

# *Care of the Soul*

Edited Readings for Focus and Reflection.

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Thich Nhat Hanh; Marianne Williamson; James Nachtwey  
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Editor's Note: The writings in this book were selected because they point toward capacities that exist within all people. They come from a wide variety of sources including, Christian, Jewish, Toltec, Buddhist and agnostic. Focus on the intention of the writing and look to see if you are willing to include a wide range of beliefs.

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## **Dedication: NAMASTE!**

“I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides. I honor the place in you of love, of light, of truth and of peace. And when you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us.”

The first and last word in this collection of writings is this word, Namaste. It is the most powerful single word I have ever heard. It was taught to me by Marge Knuuti, a nurse and teacher, who heard it on her first trip to Calcutta as a volunteer at the Home for the Dying, established by Mother Theresa. After a long, exhausting trip in the intense heat of the Indian summer, Marge wanted to rest when she arrived. As fate would have it, a new group of people, gathered from the streets of Calcutta, had just been brought to the Home to die with dignity and Marge was pressed into service. Fighting back her own feelings of sickness, she knelt to tend to her first patient. Not only had he been placed in the street but had been struck by a vehicle so that a bone protruded from one leg. As Marge came close, he said, “Namaste.” Marge had no idea what it meant and it was eight hours before she could ask one of the Sisters for its definition. That man, having lived a pauper’s life, in great pain and without anesthesia, set an example of grace, courage and loving-kindness that can be a benchmark for us all. This collection of writings is dedicated to that man and that place in us where there is only one of us.

## Preface

There is nothing like the sound of the open ocean crashing against the rocky coast of Maine. Listen for a minute and you will hear the rhythm, the pace of the sea water as it hits the shore. Day in and day out that water comes in and goes out, in cycles as regular as anything on Earth. Two high tides and two low tides each day, predictable years in advance. At anything but the highest of tides, you can see the tidal marks of the water at last high tide. There is something so regular, powerful, beautiful about it, that in this one place, I sense the entire ordering of the universe, the incredible gift we have been given – life – is impossible to miss in this place. Almost anything can be going wrong, crisis upon crisis and in this place by the ocean, I am, in the midst of chaos, at peace. I feel connected to all things. I become at peace with all people because I know in my heart the temporal nature of our existence on this planet.

If I have painted well, you will sense that this is a magical place for me.

One that without effort or energy creates calm and an over-riding experience of loving kindness. Sometimes I am in Chicago or Newark or New York, long distances from my instant tranquility machine. In those moments, I have learned that I must be able to recreate the ingredients of this experience by the ocean in order to be as focused and useful as possible in the world.

It may be that for you the place which creates these special feelings of oneness with the world and tranquility of the soul has nothing to do with the ocean. For you, it may be a particularly beautiful garden that you tend with all your heart.

It may be a range of mountains so beautiful that it takes away your breath. It may be a glass-smooth lake, just when the fish are feeding. It may be a machine, so awesome in its detail that the majesty of human imagination is unavoidable. For each of us it will be different and for each of us there is usually a place, a magical place where peace, calm and being centered come naturally.

Over the years, I have learned ways to capture the feeling of these special places and recreate them in places that bear no resemblance to the ocean: in hotel rooms in the heart of huge cities, in distant lands or simply at a client's site in new territory. It is my experience that there are three ingredients which comprise this special, renewing feeling of caring for the soul.

The first component is the spiritual nature of the experience. When I am at the ocean, I feel *the incredible gift I have been given, to be alive*, awake and able to communicate with loving-kindness. For me this is a gift from God. So I read the Bible, five versions so far. I have read the Qur'an, the original teachings of the Buddha, The Course in Miracles, The Kabbalah, the Tao, The Counting of the Omer and The Book of Mormon. While the influence of human beings is discernable in all these texts, reading other's experiences and stories reminds me that all people throughout time have worked to understand the spiritual nature of our existence. It allows me to know that we all consider the nature of our existence. The more I am aware of this, the greater my compassion for all beings, no matter where I might meet them along the path.

The second ingredient is a sense of *connectedness*. When I am not at the ocean, any gift of nature, trees, plants, even a six inch square of earth will produce the experience of inter-connectedness.

I have an inspiring, angel-winged begonia in my office. It is well over four feet high and four feet wide. If I look at it carefully, the growth of its leaves, the shoots that become beautiful flowers and the delicate nature of its water supply system, I am blown away. I think about the soil it grows in, the air it purifies, the water it requires. I realize that my ancestors are in that soil, part of that water. We are life, inner connected in everything we do and touch. It reminds me that there is nothing I do not impact and that I am impacted by. It reminds me that the children dying of hunger and malnutrition are my children.

The third ingredient is the process of introspection and a recognition that *the only thing I control is how I am going to be today*. At the ocean, the power of the experience reminds me of the power within me. Away from it, I read books that remind us through questions and inquiry about the gifts we have been given. My favorites are in the “What One Person Can Do” collection: Thich Nhat Hanh, Don Miguel Ruiz, Greg Baer, MD, Marianne Williamson, Rachel Naomi Remen and James Nachtwey. Recently I finished Nelson Mandela, *In His Own Words*, an edited collection of his speeches and Emmanuel’s *Book II, The Choice for Love*. I read anything recommended to me, that helps me realize that the way I am being is up to me. Through this process, I become clear about what I can do something about and that which can be released. There is tranquility in knowing the difference.

The final part of the process is simply *to remind myself that I need to be gentle with myself*. All I can do is the best I can do. Taking the time to get centered, to revisit what my purpose on the planet is and see if how I intend to be today will further that end creates a sense of peace. Every once in a while, during a day, I will get so wound up in the doingness of

life that I forget about the gift of it. I find myself reactivated or upset about something that has nothing to do with me. When I am conscious in those moments, I realize I am stuck, I back away from what or whomever I am dealing with, take a deep breath, remind myself of the tranquility of my soul care, get centered and return to the moment, this time truly being present.

For me, in order for the re-creation to be effective, I need to set aside time before I begin the day. In this way I can frame or contextualize the day before any interactions with people. For ten days recently, I had a four month old guest living with me, so I had to adjust my rising and soul-care in order to be able to anticipate Noel's internal clock and clear demands. Easy, no; possible, yes. Four children; more demanding, still possible. Other times of the day work for some people, the majority find morning returns the greatest advantage. Once you have truly mastered the space of self-care, each moment of everyday becomes a self-care moment.

Having said all that, be mindful that no one but you can determine what is the best self-care, soul-care for you. They cannot tell you what it should contain nor when it should occur. You will know that you are there when you are able to access, at least once a day, a sense of tranquility, peace and purpose that soothes your soul.

It is our hope that these edited writings will be of use along the way.

# **The Four Agreements, A Toltec Wisdom Book**

By Don Miguel Ruiz

## **One**

### **Domestication and the Dream of the Planet**

Everything that exists is one living being, and that light is the messenger of life, because it is alive and contains all information.

Everything in existence is a manifestation of the one living being we call God.

The real us is pure love, pure light.

We are born with the capacity to learn how to dream, and the humans who live before us teach us how to dream the way society dreams. The outside dream has so many rules that when a new human is born, we hook the child's attention and introduce these rules into his or her mind. The outside dream uses Mom and Dad, the schools, and religion to teach us how to dream.

*Attention* is the ability we have to discriminate and to focus only on that which we want to perceive.

The only way to store information is by agreement. The outside dream may hook our attention, but if we don't agree, we don't store that information. As soon as we agree, we *believe* it, and this is called faith. To have faith is to believe unconditionally.

All of humanity is searching for truth, justice, and beauty.

There is no truth to find. Wherever we turn our heads, all we see is the truth, but with the agreements and beliefs we have stored in our mind, we have no eyes for this truth.

We don't see the truth because we are blind.

In your whole life nobody has ever abused you more than you abused yourself. And the limit of your self-abuse is exactly the limit that you will tolerate from someone else. If someone abuses you a little more than you abuse yourself, you will probably walk away from that person. But if someone abuses you a little less than you abuse yourself, you will probably stay in the relationship and tolerate it endlessly.

Our image of perfection is the reason we reject ourselves the way we are, and why we don't accept others the way they are.

The most important agreements are the ones you made with yourself.

If you want to live a life of joy and fulfillment, you have to find the courage to break those agreements that are fear-based and claim your personal power.

## Two

### The First Agreement – Be Impeccable with Your Word

*Speak with integrity. Say only what you mean. Avoid using the word to speak against yourself or to gossip about others. Use the power of your word in the direction of truth and love.*

The word is a force; it is the power you have to express and communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in your life.

Depending upon how it is used, the word can set you free, or it can enslave you even more than you know. All the magic you possess is based on your word. Your word is pure magic, and misuse of your word is black magic.

When you are impeccable, you take responsibility for your actions, but you do not judge or blame yourself.

Being impeccable with your word is not using the word against yourself.

Being impeccable with your word is the correct use of your energy; it means to use your energy in the direction of truth and love for yourself.

Whenever we hear an opinion and believe it, we make an agreement, and it becomes part of our belief system.

Gossip is black magic at its very worst because it is pure poison. We learned how to gossip by agreement.

When we were children, we heard the adults around us gossiping all the time, openly giving us their opinions about other people. They even had opinions about people they didn't know.

Fear and suffering are an important part of the dream of the planet; they are how the dream of the planet keeps us down.

What we don't see is that misuse of our word is putting us deeper into hell.

How many times have you hooked other people's attention, and spread poison about your loved one in order to make your opinion right? Your opinion is nothing but your point of view. It is not necessarily true.

How much you love yourself and how you feel about yourself are directly proportionate to the quality and integrity of your word. When you are impeccable with your word, you feel good; you feel happy and at peace.

## Three

### **The Second Agreement – Don't Take Anything Personally**

*Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream. When you are immune to the opinions and actions of others, you won't be the victim of needless suffering.*

What causes you to be trapped is what we call *personal importance*. Personal importance, or taking things personally, is the maximum expression of selfishness because we make the assumption that everything is about “me”.

Nothing other people do is because of you.

Even when a situation seems so personal, even if others insult you directly, it has nothing to do with you. What they say, what they do, and the opinions they give are according to the agreements they have in their own minds. Their point of view comes from all the programming they received during domestication.

But it is not what I am saying that is hurting you; it is that you have wounds that I touch by what I have said.

Then, if you get mad at me, I know you are dealing with yourself, I am the excuse for you to get mad. And you get mad because you are afraid, because you are dealing with fear. If you are not afraid, there is no way you will get mad at me. If you are not afraid, there is no way you will hate me. If you are not afraid, there is no way you will be jealous or sad.

When you feel good, everything around you is good.

You are happy with the movie that you are producing, happy with your agreements with life. You are at peace, and you are happy. You live in that state of bliss where everything is so wonderful, and everything is so beautiful. In that state of bliss you are making love all the time with everything that you perceive.

Whatever people do, feel, think, or say, *don't take it personally*. If they tell you how wonderful you are, they are not saying that because of you. You know you are wonderful. It is not necessary to believe other people who tell you that you are wonderful. Don't take *anything* personally. Even if someone got a gun and shot you in the head; it was nothing personal. Even at that extreme.

Humans are addicted to suffering at different levels and to different degrees, and we support each other in maintaining these addictions.

They are lying to you because they are afraid.

If others say one thing, but do another, you are lying to yourself if you don't listen to their actions.

When you make it a strong habit not to take anything personally, you avoid many upsets in your life. Your anger, jealousy, and envy will disappear, and even your sadness will simply disappear if you don't take things personally.

If you keep this agreement, you can travel around the world with your heart completely open and no one can hurt you. You can say, "I love you," without fear of being ridiculed or rejected. You can ask for what you need. You can say yes, or you can say no – whatever you choose – without guilt or self-judgment. You can choose to follow your heart always. Then you can be in the middle of hell and still experience inner peace and happiness.

## Four

### **The Third Agreement – Don't Make Assumptions**

*Find the courage to ask questions and to express what you really want. Communicate with others as clearly as you can to avoid misunderstandings, sadness and drama.*

Making assumptions in our relationships is really asking for problems. Often we make the assumption that our partners know what we think and that we don't have to say what we want.

She gets so upset because he fails to meet her expectations. Making assumptions in relationships leads to a lot of fights, a lot of difficulties, a lot of misunderstandings with people we supposedly love.

We make all sorts of assumptions because we don't have the courage to ask questions.

Or maybe you need to stop lying to yourself about what you truly want.

Your love will not change anybody. If others change, it's because they want to change, not because you can change them.

We don't need to justify love; it is there or not there. Real love is accepting other people the way they are without trying to change them.

You always have the right to ask. Likewise, everybody has the right to ask you, and you have the right to say yes or no.

What will really make the difference is action. Taking the action over and over again strengthens your will, nurtures the seed, and establishes a solid foundation for the new habit to grow.

A white magician uses the word for creation, giving, sharing, and loving. By making this one agreement a habit, your whole life will be completely transformed.

This is the mastery of intent, the mastery of the spirit, the mastery of love, the mastery of gratitude, and the mastery of life. This is the goal of the Toltec. This is the path to personal freedom.

## Five

### **The Fourth Agreement – Always Do Your Best**

*Your best is going to change from moment to moment; it will be different when you are healthy as opposed to sick. Under any circumstance, simply do your best, and you will avoid self-judgment, self-abuse, and regret.*

And if you don't judge yourself there is no way you are going to suffer from guilt, blame, and self-punishment.

Do your best, and perhaps you will learn that no matter how long you meditate, you can live, love, and be happy.

Doing your best, you are going to live your life intensely. You are going to be productive, you are going to be good to yourself, because you will be giving yourself to your family, to your community, to everything.

On the other hand, if you take action just for the sake of doing it, without expecting a reward, you will find that you enjoy every action you do. Rewards will come, but you are not attached to the reward. You can even get more than you would have imagined for yourself without expecting a reward. If we like what we do, if we always do our best, then we are really enjoying life.

When you do your best you learn to accept yourself. But you have to be aware and learn from your mistakes. Learning from your mistakes means you practice, look honestly at the results, and keep practicing. This increases your awareness.

Doing your best really doesn't feel like work because you enjoy whatever you are doing.

If you take action because you have to, then there is no way you are going to do your best. Then it is better not to do it. No, you do your best because doing your best all the time makes *you* happy. When you are doing your best just for the pleasure of doing it, you are taking action because you enjoy the action.

The best way to say, "Thank you, God," is by letting go of the past and living in the present moment, right here and now. Whatever life takes away from you, let it go. When you surrender and let go of the past, you allow yourself to be fully alive in the moment.

If you live in a past dream, you don't enjoy what is happening right now because you will always wish it to be different than it is.

Not enjoying what is happening right now is living in the past and being only half alive. This leads to self-pity, suffering, and tears.

Just your existence proves the existence of God. Your existence proves the existence of life and energy.

Action is what makes the difference.

