



What About Love?
Reminders for Being Loving
GINA LAKE

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INTRODUCTION

Love is so important to our well-being; and yet, contacting that which is within us that is naturally and spontaneously loving is often difficult. This book is intended to help you do that. It is made up of essays and short quotes taken from my other books, particularly *Loving in the Moment*, *Living in the Now*, *Embracing the Now*, *Trusting Life*, and *Anatomy of Desire*. To better understand what is presented here, it seems important to define some of the terms used, although those who are familiar with Eckhart Tolle's writings will already be familiar with these terms.

It is obvious that human beings have a dual nature, that is, they have the potential for both good acts and harmful acts. We can be loving, compassionate, and altruistic or the opposite. Most of us would like to be more loving because it feels good to be loving and because it is actually our true nature to be loving. But something exists within us

that makes it difficult to be loving consistently, and that something is the *ego*.

The ego is the false self (as opposed to the true self, or *Essence*, as I like to call it). The ego is made up of conditioning—beliefs, opinions, judgments, “shoulds,” and any number of ideas that are part of our programming and psychological makeup. This conditioning affects how we see and react to the world, and we often respond unconsciously to this conditioning without realizing that we have a choice. Although some of our conditioning is necessary and useful, much of it is false, negative, and limiting. This is the conditioning that causes us suffering and results in our causing suffering to others. These false, negative, and limiting beliefs and perspectives are what interfere most with loving.

The ego is reflected in the voice in our head, the ongoing inner commentary we all are so familiar with. The ego admonishes and pushes us, chats with us, judges, fantasizes, and tells us what to do and how to do it. The ego is also behind most sentences that begin with “I.”

This aspect of the mind is often referred to as the *egoic mind* because it is the aspect of the mind that is driven by the ego. The egoic mind is different from the more functional mind that we use to read,

learn, calculate, design, analyze, and so forth. The functional mind doesn't speak to us but is a tool we use when engaged in tasks that require us to think.

The ego tells us how to run our life, but it doesn't have the wisdom to guide us. Instead, the ego is the cause of suffering because its voice is so often negative and leads to negative feelings. The ego's perceptions and values are too limiting and narrow to encompass the truth about life. The egoic mind is an archaic aspect of ourselves that we are evolving beyond.

The ego—who we think we are, with all the judgments, conditioning, and projections—is an imposter, and this imposter is the saboteur of all relationships and of happiness in general. Essence is who we really are, the divine Self that is living this life through us. It is our essential goodness. We are actually spiritual beings playing at being human beings.

Because we are programmed to pay attention to the voice in our head, we often fail to notice what is actually going on in the present moment—in the Now; we often aren't present to reality. Most people live in a mental world, a virtual world of sorts. When we drop out of this mental world into the Now and are fully present to whatever experience we are

having, we experience a depth, a richness, and a joy and peace that feel sacred. When we are in the Now, we experience love! Love easily flows outward toward others and all life. This is the experience of our true self, or Essence. So, when we talk about being in the Now or being present to life, we are also talking about this experience of Essence—the experience of our divine Self.

The experience of being identified with the ego, on the other hand, is an experience generally of contraction, fear, judgment, unhappiness, and discontentment. Love doesn't flow from the ego. The ego's relationship to relationship is: "What can you do for *me*?" Love is only experienced when we are aligned with Essence. So we can become more loving by learning to become more aligned with Essence and less identified with the negative, judgmental voice in our head. This is accomplished by simply becoming more aware of our dual nature and consciously choosing to align with love rather than identify with the egoic mind's judgment and other thoughts that cause negative feelings and contraction. What chooses love? That is the great Mystery, isn't it? That is Essence—who you really are!

PART 1

LOVE IS...

LOVE IS ALL YOU NEED

We have everything we need because all we need is love, and everyone has an unlimited supply of that. Not everyone may feel love, but it is always there and available to give to others.

The way we experience the unlimited supply of love is by giving it away. That is counter-intuitive, which is why it may seem like there isn't enough love. When we believe we need to get love from outside ourselves, that sense of lack stops the love flowing from inside us to others. Believing that you need love becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy: You believe you need love because you aren't experiencing it, and in trying to get it, you fail to give it, so you don't experience it. You can't really do two things at once: If you are relating to someone, you are either giving your attention (love) to that person or trying to get something from that person. You are either in Essence (giving attention) or in ego (trying to get attention). These are very different states of consciousness, and they result in very different experiences.

The experience of being in ego is an experience of lack. The ego never has enough of anything, including love. So the ego looks outside itself to try to get what it feels it lacks. The ego tries to manipulate the world to fill its desires and so-called needs.

The experience of being aligned with our true nature, or Essence, on the other hand, is an experience of fullness. If Essence has a need, it would be to give love, to attend fully to whatever is happening right now in the present moment. Being in Essence is an experience of loving whatever is arising and giving attention to that out of love for it. When we do that, we fall in love with life. And when we are in love with life and with the present moment, there is a natural movement outward to give to or support whatever is showing up in life.

That flow of love and attention toward life is the experience of love that everyone is looking for. It is always possible to give attention and love to whatever is showing up in our life. It is a simple choice, but not so easy to do. The ego doesn't value doing that. It doesn't believe that doing that will get it what it wants.

The irony is that giving love and attention to whatever is showing up in our life is exactly what gets

us what we want, and doing what the ego thinks will make it happy results in the opposite. Life is a little like Alice's experience in Wonderland: Everything is backwards. However, once you realize that secret about life, your experience of the world changes. Life becomes bountiful and supportive rather than lacking and unkind. The kindness that flows from you creates a kind world, not only for you, but also for others. All you need is love—and you already have plenty of that to give!

From *Living in the Now*

LOVE IS GENTLE

I was listening to a song the other day, and some of the words were “Love is gentle, and love is kind.” The truth of that really touched me. We think of love as being a feeling—an emotion—but true love is more of a being and a doing, a giving, an outpouring. Love touches, love offers itself, love is gentle, and it is kind. That's how we know it. We know love by its fruits. Love gives: It listens, it caresses, it nourishes, it nurtures. It does whatever is needed of it. Love naturally responds to life as life presents itself.

Romantic love isn't like this at all. Romantic love is a giddy feeling, an excitement, an anticipation of getting something from someone. It makes us feel like a kid at Christmas—“Yippee! I'm going to get what a want!” Romance is exciting, fun, and feels wonderful, but it's not really love. It's too self-centered for that. When we are in love, we are often oblivious of the needs of others, as we have only the beloved on our mind. We become fascinated and obsessed with the beloved to the exclusion of

everything else. We love the beloved, not for what he or she is, but for what we *think* that person might mean to us and to our life. We are excited because the beloved is *believed* to enhance us.

The feelings of romantic love are created by an illusion (i.e., psychological projection) and by the release of certain chemicals in the brain. Romantic feelings are a very different kind of love than true love; they are a falling in love with what we hope will be our salvation and happiness forever. That kind of love never lasts and often disappears upon getting to know someone better. If we are lucky, it turns into something truer, more real, more akin to our true nature.

It is our nature to love, to be gentle, to be kind. When all thoughts from the egoic mind (the voice in your head) drop away or aren't given attention, love is our natural response to life. The only thing that ever interferes with love is a thought, usually a judgment or fear. These are the enemies of true love. They undermine it and eat away at it, or prevent it altogether. Love cannot exist in the ego's world of judgment and fear. And yet we, as humans, need and want love so desperately. Because of this, we learn to love for love's sake, for the joy of loving, without conditions, just because it is our nature to love. We

learn to move beyond the ego's judgments and fears because doing so is the only way to get what we really want—true love. We find a way to love in spite of our judgments and fears.

We discover this very simple truth: Love is an act of kindness, not a giddy feeling. Love is a natural expression of our true nature, not a feeling we get from others. The ego manipulates others to do what it wants so that it can feel love, but that's the opposite of love. Love allows others to be just as they are. It supports and nurtures, listens, and cares. Love flows toward others from within us. It exists within us and isn't something we get from others.

This kind of love is the most fulfilling thing in the world. Experiencing it doesn't require that you be beautiful or rich or healthy or intelligent or that you have a special talent or standing in life; experiencing it only requires that you express it. It's free and it frees us, and it frees others from the ensnarement of the false self. It's the greatest gift and one that doesn't cost the giver anything. It takes nothing from the giver and returns everything. This is the great secret we are meant to discover.

From *Living in the Now*

LOVE TRANSCENDS APPEARANCES

Appearances seem so important. Most of us believe that our appearance is very important, and we work very hard at looking a certain way. This is especially true for women, of course, and this conditioning is very difficult to overcome because there's a lot of fear that not looking good will have drastic consequences. For many people, appearance is a top priority and often remains that way right up until death. My mother, for instance, insisted on "putting on her face" even on her deathbed after her body had been diminished to skin and bones by cancer. Even then, she was still trying to improve herself, still not seeing the beauty that she was as this old dying woman, still not allowing herself to just be as she was.

Our appearance does affect how others initially react to us. However, it's not as important as we make it. We suffer over it and try so hard to look other than the way we do. All of this trying is exhausting and takes time and energy away from things that are more fulfilling and important in life.

That's the problem—when we are consumed with our appearance, we aren't giving our attention and energy to other things that might be more meaningful, fulfilling, and rewarding. We might not discover that cultivating kindness is more rewarding than cultivating beauty. We might fail to notice the beauty that is here, within ourselves and others, just as we are.

Inner beauty and outer beauty can be at odds, since there is only so much attention and energy we have. Where your energy and attention go reflects what you value. Do you value outer beauty more than inner beauty? You might say you don't, but where are you putting your energy and attention? What are your thoughts on?

The funny thing is that others love us for our inner beauty, for the unique expression of Essence that we are, although they may be attracted to us by our outer beauty. However, that allure doesn't mean much if they don't also fall in love with us. What people fall in love with isn't our outer beauty (that's attraction or infatuation, not love), but something much more subtle—our being. They love us because they see lovable qualities that belong to Essence: goodness, creativity, kindness, joy for life, patience,

compassion, courage, wisdom, strength, clarity, and so on.

The beauty of getting old with someone is the opportunity it presents to really get that appearances don't matter. You watch as your beloved changes before your eyes into an old man or old woman, but you may love him or her more than ever, not because of how he or she looks, but because you love your beloved's being—you love how he or she is in the world and with you. That's when you really get that all this emphasis on appearances is false. Appearances never were that important. You only thought they were.

Just because most people believe that appearances are important doesn't make it so. People are under the illusion that appearances are far more important than they are, which does create that reality to some extent—it makes this seem true. This illusion results in a culture that's sadly misled into putting too much energy and attention on such things. This cultural illusion makes it more difficult to discover the truth—that appearances aren't that important. But life is wise and ages us so that we can discover the truth. It is perhaps one of the greatest lessons of our lives, although it may take a lifetime to learn it.

If we realize that appearances aren't that important, then aging can be experienced as fortunate, as it gives us the gift of finally getting to relax and stop striving to improve ourselves. We finally get to put our attention on what's important—on loving others (and ourselves) just the way we are. This is the greatest gift we can give others and ourselves, and the most important thing we can do in life.

From *Living in the Now*

LOVE IS ACCEPTANCE

Some people are easier to love than others, and they are the ones, therefore, who experience a lot of love. They experience it both within themselves and coming to them from others. What is their secret? Amazing good looks? No. Stunning personalities? No. Money and power? No. Their secret is none of the things we assume will make us more lovable. Their secret is that they love, and by that I mean, they accept others the way they are. Isn't that when you feel loved—when you feel accepted rather than judged?

Acceptance is the opposite of judgment and the antidote to judgment, and acceptance brings us the experience of love. What is the experience of love? It is the experience of accepting and being accepted, the experience of relaxation, of being able to just be, without struggling and striving to be any different than we are or requiring that others be different than however they are. That is what we all want—to just be able to relax and be okay just the way we are and to be okay with others just the way they are.

When someone gives us this gift of acceptance, we love them. What a gift! It is a gift you would never reject and hopefully one you will return, because returning it—giving others this gift—brings you the experience of love. Loving and accepting others feels good. It is its own reward. It isn't even necessary for others to love and accept you in return because it's enough to just feel love and acceptance for others.

