, reveling in her freedom. When I finally caught up to her with a treat in hand, I slipped and fell in my white linen pants.

**“Cultivating lightheartedness requires flexibility. It takes letting go of our ego, expectations, or reservations, and embracing the sense that nothing is more important than the present moment.”**

Finally, after a challenging drive with my dad (who wanted to tell everyone in Michigan that they were awful drivers), I arrived at the bookstore ready to greet the eleven hundred people who had shared on Facebook that they were attending the signing. Yet the eleven hundred soon turned into eleven, including my dad. For the others, I arranged to videotape my presentation—except that my camcorder chose that moment to die, and the backup was two hundred miles away.

My presentation went well, but just as I was letting out a sigh of relief and getting ready to wrap things up, a young University of Michigan graduate student asked a question. I hadn't realized that a question could actually last fifteen minutes! By the time he was finished, I had completely forgotten what his question was, so I answered him with a smile and the first thing that came to mind.

I finally made it home around midnight, happy in my heart even after my dad pointed out that after gas, dinner, and the earlier loss of books, my profit was the change in his pocket. Despite the apparent setbacks, I felt the day had been perfect just as it had unfolded. Being flexible, keeping a sense of humor, and allowing for playfulness had sustained the flow of love energy through me, supporting responsive rather than reactive choices.

My responsive choices supported a flow of positive energy from the moment I received the e-mail about the damaged books. As the day unfolded, I was mindful of my thoughts, and noticed whether they elevated my energies or lowered them. To maintain a higher vibration, I paused when I felt a physical or emotional reaction surface, and as soon as possible released the negative energy attached to it. Making deliberate choices to sustain a higher vibration of energy attracted the resources that supported me. Radiating love to everyone—even the arrogant student, the reckless driver, and the careless USPS employee—shifted this experience from a potentially negative one to a timely and intimate road trip with my dad.

Cultivating lightheartedness requires flexibility. It takes letting go of our ego, expectations, or reservations, and embracing the sense that nothing is more important than the present moment. It encourages responding rather than reacting, and inspires an instantaneous recognition of the silliness of many situations.

**We can discover our capacity for playfulness and connect with our childlike nature by letting go of any thoughts that interfere with our ability to be flexible and fully enjoy life's wonders.** We can dance spontaneously when we hear music at the grocery store, giggle when we get drenched in the rain, or sing aloud while listening to our music. Instead of tackling household tasks in earnest, we can boogie while washing the car, sing our favorite songs while doing the dishes, and experiment with a recipe while cooking. We can take pleasure in the simple things in life that make our hearts sing, and invite others to join in as we go barefoot in the grass or float in a pool of water. We can also seek out new activities that make us laugh and play with joyful abandon while broadening our perspective on wonder. Our lives will evolve miraculously when we are able to cultivate lightheartedness sufficiently to embrace the philosophy of “let's see what happens.”

Cultivating lightheartedness involves a willingness to participate in life fully and fearlessly while realizing our soul potential, looking for and expecting nothing while inviting in everything. Through cultivating a lightness of heart, we heal, connect, and love.





RADIATING  
*Love*  
TO ALL OF LIFE

“ *There is a force in the universe  
which if we permit it  
will flow through us and  
produce miraculous results.* ”

— MAHATMA GANDHI

To support the global transformation to universal love, we must first transform ourselves and our relationships. We can do this by raising our consciousness to the vibration of love and radiating it at every moment to all of life with no expectations or attachments. This involves being responsible for our choices, healing ourselves, helping others heal, and living consciously and harmoniously. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke commented on how such love compels us to manifest spiritual development in the outer world: “Love is a high inducement for individuals to ripen, to strive to mature in the inner self, to become world, to manifest maturity in the outer world, to become that manifestation for the sake of another.”<sup>2</sup>

**We radiate love when we open our hearts to ourselves, other people, and life itself.** Energetically, light moves through space, is pulled into a field called gravity, and attracts matter. This energetic attraction becomes thought, which informs the body, and then information, which guides us to think, speak, feel, or act, and is the direct link to our soul. Channeled through our hearts, light energy transforms us into creational beings capable of manifesting intentions to co-create our reality. A person who loves sends out a high frequency vibration into the world, while someone who has difficulty loving emits a lower frequency. The spiritual law of attraction—which is also the law of love—suggests that the energy we radiate expands and attracts more of the same energy in return. As love conduits, we sustain the circulation of loving energy through our positive thoughts, feelings, and choices that benefit ourselves and others.