Your own body is a manifestation of God, and if you honor your body everything will change for you. When you practice giving love to every part of your body, you plant seeds of love in your mind, and when they grow, you will love, honor, and respect your body immensely. Every action then becomes a ritual in which you are honoring God. After that, the next step is honoring God with every thought, every emotion, every belief, even what is "right" or "wrong".

If you are impeccable with your word, if you don't take anything personally, if you always do your best, then you are going to have a beautiful life. You are going to control your life one hundred percent.

Do not give your Judge the satisfaction of turning you into a victim. No, be tough with yourself. Stand up and make the agreement again.

Do not be concerned about the future; keep your attention on today, and stay in the present moment.

## Six

### **The Toltec Path to Freedom – Breaking Old Agreements**

Very young children are not afraid to express what they feel. They are so loving that if they perceive love, they melt into love. They are not afraid to love at all. That is the description of a normal human being.

There is no need to blame your parents or anyone who abused you in your life, including yourself. But it is time to stop the abuse. It is time to free yourself of the tyranny of the Judge by changing the foundation of your own agreements. It is time to be free from the role of the Victim.

The first step toward personal freedom is awareness. We need to be aware that we are not free in order to be free.

There are three masteries that lead people to become Toltecs. First is the Mastery of Awareness. This is to be aware of who we really are, with all the possibilities. The second is the Mastery of Transformation – how to change, how to be free of domestication. The third is the Mastery of Intent. Intent from the Toltec point of view is that part of life that makes transformation of energy possible; it is the one living being that seamlessly encompasses all energy, or what we call “God.” Intent is life itself; it is unconditional love. The Mastery of Intent is therefore the Mastery of Love.

At best, being a warrior gives us an opportunity to transcend the dream of the planet, and to change our personal dream to a dream that we call *heaven*.

Just like hell, heaven is a place that exists within our mind. It is a place of joy, a place where we are happy, where we are free to love and to be who we really are. We can reach heaven while we are alive; we don't have to wait until we die. God is always present and the kingdom of heaven is everywhere, but first we need to have the eyes and ears to see and hear that truth.

Every time we face one of the fears we are a little more free.

To do this we have to gain control of our emotions, we have to refrain from fueling the emotions that come from fear.

We have learned that the dream you are living now is the result of the outside dream hooking your attention and feeding you all of your beliefs. The process of domestication can be called the *dream of the first attention* because it was how your attention was used for the first time to create the first dream of your life.

If you have awareness that the whole drama of your life is the result of what you believe, and what you believe is not real, then you can begin to change it.

So the next step is to develop awareness of all the self-limiting, fear-based beliefs that make you unhappy. You take an inventory of all that you believe, all your agreements, and through this process you begin the transformation.

As those smaller agreements are broken, your personal power will increase until you reach a point when you can finally face the big demons in your mind.

That's one way out of the dream of hell. But for every agreement you break that makes you suffer, you will need to replace it with a new agreement that makes you happy. This will keep the old agreement from coming back. If you occupy the same space with a new agreement, then the old agreement is gone forever and in its place is the new agreement.

The way you are living now is the result of many years of domestication. You cannot expect to break the domestication in one day. Breaking agreements is very difficult because we put the power of the word (which is the power of our will) into every agreement we have made.

We are addicted to being the way we are. We are addicted to anger, jealousy, and self-pity. We are addicted to the beliefs that tell us, "I'm not good enough, I'm not intelligent enough. Why even try? Other people will do it because they're better than me."

The way you see the world will depend upon the emotions you are feeling.

Imagine that the human mind is the same as your skin. You can touch healthy skin and it feels wonderful. Your skin is made for perception and the sensation of touch is wonderful. Now imagine you have an injury and the skin gets cut and infected. If you touch the infected skin, it is going to hurt, so you try to cover and protect the skin. You will not enjoy being touched because it hurts.

Now imagine that all humans have this skin disease. Nobody can touch each other because it is going to hurt. Everyone has wounds on their skin, so the infection is seen as normal, the pain is also considered normal; we believe we are supposed to be that way.

Can you imagine how we would behave with each other if all the humans in the world had this skin disease? Of course we would hardly ever hug each other because it would be too painful. So we would need to create a lot of distance between us.

The human mind is exactly like this description of infected skin.

We have a dysfunctional dream of the planet, and humans are mentally sick with a disease called fear. The symptoms of the disease are all the emotions that make humans suffer: anger, hate, sadness, envy, and betrayal. When the fear is too great, the reasoning mind begins to fail, and we call this mental illness. Psychotic behavior occurs when the mind is frightened and the wounds so painful, that it seems better to break contact with the outside world.

We must forgive those we feel have wronged us, not because they deserve to be forgiven, but because we love ourself so much we don't want to keep paying for the injustice.

First, we need to forgive our parents, our brothers, our sisters, our friends, and God. Once you forgive God, you can finally forgive yourself. Once you forgive yourself, the self-rejection in your mind is over. Self-acceptance begins, and the self-love will grow so strong that you will finally accept yourself just the way you are. That's the beginning of the free human. Forgiveness is the key.

The warrior has awareness.

The warrior has control. Control over one's own emotions, control over one's own self.

The final way to attain personal freedom is to prepare ourselves for the initiation of the dead, to take death itself as our teacher.

We have just the present to be alive.

The angel of death can teach us to live every day as if it is the last day of our life.

And of course I treat the people I love with love because this may be the last day that I can tell you how much I love you.

The love that makes me happy is the love that I can share with you. Why do I need to deny that I love you? It is not important if you love me back. I may die tomorrow or you may die tomorrow. What makes me happy now is to let you know how much I love you.

The resurrection is to be like a child – to be wild and free, but with a difference. The difference is that we have freedom with wisdom instead of innocence.

## Seven

### **The New Dream – Heaven on Earth**

Imagine that you have permission to be happy and to really enjoy your life. Your life is free of conflict with yourself and others.

Imagine living your life without fear of expressing your dreams.

You know what you want, what you don't want, and when you want it. You are free to change your life the way you really want to. You are not afraid to ask for what you need, to say yes or no to anything or anyone.

Imagine living your life without the fear of being judged by others. You no longer rule your behavior according to what others may think about you. You are no longer responsible for anyone's opinion. You have no need to control anyone, and no one controls you, either.

Imagine living your life without judging others. You can easily forgive others and let go of any judgments that you have. You don't have the need to be right, and you don't need to make anyone else wrong. You respect yourself and everyone else, and they respect you in return.

Imagine living without the fear of loving and not being loved. You are no longer afraid to be rejected, and you don't have the need to be accepted. You can say "I love you" with no shame or justification. You can walk in the world with your heart completely open, and not be afraid to be hurt.

Imagine living your life without being afraid to take a risk and to explore life. You are not afraid to lose anything, you are not afraid to be alive in the world, and you are not afraid to die.

Imagine that you love yourself just the way you are. You love your body just the way it is, and you love your emotions just the way they are. You know that you are perfect just as you are.

Only love has the ability to put you in that state of bliss.

The world is very beautiful and very wonderful. Life can be very easy when love is your way of life. You can be loving all the time. This is your choice.

You can see everything with the eyes of love. You can be aware that there is love all around you.

The only reason you are happy is because you choose to be happy. Happiness is a choice, and so is suffering.

## **The Mastery Of Love, Wisdom Book**

By Don Miguel Ruiz

### **Introduction – The Master**

Whatever you do for others, you do for me.

The Master lives within everyone. When you give food to the one who is starving, when you give water to the one who is thirsty, when you cover the one who is cold, you give your love to the Master.

# One

## The Wounded Mind

All of our drama and suffering is by practice. We make an agreement with ourselves, and we practice that agreement until it becomes a whole mastery.

To become masters of love, we have to practice love. The art of relationship is also a whole mastery, and the only way to reach mastery is with practice. To master a relationship is therefore about action. It is not about concepts or attaining knowledge.

The human mind is sick with a disease called fear.

The manifestation of the disease of fear is anger, hate, sadness, envy, and hypocrisy; the result of the disease is all the emotions that make humans suffer.

We create all these little demons in our mind because we have learned to dream hell in our own life.

The real us is pure love; we are *Life*.

Now imagine that one day you awake on *this* planet, and you no longer have wounds in your emotional body. You are no longer afraid to be who you are. Whatever someone says about you, whatever they do, you don't take it personally, and it doesn't hurt anymore.

You no longer need to protect yourself. You are not afraid to love, to share, to open your heart.

They are living in the moment. They are not ashamed of the past; they are not worried about the future. Little children express what they feel, and they are not afraid to love.

What we call education is nothing but domestication of the human being.

## Two

### The Loss of Innocence

As children, we don't have any definition of love as an abstract concept; we just live love. It's the way we are.

The emotional energy that lives in our home is going to tune our emotional body to that frequency.

If we have the awareness, we have the opportunity to heal our emotional body, our emotional mind, and stop the suffering.

The human mind is sick because it has a Parasite that steals its vital energy and robs it of joy. The Parasite is all those beliefs that make you suffer.

All the guilt, all the blame, all the emotional poison in your emotional body keeps pulling you back into the world of drama.

This is the biggest lie we believe about ourselves, because we are *never* going to be perfect. And there is no way that we can forgive ourselves for not being perfect.

You are no longer a child, and if you have an abusive relationship, it is because you accept that abuse, because you believe you deserve it. You have a limit to the amount of abuse you will accept, but no one in the whole world abuses you more than you abuse yourself.

Energy attracts the same kind of energy, the same vibration.

Life brings to you exactly what you need. There is perfect justice in hell. There is nothing to blame. We can even say that our suffering is a gift. If you just open your eyes and see what is around you, it's exactly what you need to clean your poison, to heal your wounds, to accept yourself, and to get out of hell.

## **Three**

### **The Person Who Didn't Believe in Love**

Happiness never comes from outside of us.

It doesn't matter how much you love someone, you are never going to be what that person wants you to be.

## Four

### The Track of Love, the Track of Fear

Your truth is not the truth for anyone else, and that includes your own children or your own parents.

Every human being has a personal dream of life, and that dream is completely different from anyone else's dream.

Love has no resistance. Whatever we do is because we *want* to do it. It becomes a pleasure; it's like a game, and we have fun with it.

Love has no expectations.

Fear doesn't respect anything, including itself. If I feel sorry for you, it means I don't respect you. You cannot make your own choices. When I have to make the choices for you, at that point I don't respect you.

Anger is nothing but fear with a mask. Sadness is fear with a mask. Jealousy is fear with a mask.

Love is always kind, and that kindness makes you generous and opens all the doors. Love is generous. Fear is selfish; it is only about me. Selfishness closes all the doors.

Love is unconditional. Fear is full of conditions.

In the track of love, there is no *if*; there are no conditions.

I love you for no reason, with no justification. I love you the way you are, and you are free to be the way you are.

All that drama and suffering is because we are using the channels of communication that existed before we were born. People judge and are victimized, they gossip about each other, they gossip with their friends, they gossip in a bar.

You are only responsible for your half; you are not responsible for the other half. It doesn't matter how close you think you are, or how strongly you think you love, there is no way you can be responsible for what is inside another person's head.

If you are playing tennis, you have a partner, you are a team, and you never go against each other – never. Even if you both play tennis differently, you have the same goal: to have fun together, to play together, to be playmates.

If you see your partnership, your romantic relationship, as a team, everything will start to improve.

In the track of love, you are giving much more than taking. And of course, you love yourself so much that you don't allow selfish people to take advantage of you.

Generosity, freedom, and love will create the most beautiful relationship: an ongoing romance.

To master a relationship is all about you. The first step is to become aware, to know that everyone dreams his own dream.

Once you know this, you can be responsible for your half of the relationship, which is you. If you know that you are only responsible for half of the relationship, you can easily control your half. It is not up to us to control the other half. If we respect, we know that our partner, or friend, or son, or mother is completely responsible for the other half, there is always going to be peace in that relationship. There is no war.

The quality of your communication depends upon the choices you make in each moment, whether you tune your emotional body to love or to fear.

Finally, if you are aware that no one else can make you happy, and that happiness is the result of love coming out of you, this becomes the greatest mastery of the Toltecs, the Master of Love.

The only way to master love is to practice love. You don't need to justify your love, you don't need to explain your love; you just need to practice your love. Practice creates the master.

## **Five**

### **The Perfect Relationship**

And what is the right woman, the right man? Someone who wants to go in the same direction as you do, someone who is compatible with your views and your values – emotionally, physically, economically, spiritually.

The right woman for you is the woman you love just the way she is, the woman you don't have the need to change at all.

You are going to be the right man for her if she loves you just the way you are and she doesn't want to change you.

This is the only way to begin a great relationship. First you have to know what you want, how you want it, when you want it. You have to know exactly what the needs of your body are, what the needs of your mind are, and what fits well with you.

You can love everyone: but to deal with a person on an everyday basis, you will need someone more closely aligned to you.

You need to be honest with yourself, and honest with everyone else. Project what you feel you really are, and don't pretend to be what you are not. It's as if you are in a market.

You have to accept yourself and love yourself just the way you are. Only by loving and accepting yourself the way you are can you truly be and express what you are.

Let her be who she is. She has the right to be who she is; she has a right to be free. When you inhibit your partner's freedom, you inhibit your own because you have to be there to see what your partner is doing or not doing. And if you love yourself so much, you are never going to give up your personal freedom.

If you can love your partner the way she is, if you can open your heart completely to your partner, you can reach heaven through your love.

Let go of the past and begin everyday at a higher level of love. This will keep the fire alive and make your love grow even more.

To keep the two of you happy, you have to keep your half perfect. You are responsible for your half, and your half has a certain amount of garbage. Your garbage is your garbage. The one who has to deal with that garbage is you, not your partner.

## Six

### The Magical Kitchen

You have an abundance of love in your heart. You have love not just for yourself, but for the whole world. You love so much that you don't need anyone's love. You share your love without condition; you don't love *if*. You are a millionaire in love.

Your heart is like that magical kitchen. If you open your heart, you already have all the love you need.

What we call love – someone who needs me, someone who cares about me – isn't love; it is selfishness.

There is nothing to learn about love. Everything is already there in our genes, in our nature.

Not being perfect, you reject yourself, and the level of self-rejection depends upon how strong the adults were in breaking your integrity.

You have to focus on the most wonderful relationship you can have: the relationship with yourself. It is not about being selfish; it is about self-love.

If you go into a relationship with selfishness, expecting that your partner is going to make you happy, it will not happen.

How can someone tell you, “I love you,” and then mistreat you and abuse you, humiliate you, and disrespect you.

If we love, we want the best for those we love.

*Your* heart is a magical kitchen. Open your heart.

In your heart is all the love you need. Your heart can create any amount of love, not just for yourself, but for the whole world. You can give your love with no conditions; you can be generous with your love because you have a magical kitchen in your heart.

Selfishness comes from poverty in the heart, from the belief that love is not abundant.

When we know that our heart is a magical kitchen, we are always generous, and our love is completely unconditional.

## Seven

### The Dream Master

You need to have the courage to use the truth, to talk to yourself with the truth, to be completely honest with yourself.