The ego loves, or tries to love, in order to get love or something else it wants. But this kind of love isn't really love. It's more like being nice, and it may not entail acceptance at all but something more like tolerance for the purpose of getting something. This is a very different experience than love. Tolerating people is better than not tolerating them, but it's not the same as enjoying them, which can only come from true acceptance.

You accept others because you appreciate the unique expression of life that they are. What amazing things these human forms are! And all the different personalities! When we can just let people be the way they are, it is such a relief—for us and for them. Allowing people to just be is loving them, and this appreciation and allowing flows from our true nature, or Essence, which is love. Accepting and

loving is how Essence feels toward life and every one of its creations.

What makes someone lovable? Certainly their acceptance of us makes them lovable. But what also makes them lovable is their acceptance of themselves. People who accept themselves, who are gentle and kind to themselves, are also gentle and kind to others. We see these qualities in them, and we relax. And when we relax, we become aligned with our true nature.

People who love and accept themselves are lovable because they reflect Essence, and that's what we all really want—not someone to do our every bidding and match our every fantasy. What we really want is to be with someone who knows how to love because our deepest desire is to love. Therefore, we are drawn to those who know how to love. They are our teachers—the way-showers in this world. And this is our destiny as well—to be a place of refuge, where egos dissolve and all that is left is the love that we are.

From *Loving in the Moment*

LOVE IS A CHOICE

We tend to think of love as an uncontrollable feeling that comes over us. Although this overwhelming feeling does happen, real love and love that is sustained is always a choice: You choose to be open to someone, you choose to accept them, and that openness and acceptance allows love to flow. This process is often unconscious, so we often don't realize we are choosing to accept someone when it's happening. But that choice to accept someone is what precedes love. It happens unconsciously all the time, and it can happen more consciously too.

When acceptance and love happen unconsciously, it's often because someone fits our ideas, desires, and conditioning. We find that person pleasing because we identify with him or her in some way, probably because we see qualities similar to ours, or perhaps because we see a quality we admire and would like to develop. When our acceptance doesn't happen automatically and unconsciously, we can simply choose to accept someone because he or she is different or unusual in some way.

You can learn to welcome and embrace differences rather than reject them, as the ego does. When you do that, you open up a new world of possibilities in relationship with people you never thought you could love. You still might not choose to have relationships with them, but you don't have to miss out on the experience of love by rejecting them just because they're different from you or because they don't match your conditioning in some other way.

It's useful to notice how much we withhold love from others because they are different. Once you become more conscious of this tendency, you are free to make another choice—to choose to celebrate differences rather than reject them—and that choice opens your heart and your life up to new possibilities.

From *Loving in the Moment*

LOVE IS BEING IN ESSENCE

Our true nature, Essence, is love. To be in Essence is to be in love. If love is what you want (do you?), then being in Essence and staying there is how to have it. The problem is that we have other agendas—other desires—when we are in relationship. Sometimes we want to be right more than we want to experience love. Sometimes we want to be separate and avoid being vulnerable more than we want to experience love. And sometimes we want what we want more than we want love.

It's important to realize that there are reasons why we don't choose love as often as we could. There's a payoff for the ego in not choosing love, and it's good to be aware of what you are trading love for. When we are identified with the ego, other things seem more important than love, because they are more important to the ego than love. That's the catch. The ego doesn't choose love.

So what are you to do if you are identified with the ego, but you know Essence enough to want that? That's the situation so many of us find ourselves in.

Very few of us live from Essence most of the time. There's an answer, though. When you do choose love, that's Essence choosing love. Essence is able to reach into the egoic state of consciousness and draw us to itself, but we have to be willing to pay attention to Essence instead of the egoic mind (the voice in our head). Essence won't shout at you like the egoic mind does. It won't try to convince you, scare you, or bully you to come to it, like the egoic mind does. Essence whispers softly in each moment. It entices you with feelings of love, joy, peace, contentment, and happiness that seep into the egoic state of consciousness. When you pay attention to these feelings, you are paying attention to Essence, and doing that drops you into Essence.

The way out of the egoic state of consciousness and into Essence is not a hard road after all. All it takes is paying attention to the love, joy, peace, contentment, compassion, wisdom, and happiness that are already here in this moment. Can you feel them—any of them—even just a little? That is your doorway into Essence. Even a sliver of love or peace or joy can take you there. Pay attention to that sliver—notice it—and then that will become your experience of the moment instead of your thoughts. Instead of noticing your thoughts, notice these subtle

feelings and qualities that belong to Essence, and you are there! Making this choice isn't difficult or unpleasant, but it is a choice.

This is also the answer to finding love in relationship: Notice the love that's there and not the other person's persona, words, or actions. This person in front of you is playing a part. Let that part be played, recognize it as a part, and enjoy it. It's all play—*lila*, as the Hindu mystics say: God playing with God in many forms. What fun! Essence enjoys the characters that we are. It accepts them and revels in their quirks and uniqueness. It has compassion for their pain and the suffering they bring to themselves and to others. It accepts this pain as part of life too.

Essence accepts whatever your partner is doing or saying because Essence knows that it's not the whole truth of him or her. Essence sees the truth about the other, and it loves the other because the other is itself. To Essence, it's clear that the other is no different from itself. It feels and sees the sameness. It knows only Oneness. It can't be fooled by words, behavior, and looks. Appearances can't totally hide the truth. Look into your beloved's eyes and see.

This is the experience you have to look forward to when you choose Essence over the ego, love over being right or superior, acceptance over judgment, kindness over criticism, and unity over being separate and safe. These are your choices, which can only be made by you. Happiness and love depend on them, but happiness and love can wait. Essence is patient, and it will wait as long as it has to for you to choose it over the ego.

It's time to choose Essence, to choose love. You choose Essence not just for your own happiness or for a happy relationship, but also for peace, love, and happiness for all—for the rest of you in your many guises. You are here to find love, not just for yourself, but also for the divine Self, which has been hiding love from you in this world of form just so that you could have the pleasure and amazement of discovering it in the simple quiet of this moment—and in your beloved's eyes.

From *Loving in the Moment*

LOVE IS RECOGNIZING THE DIVINE SELF

Love flows when we recognize our own divine Self in another. It flows when we are able to see beyond (or behind) the egoic mask to the real Self, which is exquisitely lovable and which evokes love. All the qualities we love in another are qualities of the divine Self, of Essence: compassion, understanding, wisdom, kindness, love, patience, and inner strength.

These are not qualities of the ego, which is innately self-centered and focused on its needs. Where are the wisdom, compassion, and love in that? Is it any wonder that when we are identified with the ego, we don't feel very lovable? The ego is not very lovable, but our true nature, or Essence, is; and when we are aligned with Essence, even our ego and the egos of others are experienced as lovable.

The ego doesn't know how to love, but the Divine in us—Essence—does. Essence loves. It's also wise, understanding, kind, compassionate, sensitive, patient, and caring. Anything you would want a lover or another human being to be comes from Essence, not from the ego.

The love that the ego has to offer is tainted by self-interest. “What’s in it for me?” lingers in the background of every interaction between those who are aligned with their egos. This is not love, but manipulation disguised as love or kindness. It may be better than undisguised manipulation, but it’s still not love in its purest sense. The ego and love can’t inhabit the same space. One must go.

Pure love can only come from Essence, which is unadulterated goodness. Essence loves because it feels good to love and for no other reason. Essence loves because it is its nature to love; we love because it is our nature to love.

From *Loving in the Moment*

LOVE IS BEHIND ALL LIFE

If evil were behind life, this would be a sad world, indeed. As bad as it can get here, there are probably few people that feel that evil is what is behind this world. Certainly few want evil to be behind this world, and that's a good sign. Something in us wants and gravitates toward goodness, not evil. Negativity tugs at us and even grabs hold of us at times, but something else continually pulls us toward the opposite, toward love.

Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of love. Evil isn't a reality itself but the result of the absence of contact with Reality, with what is true—love. Evil is the result of being divorced from our true nature, being very, very divorced, so divorced that someone might not even believe in love because he or she has so much fear and so much difficulty feeling love. Such deep separation is a frightening and lost place.

The spectrum of life is a spectrum of love: On one end is pure love and the experience of oneness with all life, and on the other end is the absence of

love and the experience of complete separation and fear. What exists in the absence of love is fear, and fear can produce hateful acts.

Those who are lost in the deepest separation need our love and compassion; and yet, they are the ones who are most difficult to love. Nevertheless, no one is ever irretrievable. All eventually return to love. This journey on earth, which takes many, many lifetimes, is a return to love and a rediscovery of our oneness with all, in fact, of our true nature *as* Oneness. The journey is a beautiful one because it ends in love. It takes us away from separation and returns us to unity. This is surely evidence that love is behind all Life. We evolve from feeling very separate to realizing our oneness with all life. What a wonderful discovery and ending to this adventure called life. Life is good.

How do I know this? You don't have to take my word for it. Many, many have gone before us, and this is what they report and have reported. These individuals are the ones we revere as saints, spiritual masters, avatars, and founders of our religions. We revere them because we want the peace, love, and wisdom that they embody.

We want peace, love, and wisdom because these are what bring meaning and joy to life. Why?

Because peace, love, and wisdom are what is behind life. We don't revere murderers and rapists or those who torture, maim, and steal from others. Why? Because we know what's true and good when we see it. We just know it. All societies value love. Love not only helps us survive by making it possible to cooperate with others, but love feels good; it just feels right. We know the rightness of love, and that is why we can trust life. Life is all about love.

From *Trusting Life*

LOVE IS WHAT DRIVES LIFE

Fear drives the ego, but love drives life. Love drives all that matters in life. Love is the motivating force in life that creates, sustains, enhances, and gives meaning to life. There is nothing else here but love because Life *is* love. We *are* love.

This Love is hidden only by a *sense* of being someone who is afraid of life. The ego is this sense of ourselves as small, afraid, and inadequate. Our identity as a separate individual, as the ego, is of someone who feels lacking, insignificant, lost, confused, afraid, struggling, and in conflict with life. So it's no wonder the ego wants and feels it needs so much to be okay and happy. But this is a false identity and false needs—we need nothing but what we already have to be happy.

We are not the individual we *think* we are. We *are* life. It is living through us. And when the ego is put aside, Life lives through us more cleanly and purely, and with ease, gratitude, fortitude, joy, and love. When the ego is no longer dominant, it

becomes obvious that all that's here is Essence *being* and relishing in being.

Life is trustworthy because love is behind life. Love is what is unfolding life and making life happen. Love is the motivating force in all we do: Love for our life, our body, and food motivates us to grow, shop for, prepare, and eat what we need to sustain us. Love for self-expression, expansion, discovery, and self-development motivates us to speak, learn, create, expand our capabilities, and develop our talents. Love for others motivates us to procreate, relate, give, care for, nurture, and support others and society. Love for pleasure and fun motivates us to play, rest, sing, dance, and enjoy life. Love for security and safety motivates us to be careful and take care of ourselves. Love for being productive motivates us to work and develop our skills. Love for knowledge motivates us to learn, read, and share what we've learned.

Love allows us to identify with the ego, and love is even what motivates the ego: Love for security, safety, self-preservation, superiority, power, comfort, and prestige motivate the ego to pursue what it pursues, such as money, beauty, and a good job.

The ego and Essence are motivated to do many of the same things: Both motivate us to take care of

ourselves, work, play, pursue relationships, and in other ways create a life. However, the ego and Essence do these things for different reasons. While Essence does them for the love of life, the love of being alive, and the drive to perpetuate life, the ego does them out of feelings of lack and fear in order to gain superiority and control. Because the ego acts from fear, it often causes harm, but even love is behind that, albeit a distorted version of it: love for what the ego is trying to get by harming someone or love for its own self-preservation.