Numerous scientific studies have verified the ways in which our internal energy systems affect others and our external environments. HeartMath researchers, for instance, are interested in emotional energetics, “the energetic interactions within and between people and between people and their environment.”<sup>3</sup> This expanding area of study is focused on answering questions such as how the various energy systems within us affect our emotions, how emotions affect our energy systems, and how the energy generated by the powerful electromagnetic field each of us possesses affects other people and our environment. In essence, our energy affects everything that comes into contact with it.

*“When our intentions align with our ego, we create scarcity. On the other hand, when our intentions align with our soul, we create prosperity.”*

Additional studies also demonstrate the effects of our thoughts and energy on our immediate environment. For instance, Dr. Konstantin Korotkov, Deputy Director of the Saint-Petersburg Federal Research Institute of Physical Culture, who has studied the human energy field, proposes that we can change the world simply by using our energy. He states that when we think positive and negative thoughts, each has a different effect on our surrounding environment. Although this concept has been supported by many quantum physicists, such research attempts to prove the idea that our consciousness is part of the material world, and that when we positively shift our consciousness we can directly influence our world.

Dr. Robert Jahn, in conjunction with the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) Laboratory, has also studied the effects of the human mind and intention on the surrounding environment. He has concluded that the mind does, in fact, have a subtle capacity to influence the output of devices known as random event generators (REGs). Dr. Jahn was able to determine that, in the human mind's interactions with the machines, the

mind was able to affect the outcomes of the machines in ways that were not explainable. This indicates that consciousness can have an effect on the physical world.

In gratitude for supporting him during his first week back to school as a high school teacher, my husband Doug gave me a hundred-dollar bill. He knew that I needed (and deserved) a break, and that I enjoyed playing the penny slot machines at the Horseshoe Casino near our home.

The next morning, I drove to the casino. I immediately felt drawn to the Jungle Cats penny slot, so I sat down there first. Before playing the machine, I took a moment, opened my heart, and felt gratitude for my abundant life. Then, I declared my intention to win enough money to fund my new website, and put the hundred-dollar bill into the machine. On the third spin, betting only forty cents, I won the diamond progressive jackpot of \$1,491—just enough to pay for the website, which was \$1,471.

Such experiences of divine synchronicity become common when we follow through on intuitions, hunches, and sensations that seem to come out of the blue with no connection to an agenda. **When our intentions align with our ego, we create scarcity. On the other hand, when our intentions align with our soul, we create prosperity.**

Other research has specifically demonstrated the effect of the vibrational frequency of love on our physical world, and substantiates our potential ability to transform the world through radiating love. Dr. Masaru Emoto's core message is that kindness, love, gratitude, and beauty affect us, not just on emotional and spiritual levels, but on cellular and molecular levels as well. In discussing the impact that love can have on the world, he writes, "I particularly remember one photograph. It was the most beautiful and delicate crystal that I had so far seen—formed by being exposed to the words 'love and gratitude.' It was as if the water had rejoiced and celebrated by creating a flower in bloom. It was so beautiful that I can say that it actually changed my life from that moment on."<sup>4</sup>

His research on water and the science of quantum physics acknowledges that any substance, even dense ones such as rock, wood, or concrete, vibrates at a certain frequency and is affected by vibration, stating, “The entire universe is in a state of vibration, and each thing generates its own frequency, which is unique.”<sup>5</sup> Like a string plucked on a harp, every human being also vibrates at a unique frequency and has the sensory ability to feel the vibrations of others. Most importantly, when we emanate the high frequency of love, we not only receive the benefits of the high vibration, but also raise the vibration of others around us. Therefore, people emitting lower frequencies will “rise to the occasion” when in the presence of someone who is emitting a higher frequency by matching that higher frequency.