Your reactions are the key to having a wonderful life. If you can learn to control your own reactions, then you can change your routines, and you can change your life.

A dream master creates a masterpiece of life.

You have to stalk your own reactions; you have to work with yourself every moment. It takes a lot of time and courage, because it's easier to take things personally and react the way you always react.

That is the challenge: to change your normal reactions, to change your routine, to take a risk and make different choices.

When we recover free will, in any moment we can choose to remember who we are.

Becoming aware is about being responsible for your own life. You are not responsible for what is happening in the world. You are responsible for yourself.

We don't need to judge; we don't need to blame or feel guilt. We just need to accept our truth and intend a new beginning.

When you love yourself, your price is very high, which means your tolerance for self-abuse is very low.

To avoid being with yourself, you need to take something to numb you, to take your mind away from yourself.

## Ten

### Seeing With Eyes of Love

You are what you believe you are. There is nothing to do except to be just what you are. You have the right to feel beautiful and enjoy it. You can honor your body and accept it as it is. You don't need anyone to love you. Love comes from the inside. It lives inside us, and is always there, but with that wall of fog, we don't feel it. You can only perceive the beauty that lives outside you when you *feel* the beauty that lives inside you.

## Eleven

### Healing the Emotional Body

The only way to heal your wounds is through forgiveness.

Just imagine if all humans could start being truthful with themselves, start forgiving everyone, and start loving everyone.

If all humans loved in this way, they would no longer be selfish; they would be open to give and receive, and they would no longer judge each other. Gossiping would be over, and the emotional poison would simply dissolve.

## **Twelve**

### **God Within You**

When you know that the power that is Life is inside you, you accept your own Divinity, and yet you are humble, because you see the same Divinity in everyone else. You see how easy it is to understand God, because everything is a manifestation of God. The body is going to die, the mind is going to dissolve also but not you. You are immortal; you exist for billions of years in different manifestations, because you are Life, and Life cannot die. You are in the trees, the butterflies, the fish, the air, the moon, the sun. Wherever you go, you are there, waiting for yourself.

# **Living Buddha, Living Christ**

By Thich Nhat Hanh

## **Introduction**

When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will *realize it is you who are the children of the living Father*, but if you will not know yourselves, then you dwell in poverty, and it is you who are that poverty.

For whoever had not known himself knows nothing, but he who has known himself has already understood the depth of all things.

Let the one who seeks not stop seeking until he finds. When he finds, he shall be troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be amazed, and shall come to transcend all things.

Jesus said, “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Speak of the truth with those who search for it, and of knowledge to those who have committed a sin in their error. Make firm the foot of those who have stumbled; give rest to those who are weary, and raise up those who wish to rise, and awaken those who sleep.

# Chapter One

## Be Still and Know

We human beings can be nourished by the best values of many traditions.

Until there is peace between religions, there can be no peace in the world.

Do not think the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others' viewpoints.

It is because of the practice of meditation – stopping, calming, and looking deeply – that I have been able to nourish and protect the sources of my spiritual energy and continue this work.

When you touch someone who authentically represents a tradition, you not only touch his or her tradition, you also touch your own.

If we think we monopolize the truth and we still organize a dialogue, it is not authentic.

Dialogue must be practiced on the basis of “non-self.” We have to allow what is good, beautiful, and meaningful in the other’s tradition to transform us.

Our capacity to make peace with another person and with the world depends very much on our capacity to make peace with ourselves. If we are at war with our parents, our family, our society, or our church, there is probably a war going on inside us also, so the most basic work for peace is to return to ourselves and create harmony among the elements within us – our feelings, our perceptions, and our mental states. That is why the practice of meditation, looking deeply, is so important. We must recognize and accept the conflicting elements that are within us and their underlying causes. It takes time, but the effort always bears fruit. When we have peace within, real dialogue with others is possible.

When we see the nature of inter-being, barriers between ourselves and others are dissolved, and peace, love, and understanding are possible. Whenever there is understanding, compassion is born.

In Buddhism, faith means confidence in our and others' abilities to wake up to our deepest capacity of loving and understanding.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Mindfulness and the Holy Spirit**

I felt that all of us also have the seed of the Holy Spirit in us, the capacity of healing, transforming, and loving. When we touch that seed, we are able to touch God the Father and God the Son.

*...I am aware of my heart.  
...I smile to my heart.  
I vow to eat, drink, and work in ways  
that preserve my health and well-being.*

If we can learn ways to touch the peace, joy, and happiness that are already there, we will become healthy and strong, and a resource for others.

The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When our mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers. If you love someone but rarely make yourself available to him or her, that is not true love. When your beloved is suffering, you need to recognize her suffering, anxiety, and worries, and just by doing that, you already offer some relief. Mindfulness relieves suffering because it is filled with understanding and compassion. When you are really there, showing your loving-kindness and understanding, the energy of the Holy Spirit is in you. That is why I told the priest in Florence that mindfulness is very much like the Holy Spirit. Both of them help us touch the ultimate dimension of reality. Mindfulness helps us touch nirvana, and the Holy Spirit offers us a door to the Trinity.

When the energy of the Holy Spirit is in us, we are truly alive, and capable of understanding the suffering of others and motivated by the desire to help transform the situation.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Living Buddha, Living Christ**

It means that the seed of the Kingdom of God is within us.

The practice is to touch life deeply so that the Kingdom of God becomes reality.

In fact, we have to open more doors for future generations.

The Buddha relies on us for the Dharma to continue to develop as a living organism – not a stale Dharma, but a real *Dharmakaya*, a real “body of teaching.”

When I see you walking mindfully, I touch the peace, joy, and deep presence of your being. When you take good care of your brothers and sisters, I recognize the living Dharma in you.

Without understanding there cannot be true love, and without love there cannot be true understanding.

Jesus is not only our Lord, but he is also our Father, our Teacher, our Brother, and our Self. The only place we can touch Jesus and the Kingdom of God is within us.

Every one of us could have been visited by a sage when we were born. The birth of every child is important, no less than the birth of a Buddha. We, too, are a Buddha, a Buddha-to-be, and we continue to be born every minute.

Expecting parents have to be very careful because they carry within them a baby, one who might become a Buddha or a Lord Jesus.

If you have enough spiritual strength, you will give birth to a spiritual child, and through your life and practice, you continue giving birth, even after you die.

We, too, must learn to live in ways that reduce the world's suffering. Suffering is always there, around us and inside us, and we have to find ways that alleviate the suffering and transform it into well-being and peace.

Protestant theologian Paul Tillich describes God as the ground of being. The Buddha is also sometimes described as the ground of being.

For a Buddhist to be attached to any doctrine, even a Buddhist one, is to betray the Buddha. It is not words or concepts that are important. What is important is our insight into the nature of reality and our way of responding to reality.

We must practice living deeply, loving, and acting with charity if we wish to truly honor Jesus.

Many who have neither the way nor the life try to impose on others what they believe to be the way.

When we understand and practice deeply the life and teachings of Buddha or the life and teachings of Jesus, we penetrate the door and enter the abode of the living Buddha and the living Christ, and life eternal presents itself to us.

It is possible to manifest mindfulness, understanding, and love through people of our own time, even ourselves.

When the church manifests understanding, tolerance, and loving-kindness, Jesus is there. Christians have to help Jesus Christ be manifested by their way of life, showing those around them that love, understanding, and tolerance are possible.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Communities of Practice**

... sharing space, sharing the essentials of daily life, observing the same precepts, using only words that contribute harmony, sharing our insights and understanding, and respecting each other's viewpoints.

We do whatever we can to benefit others without seeing ourselves as helpers and the others as the helped. This is the spirit of non-self.

With utmost courage, Jesus taught a gospel of nonviolence. Is the church today practicing the same by its presence and behavior?

## Chapter Six

### A Peaceful Heart

To work for peace, you must have a peaceful heart. To preserve peace, our hearts must be at peace with the world, with our brothers and our sisters. Trying to overcome evil with evil is not the way to make peace.

He said that if you are angry with your brother, you are already in hell. Anger is hell. You only need to kill in your mind and you are already there.

Our enemy is not the other person, no matter what he or she has done.

Educators, legislators, parents, journalists, filmmakers, economists, artists, poor people, rich people, all of us have to discuss the situation and see what we can do.

When you look deeply into your anger, you will see that the person you call your enemy is also suffering. As soon as you see that, the capacity of accepting and having compassion for him is there. The idea of “enemy” vanishes and is replaced by the notion of someone who is suffering and needs your compassion.

When we take sides, we misunderstand the will of God. We have to find the *real causes* for social injustice, and when we do, we will not condemn a certain type of people.

*Nonviolence does not mean non-action. Nonviolence means we act with love and compassion.*

When you are motivated by love and the willingness to help others attain understanding, even self-immolation can be a compassionate act. When Jesus allowed Himself to be crucified, He was acting in the same way, motivated by the desire to wake people up, to restore understanding and compassion, and to save people.

These great women/men all knew that it is the truth that sets us free, and they did everything they could to make the truth known.

If while we practice, we are not aware that the world is suffering, that children are dying of hunger, that social injustice is going on everywhere, we are not practicing mindfulness. “Forgive them, for they know not what they do.” If we practice looking deeply into his situation and the causes of how he came to be the way he is now, and if we visualize ourselves as being born in his condition, we may see that we could have become exactly like him.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **For a Future to Be Possible**

We express our love and care for others by working hard, but if we do not have time for the people we love, if we cannot make ourselves available to them, how can we say that we love them?

Speaking unmindfully or irresponsibly can destroy us, because when we lie, we lose faith in our own beauty and we lose the trust of others. We have to dissolve all prejudices, barriers, and walls and empty ourselves in order to listen and look deeply before we utter even one word.

We have not cultivated the arts of listening and speaking.

Keeping your body healthy is the best way to express your gratitude to the whole cosmos, to all ancestors, and also not to betray future generations.

There is no need to blame or condemn. Those who destroy themselves, their families, and their society are not doing it intentionally. Only understanding and compassion on a collective level can liberate us.

If we love someone, we have to be patient. We can only help a person transform his or her negative seeds if we are patient and kind.

This love is possible when there is the understanding that you are not separate from other beings or the environment.

We can realize peace right in the present moment with each look, smile, word, and action.

Precepts and commandments offer us a wonderful way to live, and we can practice them with joy.

We must glean the best values of all traditions and work together to remove the tensions between traditions in order to give peace a chance.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Taking Refuge**

We may understand this as a kind of fight between light and darkness, but in reality, it is an embrace. Mindfulness, if practiced continuously, will be strong enough to embrace your fear or anger and transform it.

It is by watering the seeds of the awakened qualities that are already in us, by practicing mindfulness, that we touch the living Buddha and the living Christ.

Eventually, you discover that the Pure Land is in your own heart, that you do not need to go to a faraway place. You can set up your own mini-Pure Land, a Sangha of practice, right here, right now.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **The Other Shore**

We have to transcend notions like birth, death, being, and non-being. Reality is free from all notions.

Our daily practice is to increase, to strengthen that power. Dwelling mindfully, we know that each moment is a moment of renewal.

If you practice deeply, one day you will realize that you are free from birth and death, free from many of the dangers that have been assaulting you.

When we extinguish our ideas of more and less, is and is not, we attain the extinction of ideas and notions, which in Buddhism is called nirvana.

If you talk about things you have not experienced, you are wasting your and other people's time.

The world of no-birth and no-death is not something apart from the world of birth and death. In fact, they are identical.

Whenever we see someone who is loving, compassionate, mindful, caring, and understanding, we know that the Holy Spirit is there.

If you know how to touch your ancestors in the ultimate dimension, they will always be there with you. The ultimate dimension is a state of coolness, peace, and joy.

When we touch one thing with deep awareness, we touch everything. Touching the present moment, we realize that the present is made of the past and is creating the future.

Each of us has the capacity to touch nirvana and be free from birth and death, one and many, coming and going.

Once you are capable of touching the water, you will not mind the coming and going of the waves. You are no longer concerned about the birth and the death of the wave. You are no longer afraid. You are no longer upset about the beginning or the end of the wave, or that the wave is higher or lower, more or less beautiful. You are capable of letting these ideas go because you have already touched the water.

## Chapter Ten

### Faith and Practice

Buddhists and Christians know that nirvana or the Kingdom of God is within their hearts. Buddhist sutras speak of Buddha nature as the seed of enlightenment that is already in everyone's consciousness. The Gospels speak of the Kingdom of God as a mustard seed planted in the soil of consciousness. The practices of prayer and meditation help us to touch the most valuable seeds that are within us, and they put us in contact with the ground of our being. Buddhists consider nirvana, or the ultimate dimension of reality, as the ground of being. The original mind, according to Buddhism, is always shining. Afflictions such as craving, anger, doubt, fear, and forgetfulness are what block the light, so the practice is to remove these five hindrances. When the energy of mindfulness is present, transformation takes place. When the energy of the Holy Spirit is within you, understanding, love, peace, and stability are possible. God is within. You are, yet you are not, but God is in you. This is interbeing. This is non-self. But I am afraid that many Christians and many Buddhists do not practice, or if they do, they practice only when they find themselves in difficult situations, and after that, they forget. Or their practice may be superficial. They support churches and temples, organize ceremonies, convert people, do charity work or social work, or take up an apostolic ministry, but do not practice mindfulness or pray while they act. They may devote an hour each day for chanting and liturgy, but after a while, the practice becomes dry and automatic and they do not know how to refresh it. They may believe that they are serving the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, or serving the Trinity and the church, but their practice does not touch the living Buddha or the living Christ.

At the same time, these men and women do not hesitate to align themselves with those in power in order to strengthen the position of their church or community. They build up a self instead of letting go of the ideas of self. Then they look at this self as absolute truth and dismiss all other spiritual traditions as false. This is a very dangerous attitude; it always leads to conflicts and war. Its nature is intolerance.

That is why it is crucial to remember that the practice should not be abandoned after some stability and peace have been attained.

We know very well that our daily practice of mindful living has brought us joy and peace, and so we have faith and confidence in our practice. It is a kind of experiential faith. We know that when we practice walking mindfully, we refresh ourselves, and we feel peace and joy with every step.

Religious experience is inevitably human experience. It has to do with the human consciousness, both individual and collective. In Buddhism, religious practice begins with mindfulness. As the practice deepens and mindfulness becomes more sustained, the practitioner is able to touch, feel, see, and understand more deeply. Understanding makes love and compassion possible, and when love and compassion are present, understanding deepens. The practitioner learns how to practice to maintain mindfulness and help it grow. She knows that while mindfulness is alive, transformation can take place.

But training in mindfulness practice is needed for us to succeed.

The Lord's Prayer shows us that loving God is loving the living beings we see and touch in our daily life. If we can love them, we can love God.

If they really believe that there are valuable elements in each other's tradition and that they can learn from one another, they will also rediscover many valuable aspects of their own tradition through such an encounter. Peace will be a beautiful flower blooming on this field of practice.

## **Going Home - Jesus and Buddha as Brothers**

By Thich Nhat Hanh

### **Chapter One**

#### **The Birth of Understanding**

If we observe things deeply, we will discover that one thing contains all the other things.