Because the ego sees itself as separate from everything, it is driven by fear and sees others and the world as something to conquer or subdue. This is obvious in how people have related to the environment. While native peoples have generally viewed themselves as part of a Whole and as belonging to and caretakers of nature, our ego-driven societies have related to the environment and other peoples as something to control and use for our own needs, without considering the impact of our actions on the Whole. These are two very different ways of being, which come from very different states of consciousness and result in very different worlds. If we don't begin to relate to the world more from Essence instead of the ego, there may not be much of

a world left. Raising our consciousness is not just for ourselves, but for everyone and for the earth—for the Whole.

Many think that if they don't live as the ego would have them live, they'll end up doing nothing. They think that spiritual teachings that emphasize meditation, acceptance, and being in the moment lead to being passive and avoiding the world and practical matters. Many assume they won't get anything done or be able to pay their bills if they live as these teachings suggest. But that's a misunderstanding. These teachings emphasize what they do because doing these things drops us into Essence, where we can then discover how Essence is moving us to act *now* in the world and what wisdom and insights it might have for us that can inform our life and actions. How do we know what to do and how to live our life? Instead of getting the answers from the egoic mind, we can find out by paying attention to what's coming out of the Now.

Life happens, and it happens through us. We can be moved by the ego and its fear, or we can let life happen through us as it's meant to by letting Essence move us. Essence is motivated by love, not by fear, and the results of Essence moving through us are peace, harmony, unity, and love. The only thing

that can interfere with wiser and more loving action in this world is following the ego's fear and letting the ego dominate our lives. When we're no longer listening to the egoic mind, Life has a chance to flow through us as it's meant to and as it naturally does, even to some extent when we are ego identified.

From *Trusting Life*

PART 2

BEING LOVING

LOVE THE UNIQUENESS IN EVERYONE

The ego—the aspect of ourselves that appears to be running the show and using our mind, via the voice in our head, to do it—is deeply conditioned, or programmed, to react to differences as alien to itself and therefore potentially dangerous. It views others as a threat to its survival, and yet it needs others to survive.

What a dilemma and interesting situation we find ourselves in. As long as we see ourselves as the ego and identify with the voice in our head, we are bound to feel tension between ourselves and others, especially when we perceive differences. Since every person is entirely unique from every other, this tension is nearly ongoing. We experience occasional relief from it when we meet someone who is similar to us in some way, or when we think someone is similar, but eventually the differences show up.

The ego feels that it must do something about these differences. It points them out, judges them, argues with them, attacks them, and tries to change them. Differences make the ego feel superior,

inferior, defensive, frightened, or angry—not loving, kind, compassionate, or even curious. For the ego, differences stir up inner and outer conflict and plenty of feelings. This is the ego’s experience of relationships.

For the ego, relationships are difficult and stressful, and other people are never quite right. “If only . . . ,” it dreams. It’s sure the problem is that the right person just hasn’t come along: “If only the right person would come into my life, then I could relax and live happily ever after.” Even those in relationships often secretly dream of another more perfect relationship.

This is the way the ego deals with every aspect of life, not only relationships: It longs and hopes for a better this and a better that. It isn’t satisfied with life, no matter what life brings. It sees life as falling short no matter what happens, and it sees relationships this way as well. As long as our identity is tied up with the ego and its servant, the egoic mind, we will never be satisfied with life or with our relationships.

Fortunately, we are not our ego or the voice in our head. We are only programmed to think we are. Once you see this, you can begin to experience your true Self—Essence—and live your life and carry on your relationships from there. From Essence, true

love is entirely possible. But true love is not possible from the ego. What does the ego know about love? It knows only about protecting its interests, and there's no room for that in true love.

From *Loving in the Moment*

GIVE FREELY

The ego is always trying to get something for itself from others and from the environment because it's afraid and unhappy. The ego believes it doesn't have enough to be happy, so its strategy is to withhold what it has and try to get more of what it thinks it needs to be happy.

This strategy may seem sensible—and to the ego, it is. However, the real solution to the perception of not having enough is to see that that perception is erroneous and that we have always had enough to be happy. Right now, we are existing and being supported in that existence, which has always been true and will be true for the remainder of our lives. From the place of realizing we have what we need to be happy, and only from that place of completeness, can giving happen, because if we believe we don't have enough to be happy, why would we give?

The ego's belief in not having enough blocks love, which is essentially an outflow of attention, energy, or gifts to others. When the majority of people believe they don't have enough to be happy, the

global flow of love and energy is sluggish. However, when the majority of people believe otherwise, love and energy flow, proving the abundance and support that is available in life.

We are free to choose the ego's way and withhold what we have to give or to give more freely. The result of these two choices is very different: When we give freely, we feel full and complete; when we withhold, we feel small, petty, impotent, and lacking. We are meant to learn that giving fulfills us, while withholding and trying to get causes us to feel empty and even more needy. This understanding runs counter to our programming, which drives us to try to get something from others to fulfill our neediness, only to end up even more needy, grasping, lacking, and unfulfilled.

The value of giving is one of the great secrets of life. Giving requires a leap of faith, an ability to trust that giving is worthwhile. Once we begin to trust this and see the results of giving, then giving becomes much easier, even when we feel we don't have enough. To make this leap, we only need to see that the feeling of not having enough isn't true, but merely the way the ego sees life. Feelings don't tell the truth about life, but are an outgrowth of the programming of the false self.

Allowing the perception of lack to interfere with giving results in the very sense of lack the ego believes in. The ego's belief in not having enough is a self-fulfilling prophecy. As long as we believe we don't have enough to be happy, we won't give and we won't discover the truth, which is that Life is abundantly providing for us to the extent that we join the global flow, the outpouring of giving. If we hold ourselves separate from the Whole, however, then we won't benefit as fully from the flow of Life as possible. Life is calling to us to jump into the flow of abundance and to contribute our share. The more who do that, the more abundantly we all can live.

From *Embracing the Now*

EXPERIENCE THE SOURCE OF LOVE WITHIN

Many wonder, "How can I get more love in my life?" The problem with this question is that it assumes you don't have enough love right now and that you have to do something to get it. It also assumes that love is something we get from other people. If you believe these assumptions, you will get busy trying to do something to get love, and you will be doing those things from a sense of lack, which is not particularly attractive. When we believe we lack love, we create a sense of lack within ourselves, and that sense of lack becomes somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophesy, as people sense that we want something from them.

When we are looking to get something from people, even love, it's coming from the ego, which is a place of self-centeredness, tension, and discontentment: "What can you do for me?" Other egos are also looking for what someone else can do for them. Those who are looking for something or someone to fulfill them from the outside aren't likely

to find it, not only because other people don't necessarily want to fill that role, but also, more importantly, because we can never get enough love from outside ourselves to fulfill the ego's sense of lack.

The only solution to wanting more love is realizing the truth about love: It is our nature to love, and each of us has an unlimited supply of it, but we must choose to activate this supply of love by giving it away. The way to have the experience of love is to give love. When love is flowing from us, we experience love. It doesn't come from others. This becomes apparent when someone is in love with us, but we aren't in love with him or her. Someone loving us isn't enough to get us to feel love. Love isn't something someone can give us. What we really want is to feel the love that we *are*. The source of love is inside of us, and we experience love when we choose to give it to others.

We are used to thinking of love as an emotion, a feeling that sweeps over us, like when we fall in love. Falling in love is the most wonderful feeling, and yet, the feeling of falling in love isn't true love, and it doesn't last. We long for that feeling to be our ongoing experience, but it can't be. Falling in love is a feeling that comes and eventually goes. True love is

not so much a feeling as a way of being. It's a state of acceptance, openness, kindness, and receptivity to another. We experience love as a result of being open and attentive to and accepting of whomever is in front of us.

Love also flows when we are simply open to and accepting of life and whatever experience we are having. Love flows from us (and is experienced by us) whenever we are fully present and accepting of how life is showing up, whether a relationship is part of that moment or not. Love flows whenever we aren't complaining about life, wanting something different, or judging and evaluating whatever is going on.

Love is our natural state. It's the state we drop into whenever we are simply saying yes to how life is showing up in the moment. The only thing that can interfere with this yes is the egoic mind saying no to life. So the only thing that can interfere with love is a thought! No person or circumstance can interfere with our ability to feel love unless we allow it to. And no person can make us feel love unless we allow it either. The really good news is that love is a possibility in every moment. It's in our control. It's our choice: We can choose to love whatever and whomever we are experiencing or not.

Our default position as humans seems to be to reject and find fault with our experience and with the people we encounter. But that doesn't have to be our response to life. We have the power to ignore the judgments and negativity of our minds and to open our hearts in acceptance to whatever happens to be showing up. When we do that, we discover that there's no shortage of love.

When we are very present to whatever experience we are having instead of involved in our thoughts about life, love flows outward from within us to whatever and whomever we are experiencing. We also find that love from others is the natural response to this outward flow. But the love that's returned to us is not the source of our love, as nice as that love might be.

You are the source of love, and you have the power to feel love. In any moment, you can choose love instead of following your train of thoughts about what you want and how you'd like things to be. You are the creator of your experience because you can choose how you respond to life. We may not be able to control what comes our way and whether we are in a relationship with someone at a particular time. But we can control how we choose to see and respond to whatever life brings us. Once we've

learned that we are masters of our experience in this way, life can be full of love whether we have someone special returning our love or not.

From *Living in the Now*

PUT LOVE ABOVE BEING RIGHT

The desire to be right is one of the ego's strongest desires because being right is felt to be closely tied to survival. Being right puts us on top, and that's where the ego wants to be because the ego thinks that being on top will keep it safe. Again and again, the ego will choose being right over love and connection with others. This tendency to make being right more important than love is what makes relationships so difficult. When people in a relationship are ego identified, both want to be right, and that's especially impossible when no one is actually right!

The reason that no one is actually right is because disagreements are based on conditioning, and conditioning is simply different beliefs. Everyone thinks their beliefs are right; however, there is no absolute truth when it comes to beliefs, only relative truth. Conditioning is conditioning, and all conditioning bears the stamp of the ego. Conditioning is made up of generalizations, beliefs that have been passed on, truisms, cultural and religious training, and other acquired ideas. When

we are attached to our conditioning and to being right, we argue about things like the right way to make the bed or wash the dishes. Getting the other person to do things our way becomes more important than loving that person and accepting that we are all different.

Our true self, Essence, loves our differences, or we wouldn't be the way we are. Life wouldn't be what it is if we weren't different from each other. What an amazing thing it is that each of us is so unique! However, the ego feels threatened by these differences, and so it is uncomfortable with them. We are designed to both love others and disagree with them. It's part of our evolution to learn to lovingly disagree, which requires that we hold our differences more lightly than the ego is used to doing.

Wanting to be right is not a worthwhile desire, and that has to be seen. This desire is the ego doing what egos do. Choosing love over being right is the choice that brings happiness because choosing love over our conditioning shifts us out of the ego's world and into Essence's. Essence chooses love because Essence is moving all of life toward love. Whenever we choose love over being right, or any other value of the ego, we drop into Essence and immediately

experience the love, peace, joy, and contentment of Essence.

By using our will to choose love instead of following our programming, we evoke love. As soon as we give our attention to love, we land in love. And what could be better than that? When you make this choice often enough, you discover that being loving and accepting feels much better than being right. The ego gets some smug pleasure from being right, but that bit of pleasure can't compare with the good feeling that comes from loving.

Noticing that you have a choice is key to making the right choice. When we are involved with others, we often go unconscious and respond automatically from the ego. Being in relationship is challenging even to those who are very conscious and aware because the ego is easily triggered in relationship. As soon as we open our mouths, we tend to give voice to the ego and its thoughts, without evaluating those thoughts first.

What we often voice are our opinions and judgments, all of which are likely better left unsaid. The ego's opinions and judgments don't serve our relationships any more than they serve us. Opinions and judgments are generally a way we try to prove to others that we are right. When we pay close

attention to our interactions with others, we discover that much of what we say is an attempt to know something or to be right, which is how the ego tries to be superior.

Another desire can replace the desire to be right and to be superior, and that is the desire for love and unity. You can choose to not speak the ego's divisive judgments, opinions, and beliefs. The loving choice is often to *not* speak. You choose to not give your attention to the ego's judgments, opinions, and beliefs because giving your attention to them doesn't support love. When you make the choice to ignore and not give voice to such thoughts, you are choosing Essence's desire for love over the ego's desire to be right.