When we emanate love, we ascend to our highest level of soul potential. We perform better at work, are more creative, are healthier, and impact our environment in a positive way. It is time we realize that we are change agents of love. To transform our planet, we must elevate our vibration and seed the environment with droplets of love. By loving our planet, we can live in harmony with nature, conserve our earth and its inhabitants, and do nothing to destroy it.

An example of a worldwide initiative that encourages this shift is The Global Coherence Initiative (GCI), a science-based project to unite people in heart-focused intention in order to facilitate a shift in global consciousness from discord to balance, cooperation, and peace. GCI is in the process of placing fourteen sensors around the world to test the hypothesis that the earth's magnetic field is affected by mass human emotions. In addition, GCI is educating members about how to harness their personal and collective heart energy, and radiate love and compassion to people and places in need.

This is a pivotal period of human history—a time of massive breakdown and escalating breakthroughs. We are being called to collectively gather in universal love, and activate the soul potential within us to co-create a new world for our planet and all living beings. The more we learn to love

and be loved, the more we jointly channel our energies for the greater good. This shift in vibration can affect our world at the subatomic level of reality; therefore, our reality is not actually matter, but a powerful flow of energy. Barbara Marx Hubbard suggests in her "Sacred Journey of the Conscious Evolutionary" program that "It is vitally important for us to merge our conscious intentions for our lives with our soul's intentions and the very intentions of the universe working through us. That's when real magic happens. As we do, we become conscious evolutionaries, able to accelerate our own evolution and the evolution of the world around us. We begin to embody a higher frequency of ourselves, which can truly shift the world."<sup>6</sup> Love is the only vibration that elevates and completely dissolves any toxicity resulting from fear, anger, and negativity.

In collectively directing our energy of love positively and consciously, we open ourselves to co-creation. Like a pebble dropped into a pond, our intention, in co-creation with a divine energy source, sets off an energetic vibration that radiates outward from our heart centers and shifts everything in our path. In her book *The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe*, Lynne McTaggart speaks to this premise: "Our natural state of being is a relationship—a tango—a constant state of one influencing the other. Just as subatomic particles that compose us cannot be separated from the space and particles surrounding them, so living beings cannot be isolated from each other ... By the act of observation and intention, we have the ability to extend a kind of super-radiance to the world."<sup>7</sup> Thus, our collective heart energies co-create a resonant field of love that can influence the energies, thoughts, emotions, and actions of others and the world in a positive way.

Upon meeting the Dalai Lama in India in 1996, Marianne Williamson asked him how people can personally impact the world through positive thoughts and emotions. "Your Holiness, if enough of us meditate, will we save the world?" she inquired. He leaned toward her and answered, "I will answer you in reverse. If we want to save the world, we must have a plan. But no plan will work unless we meditate."<sup>8</sup> From the Buddhist point of view, meditation is a spiritual discipline that allows us to control

our thoughts and emotions. If as many of us as possible harnessed the energy of love and shifted our negative thoughts and emotions to positive ones, we would have the greatest transformational power our world ever created.

When we meditate, our hearts radiate a more harmonic electromagnetic energy field that positively impacts all living beings and our environment. To create this vibrational field, we don't have to sit cross-legged on the floor for hours while chanting a positive mantra. It is possible to do this simply through radiating love from our hearts, one love beam at a time. Such love beams can shift the energy of all negativity and bring about the highest and best good for all.

When we channel love from our Source as love, we can manifest miracles. We are born as love and, realizing this, can radiate love, overriding the predictable, and manifesting our intentions. As love, we *are* the miracle of creation.

This means that when we change our thoughts, words, and actions, we can change our lives and the whole world. With such knowledge, we can see ourselves as a powerful energy source and abandon self-defeating roles we have taken on, such as playing powerless victim, dominating others, and being needy and greedy. We can listen to ourselves and no longer follow anyone else's direction, belief system, or idea of what we should be.