Mindfulness is to be aware of everything you do every day. Mindfulness is a kind of light that shines upon all your thoughts, all your feelings, all your actions, and all your words.

There are always some people who are ready to embrace a doctrine, a notion, a dogma, and they miss the real teaching.

To the Buddhist, “To be or not to be” is not the question. The question is whether or not you can transcend these notions.

Why do you have to love your enemy? How can you love your enemy? In the Buddhist teaching, this is very clear. Buddhism teaches that understanding is the ground of love. When you are mindful, you realize that the other person suffers. You see her suffering and suddenly you don’t want her to suffer any more. You know that there are things you can refrain from doing to make her stop suffering, and there are things you can do to bring her relief.

When you begin to see the suffering in the other person, compassion is born, and you no longer consider that person as your enemy, you can love your enemy. The moment you realize that your so-called enemy suffers and you want him to stop suffering, he ceases to be your enemy.

In Buddhism we learn that understanding is the very foundation of love. If understanding is not there, no matter how hard you try, you cannot love.

Your sisters and your brothers also suffer. The moment you see the suffering in them, you stop blaming them, and you stop the suffering in you. If you suffer and if you believe that your suffering is created by the people around you, you have to look again. Most of your suffering comes from the lack of understanding of yourself and others.

In Buddhism, I don’t think that compassion and loving-kindness are practiced for the sake of our individual salvation. The truth taught by the Buddha is that suffering exists. If you touch suffering deeply in yourself and the other person, understanding will arise.

When understanding arises, love and acceptance will also arise, and they will bring the suffering to an end.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Going Home**

Mindful breathing brings you home – it generates the energy of mindfulness in you. Mindfulness is the substance of a Buddha.

There are so many young people who are homeless. They may have a building to live in, but they are homeless in their hearts. That is why the most important practice of our time is to give each person a home. Be a home for them. Each of us has to serve as the home for others. When we look at something or someone, be it a person, a tree, or anything, look at it in such a way that we touch them as part of our home.

The Dharma body isn't given to you by someone else. It is deep within you and it is a matter of discovering it. When you practice walking meditation, you can release your anger and sorrow. You can look more deeply into the reality of things and get rid of all your illusions, cravings, and desires. That means that you have the body of the Dharma within you.

When you know something, you stick to your knowledge. You are not ready to let it go, and this is an obstacle on the path of practice. In Buddhism, knowledge can be seen as an obstacle.

Many people try to accumulate knowledge, and one day they may realize that the knowledge they possess has become an obstacle in their understanding.

When you climb a ladder, unless you abandon the lower step, you will not be able to climb to a higher one. Knowledge is like that. If you are not ready to let go of your knowledge, you cannot get a deeper knowledge of the same thing.

Understanding is a process. It is a living thing. Never claim that you have understood reality completely. As you continue to live deeply each moment of your daily life, your understanding grows as does your faith.

Concentration is the food of understanding. You have to be concentrated for understanding to be possible.

Mindfulness is to be here now. Eating mindfully, walking mindfully, sitting mindfully, and hugging mindfully is where you develop concentration. Because you are concentrated, you are able to understand. If you are able to understand, your faith is strengthened. Mindfulness, energy, diligence.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Let the Child Be Born to Us**

Having the kind of energy that can keep you lucid, loving, and tolerant is very different from having energy that is blind.

In the teaching of the Buddha, faith is made of a substance called insight or direct experience. When a teacher knows something, he or she wants to transmit that to disciples. But she cannot transmit the experience, she can only transmit the idea. The disciple has to work through it himself. The problem is not to communicate the experience in terms of ideas or notions. The issue is how to help the disciple go through the same kind of experience.

Enlightenment, freedom, and transformation happen through direct experience. That is true knowledge, not an intellectual conception of it. Deep understanding of what is there as the object of your perception is true knowledge.

The technique is to remove all notions in order for the table to be possible as a direct experience.

Suppose someone asks you, “What do you believe or think to be the most basic conditions for your happiness?” They may suggest that you reflect a little bit on it and write down on a sheet of paper the basic conditions for your happiness. This is a very wonderful invitation for us to re-examine our notion of happiness. According to the teaching of the Buddha, our notion of happiness may be the obstacle to our happiness. Because of that notion, we may remain unhappy for our entire lives. This is why it is so crucial to remove that notion of happiness, then you have the opportunity to open the door to true happiness, which already exists inside and around us.

But we can always improve our way. Our faith is a living thing, not something static. Our faith is a living thing like a tree or an animal.

True faith is always true faith, but since faith is a living thing, it must grow. If we adopt that kind of behavior and know how to handle our faith and therefore our love, it will not make people suffer.

When we believe something to be the absolute truth, we are closed.

We will destroy each other in the name of faith, in the name of love, just because of the fact that the objects of our faith and of our love are not true insight, are not direct experience of suffering and of happiness; they are just notions and ideas.

We should not start a war and destroy people because of our concepts.

Faith is a power. With the power of faith in you, you become very active. You don't know difficulty or tiredness; you can withstand all kinds of obstacles.

Faith is the energy that brings forth the second faculty – diligence. You are active and you have energy and joy within yourself. When you are diligent in your practice, you develop another kind of energy within yourself called mindfulness – the third faculty.

Mindfulness is to be there, alive in the present moment, body and mind united. It is the capacity of being there in order to live deeply every moment of your daily life. Mindfulness helps you to touch the wonders of life for self-nourishment and healing. It also helps you to embrace and transform your afflictions into joy and freedom.

According to the teaching of Buddha, life is available only in the present moment. Mindfulness is the fruit of your practice when you have the energy of diligence within you.

Insight is the fruit of direct experience. That is why we have said before that your faith is not made of notions and ideas but of a substance called insight or direct experience.

When you begin to understand, when you have been able to free yourself from a notion, that is enlightenment.

If you practice with diligence, you know that you are cultivating that precious energy within you every day, and you know that your understanding, your tolerance, your kindness, and your love depend on that energy.

To me, the Holy Spirit is faith, the Holy Spirit is mindfulness; the Holy Spirit is love. The Holy Spirit is already there within us. If we are able to touch it within ourselves and help it to manifest in us, we can cultivate the Holy Spirit the way we cultivate mindfulness.

And we practice in such a way that Buddha is born every moment of our daily life, that Jesus Christ is born every moment of our daily life – not only on Christmas day, because every day is Christmas day, every minute is a Christmas minute. The child within us is waiting each minute for us to be born again and again.

If you are not peaceful, and happy and strong, how can you expect to help other people to be happy, and strong, and stable?

We learn within Buddhism that the negative is useful in making the positive. It's like the garbage. If you know how to take care of the garbage, you will be able to make flowers and vegetables out of it. Garbage can be made into compost, and compost is essential for flowers and vegetables. So you embrace everything that is in you.

If you have an idea about Father, please be careful. If you are not careful, you can become a dictator.

Please don't worry about tomorrow or yesterday, what you need is only today. If you worry too much, you will suffer. This is the practice of living deeply the present moment.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Seeking the Dharma Body, the Body of Truth**

If you do well in that practice, some day you will come to the understanding that the Buddha is not really another person. The Buddha is within us, because the substance that makes up a Buddha is the energy of mindfulness, of understanding and compassion. If you practice well and you listen to the Buddha, you know that you have the Buddha nature within you. You have the capacity of waking up, of being understanding and compassionate. Therefore, we have made progress and now we are seeking the Buddha from within. The Buddha ceases to be the other. The Buddha can be touched everywhere and especially within yourself.

“Producing the highest mind.” Here it is said very directly that the highest mind is Bodhicitta – producing the mind of love. We know right away that this is not just a formula to recite or an attempt to seek refuge or protection. It is more than that. There is protection, of course, but this is the highest kind of protection. When you realize that you have the Buddha nature in you, when you know that the energy of the mind of love is in you, then you become a Bodhisattva and you can confront any kind of danger or difficulty.

The Dharma is to be practiced. A mere declaration does not help very much. You have to live up to that kind of statement that you make.

If in the Buddhist tradition every one of us has the task of Sangha-building, then in the Catholic Church, in the Protestant church, in the Orthodox Church everyone has also the task of Church-building. Church-building does not mean just organizing. Church-building means leading your life in such a way that the Church becomes more and more tolerant, understanding, and compassionate so that every time the people go to the Church they can touch the Holy Spirit. This is an invitation for all of us because this is our practice as Buddhists and as non-Buddhists; it can be applied to every spiritual tradition.

It is our task to build a Sangha, to build a church in such a way that the Holy Spirit, that mindfulness, should prevail so that tolerance becomes possible and understanding becomes possible in order to make compassion possible. This you practice for peace and you practice for the future of our children and grandchildren.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Meaning of Love**

The wave does not have to die in order to become water; it is water right now, right here.

The Kingdom of God is the same; it is not situated in space and time. You do not have to die in order to enter the Kingdom of God; in fact you are already in it now and here. The only thing is that you don't know that.

That is the true meaning of loving God with all your might. You do not reserve for that object of your love only a few minutes or one hour a day. You have to devote twenty-four hours to touching the Kingdom of God, to touching the ultimate dimension that is deep within you. You can only love your God with all your might when you are really a full-time student or practitioner.

Touching deeply the leaf or a wave or a person, you will touch the nature of the interconnectedness of everything. You will touch the nature of impermanence, of non-self, of interbeing. By touching the nature of interbeing, no self, you are touching the ultimate, you are touching God and nirvana. We have the distinction between the ultimate dimension and the historical dimension, but in fact the two dimensions are just together. There is an illusion to be removed.

This is the interbeing nature of happiness and suffering. There is an illusion to be removed – that happiness can be without suffering, that well-being can be without ill-being, that right can be without left.

The joy to be alive can be there only when you know what dying is.

Love is a practice and unless you know what suffering is, you are not motivated to practice compassion, love, and understanding.

## Chapter Six

### Jesus and Buddha as Brothers

In my country we had suffered a lot because missionaries had tried to pull us out of our own traditions. They said we could only be saved by giving up our ancestral traditions, our Buddhist practices. We don't want to do the same thing to our friends.

A tree without roots cannot survive. A person without roots cannot survive either.

To be able to help a hungry soul, you have first to earn his or her trust, because hungry souls are suspicious of everything. They have not seen anything truly beautiful, good, and true. And they suspect you and what you want to offer. They are hungry, but they do not have the capacity to receive and to ingest, even if you have the right food to offer them, even if you have something beautiful, true, and good to offer them.

You have to eat in such a way that love, peace, and stability are possible, that you are a support to others. We have to eat in such a way that compassion is nourished within our hearts.

The energy of the Buddha is the energy of mindfulness, the energy of peace, the energy of concentration and wisdom.

Where mindfulness is, there is true presence. Where mindfulness is, there is the capacity to understand. You have the capacity to accept, to become compassionate, to love, and therefore to touch the energy of mindfulness so that it may become manifest in you.

In his own tradition, people talk a little too much about the teaching. People have gone astray by inventing too many things and organizing too much. They lose the true essence of the Dharma.

It is possible, according to Jesus and according to the Buddha, that we can restore our peace. We can restore our hope. This peace and solidity, that hope, is for those we love, for those who live all around us. Every step you make in the direction of peace, every smile that you produce, and every loving look that you have inspires and helps the people around you to have faith in the future.

# **REAL LOVE – The Truth About Finding Unconditional Love & Fulfilling Relationships**

By Greg Baer, MD

## **Chapter One**

### **The Missing Ingredient: What Relationships Really Need**

Real Love is unconditionally caring about the happiness of another person.

Genuine happiness is a profound and lasting sense of peace, and fulfillment that deeply satisfies and enlarges the soul.

With Real Love, nothing else matters, without it, nothing else is enough.

Fortunately, there are two reliable signs that love is not genuine: **disappointment** and **anger**.

Giving or withholding acceptance based on another person's behavior is the essence of conditional love, and nearly all of us were loved that way as children.

As a result, no matter how much conditional love we receive, we still feel empty, alone, and miserable.

And although we like to believe otherwise, because we have received conditional love from others all our lives, that's what we tend to give to those around us. We naturally pass on what we were given.

If you're unhappy, don't look to your partner for the cause. You're unhappy because you don't feel unconditionally loved yourself and because you're not sufficiently unconditionally loving toward others.

We often need to see that we were not unconditionally loved in the past, not so we can blame our parents or any particular person; but so we can stop blaming the partners we have now and begin to find the Real Love we need to create the genuine happiness we all want.

People who don't feel unconditionally loved are desperate and will do almost anything to eliminate the pain of their emptiness.

## Chapter Two

### **Getting and Protecting: The Many Faces of Imitation Love**

When we don't feel unconditionally loved, our need for praise is unbounded, and much of that need is filled - however briefly - when other people find us sexually desirable.

In fact, we often do things for people just so we can receive their gratitude. We prove that every time we're disappointed and even angry on the occasions when we *don't* receive an expression of appreciation for something we've done for someone else.

But people who feel unconditionally loving don't require gratitude for the things they do. Their concern is for the happiness of other people.

The pursuit of pleasure is a way to distract ourselves from the emptiness and pain that always accompany a lack of Real Love.

If we can't have genuine acceptance, we can at least do everything in our power to avoid more disapproval. One way to minimize the risk of criticism and pain is to avoid doing anything unfamiliar. So we stay in the same boring, dead-end jobs, attempt to learn nothing new, and continue in stagnant, unrewarding - but predictable - relationships.

If Imitation Love leaves us feeling empty and miserable, why do we keep pursuing it? Because living without unconditional love and feeling alone are unbearable, and we'll do almost *anything* to get rid of those feelings, however superficial and temporary the relief might be.

Victims are always saying variations on the following three sentences: (1) Look what you did *to* me (2) Look what you should have done *for* me (and didn't). (3) It's not my fault. Victims have excuses for everything and blame everyone but themselves for their own mistakes and unhappiness. We've all acted like a victim at some time in our life. Whenever we're confronted with a mistake we've made and say, "I couldn't help it," we're acting like a victim.

It's a huge waste of time, energy, and happiness to wallow in excessive guilt when we make mistakes. How much more productive it is to simply see our mistakes clearly and learn from them.

Until a child - or an adult - is utterly convinced that he or she is loved unconditionally, even a small amount of doubt or fear is sufficient to destroy the effect of many moments of acceptance and safety.

Similarly, people who are raised with insufficient Real Love don't *choose* to be empty and afraid, but they are. And in that condition, they *will* choose Getting and Protecting Behaviors, because they're emotionally and spiritually starving, and they *cannot* be as loving or happy as those who have received sufficient unconditional love all their lives. Fortunately, however, we can all learn to change our feelings and behaviors. Helping us to do that is my entire purpose for writing this book.

To be more loving toward people, even when we don't feel sufficiently loved ourselves, can contribute significantly to the process of feeling loved and being loving.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Being Seen and Getting Loved**

Real Love, we can look for two characteristics that reliably identify it:

- (1) The absence of Getting and Protecting Behaviors.
- (2) The absence of disappointment, anger, and fear.