From *Anatomy of Desire*

TAKE TIME TO RESPOND FROM A DEEPER PLACE

The first and automatic response to anything, such as a request from someone or even an opportunity, is likely to come from the ego. We are programmed to respond automatically, and this programming is released into the mind as a thought, opinion, belief, point of view, attitude, or emotional reaction. Often the response is similar to how we have responded many times before, and it usually has some psychological, emotional, or even astrological basis.

Notice how quickly you come up with a response to something or someone, such as someone asking you to do something. If a response isn't quick, it's usually because of conflicting programming: Two different programmed responses are in conflict, in which case, the immediate reaction might be confusion, frustration, or anger.

If you identify with the first response, that is, if you take the voice in your head (the ego's voice) as *your* voice, *your* opinion, or *your* reaction, chances are that response won't be very charitable or wise

because the ego isn't either of these. When you give voice to the ego, you won't feel very good about yourself because the ego's responses tend to be self-centered, unkind, and narrow-minded, which is how we feel when we are identified with the ego.

When that happens, you might try to feel better about yourself through various strategies. You might try to build a case to justify your responses, and judgments are often part of that. Since judging never feels good, the ego may try to feel better by seeking pleasure or in other ways trying to improve its self-image or situation, all because you bought into your initial, automatic reaction.

Once you realize that your initial reaction is most likely from the ego, you can just wait a moment for some other reaction to arise from deeper within you, from Essence. If Essence is given a chance, it will act and speak through you. But if you act and speak automatically from the ego, you won't discover how Essence might have responded.

You can tell when Essence is speaking and acting through you because instead of being tense, confused, or unkind, you feel at peace, open, accepting, and loving. Your response to a request, for instance, may still be no, but you will deliver that

"no" in a way that the person won't feel hurt or offended.

As we mature, we usually do learn to be kinder because acting out of the ego gets us into trouble. Egos aren't very nice, and most of us learn to be nice by holding back our initial reactions. Doing that is certainly better than giving voice to an unkind ego, but that can leave us with negative feelings if we still believe our ego's viewpoint. The way out of these feelings is to recognize that those thoughts are the ego's and not your true voice. Don't agree with the egoic mind, stay apart from it, and just notice it. Then you can discover your true voice.

You don't have to *try* to be nice; you only have to realize that what isn't nice about you (and everyone else) is the ego, and not who you really are. Step back and give some space and time to your initial thoughts and reactions, and you will discover Essence, which has the wisdom and love to bring peace and harmony to any situation.

From *Living in the Now*

FOCUS ON WHAT IS LOVABLE

The alternative to rejecting something about the way things are, which is what the ego does, is finding something to love about it. There's always something to love in every moment. Can you find a sensation, something of beauty, or a sound that is loveable? Is peace here, even just a sliver? Is love? Is contentment? Is the universe holding together?

Being happy or not being happy is largely a matter of what we focus on. The ego can be miserable, and we can still be happy if we find something loveable about what is going on. Finding something to love is hard for the ego, but it's actually easy because there's plenty that is loveable about life. From Essence's standpoint, all of life is loveable because Essence experiences life differently than the ego. Essence says yes to it, while the ego says no. Paying attention to the ego's rejection of life makes us miserable, while noticing what is loveable fills us with love.

The secret to happiness is to love—not to be loved, but to love. Loving is essentially saying yes to life, accepting it. Loving feels good, even better than being loved. Nothing feels better than loving. However, the

ego doesn't want to love as much as it wants other things, such as power and security. It would rather feel angry, sad, or any other emotion than love. Emotions give the ego some identity, some reason for existing. They give it a problem to fix.

The ego doesn't want to love because loving makes it feel vulnerable. It doesn't trust love because the ego isn't what creates or experiences love. Loving is the domain of Essence, and when we are experiencing love, we are experiencing Essence. So to move out of the ego and into Essence, all we have to do is find something to love. Doing that is easy, but the catch is we have to want to.

The *you* that wants to move out of ego identification and into Essence is the *you* that is already not identified with the ego. That is a catch! The ego doesn't want you to move out of ego identification, but something else does, and that's Essence. There comes a time in our spiritual evolution when we become aware of a *you* that can choose to move out of ego identification. Then we begin to wake up out of ego identification and live more as Essence in the world. Essence is what chooses love over the ego's values. Essence is what loves, not the ego.

When we choose to find something loveable about the present moment, we will find many things. One thing that's always loveable is simply our willingness to love. What a miracle! In the midst of such a painful and difficult world, we have within us a willingness to love. That goodness within us is extremely loveable. That same goodness is within everyone else too, although that goodness—God-ness—is often hidden by the ego. Still, there's much evidence of the goodness within everyone when we look for it.

One of the easiest ways to experience love is to give our attention to something we love. Just looking at our pets, for instance, opens our Heart, which is why pets are such a gift to us. Of course our children and other loved ones also open our Hearts, although their egos and ours often complicate love. Our pets' lack of ego allows our ego to relax and stay in the background. Anything of beauty also evokes our love: nature, colors, art, and music. Since beauty is always available, love is always available.

We can also experience love for the gift of being alive and for being able to experience the present moment. That's the love Essence feels as it lives life through us. What a wonder the physical body is! That sense of wonder and gratitude for life, the body, and other living things is love. The Being that we are is in

awe of life. When we move our attention onto that which loves life, we feel complete. Nothing more is needed in the moment than that. What a surprise that life can be this simple and complete!

Finding something to love in every moment is the antidote to the ego's rejection of the moment. When you find yourself struggling against life, stop and notice what's beautiful and loveable. And don't just stop with one thing; find another and another. Life can be lived from a place of celebration and gratitude instead of rejection. It's your choice.

From *Embracing the Now*

LOVE WHAT YOU DO

One step beyond accepting whatever is happening is loving it. Once we accept what's happening, then we might as well love it. Loving whatever is happening just means getting involved, or absorbed, in it, jumping right into it and having the full experience of it. Thinking dilutes experience and keeps us from fully immersing in whatever we are doing. Thoughts accompany most experiences, and keep our attention from being completely on whatever experience we are having. Whatever you are doing, really do that, jump in with both feet. If you're going to eat that piece of cake, then really experience it, unaccompanied by thoughts of guilt or strategies for how you will make up for the calories.

So often, we commit to doing something without really committing to it. We have one foot in an experience and one foot out of it. While we are doing something, we question whether we want to be doing it, complain about it, or think about something else. Being involved with our thoughts dilutes the experience we are having. It removes us

from that experience and makes it hard to enjoy the experience.

If you can't commit to being fully in an experience, then one option might be to not do it at all. Do you really need to do it or do it at this time? The ego pushes us to do things on its timetable and to do things aligned with its goals. It pushes us to do something *and* complains about doing what it's pushing us to do. If you're going to do something, then commit to doing it with joy. If you can't do something with joy, then consider not doing it at all or not doing it just then, if you can.

Any experience can be enjoyable if our attention is fully committed to it. The secret to enjoying life is committing our attention to whatever we are doing. When we do that, we land in the Now and in Essence, and Essence loves life. As long as we continue to give our attention to what we are experiencing, we will feel love for life, however life happens to be showing up.

Giving our attention to what we are doing is much more difficult when we are doing something we don't like to do. If we didn't like doing something in the past, we often assume we won't like doing it again, but do you really know that? The reason we don't like doing something is because the mind gives

us reasons for not liking it: Doing it is uncomfortable, messy, hard, tiring, scary, and so on. Such complaints seem reasonable from the ego's standpoint. However, we can love doing something even though it's uncomfortable, messy, hard, tiring, scary or whatever. Besides, no experience can be summed up in a few words. These are the ego's stories, which don't capture the entire, real experience. The mind emphasizes the negatives and ignores the positives. When we focus on the negatives, they become magnified, and the rest recedes into the background. The result is that we have a negative experience.

Essence loves experiences the ego considers unpleasant just as much as it loves pleasant ones. It doesn't categorize life as good or bad, pleasant or unpleasant, like the ego does. It doesn't evaluate or judge like the ego does. "Pleasant" and "unpleasant" aren't in Essence's vocabulary. Whatever *is*, is just the way it is, without a particular definition. Accessing the part of us, Essence, that loves the experience we are having is always possible, but to do that, we have to ignore the ego's point of view.

Complaining about something while we are doing it makes it impossible to enjoy it. Check it out for yourself: Has complaining ever improved an

experience? What happens when you give up your complaints and become absorbed in the experience rather than in the pain, discomfort, or resistance to it? Without the ego's complaints and fears, even physical pain can be accepted and more easily endured. Without the mind's complaints, enjoying, or at least accepting, anything is possible.

The ego likes to complain because complaining gives it something to talk about. The chatterbox mind has to say something! So the mind finds something it doesn't like and gets very busy building a case against it. The problem is, if we are complaining about something when we're doing it, complaining becomes our experience of doing it, and we're no longer having the full experience of the Now.

To love what we are experiencing, all it takes is our attention. When we give our attention to something, love flows to it. So if you want to love what you're experiencing instead of resist it, give it your attention. That's the antidote to the ego's resistance. If we give our attention to our resistance, we are loving resisting. Then resistance is magnified and becomes our experience.

Because the ego doesn't want to love, we have to find within us that which is willing to love life just as

it is. We have to summon that to counter the ego's complaints and resistance to life. We summon, or align with, Essence by giving our full attention to the Now.

From *Embracing the Now*

NOTICE WHAT YOU LOVE

What do you like most about being alive now on planet earth? The song from “The Sound of Music” about favorite things (“Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens... these are a few of my favorite things”) is an expression from Essence. When we are in Essence, we love the little things, like whiskers on kittens—what a miracle! There's so much joy when we are really present to life and the miracle that it is. We get joy from the littlest things.

This is so unlike the ego, which disparages such things. “Oh that—I've seen that before!” is its attitude. It wants life to be about *it*, not about life itself. The ego loves whatever makes it feel good about *itself*, not what makes it feel good. This egocentricity is one of the most obvious differences between the state of ego identification and our natural state, or Essence. The ego refers whatever is happening back to itself: What will it mean to *me*? But when we are in Essence, we experience Essence's joy at experiencing itself through *all* of creation.

So what is it you love about life? It's so good to notice and acknowledge this because doing so aligns us with Essence and strengthen our awareness of Essence's presence in our life. When we notice those whiskers, those dew drops, those beautiful and amazing things about planet earth and its creations, we can't help but feel Essence's joy. The only thing that gets in the way of that joy is not noticing such things, and the only reason we don't is if we are busy noticing something else, which for most people is their thoughts.

Do your thoughts bring you that same kind of joy? It really helps to notice the impact that thoughts have on your state of consciousness because when you do, you see that they don't give you the same peace, joy, and happiness that noticing life more purely does.

Do you love how the clouds move and shift as you watch them? Do you love how the stars seem to twinkle? Do you love how your dog's chest moves up and down when breathing? Do you love the sound of the wind in the trees before a storm? Do you love the smell of damp leaves in the fall? Do you love the feel of the water against your skin when you are swimming through it? It's impossible to run out of things to love about life. What a wonderful spiritual

practice it is to notice and feel gratitude for the little things in life. What feels that way is Essence. So you see, Essence is very close at hand. It's not some mysterious force separate from us, but that which lives through us and experiences this precious life we have been given.

What a different world it is when, instead, we are identified with the ego. Every little experience and change has tension around it: Will it be good or bad for *me*? The ego evaluates everything, even the breeze, even the dew, even the whiskers on kittens. It can find a problem with anything: The breeze musses *my* hair, the dew makes *my* feet wet, *I* need to trim those whiskers. That's how the ego sees life. It's always about how something affects *me*, how it might affect *me* in the future, or how it has affected *me* in the past.