Realizing that we control our perspective on our lives, and can influence the lives of others and our world through raising our vibrational frequency to love, we become free, creative, and connected beings. We can interact with others without fear of being displaced from our connection with Source, for once we recognize that we have the same ultimate essence as other people, we do not feel separation or conflict, but only oneness in the same energy source. If loving intentions, thoughts, feelings, and words can impact our physical world in the way in which science and research have demonstrated, the implications for humanity are far-reaching.



A world of love begins with us. If each of us takes responsibility for the energy we project by becoming more conscious of our intentions, thoughts, feelings, and choices, it will be possible to increase global heart coherence, sustain the flow of love, and ultimately transform our world.



LIVING IN THE  
FLOW OF  
*Love*

“ *Wisdom tells me I am nothing.  
Love tells me I am everything.  
And between the two, my life  
flows.* ”

— NISARGADATTA MAHARAJ

**L**iving in the flow of love nourishes positive energy and a healthy optimism for our future and the future of our world. **When we channel love and create what we want in alignment with what is best for ourselves, others, and our world, this flow becomes a spiritual path that leads to living joyfully, abundantly, and well.** Living in the flow of love is the path of seeing life as a challenge, an adventure—and, most of all, a gift.

People who live in the flow of love are love ambassadors. They aren't saints, prophets, or gurus maintaining an austere and monastic lifestyle. Quite the opposite, they are people like us. They usually go unnoticed until you realize how happy, joyful, and peaceful they are, even in the midst of life's messiness. When you engage in a conversation with them, you see how positive and present they are compared to most people living at lower levels of spiritual awareness.

Love ambassadors are connected to a field of divine energy that emanates from them. They consciously plug into this energy source through prayer or meditation, being in nature, or simple mindfulness. Through this connection to Source, they are in touch with their infinite nature as love, and live each day as a sacred meditation.

Living in the flow of love, love ambassadors are fully present, and notice the beauty and wonder in the world around them. They tune into their senses, which turns up the volume on the artistry that surrounds them.

Gazing up at the stars, listening to the sounds of a wind chime, or smelling the newly mown grass, they are mindful of their world. Watching nature unfold in its brilliance, they realize that they are a part of a natural cycle of life and death. Death is not something they fear, because they see death as simply one more transition—like moving from one room to another. Similarly, they embrace spiritual shifts, not as upsets, but as an essential part of life. Even with their heightened spiritual energies, they remain grounded as the world changes around them.

As love emissaries, they are committed to their personal transformation. Secure in their trust in themselves and their divine Source, they let go of trying to control their lives, and instead allow them to unfold. By acknowledging the divine order that exists within them and in everything around them, they surrender any expectations of how life should be, and focus their intentions on what they *want* it to be. This surrender creates a simpler, more authentic way of living; a path of love.

Knowing that they are highly sensitive beings, these emissaries are constantly aware of their thoughts, feelings, and intuitions, and pay

special attention to the moments of clarity which occur unexpectedly. They completely trust the spiritual information coming through their hearts, and act on it without reservation.

***“Living in the flow of love nourishes positive energy and a healthy optimism for our future and the future of our world.”***

Love ambassadors live in a constant stream of gratitude. They wake up every morning with a sense of appreciation and a healthy anticipation for what the universe has in store for them. Before their

feet even touch the floor, they open their hearts and give thanks for the day in front of them. They trust that no matter what happens that day, it will be a good day. You won't hear them complaining about the little

things that triggered them that day, because they accept life as it comes, and trust that they are getting exactly what they need to spiritually grow at any given moment. You will hear them speak gratefully throughout the day about even the simplest things.

Life comes at love ambassadors too; yet, they trust that their spirit is stronger than any problems they can possibly face. They embrace every situation as an opportunity for transformation, even when that situation unravels the fabric of their lives. They focus on the light in darkness, and affirm their strength in handling whatever comes their way. Instead of, “Why did this happen to me?” you will hear them ask questions like, “What is this challenging person or situation revealing to me about myself and my life?” They actively replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations such as: “I am love,” “I am safe,” and “I trust my connection to Source.” They repeat these affirmations throughout the day, focus their attention on the positive events in their lives, and are aware of their divine essence in the flow of life. They trust that they can heal or transform their lives by accepting what’s right in front of them, even when it’s difficult. They welcome spiritual feedback from the universe and incorporate this information into their daily lives.