The most fundamental principle of all relationships is the Law of Choice, which states that everyone has the right to choose what he or she says and does.

A relationship is the natural result of people making independent choices. Remember, as I said earlier in the chapter, that a wise woman/man is anyone who feels sufficiently loved in a given moment that he or she is capable of accepting and loving us when he sees the truth about us.

You only get to make choices that involve your own behavior.

Trying to change another person is manipulative, controlling, and arrogant, and it proves that we're primarily concerned with our own happiness, not our partner's.

Anything we get as a result of manipulation cannot be felt as Real Love and is therefore worthless.

But perhaps the worst consequence of controlling others is that we can't learn to be loving, which is the greatest joy of all. We can't be happy while we're selfishly manipulating people.

And so, while we may avoid the pitfall of direct manipulation, we can still destroy our relationships if we crush our partners under the burden of expectations.

Expectations cannot be justified either by what we need or by what we have done for others. The Law of Expectations, which follows naturally from the Law of Choice, states that *we never have the right to expect that another person will do anything for us.*

Whenever we expect another person to change in any way, we are, in effect, demanding that he or she love us - care about us - and make us happy.

We can have expectations about many things, *but we never have the right to expect someone to love us or make us happy, even when they promise to do so* - as in the case of wedding vows. When we *expect* love, anything we receive can only feel like an order that was filled, or something that we paid for.

In all unhappy relationships, the real cause of unhappiness is a lack of unconditional love; controlling and expectations are just symptoms of that cause.

And so, no matter what our partner does, we can never justify being angry - the consequences of anger are just too severe. Anger is always wrong.

The truth and Real Love can never be separated.

But as we begin to feel unconditionally loved, we begin to see people without the blinding effects of emptiness and fear, and then all human beings become beautiful to us and easy to accept just as they are.

Anger is always a choice, not something other people “make” us feel.

We need to focus on taking our own steps toward feeling loved and being loved.

## Chapter Four

### **Taking the Leap of Faith: Everyday Wise People and How to Find Them**

If you're unhappy in a relationship, you're always wrong.

Some people seem to find it impossible to admit being wrong. Being right is a protective habit they will not give up. But such people aren't bad, they're just afraid and angry.

These people need to understand that; even though their emptiness began in childhood, through no fault of their own, what they do about it now is their responsibility.

If you're unhappy in a relationship, you're always wrong. As long as you focus on being right, you're wasting your time, effort, and chance for happiness.

We can't feel loved if we manipulate people in any way.

With faith, remembering that *one* person loves you can outweigh the effect of a thousand people criticizing you.

I don't know anyone who would eat with pigs out of a trough in a muddy barnyard if he knew that a well-prepared meal was available on a table in the clean house - do you? And that's because *we really do tend to make the best choice we can see.*

When we're not being loving, it's because we simply don't see the availability of that choice. We haven't been taught *how* to be loving. We're incapable of doing what we've never been taught, and we can't give what we've never received.

“Placing blame is useless. I'm talking about how you can move forward, be happier, and change your relationship.”

“Trust is not earned. It is given as a gift.”

A lack of faith in other people means that we remain doubtful and fearful, and that we continue to protect ourselves. And in that condition, loving relationships are impossible.

Faith is not a feeling. It's not wishing or hoping. It's a choice we make. With faith, we choose to believe something is true and then *behave* as though it were.

Most of us cannot talk about being unhappy without blaming our partners.

All he ever wanted was for me to love him no matter what he did, and I haven't done that. When he screws up, I get irritated at him, and then he can see that I *don't* love him unconditionally.

If we have not received enough unconditional love, feeling afraid and angry is *unavoidable*.

Real love is *freely* given and received. Expectations ruin the possibility of feeling Real Love. You will change your relationships and your happiness dramatically if you can just stop insisting that any one person accept or love you. *Simply tell the truth about yourself and wait to be loved by whoever is capable of loving you unconditionally.*

Every time we're angry, we're really just protecting ourselves from something we're afraid of. Usually the thing we're afraid of is not feeling loved.

“I don't forget the things I *want* to remember - I never forget to watch the Super Bowl.”

Any time we decide to tell other people the truth about ourselves, we're making a decision to stop using our Getting and Protecting Behaviors; and we greatly accelerate our ability to feel Real Love. It's a wise decision we're all capable of making.

## Chapter Five

### **The Effect of Real Love: Like Money in the Bank**

For example, when we were young, our parents and a few others played a very large role in determining our view of the entire world, and if we didn't receive sufficient Real Love from them - I offer no *blaming* here, only an *understanding* - we learned to react to everyone else with Getting and Protecting Behaviors, usually for the rest of our lives.

Sufficient Real Love eliminates our emptiness and fear from both the past and present.

We don't need to feel loved by the people from our past who once failed to love us. We just need to know that *we are loved by someone*.

When you feel Real Love from just *one* person, that love gives you greater strength to interact with *everyone* else in your life.

Other people hurt us only because they themselves are drowning and doing what it takes to protect themselves and fill their own emptiness.

But victims need to avoid making their wounds the focus of their lives.

It takes more than a little love to eliminate the emptiness and fear of a lifetime.

We *must* get loved ourselves before we can love anyone else, and the process of feeling loved begins with telling the truth about ourselves to people who are capable of accepting and loving us.

I therefore recommend that you choose to talk to wise people for whom you will not feel a sexual attraction. It's very difficult for you to feel Real Love from someone when you're manipulating him or her for sexual attention, and you don't want to do anything that will interfere with your fidelity toward your committed partner. In addition, I suggest that you talk with your partner about your intentions to tell the truth about yourself with others.

We learn to be loving in the same way we learn anything else - we practice, and the progress is gradual. But when we're not grateful for the small steps people take, we don't see their progress, which guarantees that we'll continue to be disappointed and unhappy. Being ungrateful is a natural result of having expectations.

Gratitude is not a trick of positive thinking. Gratitude is a *choice* we make to simply acknowledge the truth about what we have, which greatly amplifies our enjoyment of everything we receive.

Sadly, most of us learned a form of gratitude that can actually interfere with happiness. From childhood, we were taught to be grateful *to* the people who did things for us. If we failed to express our gratitude when people gave us an ice cream cone or birthday gift, for example, some adult usually admonished, "Now, what do you say?" In effect, we were forced to say thank-you to the people who gave us anything.

Regrettably, that approach usually taught us unfortunate lessons, both as the receiver of those "gifts" and later when we gave them. When we were pressured to be grateful, we didn't experience feelings of love and happiness; what we felt was a sense of obligation.

## Chapter Six

### **Sharing Your Fortune: The Power of Loving Others**

The joy of being loved is indescribable, but the joy of unconditionally loving others is even greater.

## Loved: We Can't Give What We Don't Have

We can't love other people unconditionally until we've felt unconditionally loved ourselves. We can't give what we don't have.

We also need to understand that loving other people usually does not involve telling them the truth about themselves, as Michelle was trying to do. Loving others is usually demonstrated by the unspoken acceptance or quiet acts of kindness.

We see people clearly, when we see them as they really are - with their needs, fears, flaws, and strengths - instead of seeing what we want from them or fear from them. And we must see people clearly before we can love them unconditionally.

When we don't feel loved ourselves - when we're empty and afraid - we can't see people clearly; we can only see what they might do to us or for us. Our vision is impaired, and that condition inevitably leads to expectations, disappointment, and intolerance.

While we're experiencing the unbearable pain of feeling unloved, we're blind to other people's needs and feel justified in expecting them to give us whatever we think we need to alleviate our discomfort. As a result, we simply cannot tolerate anyone who will not help us. But most of the people around us don't feel unconditionally loved either; so they're naturally focused entirely on filling their own needs. In that condition, they're incapable of giving us the happiness we expect, and they'll even do things that inconvenience and hurt us. Our disappointment in others - and conflict with them - is therefore guaranteed.

Another effect of being unable to see people clearly is that they effectively disappear. When we see them only as objects that either serve or hurt us, who they really are does not exist for us. Obviously, we are then alone, the very condition we fear the most.

*Seeing clearly is, therefore, the natural result of eliminating emptiness and fear with Real Love.*

When we see people without distortion, we cease to feel threatened and alone. We realize that all the “unattractive” behaviors of human beings - attacking, accusing, manipulating, selfishness, anger, and so on - are just reactions to their own emptiness and fear. When we feel loved, we no longer find people “ugly” when they use their Getting and Protective Behaviors - we see that they’re just drowning and trying to survive.

The world is a much more beautiful place when we see it clearly; as are the people who live in it.

There are only two reasons we don’t accept people as they are:

1. We want something from them and don’t get it. When we feel unloved, we cannot accept anyone who fails to give us what we want.
2. We’re afraid of them because they’re criticizing, mocking, or avoiding us - or because they might do those things. How can we possibly accept someone we’re afraid of?

It’s the lack of Real Love in our individual lives that causes all the anger, racism, and contention in the world.

We generally don't accept people as they are. We say we do. We wish we did. We know we should. But we don't, and we prove that with our behavior.

Disappointment is so common among people that we believe it's a normal and unavoidable reaction to not getting what we want. We're disappointed if other drivers aren't courteous, if our boss isn't appreciative, if our spouse isn't cooperative and loving, if our children aren't sufficiently grateful, and so on. What we need to understand is that disappointment is absolute proof that we don't accept people and things the way they are; and it's always selfish and wrong.

Anger is a tiny step beyond disappointment, and is always selfish and unloving. As long as we feel angry, we can't have a loving relationship with anyone. Disappointment and anger are selfish. You can't be genuinely loving toward your partner if you're disappointed or angry with him or her. When we attempt to control our partner's behavior, we demonstrate in yet another way that we don't accept him or her.

When we genuinely accept other people, our behavior changes in any number of ways. For example, when people make mistakes that inconvenience us, we almost always expect them to apologize, and then we generously consider whether or not we'll bless them with our forgiveness. But if you truly accept someone, why would you ever require him to apologize to you for making the mistakes that are unavoidable in the process of learning? You learned from making mistakes, and so will your partner. People really do have the right to make their own choices, including the ones that inconvenience *you*. Demanding an apology is therefore selfish and arrogant, and in any case it will make *you* unhappy.

“We all make mistakes. It’s the human condition. It’s unavoidable. So do you. When you get angry, whether you realize it or not, you’re saying that people - in this case a lot of people - have dared to commit the crime of inconveniencing Your Royal Highness. And you expect some kind of apology from them. You want them to stop being who they are - with all their inconvenient flaws - and make things right with *you*.”

Our relationships will become much happier when we decide not to require apologies from our partners, but instead to apologize ourselves (which really means to tell the truth about our mistakes) and to quickly forgive (which really means to accept) our partners. By learning to give your partner the gift of your acceptance you’ll bring great joy into your own life, and you’ll experience an enormous change in your relationship.

It’s quite common for people - especially parents - to say “I love you, but I’m angry at your behavior.” *This is a lie* we use to justify our anger. When we genuinely accept someone, we never feel disappointment or anger as we describe their mistakes. When people feel unconditionally loved, *they don’t get angry*.

When you love *unconditionally*, you don’t expect anything in return.

I’ve heard you play the piano, and you do it beautifully. But when you were a child, didn’t you make lots of mistakes while you were practicing?

“Sure,” said Sandra.

“And was it stupid of you to make those mistakes?”

Sandra finally smiled, “No, Everybody makes mistakes when they’re learning to play.”

“And everybody makes mistakes when they’re learning to love people, too.”

In the beginning, we all need to feel the love of people who are willing to stay with us while we learn to tell the truth and feel their love. We need to be loved while we have nothing to give in return, and while we still use Getting and Protecting Behaviors. *Our partners need the same experience.* Are we willing sometimes to be the ones who give that to them? Are we willing to love a partner who gives us little or nothing in return? If not, we’ll never learn to be loving and will give up the possibility of having loving relationships.

For that reason, I can’t propose strongly enough that the fullest measure of happiness in life comes from sharing our love with others at every opportunity.

As you make conscious decisions to share your love with others, you’ll experience a miraculous increase in the Real Love you feel, even if those whom you love don’t return the love you give.

Giving Real Love is relatively effortless, when compared with the enormous exertion associated with lying, attacking people, acting like a victim, and otherwise manipulating people.

## Chapter Seven

### Playing a Beautiful Duet: The Joys of Mutually Loving Relationships

Mutually loving relationships develop only *after* many acts of faith. If you want such a relationship, you must be willing to tell the truth about yourself to your partner even on the many occasions when you're not sure he or she is being loving.

If we can't provide the unconditional acceptance people need while they hear the truth about themselves, we should be quiet.

Do not consider telling other people the truth about themselves unless you are unconditionally loving *and* they are feeling loved enough to hear what you are saying.

In a loving relationship, you can always make a request, but when you're disappointed and angry if you don't get what you "requested", you demonstrate that you were really making a demand.

If we make vague requests, or if we drop nebulous hints here and there, we shouldn't be surprised when we don't get what we want. Be clear about telling your partner what you want. Be certain you feel loved and loving when you make your requests. And then remember that your partner does not *have* to agree to your requests in order to express his or her love for you.

We *cannot* be happy if we keep score with our partners.

## Chapter Eight

### Real Love in All Our Relationship: Spouses, Children, Friends and Co-workers

We tend to fall in love with someone because that person makes *us* feel good. That is not Real Love.

“I haven’t had sex with Paula for all those months, either,” I said, “but *I’m* not angry at her.”

Bruce looked rather surprised. “But that’s different. She’s my wife!”

“So what?”

“But she’s supposed to have sex with me. We’re married!”

“You believe that because you’re married to Paula, she’s *obligated* to have sex with you - how much fun do you think that is for her? How would *you* like to be with someone who *forced* you to be with them and do things for them? You can’t have a loving relationship with Paula as long as you keep demanding things from her - and I don’t mean just sex, I mean *anything*.”

Most of us get married so we can feel justified in demanding that our partner make us happy.

In the absence of Real Love, sex can become a powerful and dangerous source of Imitation Love, and many of us will do almost anything to get it.

There is nothing that will make you more sexually appealing to your partner than if he or she knows you genuinely care about his or her happiness.

“That’s because when people feel loved, they lose their need to protect themselves with anger. The more you do this - talk to people who can see you and accept you- the easier it will be for you to be loving toward Matt.”

When people feel unconditionally loved, most sexual dysfunction disappears.

Good parenting is not a technique but a natural result of unconditionally loving and teaching our children.

*No parent ever has the right to expect love from a child.* It’s the responsibility of parents to teach and love their children, not the other way around.

When our children are angry, rebellious, or otherwise difficult, they’re reacting to insufficient Real Love in their lives, and we parents always have a major responsibility for that.

There is no job in the world more important than being a parent, but our behavior testifies that we don’t believe that.

“Amazing; I really do have a choice. When I remember that I’m loved, I don’t feel angry at anyone. I like having a choice instead of always getting angry and feeling miserable.”