The egoic mind tells stories about the big and little things in life, which takes us out of the experience of life and makes life seem more terrible, frightening, and troublesome than it actually is. The reason living in Essence feels peaceful is that peace is the real experience of life. Yes, life is more peaceful than the ego's experience of it. The mind scares us and causes us to distrust life and live in fear, doubt, and suspicion of what is going to happen rather than

in excited anticipation for what will be revealed next in this great adventure called life. Yes, life is terrible sometimes, but it's never as terrible as the mind says it is. The ego makes it terrible by telling us it is terrible. How obvious this is once we really look, and that is the difference. When we are conscious and noticing what's true rather than unconscious and accepting what the mind tells us, the truth is obvious. Just notice this beautiful gift of life you have been given. Just notice what is true and real.

From *Living in the Now*

BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Love is the underlying fabric of life, and kindness is its reflection in the world, through us. It can be conveyed in attentiveness to others, in words, or in deeds. One of the most powerful acts of kindness is kindness toward ourselves. That is really where kindness begins. If we aren't kind to ourselves, how can we be kind to others? Unless we are also kind to ourselves, kindness toward others is more of a manipulation, an attempt to get others to give us something, including love. However, unless we are kind to ourselves, we won't even be able to take in any kindness we do receive from others. That place of lack inside of us can't be filled from the outside. First, we have to be kind to ourselves.

True kindness comes from a desire to soothe and comfort others because we have discovered the power and blessing of kindness as a result of having received it. Receiving kindness from others heals us and makes it possible to express it to others. If we haven't received much kindness from others, we need to find a way to give it to ourselves, to be kind

to ourselves even though others may not have been. To do that, we have to do two things: We have to forgive those who weren't kind to us, and we have to see that we deserve love.

Unfortunately, those who didn't receive a lot of kindness as children usually concluded that they deserved that and that they aren't lovable. They need to forgive those who were unable to be kind to them (probably because they were treated the same way when they were young) and learn to give love to themselves. Those who were abused learned to abuse themselves inwardly; they learned to believe their negative thoughts about themselves. They need to develop a loving inner voice rather than an unloving one. That can be done, but it takes a willingness to see the truth, to see through the negative self-image to the truth—that you are divinity in a human body, that you are love incarnate.

Everyone has the same capacity to love, but that ability may have been squelched by not having been loved. Not being loved as a child blocks the natural flow of love, and giving love to yourself allows love to flow outward again. It's always possible to give ourselves love because our true nature (Essence) loves the human expression that we are, no matter what we have or haven't done, no matter what our

shortcomings are. When we tap into the love—the kindness and compassion—that our true self has for the human that we are and for all of humanity, we unleash the power of love in our life to heal ourselves and others.

We desperately need this now on earth. Can you find it in your heart to be kind to yourself? This is not a selfish act, but the most unselfish act because it allows the love of your true nature to flow outward toward all of life. You don't have to like the ego and its ways; just accept it as part of the human condition. Be kind and compassionate toward yourself and those who are caught in the ego and the suffering it causes, and this kindness will release you and others from the ego's prison of limitation and fear. Love yourself and others for the courage to be alive and be human in these difficult and challenging times. Give yourself and others some slack. Forgive, allow, accept, and be kind. Relax and let everything be as it is.

From *Living in the Now*

ENJOY WHATEVER YOU ARE DOING

Whatever you are doing, enjoy it! You have another option, of course, which is to not enjoy it. Notice what keeps you from enjoying whatever you are doing. It's your thoughts, isn't it? Even when you are experiencing pain or something unpleasant, like going to the dentist, if you don't listen to any negative thoughts, fears, complaints, and desires about it, you won't suffer. You'll just have the experience.

Our thoughts about whatever we are doing interfere with enjoying it not only because they are often negative, judgmental, or resistant to the experience, but also because thoughts—even positive ones—remove us from an experience to some degree. Some thoughts don't interfere much with being present and enjoying what we are doing; they just float in and out of our mind, without taking very much of our attention. Other thoughts, however, grab us, and we lose touch with what we are doing and the experience we are having. When that

happens, it feels like we are going through the motions or doing something just to get it done.

We can go through life this way if we want, but when we aren't fully in contact with what we're doing, we miss out on the potential joy and pleasure in it. Any experience can be interesting, since we have never had it before. And any experience can be enjoyed, because when we are immersed in it, we lose the false self (the sense of *I* or *me*) and discover our true self, which is always enjoying life. Essence is always in-joy. And from Essence's standpoint, every moment is an opportunity to serve life and love, which is another source of joy. What if you approached each moment as an opportunity to experience, serve, or love?

The secret to enjoying whatever you are doing is getting lost in it, getting involved in it. That means getting all your senses involved in it or, more accurately, noticing how all your senses *are* involved in it. Noticing sensory experience takes us out of our egoic mind (our functional mind is still available) and into the experience we are having. When you are present to the experience you are having, you are in the moment, where it's possible to experience Presence, or Essence. The experience of Essence is

highly pleasurable, so no matter what you are doing, if you are present to it, it will be enjoyable.

What's so hard about being present? It takes some practice to be in our body and aware of our sensory experience because the habit of being absorbed in thought is so deeply ingrained. We have to practice being present again and again to neutralize the old habit of identifying with the voice in our head, and that takes dedication and commitment.

Meditation is a way of practicing being present, and it will really help you live in the moment more. Meditation teaches us to detach from the egoic mind, observe it, and see it for what it is. Objectivity toward the voice in our head is essential in breaking the programming that causes us to identify with that voice, which belongs primarily to the ego. You can even learn to enjoy meditation if you don't listen to the egoic mind's resistance to it!

From *Living in the Now*

EXPRESS GRATITUDE

Gratitude is a quality of Essence, and when we are feeling it, we are in Essence. When we are not feeling it, expressing it anyway can get us to feel it, and expressing gratitude will also help others in our life drop into Essence. Expressing gratitude is good for you and good for those you express gratitude to. It's a simple thing you can do that will help you and those around you live more from Essence.

It's surprising how uplifting gratitude, even over little things, can be: "I love that you remembered to do that." "You're so wonderful at fixing things." "I appreciate how sweet you are." Giving and receiving gratitude for something small feels just as good as giving and receiving it for something big. The small things that others do for us are so often overlooked and taken for granted, but they are real opportunities to express our gratitude and thus keep the good feelings going in our relationships.

There's always something to be grateful for—just the fact that you and your loved ones are together for another day (someday this will no longer be true),

that you can function as you do, that you have what you have. The fact that someone is willing to do anything for us is quite a miracle; it's an act of love. These acts of love are natural to Essence, but not natural at all to the ego. Every act of giving without trying to get something in return comes from Essence.

Tension in relationships is often caused by not feeling appreciated, and gratitude is the antidote to that. A lack of appreciation for our partner and what he or she does comes from being identified with the ego. When we are identified with the ego, we notice what someone hasn't done for us. And we don't notice what he or she has done for us, so we don't feel appreciation. We take for granted the good qualities and good acts of our partner and, instead, focus on what else we want. We demand more, without appreciating what we have. We forget what we fell in love with about our partner, and we want more or something different. We forget to express gratitude because we don't feel appreciative. But this lack of appreciation can be turned around by simply expressing gratitude, whether you feel it or not.

When you are identified with the ego, your partner is bound to feel unappreciated. And when your partner feels unappreciated, he or she wants to

be acknowledged by you. When you do that, his or her ego can relax because, even though the ego doesn't express appreciation, it does expect to receive it! When your partner experiences appreciation, your partner's ego is soothed, and he or she can drop into Essence. Often, it isn't that your partner isn't willing to give to you; it's that your partner just wants to be acknowledged and appreciated for giving.

A little appreciation goes a long way in relationships. It results in cooperation, in the willingness to be helpful to each other, while a lack of appreciation often results in the withdrawal of love and giving, which can have a very negative, spiraling effect. To turn this negative spiral around, gratitude, appreciation, praise, and compliments do wonders. Sometimes that's all that is needed for harmony, happiness, and love to flow once again.

From *Loving in the Moment*

DON'T SHARE THE EGO'S TRUTH

The ego's thoughts in general, and judgments in particular, aren't necessarily useful to share with others. Honesty is not the best policy, if that honesty comes from the ego. In addition to judgments, the ego is full of opinions, complaints, and half-truths, and sharing these with others can only bring them into the egoic state of consciousness. And often, what the ego thinks is just plain hurtful. Most people are conditioned to believe that being honest is necessary and good for relationships when, in fact, it's often very detrimental. If being truthful means expressing the ego's truth, then it's better to not be truthful or to just keep quiet. The ego's truth is not the truth, and speaking it just keeps us identified with the ego and drags others into ego identification.

For instance, sharing what you don't like about your partner is just hurtful and doesn't serve. What's the point in telling your partner you don't like the way he or she smiles, or the way he or she dresses, or the way he or she drives, or the way he or she talks to the dog? It only creates tension between you. Sharing

such information is generally an attempt, although an ineffective one, to change the other person to fit your preferences. If something you say will result in contraction or negative feelings in the other person rather than love, then it's better to not say it—even if it's true to you. Choose love rather than the ego's truth. The ego chooses to speak its truth instead of being loving because doing so gives it a feeling of being right. But being right doesn't actually feel good, certainly not like love feels.

Even if your partner asks your opinion about how he or she looks, it never serves to be honest if you don't like something, especially if it isn't something that can be changed. It's one thing to say, "I like that dress better than the other one," and quite another to say, "I think you look a little fat in that." One expresses a preference about a dress, and the other expresses an opinion about the person's body, which can't easily be changed. Perhaps she says, "Do you think I've gained a little weight?" Even if you think she has, find a way to make her feel good instead of agreeing with her—for example, "You're as beautiful as ever!" Or if she says, "Are you mad at me?" you might say, "No, I'm mad about you." It feels good to say something nice, and the other person will appreciate your sweetness. You will

have brought her into Essence and out of her critical mind. What a gift!

When the ego speaks, it results in contraction, bad feelings, and possibly tension and conflict in the relationship. When Essence speaks, on the other hand, people feel good, they relax, they feel love, and they give love. Paradise is restored! When Essence speaks, it expresses appreciation, approval, acceptance, compassion, patience, and love: “Take as much time as you want,” “I love how you do that,” “It’s fine just the way it is,” “It’s not that easy to do,” “You’re so sweet.” Essence compliments and uplifts rather than judges. This is the difference between heaven and hell on earth and in relationships.

Love is much more important than honesty. Honesty doesn’t serve relationships when it creates contraction and tension. When contraction and tension are present, you can be sure that the ego’s truth and not Essence’s is being spoken. Let the results of your words be what determines whether you speak them or not. Speak only what brings harmony and love to the relationship and forgo what the ego has to say. That’s a much better policy than honesty.

From *Loving in the Moment*

MAKE THE LOVING CHOICE

The Heart loves. It loves and accepts everything that happens in life because it loves life. However, although the Heart accepts everything, it moves us and life toward love. The Heart allows the ego to move away from love, but the Heart is always moving us toward love. Eventually the Heart wins out, and we all end up feeling love, gratitude, and appreciation for life and for all that life has brought us, for that is how the Heart, or Essence, feels in every moment.

The Heart desires love above all else. It isn't willing to exchange money, safety, power, prestige, success, or anything else for love. Love is the Heart's priority, and that is how we can tell Essence from the ego. The ego isn't willing to choose love over these things unless it sees love as an avenue to these things.

In any moment, the Heart is choosing love, while the ego is likely to be choosing something else. What are you choosing? When we are unaware of the possibility of choosing love or when we are unaccustomed to choosing love, we may not see that

we have a choice. And yet every moment holds the possibility of either choosing love or choosing the ego's way of being and seeing. What is the loving choice in this moment? What would Essence do? When those questions become a part of every moment, life flows and flowers.

The loving choice draws love to it, which is all we have ever wanted anyway. Love is the most powerfully attractive force in the universe, more powerful than beauty, power, wealth, success, or anything else we might want. When we choose love, we align ourselves with Essence, with the Heart. We drop instantly into Essence, where other qualities of Essence, such as gratitude, peace, contentment, and happiness, can be felt.