When faced with a person or situation that makes them irritable or uncomfortable, love ambassadors pause, open their hearts, and allow themselves to feel their vulnerability. To prevent a reaction, they responsibly notice what is triggering their emotions, and release any associated negativity before speaking or taking action. They easily forgive someone who tailgates them, leaves a mess for them to clean up, or speaks unkindly toward them. They consistently clear negative energy by blessing and releasing any thoughts, emotions, or energies which may ultimately create energy blocks. They lovingly coach themselves through each challenging situation with supportive self-talk such as “Open and let go,” or “Let it be.” Instead of avoiding or resisting pain, they give themselves permission to lean into their tender places, and stay with their feelings until they emerge on the other side of them. They aren’t afraid to delve deep, see what is being revealed, and share it with a trusted friend.

For these awake and aware beings, there are no accidents, and divine synchronicities occur frequently. In fact, they acknowledge the people, things, and situations that seem to happen for a spiritual purpose, and witness life's events without judging them as good or bad.

As co-creators, they guide their intentions into reality by co-navigating with their Source. Visualizing themselves out in front of their intention, they imagine how their manifested intention would look and feel in their life. As they go about their day, they think and act as if their intention has already manifested. Fully open to the spiritual information that comes through their hearts, they make the discerning choices that bring their intentions into reality. If they feel in resonance with the information, they know they are in harmony with their Source. If they feel doubtful or uncertain, they pause on making any decision until the choice feels in alignment.

Love ambassadors are whole and complete within themselves, and therefore abundant. You may notice that they take great pleasure in giving and receiving; this keeps their abundance flowing and in circulation. You will see them “paying it forward” by buying coffee for someone in line behind them, or giving gifts on a whim, simply to make someone feel good. Their lives are filled with prosperity because they trust that there is more than enough to go around.

Living in the flow of love, they continuously express their intention to love themselves and their fellow beings. When they interact with others, they acknowledge them through eye contact and a smile. People feel completely seen and heard in their presence. They listen well, accept others' points of view, and don't force their ideas upon others with arguments or debates. They know putting their energy in resistance is futile, and alternatively focus it on peaceful coexistence. Throughout the day, they repeat mantras such as: “I am in love, at one, and at peace with myself, the earth, the universe and all my fellow beings,” “I create and live well as a channel of love,” and “All that I am, do, and express returns to me as love.”

Love ambassadors have a high vibrational energy that overrides negativity with love. They are highly aware of the level of energy they bring to any moment. They trust that the simple act of putting their attention on their heart center and emitting love energy raises their vibration. Through sustaining an open heart and emanating love, they give off a high vibrational frequency even in the midst of chaos and disharmony. In challenging situations, they ask themselves, “Am I showing up as the highest vibration of love?” If not, they amp up their vibration by generating compassion for the other person’s being and beaming love toward them. When you are around these people, you feel energized, uplifted, and inspired. Because their higher energies of love cancel out any lower vibrations, you may witness physical illness or emotional problems lessen or disappear altogether.

Love ambassadors are, however, aware of their need to love and care for themselves, and so they take regular breaks to restore and recharge their energies. They take quiet time throughout the day, and only selectively tune into mainstream media outlets. Much time is spent in meditation, in nature, and in healing practices such as yoga, massage, acupuncture, and alternative healing modes.

Living in the flow of love, they cultivate soul-hearted relationships by surrounding themselves with people who love, support, and care for them unconditionally. They create an energetic support team that listens to them without judging, enabling, or commiserating, and encourages them to trust themselves, follow their hearts, and embrace their vulnerabilities. They participate in their relationships fully without holding back any part of themselves. They choose to spend little time with people who are negative, fearful, or energy vampires. When they get stuck or struggle, they share their vulnerabilities with someone on their soul team.