I suggest that most problems in the workplace do not result from a lack of information, insufficient technology, or poor management techniques but from a lack of Real Love.

As we feel Real Love of other human beings, we naturally strengthen our connection to God, the source of perfect and infinite love.

## Chapter Nine

### **Dealing with Obstacles on the Path to Real Love: Disappointment, Anger, and Getting and Protecting Behaviors**

It's possible to disagree without becoming involved in a conflict, and it's the conflict, not the disagreement, that harms relationships.

A single hateful argument can neutralize the effect of a hundred words of acceptance. Experts often propose ways to “manage” those conflicts, but I suggest that we not settle for the superficial and temporary effect of such techniques and learn instead to *eliminate* as much conflict as possible by filling our lives with unconditional love and genuine happiness.

We create conflict, on the other hand, when we demand that other people respond to us in any particular way.

In any relationship, there will always be simple differences or disagreements, but Real Love eliminates the disappointment and anger that turn disagreements into conflicts.

Controlling other people is selfish and wrong. We're never justified in demanding that our partners do what we want - not when we badly need it, not when they have more than enough to give, and not even when they're married to us.

Every time you find yourself becoming irritated or unhappy, take one or more of the following steps. They can be taken in any order and repeated many times.

- Be quiet
- Be wrong
- Feel loved
- Get loved
- Be loving

When you're angry, you will not say anything loving or productive, and therefore, when you're angry, *do not speak*.

So any time you feel disappointment or anger, repeat, "*If I'm disappointed or angry, I'm wrong.*" and you won't be able to maintain those feelings for long.

*Anger is a sure sign to us that we cannot see our partner clearly.* When we're angry, we're blind - we are *wrong*. It is most unwise to continue speaking in that condition.

When you're angry, you're unloving, blind, trying to control your partner, and expecting him or her to make you happy. You couldn't be more wrong.

When we're absolutely certain that we're loved - when we have that one thing that matters most in all the world - the disagreements and anger of other people are no longer threatening to us. With Real Love, we don't become afraid and have no *need* to get angry.

Notice that Janet's anger - and her conflict with her boss - was not resolved by some clever technique of communication, it was resolved as Janet took all four of the steps we've discussed thus far. First, she exercised self-control and *kept quiet*. She then *remembered that she was loved* well enough to call her wise friend and tell the truth about herself - that she was unloving and afraid. And, as she did that, she took the step of *being wrong* by speaking a variation of the words "If I'm angry, I'm wrong," thereby telling the truth about herself and creating an opportunity to *feel unconditionally loved*.

When you're angry at your partner, you may not feel like doing something loving for him or her. But if you do it anyway, you'll create an opportunity for *both* of you to feel the miracle of Real Love in your lives.

When we tell people the truth without being unconditionally loving, or when they're not capable of hearing the truth about themselves, we can only hurt them, and we need to keep our observations to ourselves.

We can learn how to lovingly help people see the truth about their lies, and one way to do that is to tell them the truth about ourselves. Obviously the first requirement is that we ourselves feel loved.

As we tell the truth about ourselves, we give others the courage to do the same and the opportunity to feel unconditionally loved by us.

People are only angry because they're empty and afraid. When we defend ourselves, they feel even more afraid and use their Protecting Behaviors more vigorously. And on it goes. We can, however, stop the vicious cycle simply by telling the truth about ourselves, because when one or both parties in a disagreement admit to being wrong, it's difficult to continue the argument. And as we practice telling the truth and feeling loved, we can actually be loving toward the people who are attacking us.

When we feel loved, we can see unloving criticism for what it is - an attempt by a frightened person to protect himself from further emptiness and fear.

Victimhood is the result of our belief that other people have an obligation to make choices that will benefit us. It's a combination of anger (that we're not getting as much as we think we should) and fear (that we'll be hurt).

It's difficult to have a relationship with a victim, because victims see everyone else in the world as doing things *to* them or *for* them.

They see people as *objects* that will either make them happy or hurt them. As a result, they can't have relationships at all, because you can't have a relationship with an object.

We run to protect ourselves. When we withdraw physically and emotionally from people, we're running. When we drink alcohol and take drugs, we're running.

We can, however, care unconditionally about another person's happiness and still choose not to spend time with him or her. Joanne discovered this about the relationship she had with two friends. After learning to tell the truth about herself, Joanne began to feel loved and slowly gained the ability to love other people, but two of her longtime friends wanted nothing to do with telling the truth. They constantly talked about people behind their backs, got angry, acted like victims, and manipulated people for approval. When they did those things with Joanne, who was still unfamiliar with feeling and giving Real Love, she forgot how loved she felt with the wise men and women she found, and she became empty and afraid. Then, of course, she resumed using Getting and Protective Behaviors of her own. When she finally realized that the time she was spending with these friends was making it difficult for her to remain happy, she stopped associating with them. She continued to love them - she genuinely cared about their happiness - but she also knew that her spending time with them was not benefiting either her or them.

# My Grandfather's Blessings

By Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

## Introduction

My grandfather would not have used these words. He would have said that we need to remember to bless the life around us and the life within us. He would have said when we remember we can bless life, we can repair the world.

According to the Kabbalah, at some point in the beginning of things, the Holy was broken up into countless sparks, which were scattered throughout the universe. There is a god spark in everyone and in everything, a sort of diaspora of goodness. God's immanent presence among us is encountered daily in the most simple, humble, and ordinary ways. The Kabbalah teaches that the Holy may speak to you from its many hidden places at any time.

A moment of mindfulness – an acknowledgement that holiness has been met in the midst of ordinary life.

That far more often we serve by who we are and not what we know.

*NAMASTE*: I see the divine spark within you.

When we bless someone, we touch the unborn goodness in them and wish it well.

Everyone in the world matters, and so do their blessings. When we bless others, we offer them refuge from an indifferent world.

Those who bless and serve life find a place of belonging and strength, a refuge from living in ways that are meaningless and closer to our authentic selves. When people are blessed they discover that their lives matter, that there is something in them worthy of blessing. And when you bless others, you may discover this same thing is true about yourself.

Unlike helping and fixing and rescuing, service is mutual.

The Kabbalah speaks of our collective human task as Tikkun Olam; we sustain and restore the world.

Without compassion, the world cannot continue. Our compassion blesses and sustains the world.

Perhaps our only refuge is in the goodness of each other.

What remains is to understand that the value of any human life is limited unless there is something in it that stands for the benefit of others and the benefit of life itself.

The blessing we will receive when we have remembered how to bless life again may be nothing less than life itself.

Cancer forces people so deeply into their own vulnerability that they have touched the place of knowing that we hold such vulnerability in common. Once this is seen, there is no way one cannot respond.

But when she spoke to me I suddenly knew that in this I could do nothing wrong: This had struck me to a place of such depth that everything I did or said or thought or felt in response was completely true.

The thirty-seven years that I have been a physician have shown me that any of the stuff of our lives – our joys, our failures, our loves our losses, even our sickness – can become the stuff of service. I have seen people use anything to bless life. There is such a simple greatness in us all that nothing need be wasted.

The power to repair the world is already in you. When someone blesses you, it reminds you a little – untying the knots of belief and fear and self-doubt that have separated you from your own goodness. Freeing you to bless and receive blessings from everything around you.

## **Chapter One**

### **Receiving Your Blessings**

Or we may become so caught up in what is missing in the world that we allow our hearts to break. There are many ways to feel empty in the midst of our blessings.

We can bless others only when we feel blessed ourselves. Blessing life may be more about learning how to celebrate life than learning how to fix life.

It may require an appreciation of life as it is and mean developing an eye for joy.

Most important, it requires the humility to know that we are not in this task of restoring the world alone.

Put your own mask on first before you try to help the person next to you. Service is based on the premise that all life is worthy of our support and commitment.

Perhaps the wisdom lies in engaging the life you have been given as fully and courageously as possible and not letting go until you find the unknown blessing that is in everything.

It is only recently that illness and healing have been defined in terms of the body. At the beginnings of medicine, the shamans, or medicine men/women, defined illness not in terms of pathology but in terms of the soul. According to these ancients, illness was “soul loss,” a loss of direction, purpose, meaning, mystery, and awe. Healing involved not only the recovery of the body but the recovery of the soul.

The language of the soul is meaning.

Every great loss demands that we choose life again. We need to grieve in order to do this. The pain we have not grieved over will always stand between us and life. When we don't grieve, a part of us becomes caught in the past.

An elderly patient who had outlived his entire family once told me that all we get to keep are our memories. Perhaps the only way we get to keep anything may be to use it up.

“Perhaps we only *really* have as much as we can love,” she said.

But when we do not live coherently with ourselves, something begins to erode in us. We may survive, but we will not be whole or fully alive.

Perhaps losing integrity with yourself is the greatest stress of all, far more hurtful to us than competition, time pressure, or lack of respect.

Integrity is an ongoing process, a dynamic happening over time that requires our ongoing attention.

Somewhere deep inside there is a sound that is mine alone, and I struggle daily to hear it and tune my life to it.

Deep inside, our integrity sings to us whether we are listening or not. It is a note that only we can hear. Eventually, when life makes us ready to listen, it will help us to find our way home.

It is really surprising how easy it is to forget that every life matters, that we are each one of a kind and worthy of unconditional love.

As the crowd flowed past us on either side, she told me that every one of the people around us had a secret wisdom; each of them knew something more about how to live, about being happy, about loving than I did.

Life has an elegance that far exceeds anything we might devise. Perhaps the wisdom lies in knowing when to sit back and wait for it to unfold. Too hasty an activism may lead to lesser outcomes and, more important, may cause us to trust ourselves rather than learning to trust life.

He told me that *L'Chiam!* meant that no matter what difficulty life brings, no matter how hard or painful or unfair life is, life is holy and worthy of celebration. “Even the wine is sweet to remind us that life itself is a blessing.”

## **Chapter Two**

### **Becoming a Blessing**

There is a seed of a greater wholeness in everyone.

An acorn makes no sense unless we know that woven into the way it is made, there is something waiting to unfold that knows how to become an oak tree.

There is a natural yearning toward wholeness and wisdom in us all as well. This varies in strength from person to person. It may be quite conscious in some and deeply buried in others; it may form the focus of one life and lie on the periphery of another, but it is always there. Wholeness is a basic human need.

According to those who have returned from a near-death experience, we are all here to grow in wisdom and learn how to love better.

As we each do this in our own ways, we slowly become a blessing to those around us and a light in the world.

The important thing was the blessing of having someone to love.

...I know that if I listen attentively to someone, to their essential self, their soul, as it were, I often find that at the deepest, most unconscious level, they can sense the direction of their own healing and wholeness.

The possibility within all human relationships: It says that there is a way of relating to others such that one deliberately listens for the hidden beauty in them. The place of their beauty is often the place of their greatest integrity. When you listen, the integrity and wholeness in others moves closer. Your attention strengthens it and makes it easier for them to hear it in themselves. In your presence, they can more easily inhabit that in them which is beyond their limitations, a place of greater freedom and sanctuary. Eventually they may be able to live there.

It has been my experience that presence is a more powerful catalyst for change than analysis and that we can know beyond doubt things we can never understand.

Perhaps what is needed is not only to learn good medicine but to become good medicine. As a parent. A friend or a doctor. Sometimes just being in someone's presence is strong medicine.

“There is in life suffering so unspeakable, a vulnerability so extreme that it goes far beyond words, beyond explanation and even beyond healing. In the face of such suffering all we can do is bear witness so no one need suffer alone.”

Perhaps a willingness to face such shared vulnerability gives us the capacity to repair the world. Those who find the courage to share a common humanity may find they can bless anyone, anywhere.

Blessing life offers us a certain immortality. Our love outlives us and strengthens others, even after we ourselves are gone.

“Death is the end of a lifetime, not the end of a relationship.” Mitch Albom in *Tuesdays With Morrie*.

When we have the freedom to grieve, loss often turns naturally into compassion.

Grief is the way that loss heals.

What surprised me today? What moved me or touched me today? What inspired me today?

Often finding meaning is not about doing things differently; it is about seeing familiar things in new ways. Perhaps it is only by those who speak the language of meaning, who have remembered how to see with the heart, that life is ever deeply known or served.

Karma yoga, the way of action: living in such a way that one’s life becomes one’s practice.

When God says ‘*LET THERE BE LIGHT,*’ he is speaking to us personally, Neshume-le. He is telling us what is possible, how we might choose to live. God has not only given us the chance to carry the light, he has made it possible for us to kindle and strengthen the light in one another, passing the light along.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Finding Strength, Taking Refuge**

Perhaps finding the right protection is the first responsibility of anyone hoping to make a difference in this world. Caring deeply makes us vulnerable. You cannot move things forward without exposure and involvement, without risk and process and criticism. Those who wish to change things may face disappointment, loss, or even ridicule. If you are ahead of your time, people laugh as often as they applaud, and being there first is usually lonely. Right protection is something within rather than something between us and the world, more about finding a place of refuge and strength than finding a hiding place.

Hiding from suffering only makes us more afraid.

A pearl might be thought of as an oyster's response to its suffering.

Something in us can transform such suffering into wisdom. First we experience everything. Then one by one we let things go, the anger, the blame, the sense of injustice, and finally even the pain itself, until all we have left is a deeper sense of the value of life and a greater capacity to live it.

If, as Ram Dass suggests, life is the ultimate spiritual teacher, we cannot learn unless we attend school. This usually means allowing ourselves to be touched by life, to participate in it. We learn by experience. The unexperienced life does not teach anybody anything. There are no spiritual shortcuts.

Many people have become emotional couch potatoes because they do not know that they can heal their hearts.

Unless we learn to grieve, we may need to live life at a distance in order to protect ourselves from pain. We may not be able to risk having anything that really matters to us or allow ourselves to be touched, to be intimate, to care or be cared about. Untouched, we will suffer anyway. We just will not be transformed by our suffering. Grieving may be one of the most fundamental of life skills. It is the way that the heart can heal from loss and go on to love again and grow wise. If it were up to me, it would be taught in kindergarten, right up there with taking turns and sharing.

After more than thirty-five years as a physician, I have found at last that it is possible to be a professional and live from the heart.

The heart has the power to transform experience. No matter what we do, finding fulfillment may require learning to cultivate the heart and its capacity for meaning in the same way that we are now taught to pursue knowledge or expertise.

All that she needed in order to serve was the courage of her vulnerability.

When we strengthen the life in others we transcend time, and those whose lives we have once blessed are strengthened by us still.

If you carry someone else's fear and live by someone else's values, you may find that you have lived their lives.

Clear: free from obstruction; free from guilt; free from blame; free from confusion; free from entanglement; free from limitation; free from debt; free from impurities; free from suspicion; free from illusion; free from doubt; free from uncertainty; free from ambiguity; and so on. And, of course, its ultimate meaning, which is “able to serve perfectly in the passage of light.”

Someone else knew, someone else cared, and because of this I found I had the courage to deal with whatever was going to happen.

Taking refuge does not mean hiding from life. It means finding a place of strength, the capacity to live the life we have been given with greater courage and sometimes even with gratitude.