This sounds so simple, but if dropping into Essence were easy, there would be much more love in the world. The reason doing this isn't easy is that we are programmed to pay attention to the egoic mind, the voice in our head, and giving attention to anything is the same as choosing it. Whatever we give our attention to, we identify with. If we give our attention to love, we identify with love, and if we give our attention to our thoughts, we identify with (i.e., believe) them.

Choosing love requires consciously choosing to put our attention on the present moment and on the qualities of Essence instead of on our thoughts, and that takes awareness and the will to go against our programming. Once we are convinced that our programming, or conditioning, isn't worth paying attention to, giving our attention to the moment isn't so difficult. The challenge is that we are programmed to believe our thoughts and follow our conditioning.

Choosing love requires seeing beyond the ego's desires, needs, and conditioning. The ego only knows what it wants, what it feels it needs, what it believes, what it was taught, and what has worked in the past. When we are identified with the egoic mind, we make choices and act on the basis of the ego's needs, its knowledge, and its perceptions, which often doesn't result in the best response. Only Essence has the wisdom to know what is best for each situation, not the ego.

Even trying to answer the question, "What does Essence want?" might not give us the answer. We might only get the ego's answer to that question. Still, this question is worth asking because doing so interrupts the automatic identification with the egoic mind that is our default position long enough to

allow the possibility of Essence to inform us of the truth in Essence's own way.

Asking that question stops us momentarily and invites us to listen, and listening is key to aligning with Essence and with love. Because we are usually busy listening to the egoic mind, we don't hear Essence; but if our involvement with the mind is interrupted with that question, the answer may come forth from Essence. The answer isn't likely to show up as words, but as spontaneous action in accordance with love or as a sense of knowing what action would promote love.

From *Anatomy of Desire*

LOVE IS FOR GIVING

From *Living from the Heart*
by Nirmala, Gina Lake's husband
(<http://www.endless-satsang.com>)

What is love and where is it found? We search for love and try to get love, and yet it seems like we never get enough. Even when we've found it, it can slip away as time passes. What if there is a source of love that never fades and is always available? What if love is as near and easy as breathing? What if you have been "looking for love in all the wrong places" instead of actually lacking love?

Love is both simpler and more mysterious and subtle than we imagine it to be. Love is simply the spacious, open attention of our awareness, which is the gentlest, kindest, and most intimate force in the world. It touches things without impinging on them. It holds all of our experience but doesn't hold it down or hold it back. And yet, inherent in awareness is a pull to connect and even merge with the object of your awareness.

It's this seemingly contradictory nature of awareness—the completely open and allowing nature of it and its passionate pull to blend with and even become the object of its attention—that gives life its depth and sweetness. There is nothing more satisfying than this delicious dilemma of being both apart from and, at the same time, connected to something you see, hear, or feel.

Awareness is the beginning of all separation. Prior to awareness, there is just oneness or “is-ness,” with nothing separate from the oneness that would be able to experience it. With the birth of awareness comes the subtle distinction of two things: that which is aware and the object of awareness. And yet, those two are connected by this mysterious force we are calling awareness, or love.

This flow of awareness and love that connects you to all you experience is the true source of satisfaction and joy. We have all experienced it to some degree. Whenever you fall in love with a person, pet, piece of music, beautiful object, or anything else, you have felt this flow of intimate, connected awareness. Unfortunately, we've been taught to believe that the source of this good feeling was the object of our affection. So we suffered whenever we lost our apparent source. When your

lover leaves, your beloved pet dies, the concert ends, or your dream home is reposessed, you feel bereft of that loving, connected feeling.

You Are the Source

But what if you are the source of the awareness that connects you to everything? What if the love you have been seeking has always been right here inside your own Heart? What if it doesn't matter what your awareness touches, but only that awareness is flowing? That would profoundly simplify the search for love. Anything or any experience would be a suitable object for your love.

The sweetness of love is in the flow of awareness itself. The completely allowing openness and freedom you might look for from a perfect lover is already here in your own awareness. It doesn't have to try to be accepting because awareness is, by nature, open and allowing. By itself, awareness can't do anything but touch. It can't push or pull or demand something from or limit the freedom of what it touches. And yet, it is not an aloof, distant observer. It is deeply and intimately connected to the object of awareness. In fact, awareness and the object of

awareness come from the same source and are ultimately the same thing.

This connection and intimacy that is natural in awareness is satisfying and fulfilling regardless of the object of awareness. In other words, whatever you are experiencing right now is your true love. Whatever you are experiencing is an opportunity to also experience the depth of your true nature as open, loving awareness. Your true nature is true love. It is the perfect lover you have been seeking, and not only is it always here, but it is who you really are.

You might be thinking, “But wait, I don’t feel like I’m in love or loving all the time. Sometimes I feel lonely or angry and cut off from love and satisfaction.” So how can it be that love is here, but you don’t feel it? Is love really absent in those moments, or is it just limited in its expression and flow? Are there really moments when there is no awareness? Or is there always some awareness, even if it isn’t a lot? If there were no awareness, there also would be no problems because awareness is the beginning of separation (the sense of a separate self), and the end of awareness is the end of separation. Practically speaking, without awareness, there can’t be loneliness, anger, or anything else. So when you

are lonely or angry, there is at least some awareness, although possibly not much.

Even when awareness is contracted and tight, as it often is when you are lonely, angry, sad, hurt, or afraid, it has the same nature as when you are happy and excited. Even a single drop of water is still wet, and even a single drop of awareness is still open and allowing of whatever it is touching.

The only trick to experiencing the open and allowing nature of awareness is to look for it in the actual experience you are having. When your awareness is contracted by judgment or fear, it's not actually touching the object of your judgment or fear. Instead, it is touching the judgmental or fearful thought you are having. Awareness is completely allowing and open to that thought. That is the definition of awareness: it is the open and allowing recognition of the content of our experience. If awareness is not open to something, then we are not aware of it.

The key to experiencing love is to notice where awareness is flowing right now. That flow of awareness is love, and it's the most satisfying and nourishing thing you can experience. There is naturally a direction to this flow of awareness. It moves from within your being to the objects nearby

and the experiences you are having. You can only fully experience this flow of aware love as it moves in that direction.

When someone else is lovingly aware of you (not of their judgments or desires regarding you, but simply of you as you are), you can experience the outer expression of their love. You can see the way they are looking at you, the smile on their face, and their reactions to you. But the awareness of you is arising in them. The love is flowing from them toward you, and so it is filling them with a sense of satisfaction and joy. If you also are to feel satisfaction and joy, it will depend on whether you are experiencing a flow of love toward them. It is your own open awareness that fills you with that sense of connection and appreciation. *You are filled with love when you are giving it to someone or something else.*

Obviously, it's easier to open your Heart and express love when the requirements of your conditioning are being met. When someone who matches your ideal for a lover is attracted to and interested in you, it's especially easy to give him or her the same openness and attention in return. So naturally, when two people are falling in love, they are both feeling the fullness and richness of the free flow of awareness, or love. But the contact each of

them has with that love is within themselves. It's their own love and awareness that is filling them up so richly.

This truth—that you are filled with love when you love, rather than when you are loved—can free you from the search for love outside yourself. If you still aren't sure that it is your own love that fills you, think of a time when someone was in love with you, but you weren't in love with him or her. The flow of loving attention toward you wasn't satisfying. In fact, it might have been uncomfortable having someone so interested in you when you weren't feeling the same way.

In contrast, when you are falling in love with someone, it can be rich, exciting, and energizing, even if it isn't reciprocated. In unrequited love, there is an intensity and beauty from the outward flow of love that is filling you in that moment. So despite the disappointment and hurt of not being loved back, you experience a fullness and aliveness as a result of loving the other. In the Renaissance, unrequited love was even seen as an ideal. It's the love flowing out from your own Heart that fills you with joy and satisfaction. The source is within you.

Just One Being

There is just one awareness and one Being behind all the individual awarenesses. The way you can reach that oneness of Being is by experiencing the flow of love from within your being. Paradoxically, the place where you are connected to others is inside your own Heart. You can't really connect to another externally. Even if you used super glue to attach yourself to another person, there would still be a sense of separation in your outer experience, not to mention how hard it might be to disconnect!

On the inside, you are already connected to everyone and everything. The connection is this flow of awareness that is here right now reading these words. It is in the loving nature of awareness that the sense of connection is found, not in the objects of awareness. You are connected to others in the awareness flowing from within you to them. Connection is not found in the flow of awareness and love toward you, as that flow is connected to its source inside the other person.

This is good news! You can experience limitless love no matter what anyone else is doing. The only thing that matters is how much you are loving, not how much you are loved. Right now, you can be

filled to overflowing with the incredible sweetness of love, just by giving awareness to anything and everything that is present in your experience. Don't take my word for it; test it out with this exercise:

Exercise: *Allow your awareness to settle on a physical object nearby. Take an extra moment to allow your awareness to fully touch the object. Just for the sake of this experiment, give as much love, appreciation, and acceptance as you can to that object. Then notice another object. As your awareness rests for a moment on that, give it as much love, appreciation, and acceptance as you can.*

Now allow your awareness to notice a sound in your environment. As you listen, give that same loving appreciation to the sound you are hearing.

If you have any difficulty giving love and appreciation to a particular object or sound, try another object or sound. If you pick a more neutral object or sound, it will be easier at first to experience loving something for no particular reason.

Continue allowing your awareness to land on various objects, sounds, colors, tastes, smells, and sensations. With each one, allow as much love and appreciation to flow toward it as you can. Take as long as you like with each experience, and if it's difficult to

feel love toward something, just move on. It will get easier to love for no reason as you repeat this exercise.

Now notice other things that may be arising within you: an uncomfortable sensation, a thought, a feeling, or a desire. Take an extra moment to send loving attention toward it. Just for now, you can love each sensation, thought, feeling, or desire that appears within you.

As you get the hang of this, you can just allow your awareness to move naturally to whatever it touches next, either inside or outside of you. Whatever it lands on, give it love and acceptance. Just for a moment, let it be the way it is.

What is it like to give simple awareness and love over and over to things that appear in your experience? How open and full does your Heart feel when you are able to give love in this way? If you come to something that's difficult to love or accept, just notice that it's difficult, and then love that it's difficult right now. You can even take a moment to simply love the way some things are harder to love than others. Then move on to whatever is in awareness next.

Just go ahead and love whatever is in front of you, and in that way be filled with love. It's that simple, if you remember that the essence of love is

awareness and space. The ideal lover is someone who gives you lots of space to just be yourself but still connects with you as you are. Awareness is like that. It doesn't limit the object of its awareness, but it makes contact.

You Can't Run out of Love

You can give this awareness or love freely because awareness is the one thing you can never run out of. No matter how many things you've been aware of today, you still have awareness left for this moment and the next. Awareness is easy to give, and it doesn't cost anything or deplete you in any way. In your Heart, there is a limitless supply of love. Just see if you can give so much attention to something that you end up with no more awareness.

We sometimes withhold love and awareness because we think that true love requires more than this simple, open attention. Our conditioning suggests that love requires things like compromise, sacrifice, and unconditional giving of our time and effort. Perhaps some of these are necessary for a relationship, but not for love.

This is an important distinction, as we often confuse love and relationship. We mistakenly believe

that love is dependent on relationship. But if we recognize that the source of love is within us, then relationship can be seen in perspective. Relationships are important, but they aren't as important as love. The experience of this inner flow of love is satisfying, either with or without a relationship. You can experience it with a beautiful object of art in a museum, a moving piece of music, an exciting moment in a sporting activity, or in a deep connection with another person. Love is what makes relationships and everything else worthwhile.

What a rich possibility—that all the love you have ever wanted is available right now, just by giving it to everything you encounter, both within you and in the environment. Love is for giving, not for getting. And the more you give, the more fully it fills your Heart to overflowing.

PART 3

DAILY INSPIRATION

(Most quotes in this section are from
*Loving in the Moment: Moving from Ego to Essence in
Relationships*)

Love is what breaks the spell of the egoic state of consciousness and releases us from the prison of separation. It's love from others—from relationship—that ultimately frees us.