Love envoys spend time playing, simply having fun, and celebrating being, alone or with their partner, family, or friends. They are sensuous beings, and take pleasure in the simple things in life that make their hearts sing with joyful abandon. They say yes to new situations that make

them laugh, force them to explore outside their comfort zones, or prompt them to view their lives from a new perspective. They bring a sense of humor and silliness into every moment, and refuse to take life too seriously. Despite their lightness of being, ambassadors of love are highly aware of their soul purpose in this lifetime. This purpose can encompass a multitude of passions that inspire purposeful living. Love ambassadors channel love to co-create the life they envision, and walk a spiritual path that leads to living purposefully and expressing the light of their being.

Love ambassadors are responsible for their vibrational footprint on the planet. They are humanly and environmentally conscious by making choices that sustain the well-being of the planet and all its inhabitants. They live consciously through making enlightened choices that serve themselves as well as others' highest and greatest good.

Following is a story that captures the essence of living in the flow of love. In Cleveland, Ohio, we rarely see pelicans, as these strong fliers live primarily in large colonies on the East Coast. Yet, a pelican showed up on a neighborhood lake near my home, the first to have visited in the twenty-three years I have lived here. For a pelican to fly this far inland is remarkable—in fact, a miracle. Since it has taken up residence here amidst the backdrop of other wildlife, I have been captivated by its grace and strength.

The pelican has taught me a great deal about living in the flow of love. To me, its unexpected appearance on the lake is a sign of courage and trust in its journey, an inspiration to me to trust my soul journey. Although unfamiliar to this environment, it has adapted and created a space amongst the waterfowl already present without being in conflict with them, as I aspire to do in the world. Despite its massive weight, it glides through the water's currents with a natural fluidity and takes care to preen throughout the day, reflecting a harmonious relationship with its environment. Likewise, I seek to go with the flow and practice self-care and compassion without worrying about what others will think.



The pelican's stay may be for a few weeks, a month, or a year. To the pelican it's just a short stopover to enjoy the moment and then move on. I also prefer to view every moment of my life as a stopover to celebrate my soul's journey. I'm not attached to having the pelican remain on the lake; I simply relish the message this creature has imprinted on my heart.

Living in the flow of love is grace in motion. We have a sense of riding the crest of a wave, dancing in the light, and being aligned with our soul's journey. There is no ego, self-consciousness, or reservation, but rather a natural lightheartedness, and a sense that nothing is more important than the present moment. There are no problems or obstacles to inhibit us from shining our light. Laughter comes easily and quickly, as does flexibility in playing with all possibilities in life. We experience ourselves as *love* beings having a human experience. The more we live in the flow of love, the more we align with our soul's journey, and are empowered to be a force of universal love for the common good.

Love is here because we are. Together, at this unprecedented time, we are here to facilitate our evolution to universal love. It's going to take the power of our mass intention of love and every one of us being ambassadors of love to bring about this shift in the world.

I'm honored and blessed that you have chosen to walk this journey of love with me.

Blessings and love,

*Dr. Debra L. Reble*

# MEDITATION

Sit or lie comfortably in a quiet space free from all distraction. You are creating a sacred space as a gift to yourself to open your heart and awaken to your divine essence as love. Gently close your eyes and focus on the ebb and flow of your breath. Notice your breath as you inhale and exhale. Take a few deep breaths in and slowly let them out. Surrender to your breath and allow it to become rhythmic, like the waves upon the shore. Notice how you feel.

As you inhale, breathe in love of yourself, and as you exhale, breathe out any fear or tension. Fill your heart space with gratitude for who you are, and release without judgment any thoughts or feelings that surface. When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to your breath, back to your center, and back to your heart.

Follow your breath to the center of your chest—to your heart center. Lightly place your hand on your heart. Take a few more breaths and go deeper into your heart. Breathe in and look within with love of yourself, breathe out and look out to the world with love of others. Do this until your breath is rhythmic, and you feel calm and centered.

Visualize placing a pearl of white light in the center of your heart. Feel it pulsating radiant white light out from this point. Feel this energy permeating your heart, body, and mind. See yourself bathed in this radiant divine energy, the miracle of creation. This is the light of your being: the divine essence of love.