Many of us have learned to cover over what is most authentic in ourselves in order to protect ourselves or gain the approval of others.

Whenever someone has found the courage to live more deeply, more courageously than before, no matter how short a time it may be, they hold open that door for anyone who tries to follow.

More than any single thing, fear is the stumbling block to life’s agenda. Perhaps it is only the things we fear that we wish to control. No one can serve life if they are unconsciously afraid of life. Life is process.

“There is no certainty; there is only adventure.” Roberto Assagioli

Stress may be more a matter of personal integrity than time pressure, determined by the distance between our authentic values and how we live our lives.

Stress may heal only through the recognition that we cannot betray our spiritual nature without paying a great price. It is not that we have a soul but that we are a soul.

Spiritual experience is not taught; it is found, uncovered, discovered, recovered.

It is possible to be standing in your kitchen and feel the breath of God. Whether we follow it or not, it will not diminish in power; it always points in the direction of integrity, the way home.

Sometimes when people don't fit into an existing mold, it is because they belong to something larger than the present. Something they will never find because they will someday build it for themselves and others. Over the years, I have met many young people of vision who suffer from a deep sense of indifference. They may first need to abandon their resentment of the way things are in order to begin repairing the world.

It is possible to befriend uncertainty, to remind yourself and others of the fluid, ever-changing nature of things. To remain awake to all possibility.

I make my promises, and then I wait to find out. In my heart, I still hear my grandfather say, "God willing."

## Chapter Four

### The Web of Blessings

“I have become the person I needed to meet.”

To recognize your capacity to affect life is to know yourself most intimately and deeply, to recognize your real value and power, independent of any role that you have been given to play or expertise you may have acquired. It is possible to strengthen or diminish the life around you in almost any role.

There is no role that absolves us of the responsibility to listen, to be mindful that life is all around us, touching us.

Basically service is about taking life personally, letting the lives that touch yours touch you.

Should I live to be very old, I expect that I will not remember the times when I was “cool” but will be warmed only by the times when I cared passionately, risked everything to make a difference, and knew who I was.

Service is the way that this world can heal.

It is hard not to see the person you are helping as someone weaker than yourself, someone more needy.

Service is a relationship between equals.

A helping relationship may incur a sense of debt, but service, like healing, is mutual. Service is free from debt. The wholeness in me is as strengthened as the wholeness in you.

Serving is also different from fixing.

Seeing yourself as a fixer may cause you to see brokenness everywhere, to sit in judgment on life itself. When we fix others, we may not see their hidden wholeness or trust the integrity of the life in them. Fixers trust their own expertise. When we serve, we see the unborn wholeness in others; we collaborate with it and strengthen it. Others may then be able to see their wholeness for themselves for the first time.

Perhaps fixing is only a way to relate to things. Relating to another human being in this way is to deny and diminish on some profound and subtle way the power of the life in them and its mystery.

When we serve, we discover that life is holy.

When you serve, your work itself will sustain you, renew you, and bless you, often over many years.

Other times we are strengthened by discovering beyond a doubt that our love matters to someone more than we realized possible or that someone loves us just as we are.

Perhaps we can only truly serve those we are willing to touch, not only with our hands but with our hearts and even our souls. Professionalism has embedded in service a sense of difference, a certain distance.

But on the deepest level, service is an experience of belonging, an experience of connection to others and to the world around us. It is this connection that gives us the power to bless the life in others. Without it, the life in them would not respond to us.

Compassion begins with the acceptance of what is most human in ourselves, what is most capable of suffering. In attending to our own capacity to suffer, we can uncover a simple and profound connection between our own vulnerability and the vulnerability in all others. Experiencing this allows us to find an instinctive kindness toward life which is the foundation of all compassion and genuine service.

The denial of a common vulnerability is the ultimate barrier to compassion.

Curing is the work of experts, but strengthening the life in one another is the work of human beings.

We strengthen life any time that we listen generously or encourage someone to find meaning, or wonder about possibility, or dream or hope or escape from self-judgment and inner criticism, or know that they matter. Anytime we share someone's joy, we bless the life in them.

When you strengthen the life around you, perhaps you strengthen the life within you.

Perhaps this cycle of open-heartedly taking on whatever one has been given, using it all to serve the life around you, then letting it go completely refers as much to the wisdom of living a lifetime as it does to the wisdom of living each day.

Service has a life of its own. A single act of kindness may have a long trajectory and touch those we will never meet or see.

No matter what means we use, service is always a work of the heart. But science can never serve unless it is first translated by people into a work of the heart.

In the end, the difference between heaven and hell may only be that in hell, people have forgotten how to bless one another.

It takes many years to remember that everything of value we have to give was not learned from a book and that the wisdom to live well is not conferred with an advanced degree. But real teachers are everywhere. The life in us will be blessed by others over and over again until finally we have remembered how to bless it ourselves.

It is often difficult to understand the nature of things. There may be an elephant in our midst and all our efforts to analyze our part of it, to describe in greater and greater detail our own experience, the nature of what we have taken hold of, will not help us one iota in knowing what is real. This is true no matter how compelling your experience of your part or how many others are convinced of that experience or even share it with you. The elephant is beyond us all.

If the world is really one large elephant, the wisdom may lie in holding your part loosely and loving what you cannot understand. And in helping others, here in the dark.

## Chapter Five

### Befriending Life

I was stunned to find that many of the things most worth knowing are not written in books or discovered through scientific effort.

A teacher is someone who has learned how to listen to life. Someone who has found a way to listen well. From a good teacher you may learn the secret of listening. You will never learn the secrets of life.

It's not in the hand; it's in the way that you play it.

These were some of my earliest lessons in the fact that the game may lie beyond the rules, that we can know many things that we can never explain, and that following your own deepest wisdom may be the best way of all to live.

Sometimes knowing life requires us to suspend disbelief, to recognize that all our hard-won knowledge may only be provisional and the world may be quite different than we believe it to be.

Befriending life may be about strengthening and supporting life's movement toward its own wholeness. It may require us to take great risks, to let go, over and over again, until we finally surrender to life's own dreams of itself.

Befriending life is not always about having things your own way.

It has taken many years to find the recipe, the one that is my own, but I knew in that moment that it was what I needed to do.

Over and over again every molecule that has ever been is gathered up by the hand of life to be reshaped into yet another form. The molecules in you and me and indeed in everyone are secondhand, borrowed for the occasion and returned when outgrown. How strange to think that great pain may be impermanent.

Often we do not get to see the outcome of our actions, and, in a sense, this may represent a sort of immortality. Trajectories of service to a single life may be decades long and come to fruition long after those who initiated them are dead. The dead act with great power in this world still. This is as true of service to an idea as it is to a person.

Such moments evoke a sense of gratitude in all who participate as if, even as we act, we are only witnesses to life fulfilling its dream of itself and realizing its own mysterious purposes.

Their lives were imbedded in a thousand-year-old lineage of kinship.

You do not need money to be a philanthropist. We all have assets. You can befriend life with your bare hands.

I was so caught up in the insanities of the system that I did not remember that my work is not about changing a world I cannot change. It's about touching the lives that touch mine in a way that makes a difference.

When it comes down to it, no matter how great or how small the need, we can only bless one life at a time.

In my experience, no one ever really chooses surgery or chemotherapy. People only choose life and then welcome whatever means are offered to them in order to have it.

“There is so much more to life than a perfectly clean kitchen floor, Rachel,” she told me.

The marks life leaves on everything it touches transforms perfection into wholeness.

Most often the top card is love.

Blessing the life in someone usually requires a deep respect for their uniqueness, an openness to allowing them to uncover who they are rather than shaping them into who we want or need them to be. Innately, blessing life confers a greater freedom on those we bless.

They spoke not about the world as it is but about the world as it could be.

Thinking about it now, it seems to me that knowing where we are going encourages us to stop seeing and hearing and allows us to fall asleep.

The very reason that we were born, our greatest blessing, or our way to serve may come into our lives looking like a new car, a chance to travel, or a cup of the finest coffee.

The truth is that we are always moving toward mystery and so we are far closer to what is real when we do not see our destination clearly.

Befriending the life in others is sometimes a complex matter. There are times when we offer our strength and protection, but these are usually only temporary measures. The greatest blessing we offer others may be the belief we have in their struggle for freedom, the courage to support and accompany them as they determine for themselves the strength that will become their refuge and the foundation of their lives. I think it is especially important to believe in someone at a time when they cannot yet believe in themselves. Then your belief will become their lifeline.

Spiritual awakening does not change life; it changes suffering.

*Is it possible that there may be an unknowable purpose to life itself?*

This may be so, but certainly the way people die often serves those who live on, offering us the opportunity to know the importance of our love, and the blessings of our relationships, no matter how short our time together has been.

“We die, not because we are ill but because we are complete,” he told his dharma class. “Illness is the occasion of our dying, but not the cause.”

Sometimes simply being accepted as you are and cared about by others can affect people in very profound ways.

Dying may be a time of intense learning, as painful and as transforming as labor, and in the end we may give birth to ourselves.

The final step in the healing of suffering may be wisdom. Perhaps no suffering really heals completely until the wisdom of its experience has been found and appreciated. We do not return from the journey into pain and illness to the same house that we left. We have become more and the house we will live in will be more as well, for however long we may inhabit it.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Restoring the World**

He was stripped of all that he knew and left only with the unshakable conviction that life itself was holy.

And that life itself is a blessing.

We are here to grow in wisdom and to learn to love better.

This Creation myth is based on the idea of service. The purpose of human life is to uncover these sparks of light and restore the world to its original wholeness. Everyone and everything we encounter is a shell or container for a hidden spark of holiness. It is up to us to help free the hidden holiness in everything and everyone.

We restore the holiness of the world through our loving-kindness and compassion. Every act of loving-kindness, no matter how great or small, repairs the world.

Perhaps our greatest service is simply to find ways to strengthen and live closer to our goodness. This is far from easy. It requires an everyday attention, an awareness of all that diminishes us, distracts us, and causes us to forget who we are. But every act of service bears witness to the possibility of freedom for us all. And every time anyone becomes more transparent to the light in them, they will restore the light in the world.

There are many ways to befriend the movement toward wholeness in others. All of them are holy.

People who wonder do not burn out.

The world and everything in it is alive.

If everyone has in them the dimension of the unknown, possibility is present at all times. Wisdom is possible at all times.

I have begun to wonder if the secret of living well is not in having all the answers but in pursuing unanswerable questions in good company.

Fear is the friction in all transitions. Our experience has made us familiar with unfamiliar ground. What better use for this knowing than to ease fear?

According to the Kabbalah, all things can be made holy. Buried in the mundane and even the most difficult is a spark of God that invests life and all of life's experiences.

Perhaps the final step in healing of all wounds is the discovery of the capacity for compassion, an intuitive knowing that no one is singled out in their suffering, that all living beings are vulnerable to loss, attachment, and limitation. It is only in the presence of compassion that we can show our wounds without diminishing our wholeness.

The Dalai Lama has said that “compassion occurs only between equals.”

Once we stopped demanding of ourselves that we be on course all the time, we might begin to look at our mistakes differently, giving them an impeccable attention and a frictionless response. They will not prevent us from reaching our dreams nearly so much as wanting to be right will.

Serving life may require a faithfulness to purpose that lasts over a lifetime. It is less a work of ego than a choice of the soul.

“There are many mitzvot, but the greatest mitzvah of all is said to be the freeing of captives,” he told me. “Moses’s dream was for his people to be free. And so his reward was that he got to see that happen. Because he was a leader, his dream was different from the dreams of the people, Neshume-le. A real leader has the same dream that God has.”

“But they were suffering Grandpa. Why didn’t they want to go?” My grandfather looked sad. “They knew how to suffer,” he told me. “They had done it for a long time and they were used to it. They did not know how to be free.”

Only those who are not enslaved by something else can follow the goodness in them.

We are trapped by ideas of worthlessness and lack of self-esteem, by desire or greed or ignorance. Enslaved by notions of victimhood or entitlement. The choice is never between slavery and freedom; we must always choose between slavery and the unknown.

It will always require a willingness to sacrifice what is most familiar for what is most true. To be free we may need to act from integrity, on trust, sometimes for a long time.

But perhaps on the deepest level the promised land is the same for us all, the capacity to know and live by the innate goodness in us, to serve and belong to one another and to life.

## **A Return To Love, Reflections On The Principles Of “A Course In Miracles”**

By Marianne Williamson

### **Introduction**

To be consciously aware of it, to experience love in ourselves and others, is the meaning of life.

## Chapter Two

### God

*God is the love within us.*

*Whether we “follow Him,” or think with love, is entirely up to us.*

*When we choose to love, or to allow our minds to be one with God, then life is peaceful. When we turn away from love, the pain sets in.*

And whether we love, or close our hearts to love, is a mental choice we make, every moment of every day.

Without love, we have no wisdom.

To surrender to God means to let go and just love.

## Chapter Four

### Surrender

Faith is believing that the universe is on our side, and that the universe knows what it's doing. Faith is a psychological awareness of an unfolding force for good, constantly at work in all dimensions.

Our attempts to direct this force only interferes with it. Our willingness to relax into it allows it to work on our behalf. Without faith, we're frantically trying to control what it is not our business to control, and fix what is not in our power to fix. What we're trying to control is much better off without us, and what we're trying to fix can't be fixed by us anyway. Without faith, we're wasting time.

When we pollute the oceans or destroy plant life, we are destroying our support systems and so are destroying ourselves.

The internal equivalent to oxygen, what we need in order to survive, is love. Human relationships exist to produce love. When we pollute our relationships with unloving thoughts, or destroy or abort them with unloving attitudes, we are threatening our emotional survival.

The experience of love is a choice we make, a mental decision to see love as the only real purpose and value in any situation.

Little children don't think they know what things mean. In fact, they know they don't know. They ask someone older and wiser to explain things to them. We're like children who don't know, but think we do.

## Chapter Five

### Miracles

The world of the human storyline, of all our concentration on behavior and all the things that occur outside us, is a world of illusion. It's a veil in front of a more real world, a collective dream. A miracle is not a rearrangement of the figures in our dream. A miracle is our awakening from it.

Our greatest tool for changing the world is our capacity to 'change our mind about the world.'

In the presence of love, the laws that govern the normal state of affairs are transcended. Thought that is no longer limited, brings experience that is no longer limited.

Miracles themselves are not to be consciously directed. They occur as involuntary effects of a loving personality, an invisible force that emanates from someone whose conscious intention is to give and receive love.

A radical forgiveness is a complete letting go of the past, in any personal relationship, as well as in any collective drama.

The purpose of our lives is to give birth to the best which is within us.

The Christ comes as a little child because the symbol of the newborn infant is the symbol of someone whose innocence is unmarred by past history or guilt. The Christ child within us has no history.

It is the symbol of a person who is given the chance to begin again. The only way to heal the wounds of the past, ultimately, is to forgive them and let them go. The miracle worker sees that his purpose in life is to be used in the service of the forgiveness of mankind – to awaken us from our collective sleep.