Love disarms the ego like nothing else. It breaks through the egoic state of consciousness and evokes love in us, which brings us into alignment with Essence and with the other qualities of Essence: peace, joy, serenity, happiness, kindness, compassion, patience, and fortitude, to name a few. That is why love is the greatest gift we can give another. Love is the gift that allows others to relax and return to Essence and the true happiness and peace that is our birthright.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Love is so powerful that even a little bit is potent enough to change our consciousness and the consciousness of others.

It's actually possible to love anyone. There are people whose heart doesn't close to anyone, no matter what someone looks like or how someone acts or how different he or she is, because they see beyond the person's disguise to what is Real. The Real—the divine Self—is apparent in everyone if we choose to look for it. It's easier to see it in some people than in others, but it can be seen in the eyes of anyone. The eyes are where it is most easily seen. Everyone knows what it looks like, although not everyone looks for it or chooses to see it.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Once we drop into Essence and feel love, it seems so easy to love and be at peace. And when we are identified with the ego, it seems so hard to get back to this place of happiness and love. What's the secret, the key, to moving into Essence from the ego? It's always a choice. You choose love over whatever the egoic mind is telling you about life, the past, the future, yourself, someone else, or what you should do. You recognize these messages as coming from the ego, and you choose not to listen to them.

The egoic mind takes us away from love. It causes separation. When we feel love, Essence is at work, not the ego. Love is how we can recognize Essence. Likewise, separation, contraction, negativity, and the absence of love is how we can recognize the ego. When we feel these, then we know we are identified and being led by the egoic mind, not Essence. It's easy to tell when we are aligned with and listening to the ego and when we are aligned with and listening to Essence. One corresponds to the human condition and suffering, and the other to the divine condition and love.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

When we are with another, we are most able to experience Essence when thoughts aren't happening or being given our attention and when conditioning isn't being triggered. Thinking can still be happening, but if we aren't paying attention to it, we drop into Essence, and from that place it's possible to experience Essence in someone else, even if that person isn't experiencing it.

To experience Essence in another, it's only necessary to experience ourselves as Essence. There is only one Essence, and experiencing ourselves as Essence enables us to experience it in others, however briefly.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

The experience of Essence is simple and uncomplicated compared to the experience of thought. Essence is experienced as a quiet, peaceful contentment with life, all of which causes the heart to open and love to flow. This flow of love can be frightening to those who aren't used to experiencing it. Love makes the ego feel vulnerable, weak, and out of control. It only takes a second for the ego to enter into that loving moment, feel this fear, and bring you out of the moment and into your thoughts. Suddenly, you are no longer experiencing the love and the moment, but thinking about them or something else. The love, peace, and contentment of Essence are gone, and you are back in the confusion, fear, and discontentment of the ego.

The way out of the egoic state of consciousness and into Essence is not a hard road after all. All it takes is paying attention to the love, joy, peace, contentment, compassion, wisdom, and happiness that are already here in this moment. Can you feel them—any of them—even just a little? That is your doorway into Essence. Even a sliver of love or peace or joy can take you there. Pay attention to that sliver—notice it—and then that will become your experience of the moment instead of your thoughts. Instead of noticing your thoughts, notice these subtle feelings and qualities that belong to Essence, and you are there! Making this choice isn't difficult or unpleasant, but it is a choice.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

We think we are being less superficial by loving people for their personality rather than their appearance, but the personality is just more programming. People have no more control over it than they do over their appearance. The personality is not the real Self, or Essence, although the personality can be a vehicle for Essence. More often, the personality is a vehicle for the ego. Whether it is a vehicle for Essence or the ego, it's still just a vehicle—a means for interfacing with the world. The personality itself has nothing to do with who we really are; it's merely a useful tool in this physical reality.

Every personality is unique. Think about that. What an amazing thing it is that there isn't anyone, nor will there ever be anyone, exactly like you. Your appearance, personality, talents, circumstances, life purpose, and current and past life experiences are entirely unique. No one else is designed to have the experiences you are having through your body-mind and personality. That makes your life very precious, and it makes every other life very precious too, regardless of how another may seem to us. For this reason alone, all life is precious.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Our uniqueness is lovable. You can learn to feel love for anyone by loving their uniqueness. That's what the Oneness finds lovable, and when you are aligned with Essence, so do you. By choosing to look beyond the qualities you don't like or respect in others to their uniqueness, you can experience love in their presence. But you have to want to experience love before you will choose to do this.

If we are to get along with those who are very different from us, we have to find some commonality. In the absence of any commonality is Essence, which is what unites us all. We are united by the fact that there's no real separation, only apparent separation.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Letting others be here in all their glory (or otherwise) makes it possible to have a relationship with them. However, rather than doing that, we tend to relate to our ideas about them instead of to the reality, not only the reality of what they are actually presenting to us, but also the real reality—their true Self.

The image we have of someone isn't real—it's only an image, an idea. To know someone, we have to look deeper, and when we do, we find the same blessed divinity in everyone.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Judgment is probably the most destructive force in relationships. It maintains ego identification, which is incompatible with love and relationship. Judgment is the primary way the ego sustains its sense of being separate and superior. The ego puffs itself up through comparisons and judgments of others. It makes itself better than others by hauling out a rule or a conditioned belief that proves its superiority. Relationships can't thrive in such an environment. Judgment and criticism prevent love from flowering and kill it if it's already there.

No one could possibly match every idea we have for our ideal partner because many of our ideas are unrealistic and contradictory. Even if someone has the qualities we're looking for, we still have no control over how or when they are expressed. For instance, you may love it that your partner is adventuresome, but you don't want that quality showing up when the taxes need to be done. Or you may love it that your partner loves to cook, until you realize that cooking and eating is all you ever do together. It's not enough for someone to have all the right qualities if he or she doesn't express them as we would like. It's also not enough for someone to have all the right qualities if he or she doesn't feel the same way about us! Finding a partner with all the right qualities, which are primarily features of the personality, just isn't enough to make a relationship work.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

The ego has its list of qualities and attributes it wants in a partner and in a relationship. To the ego, these seem to be reasonable and useful criteria for relationship. The ego can't imagine being in love with someone who doesn't fulfill most of its criteria. The ego is so sure of what it needs in relationship, and it probably does need these things to be comfortable and as happy as it can be in relationship. Nevertheless, meeting the ego's criteria isn't enough to bring real happiness because its criteria are too narrow and shortsighted. The ego lacks the vision to understand what is necessary for real happiness. It knows only what it wants, according to its conditioning, and those desires are its basis for relationship.

The most fulfilling relationships are ones in which the individuals are fulfilling their life purposes, either jointly or individually. The perfect relationship for you—the one that will make you most happy on the deepest levels—is one that supports what you came into life to do. That is the best basis for relationship.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

When we are identified with the ego, being around others brings out judgments. Because the ego feels separate from others, it needs to feel superior to feel safe, so it sizes up the competition and brings the competition down to size by judging. Bringing the competition down to size allows the ego to relax a little in the company of others, but at a great cost, because there's no joy in maintaining this position. Making others small makes us feel very small and only increases our need to feel better than others. This strategy actually backfires and leaves us all the more entrenched in the egoic state of consciousness, which is a state of contraction—of feeling small and impotent. So the more we judge, the more we feel the need to judge. But judging never gets us the peace or love we long for.

The real you—Essence—is willing to allow the beloved to live life as he or she sees fit. It may ask for what it prefers to have happen (“Would you mind putting these things away, or do you mind if I put them away now?”), but it accepts responsibility for having this preference and doesn’t belittle the beloved in an attempt to get him or her to comply. It doesn’t use judgment and anger as a weapon to manipulate others.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

The inability to resolve differences causes many relationships to crumble, either slowly or quickly. Judgment undermines relationship little by little (or more quickly), but the result is the same—the demise of the relationship. A little bit of ongoing judgment is just as bad as a lot of it, because, over time, it's enough to kill a relationship. Judgment is more pernicious than we would like to think. It seems rather innocuous in minor doses or over small matters, but like poison, a little is enough to kill when administered repeatedly over time.

When two people are meant to be together—to enjoy love and life together, to help each other, or to learn something—love is just there. Where it comes from and why is one of the great mysteries of life. You don't and can't make love happen; it just happens. Love shows up, and you had nothing to do with it.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Love isn't something we can understand because it's not able to be grasped by the mind. Love is not in the mind's or the ego's domain. It's a quality of Essence—of who we really are—and that is too mysterious for the mind to be able to contemplate. And the mind doesn't want to. Yet love is where fulfillment lies and why relationships are so important to us.

Not only is it not our business to change others, but it's also harmful to relationships to try to do so. Ideas are just not worth the price paid in love lost. Love is more important than any conditioned idea or belief, but if you take your conditioning more seriously than love, you will lose love. The other person will withhold love from you because it will be too painful for him or her to love you.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Fortunately, love is less than a breath away, if only we turn our attention away from our judgments and onto the moment, which is full of exactly what we are looking for: love that is perfect just the way it is.

Happiness, joy, love, peace, and contentment are not arrived at by trying to get them, but by noticing that they are already here. Just check: Is love here now? Is happiness here now? Is peace here now? Is contentment here now? Noticing these qualities draws us into the experience of them.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

To align yourself with Essence and experience love and the other qualities of Essence, all you have to do is notice love. When you notice love, you are, in a sense, choosing love over the ego's ideas, and that choice brings you into alignment with Essence.

Essence lives for love and is not dissuaded from it by ideas or judgments or differences. It loves because it sees similarities, not differences. It sees how others are like itself—how others are itself. From Essence, you experience Oneness and unity with all life, and from this place, it is easy to love.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

It's not our partner's responsibility to change just because we have conditioning that demands that. Wanting our partner to change is not enough reason for him or her to change, although the ego thinks it is and tries to manipulate by claiming, "If you loved me, you would change." If we want a loving relationship, we have to take responsibility for our conditioning and the feelings generated by it, and choose to give up our judgments and attempts to change our partner. When we do this, we discover true love because our partner will love us for being so loving, accepting, and allowing.

There is nothing that opens someone's heart more than someone with an open heart. Conversely, there is nothing that closes someone's heart more than someone with a closed heart—and that means someone who is judging.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Even if you don't feel loving in the moment that you choose not to express your judgmental thoughts, your partner will appreciate your act of love, and your relationship will benefit from the accumulation of these small acts of love. In time, you will come to see how worthwhile it is to choose love instead of judgment, and doing this will become automatic.

Nothing is ever lost in choosing love. Your judgments never worked anyway. They only created anger, hurt, and separation. When you see the truth of this, it becomes much easier to choose love over judgment.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

It's ironic that so many arguments in relationships are caused by a conflict of desires, because desires are really not worth fighting over. For example, if you want to go on a trip and your partner wants to spend that money on a new sofa, or if you want a traditional wedding and your fiancé wants to elope, are those desires more important than love—more important than your relationship? Desires are conditioning, and conditioning is not more important than love. When you drop into Essence, you know this.

Arguing doesn't happen when both people are in Essence because there's nothing to argue about. Negotiation can certainly happen, though. From Essence, conditioning is just conditioning; it's nothing more than an idea, and how much substance and importance is there in an idea? Essence's point of view is that no idea is worth losing love over.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

We expect so much from our partner and our relationship. We have so many desires and expectations tied to relationship that it's no wonder we get angry at our partner as much as we do. If unfulfilled expectations and desires create anger (and they do), then we are going to be angry a lot in relationships because we have so many expectations and desires related not only to our partner, but also to relationship in general. We have lots and lots of ideas, including desires, when it comes to relationship. We really do hope (and expect) that our partner will fulfill our desires as a mate and give us the kind of relationship we want. But that's an impossible task.

As long as we are identified with the ego, we believe we need something to be happy, and we expect our partner to provide that. Even if our partner can provide some of what we think we need, no one can provide everything because there's no end to what the ego believes it needs. When it gets something, it wants more of it or the opposite. Your partner can never win at the game of trying to provide you with what you need, and you will never be able to provide that for him or her either.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

There's a deeper satisfaction to be had, and it isn't based on having anything but on *being*. When you are happy just being, then you don't need your partner to be anything for you. You don't need anything. Then it's possible to have a truly loving relationship, one based on celebrating the truth—the ultimate reality of who you are.