Open your heart as a bridge which spans beyond your body and mind to bring you deeper into your true being. Feel this energy emanating out from your heart in all directions. Repeat the mantra “I am love” to yourself while surrounding every cell in your body with this healing energy. Stay here a moment, repeating, “I am love.”

In this awakened space, you are open and connected to yourself as this divine source of energy—an infinite, all-encompassing energy of love. Let this energy expand outward, sending beams of love to everyone and everything. Imagine yourself lovingly linked to all other beings by this pulsating energy. You are a conduit for your own transformation, others’ transformations, and the world’s transformation.

Feel the expansiveness of your heart. In this elevated vibration, you love and are loved. You are worthy of love by just being here. See yourself connecting with others open-hearted, authentic, and speaking your truth. Witness yourself abundant and powerful, creating choices that align your soul’s journey.

Gently and with ease, pay attention to your breath, and start to come back into your body. Experience the divine wholeness of who you are. Feel the light shining brightly in your heart. Expand it and beam it out for all to see.

You can initiate this experience of love any time by placing your hand on your heart and focusing your attention there.



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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Dr. Debra L. Reble*

Consciously merging her practical tools as a psychologist with her intuitive and spiritual gifts, **Dr. Debra L. Reble** empowers women to connect with their hearts and live authentically through her transformational Soul-Hearted Living™ program.

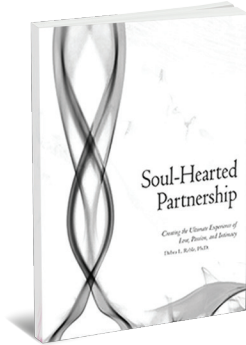
Debra is the author of *Soul-Hearted Partnership: The Ultimate Experience of Love, Passion, and Intimacy*, which garnered four book awards including the Eric Hoffer award. A frequent guest contributor to *Aspire Magazine* and other high-profile blogs, her words of wisdom are embraced by readers around the world. Her popular inspirational podcast, *Soul-Hearted Living*, airs on iTunes and other platforms and is dedicated to reconnecting women with their hearts. She is also a contributing author to the international best-seller, *Inspiration for a Women's Soul: Choosing Happiness* (2015), as well as the best-sellers *Inspiration for a Women's Soul: Cultivating Joy* (2015), *The Wisdom of Midlife Women 2* (2015), *Unleash Your Inner Magnificence* (2015), and *Inspiration for a Woman's Soul: Opening to Gratitude & Grace* (coming in August 2016), all published by Inspired Living Publishing, LLC.

Debra has a thriving private practice in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, and also sees clients virtually. She has two amazing children, Tom and Alex, and lives with her beloved husband, Doug, and yellow Labrador, Shiloh. She loves to cook, practice yoga, and dance tango and salsa with her husband.

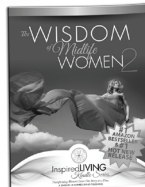
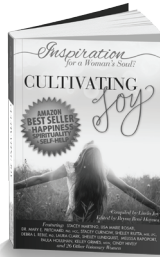
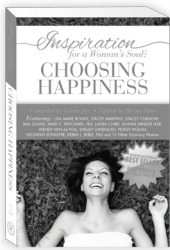
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Dr. Debra Reble, the award-winning author of *Soul-Hearted Partnership: Creating the Ultimate Experience of Love, Passion, and Intimacy* and contributing author of five best-selling inspirational books, brings you even deeper into the healing energy of love.

*Being Love: How Loving Yourself Creates Ripples of Transformation in Your Relationships and the World* invites us to experience a homecoming to our hearts, and discover our soul purpose—which is ever, and only, love. Through heartfelt narrative and real-life stories, Debra reveals how opening to the essence of love within ourselves can empower us to create and sustain love, joy, happiness, and healing in every area of our lives. At the close of each chapter are proven practices which the author—a successful healer, coach, psychologist, and teacher—uses with her clients and in her own life. These spiritual tools will help you affirm your personal path and live as a “love ambassador” in the world, every day.

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