....“The Bible says that a deep sleep fell upon Adam, and nowhere is there reference to his waking up.” So far, there has been no “comprehensive reawakening or rebirth.” We can all contribute to a global rebirth to the extent that we allow ourselves to be awakened from our own personal dream of separation and guilt, to release our own past and accept a new life in the present. It is only through our own personal awakening that the world can be awakened. We cannot give what we don’t have.

We’re all assigned a piece of the garden, a corner of the universe that is ours to transform. Our corner of the universe is our own life – our relationships, our homes, our work, our current circumstances – exactly as they are. Every situation we find ourselves in is an opportunity, perfectly planned by the Holy Spirit, to teach love instead of fear. Whatever energy system we find ourselves a part of, it’s our job to heal it – to purify the thought forms by purifying our own. It’s never really a circumstance that needs to change – it’s we who need to change. The prayer isn’t for God to change our lives, but rather for Him to change us.

That’s the greatest miracle, and ultimately the only one: that you awaken from the dream of separation and become a different kind of person. People are constantly concerning themselves with what they *do*: have I achieved enough, written the greatest screenplay, formed the most powerful company?

But the world will not be saved by another great novel, great movie, or great business venture. It will only be saved by the appearance of great people.

Until we're healed of our internal demons, our fearful mental habits, we will turn every situation into the same painful drama as the one before. Everything we do is infused with the energy with which we do it. If we're frantic, life will be frantic. If we're peaceful, life will be peaceful.

So we work within the worldly illusion, politically, socially, environmentally, etc., but we recognize that the real transformation of the world comes not from what we are doing, but from the consciousness with which we're doing it.

The past is over. It doesn't matter who we are, where we came from, what Mommy said, what Daddy did, what mistakes we made, what diseases we have, or how depressed we feel. The future can be reprogrammed in this moment. We don't need another seminar, another degree, another lifetime, or anyone's approval in order for this to happen. All we have to do is ask for a miracle and allow it to happen, not resist it. There can be a new beginning, a life unlike the past. Our relationships shall be made new. Our careers shall be made new. Our bodies shall be made new. Our planet shall be made new. So shall the will of God be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Not later, but now. Not elsewhere, but here. Not through pain, but through peace. So be it. Amen.

## Chapter Six

### Relationships

Heaven....is neither a condition nor a place, but rather the “awareness of perfect oneness.” Since the Father and the Son are one, then to love one is to love the other. The love of God is not outside us. There is a line in a song from the play *Les Miserables* that says, “To love another person is to see the face of God.” The “face of Christ” is the innocence and love behind the masks we all wear, and seeing that face, touching it and loving it in ourselves and others, is the experience of God. It is our divine humanness. It is the high we all seek.

Forgiveness is “selective remembering” – a conscious decision to focus on love and let the rest go.

Any darkness we let blind us to another’s perfection also blinds us to our own.

But what people said or did is not who they are.

Only love is real. Nothing else actually exists. If a person behaves unlovingly, then, that means that, regardless of their negativity – anger or whatever – their behavior was derived from fear and doesn’t actually exist. They’re hallucinating. You forgive them, then, because there’s nothing to forgive. Forgiveness is discernment between what is real and what is not real.

When people behave unlovingly, they have forgotten who they are. They have fallen asleep to the Christ within them. The job of the

miracle worker is to remain awake. We choose not to fall asleep and dream of our brother's guilt.

All thought is thought about ourselves, then to condemn another is to condemn ourselves.

But everything that someone does.... is either 'love or a call for love.'

I spent years as an angry left-winger before I realized that an angry generation can't bring peace. Everything we do is infused with the energy with which we do it. As Gandhi said, "We must *be* the change." What the ego doesn't want us to see is that the guns we need to get rid of first are the guns in our own heads.

All negativity derives from fear. When someone is angry, they are afraid. When someone is rude, they are afraid. When someone is manipulative, they are afraid. When someone is cruel, they are afraid. There is no fear that love does not dissolve. There is no negativity that forgiveness does not transform.

But peace isn't determined by circumstances outside us. Peace stems from forgiveness. Pain doesn't stem from the love we're denied by others, but rather from the love that we deny them. But what really has occurred is that someone else's closed heart has tempted us to close our own, and it is our own denial of love that hurts us. That's why the miracle is a shift in our own thinking: the willingness to keep our own heart open, regardless of what's going on outside us.

We're always responsible for how we see things.

We're affected by other people's lovelessness only to the extent to which we judge them for it.

The only way that I can accept someone's finding me wonderful, is if I find myself wonderful. But to the ego, self-acceptance is death.

Acceptance doesn't prohibit growth; rather, it fosters it.

In order to truly communicate, we must take responsibility for the heart space that exists between us and another. It is that heart space, or the absence of it, which will determine whether communication is miraculous or fearful.

The point is not to seek our goal in a communication, but to find a pure ground of being from which to mount our message. We don't seek joining through our words; we accept the thought that we are joined with the other person before we speak.

We don't get married to escape the world; we get married to heal it together.

Every moment, we're either extending love, or projecting fear...

The world is healed one loving thought at a time. Mother Theresa said that there are no great deeds – just small deeds done with great love.

## Chapter Seven

### Work

The Atonement means putting love first. In everything. In business as well as everything else. You're in business to spread love. Your screenplay should spread love. Your hair salon should spread love. Your agency should spread love. Your life should spread love. The key to a successful career is realizing that it's not separate from the rest of your life, but is rather an extension of your most basic self. And your most basic self is love.

You have the unlimited power of the universe within you and so does everyone else. It's nothing to take personal credit for, nor anything to feel guilty about.

Achievement doesn't come from what we do, but from who we are. Our worldly power results from our personal power. Our career is an extension of our personality.

Personal power emanates from someone who takes life seriously. There is no greater seriousness than the full appreciation of the power and importance of love. Miracles flow from the recognition that love is the purpose of our careers.

Even if we don't yet consider ourselves successful, we can devote our work now to being used in the service of the healing of the world.

No matter what form our job or activity takes, the content is the same as everyone else's; we are here to minister to human hearts.

You are powerful in whatever moment you choose to be. The choice to be used as an instrument of love, right here, right now, is a choice for personal empowerment.

What a Beethoven, Shakespeare or Picasso has done is not *create* something, so much as they have accessed that place within themselves from which they could *express* that which has been created by God.

“Grandiosity is always a cover for despair.”

‘Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.’

Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you *not* to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn’t serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you.

‘Money isn’t evil; it’s just nothing.’ Like anything else, it can be used for holy or unholy purposes.

But the moral imperative is not to block the reception of money into our lives. The challenge is to spiritualize our relationship to it, by seeing that its only purpose is to heal the world.

Think of your career as your ministry. Make your work an expression of love, in service to mankind.

A few years ago I went back to Houston for a special reunion with my high school drama department. Our teacher was retiring, and ex-students of his from all over the country came to pay their respects. At the dinner, a lot of attention was given to the fact that many of Mr. Pickett's students had gone on to become successful actors. But many of his students had gone on to become successful people, period. By teaching us the truth about acting, he taught us the truth about life. Once you know; 1. Leave your personal problems at the stage door; 2. Treat the material with honesty, dignity and without embellishment; 3. Show up fully no matter how many people are in the audience, then you know everything you need to know in order to have a powerful professional career. To know the real truth about anything is to know the truth about everything. In learning the principles of ministry, we learn the principles of success, regardless of what form our ministry takes.

The highest prize we can receive for creative work is the joy of being creative. Creative effort spent for any other reason than the joy of being in that light-filled place, love, God, whatever we want to call it, is lacking integrity. It diminishes us. It reduces inspiration to mere sales.

The world never gives you permission to shine. Only love does that. I remember being a cocktail waitress and walking into work one night thinking, "Oh, I get it! They think this is a bar!" As *A Course in Miracles* student, I now saw it differently. "This isn't a bar, and I'm not a waitress. That's just an illusion. Every business is a front for a church, and I'm here to purify the thought forms, to minister to the children of God." We can take our own lives seriously, regardless of whether or not anyone else does. No job really has any more potential impact on the planet than any other.

We're always impacting the world in which we live, through our presence, our energy, our interactions with others. The question is, what kind of impact are we having.

Show up! Be enthusiastic! Put some energy into the life you're living now!

As the I Ching says, the universe fills up the modest and cuts down the proud. In modesty, we allow things to blossom. We're not ashamed to admit we're still in process.

Ultimately, it is not our credentials but our commitment to a higher purpose that creates our effectiveness in the world.

As of that night, coffee kept me up all night. I had never before, ever, made the conscious connection between coffee and caffeine and sleeplessness, and so, in my experience, there had never been one. Neither need there be an automatic connection between a lack of credentials and a lack of opportunity.

Miracles shift us from a "get" to a "give" mentality. The desire to get something reflects a core belief that we don't have enough already. As long as we believe there is scarcity inside us, we'll continue to manufacture scarcity around us because that is our basic thought. No matter what we get, it will never be enough.

When our desire is to give instead of get, our core belief is that we have so much abundance, that we can afford to give it away. The subconscious mind takes its clue from our core beliefs, and brilliantly manufactures situations that reflect them.

Our willingness to give directs the universe to give to us.

There is no more powerful motivation than to feel we're being used in the creation of a world where love has healed all wounds.

Our power lies in our clarity about the role our work can play in the creation of a more beautiful world. The miracle is to think of our career as a contribution, however small, to the healing of the universe.

Every person is a cell in the body of human consciousness. At the moment, it is as though the body of Christ is suffering from cancer. In cancer, a normal working cell decides that it no longer wants to function in a contribution to the whole. Instead of being part of the support system of the blood or the liver, the cell goes off and builds its own kingdom. That's a malignancy, which threatens to destroy the organism.

So it is with the body of humanity. Everyone's gone off to do their own thing: *my* career, *my* store, *my* money. We've lost sight of our essential interrelatedness, and this forgetfulness threatens to destroy us. The "my" mentality is the ego. It is the belief in separation. It is the cosmic disease. Taking what we have and devoting it to the restoration of the whole is our salvation and the salvation of the world. Our devotion then becomes our work, and our work becomes our devotion.

## Chapter Eight

### The Body

It is not the body but the mind that is in need of healing, and the only healing is a return to love.

There is a healing force within each of us, a kind of divine physician seated within our minds and in communication with every cell of our being.

Within the leper is the Son of God, perfect, unalterable, changeless. The spirit is eternally healthy. The spirit cannot get sick and the spirit cannot die.

Training our minds to think from a loving, faithful perspective is the greatest boost we can give to our immune systems, and one of the greatest challenges we can pose to our minds.

What I realized was that my weight has nothing to do with my body, but with my mind.

There are people experiencing critical illness who are at peace, and people in perfect physical health who are emotionally tortured.

Within each of us there is a core – our essence, our true being. That is the place of God who is within us. Finding that essence is our return to God. It is the purpose of our lives, and even our most painful experiences can serve that purpose.

## Chapter Nine

### Heaven

Happiness isn't circumstance-dependent.

The key to happiness is the decision to be happy.

Creation is an extension of thought.

Time is just a thought. If we think it's going to take time for a wound to heal, it will. If we accept God's will as already accomplished, we experience healing of all wounds immediately.

There is no light more bright than the light that shines within us. Whether or not we see that light is irrelevant.

I have noticed that people who participate in the solution to problems don't seem to find themselves as depressed about those problems as do people standing on the sidelines doing nothing.

In the eyes of God, we're all perfect and we have unlimited capacity to express brilliantly. I say unlimited capacity rather than unlimited potential, because potential can be a dangerous concept.

Focus on human potential remains impotent without a focus on human capacity. Capacity is expressed in the present. It is immediate. The key to it lies not in what we have inside of us, but rather in what we are willing to own that we have inside of us.

The difference between those people “living their potential” and those who don’t, is not the amount of potential itself, but the amount of permission they give themselves to live in the present.

We are the adult generation. We have adult bodies, adult responsibilities, and adult careers. What many of us lack is an adult context for our lives, one in which we give ourselves permission to shine, to blossom fully, to show up powerfully in the present without fearing that we’re not good enough. Waiting for a powerful future is a way of making sure it never gets here. An adolescent dreams of what will be. An adult takes the joy in today.

Love takes more than crystals and rainbows, it takes discipline and practice. It’s not just a sweet sentiment from a Hallmark card. It is a radical commitment to a different way of being, a mental response to life that is completely at odds with the thinking of the world.

Spiritual growth is not about becoming more metaphysically complicated, but rather is about growing simpler, as these very basic principles begin to permeate more and more deeply into our thought system.

If I’m lifting weights at the gym, I can either love the experience or hate it, but it doesn’t really matter. All that affects my body is whether or not I lift the weights.

Spiritual practice supports the development of personal power.

At the highest level of our being, we don’t *do* anything. We are at rest when the power of God works through us.

When we know that love is an infinite resource – that there is enough abundance of every kind for everyone and that only what we give to others we get to keep – then we stop denigrating other people, and start blessing them instead.

A person who succeeds in any area is only creating more of a possibility for others to do the same.

But Heaven is within us. It has nothing ultimately to do with what we choose to think ourselves, not just about one person, but about all people. So forgiveness of mankind, of everyone in every circumstance, is our ticket to Heaven, our only way home.

The work toward enlightenment often entails a painful and not very pretty arousal of the worst of which we're capable, made plain to both ourselves and others, in order that we might consciously choose to release our personal darkness.

The decisions we make today, individually and collectively will determine whether the planet goes to hell or goes to Heaven.

For a fraction of the cost of keeping one criminal in jail for over a year, we could provide a child from an underprivileged background a plethora of personal and educational opportunities that would occlude the propensity to hopeless despair.

With an enlightened view of Christmas, we understand that it is within our power, through God, to give birth to a divine Self.

‘Resurrection is the symbol of joy.’ It is the great “aha!” – the sign of total understanding that we are not at the effect of lovelessness, in ourselves and others. The acceptance of the resurrection is the realization of the fact that we need wait no longer to see ourselves as healed and whole.

## **INFERNO**

By James Nachtwey

James Nachtwey has said that he was once a war photographer, but now he is an anti-war photographer. The difference is one of moral stance.

They are wars all the same, however, in that they are manifestations of human power, catastrophes caused by humans, even if blame is not always easily attributed. And because these are wars they entail a special responsibility of witness, one that does not obtain in quite the same way with devastations caused by natural phenomena. While famines, droughts and pestilences are sometimes matters of chance, and may in various ways resemble the workings of nature, they are more often the results of human enterprise, the effects of economic machinations. That makes them acts of war.

In the situations I have witnessed, there is no divine intervention. All we have is each other. We create our own problems, and it is up to us to solve them.

Deliberately to remove oneself from this dialogue is a way of turning one's back and confirms the sad proposition that a perfection of means but a confusion of aims is the misfortune of our time.

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I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides.

I honor the place in you of love, of light, of truth and of peace.

And when you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me,

there is only one of us.

Namaste!

*bill*

(Revision 12/3/18)