Since we all have conditioning that interferes with loving, finding reasons to not be in a relationship with someone is easy. What isn't so easy is overcoming conditioning enough to love. It comes down to this: Do you want love and relationship more than you want your desires and other conditioning met? Do you want love more than you want your conditioning?

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

We make the mistake of thinking that fulfilling each other's needs is the purpose of relationship and even the way to express love. Although it's true that when we love someone, we often gladly give to them, it's not true that love or relationship is about fulfilling the needs of another. That happens, but that's not the purpose of relationship. It may be the purpose of relationships between egos, but it's not the purpose of an Essence-based relationship, whose purpose is love. Love is not about needs, but about seeing beyond our conditioned needs and desires to the Essence of the other person and sharing at that level. Essence's purpose in relationships is to experience Oneness with another—to experience love. It has no other purpose. It's not trying to get anything from the other. It's just happy to be with the other and celebrate that beingness together.

Rather than looking for someone who will make us feel butterflies and goose bumps, being present to the one we are with from Essence will allow us to feel the love and connection we have always wanted. This love is more real, more fulfilling, and more substantial than butterflies and goose bumps. It often isn't for lack of the right partner that we don't feel this real love, but for lack of alignment with our own Essence and the Essence of another.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

In many cases, accepting our partner's way of being is just a matter of counteracting any complaints the ego has with a positive statement of acceptance, such as, "Let it be," "Everything is perfect," "Love is more important than this," or "He's just the way he is." These are expressions of truth from Essence, and we can use expressions like these to neutralize or change our relationship to our egoic mind, which judges and resists the many ways our partner is different from us. We can remind ourselves: "That's just the ego. There it goes again, trying to cause trouble!" Conflict is not inevitable in relationships, and we can learn to avoid it through ignoring our partner's conditioning and letting him or her just be the way he or she is. This is one of the greatest gifts we can give our partner.

We are here to learn love, and relationships teach this. If your relationship isn't helping you to learn love, but, instead, is fostering enmity, then you need to consider leaving it. If interactions within your relationship are overwhelmingly negative or abusive, and you are unable to turn that behavior around, then it's likely that you and your partner aren't meant to be together. If you have tried everything you can to transform the negativity within you and within your relationship and you haven't succeeded, then staying in the relationship might not be appropriate. Sometimes love means loving yourself enough to leave a negative or an abusive situation.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

It's never too late to say "I'm sorry." These are tremendously healing words. They can stop a conflict instantly and drop both people into their Hearts because "I'm sorry" comes from Essence. "I'm sorry" concedes that you were wrong in pushing for what you were pushing for. It stops the ego, which is trying to be right, in its tracks, and immediately allows the partner to relax and feel sympathy and love for you.

It's surprising how just saying "I'm sorry" softens you and your partner. Suddenly, there's nothing more to argue over because you have conceded the fight. There's no more reason to withhold your love, which we often do to try to manipulate our partner, and the result is that love begins to flow again. Suddenly, you both remember what you love about each other. It's funny how the ego clouds this, but it does so only momentarily if we are willing to concede our position and apologize for any hurt we may have caused. Your partner will love you for that, and more important perhaps, apologizing makes it possible for you to love your partner again.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Love is the attractive force that draws to us the help, companionship, information, and other things we need to flourish. Love creates the good karma that keeps the good going out and coming back, which makes the world go around.

Whatever we put out in the world, tends to come back to us, although not necessarily right away. Whether feedback from others or from life about our actions is immediate or not, we receive feedback instantly internally: When we act in accordance with our true nature—with love—we feel good; when we don't, we don't feel good. This is how life teaches us love: It rewards us for love and doesn't reward the opposite. So if life is rewarding loving behavior, what does that mean? This would seem to be evidence for a loving force behind life, a force that is guiding us toward love and away from whatever undermines love.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

What you can notice when you are identified with the ego is how bad this makes you feel, not to mention how bad it makes others around you feel. And you can acknowledge that feeling bad isn't what you want. You want to feel good. You want to feel love. So you forgive yourself for being human because you don't want to suffer anymore. You see that you can have your position and suffer, or you can feel good and be loving. All it takes to free yourself from suffering is to forgive yourself for being human—for having an ego. Having an ego isn't your fault anyway.

The only way the pain from the past can be stopped is through a conscious act of will to not dwell on painful memories when they arise. Dwelling on them only creates a painful present. We are free to choose, of course, and many do choose to dwell on those memories for a very long time. But it's exhausting, and it destroys relationships. Do you want love more than this pain and drama? The ego actually doesn't, but Essence does. When you are able to find that place within you that is willing to forgive and forget, then love is possible.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

To love, we have to fall in love with reality—with what's true right now, not with what might be true in the future or with what we want to be true in the future. Love happens in the now (like everything, really). That's why the ego doesn't know about love—because love is the experience of being in the now, or the present moment, and as soon as the ego experiences the now, it runs.

Commitment takes a willingness to fall in love with reality—with the real partner who is in front of you—rather than seek something else, either actually or through fantasy. What you commit to is what's here right now. Who knows what will be here next? All you ever really have is what's here right now, so it makes sense to commit to that—in other words, to give your full attention, your love, to that.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

It's possible to love whoever shows up in your life. In fact, it's very wise to do that if you want to be happy. If you don't want to be happy, you will reject whoever shows up in your life. This doesn't mean you shouldn't be discriminating. Loving and saying yes to those who show up in your life doesn't mean getting sexually involved with them unless you want to. Essence says yes to others—is open to them—because Essence is curious. And then it is very wise about getting more involved with them.

Essence commits itself to someone only when love is flowing in both directions and the relationship is rewarding on many levels. The ego, on the other hand, may commit out of sexual attraction or because some other need is met through that relationship, neither of which is a good basis for commitment.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

Commitment only makes sense when there is love, but the ego isn't capable of love. It forms relationships based on needs, and that's when commitment falters. As soon as someone's needs aren't getting met, then the commitment is questioned. Those who are identified with the ego much of the time have a very difficult time committing, while those who are identified with Essence are able to love and therefore able to commit. Eventually everyone learns to love, but relationships can be pretty volatile when egos are in charge. Even so, because relationships provide the ego with many of the practical things it values—sex, security, affection, companionship, support, and help—people who are in relationships for egoic reasons often end up discovering love. This is how life draws people out of the ego and into Essence.

Love sees beyond the costume and beyond the character that your partner is appearing as. Look into your partner's eyes, and see the true Being behind the costume. That's what you fall in love with—not someone's bank account, hair, body, power, or any of the other things the ego values so much. You fall in love with what shines in the eyes, with what is loving you back.

WHAT ABOUT LOVE?

When we love someone from our depths—from Essence—we draw the other's Essence out from hiding so that he or she can more easily express it. This is the greatest gift we can give someone—to create a loving and accepting environment where love can flourish. This kind of connection is what everyone is looking for, and it's available to everyone. You don't need to look a certain way or have anything. But you do have to be willing to drop out of the judging mind and be very present to the person in front of you or, better yet, to the divinity of the person in front of you.

You are here to find love, not just for yourself, but also for the divine Self, which has been hiding love from you in this world of form just so that you could have the pleasure and amazement of discovering it in the simple quiet of this moment—and in your beloved's eyes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gina Lake is a spiritual teacher and the author of numerous books about awakening to one's true nature, including *Trusting Life*, *Embracing the Now*, *Radical Happiness*, *Living in the Now*, *Return to Essence*, *Loving in the Moment*, *What About Now? Anatomy of Desire*, and *Getting Free*. She is also a gifted intuitive with a master's degree in counseling psychology and over twenty years experience supporting people in their spiritual growth. Her website offers information about her books and online courses, free e-books, book excerpts, a monthly newsletter, a blog, and audio and video recordings:

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Books by Gina Lake

(Available in paperback, Kindle, and other e-book formats.)

Embracing the Now: Finding Peace and Happiness in What Is. The Now—this moment—is the true source of happiness and peace and the key to living a fulfilled and meaningful life. *Embracing the Now* is a collection of essays that can serve as daily reminders of the deepest truths. Full of clear insight and wisdom, *Embracing the Now* explains how the mind keeps us from being in the moment, how to move into the Now and stay there, and what living from the Now is like. It also explains how to overcome stumbling blocks to being in the Now, such as fears, doubts, misunderstandings, judgments, distrust of life, desires, and other conditioned ideas that are behind human suffering.

Radical Happiness: A Guide to Awakening provides the keys to experiencing the happiness that is ever-present and not dependent on circumstances. This happiness doesn't come from getting what you want, but from wanting what is here now. It comes from realizing that who you think you are is not who you really are. This is a radical perspective! *Radical Happiness* describes the nature of the egoic state of consciousness and how it interferes with happiness, what awakening and enlightenment are, and how to live in the world after awakening.

Trusting Life: Overcoming the Fear and Beliefs That Block Peace and Happiness. Fear and distrust keep us from living the life we were meant to live, and they are the greatest hurdles to seeing the truth about life—that it is good, abundant, supportive, and potentially joyous. *Trusting Life* is a deep exploration into the mystery of who we are, why we suffer, why we don't trust life, and how to become more trusting. It offers evidence that life is trustworthy and tools for overcoming the fear and beliefs that keep us from falling in love with life.

Loving in the Moment: Moving from Ego to Essence in Relationships. Having a truly meaningful relationship requires choosing love over your conditioning, that is, your ideas, fantasies, desires, images, and beliefs. *Loving in the Moment* describes how to move beyond conditioning, judgment, anger, romantic illusions, and differences to the experience of love and Oneness with another. It explains how to drop into the core of your Being, where Oneness and love exist, and be with others from there.

Anatomy of Desire: How to Be Happy Even When You Don't Get What You Want will help you discriminate between your Heart's desires and the ego's and to relate to the ego's desires in a way that reduces suffering and increases joy. By pointing out the myths about desire that keep us tied to our ego's desires and the suffering they cause, *Anatomy of Desire* will help you be happy regardless of your desires and whether you are

attaining them. So it is also about spiritual freedom, or liberation, which comes from following the Heart, our deepest desires, instead of the ego's desires. It is about becoming a lover of life rather than a desirer.

Return to Essence: How to Be in the Flow and Fulfill Your Life's Purpose describes how to get into the flow and stay there and how to live life from there. Being in the flow and not being in the flow are two very different states. One is dominated by the ego-driven mind, which is the cause of suffering, while the other is the domain of Essence, the Divine within each of us. You are meant to live in the flow. The flow is the experience of Essence—your true self—as it lives life through you and fulfills its purpose for this life.

Living in the Now: How to Live as the Spiritual Being That You Are. The 99 essays in *Living in the Now* will help you realize your true nature and live as that. They answer many questions raised by the spiritual search and offer wisdom on subjects such as fear, anger, happiness, aging, boredom, desire, patience, faith, forgiveness, acceptance, love, commitment, hope, purpose, meaning, meditation, being present, emotions, trusting life, trusting your Heart, and many other deep subjects. These essays will help you become more conscious, present, happy, loving, grateful, at peace, and fulfilled. Each essay stands on its own and can be used for daily contemplation.

Getting Free: How to Move Beyond Conditioning and Be Happy. Freedom from your conditioning is possible, but the mind is a formidable opponent to freedom. To be free requires a new way of thinking or, rather, not thinking. To a large extent, healing our conditioning involves changing our relationship to our mind and discovering who we really are. *Getting Free* will help you do that. It will also help you reprogram your mind; clear negative thoughts and self-images; use meditation, prayer, forgiveness, and gratitude; work with spiritual forces to assist healing and clear negativity; and heal entrenched issues from the past.

What About Now? Reminders for Being in the Moment. The secret to happiness is moving out of the mind and learning to delight in each moment. In *What About Now*, you will find over 150 quotes from Gina Lake's books—*Radical Happiness*, *Embracing the Now*, *Loving in the Moment*, *Living in the Now*, and others—that will inspire and enable you to be more present. These empowering quotes will wake you up out of your ordinary consciousness and help you live with more love, contentment, gratitude, and awe.

For more info, please visit the "Books" page at
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