

## Opening Our Hearts

How can it be June already? This year is going so fast, but at least all the lush leaves and flowers are lifting my spirits during this glorious early summer.

I am also full of the joys of Spring because Gloria and I have just returned from a retreat in Assisi where we meditated for 2 hours or so every day on opening our hearts and the results were AMAZING.

I spent the first half of my life living almost exclusively in my head, but I am now determined to spend the rest of my life living from the heart. What about you? I am pretty sure that – like me – you were educated by your teachers and other childhood mentors to develop your thinking, but who ever told you how important it was to keep your heart open and to listen to the intuitive wisdom of your heart? Probably no one!

Not only do we need to open our hearts to become truly wise, but when we do finally find the courage to open our wounded hearts, ‘the light’ will begin to pour through the crack in our defences. This spiritual light will then assist us to connect to an infinite pool of unconditional love at the very core of our being.

Our thinking brain is always trying to protect us from danger, but although this may be a good thing in terms of evolutionary biology, when our thoughts are more or less constantly fearful or judgemental, we suffer. I don’t know about you, but if I just watch my thoughts for a few minutes, I can usually find quite a few fear inducing thoughts such as, ‘What if that little lump is the first sign of cancer? Or ‘What if the pound gets so low against the Euro I will never be able to afford to go to Assisi again?’ I can also notice a load of judgemental thoughts flitting across my mind, particularly if I am tired or under the weather.

For example, on our way home from Assisi we spent our last night in Pisa and I was feeling tired and spacey as I came down from the very high energy generated during our retreat. So when I went out to find a café for a cup of tea and a cake, I found myself getting really irritated with the tourists who were blocking the path in front of me because they were having their picture taken with one arm outstretched ‘holding up’ the Leaning Tower of Pisa. I began muttering to myself, ‘Oh for goodness sake that is so corny – will you please just get out of my way!’ But at least I gently laughed at myself for being so grumpy.

I am sure you too have 'lost the plot' occasionally when you have felt horribly tired or scared. But in my experience, the more often we take that short, but highly significant journey down from our head to our heart, the more we will begin to see the world and everyone in it in a very different light. For example, none of my positive experiences in my pre-meditative years come anywhere near to the love and joy I feel during a spiritual retreat as my heart opens up to connect to universal, unconditional higher love and light.

When my heart is open like this, I totally trust its intuitive wisdom and I let it guide me wherever it wants me to go. One morning in Assisi for example, I went to meditate for a while in the awesome Basilica of Saint Francis, but I just could not settle. So I let my open heart guide me and found myself going for a long walk in the woods near the Basilica. Towards the end of that walk, I was actually crying with joy and gratitude for the incredible natural beauty all around me.

As my heart opened up a little more each day on the retreat, I also noticed that I was feeling genuine love and compassion for everyone in our group, including one or two personalities whom I found a little irritating at times. My egoic-self did not stop being a bit annoyed by these personalities. It was just that I found I could pretty easily rise above my irritation with them to see them as beautiful souls, rather than troubled egos.

Some serious meditators seem to spend a long time focussing solely on calming their minds. Others undergo many, many hours of intense meditation trying to crack Zen koans or attempting to answer the deep question 'Who am I?' But after having meditated for over 30 years, I now believe that these types of meditations can only take us so far along the awakening, healing path.

Yes, a solid long-term meditation practice can certainly help us to calm our hyperactive minds for a while, and may even assist us to become much more creative and successful in life like Steve Jobs. But most people know that Steve Jobs was a nightmare to work with, despite being such a dedicated meditator. Why was that? Well, I read somewhere that although Steve Jobs spent a lot of time doing meditation with his mind, he never actually did any meditations designed to open his heart and so he was only half-cooked!

So this month, I would like to suggest that you spend some time tuning into your own loving heart. You might even like to draw a picture of it. Many years ago when I was in therapy, I drew a picture of my heart surrounded by a brick wall covered in barbed wire. But I am sure that if I drew my heart now, it would be far less defended. In fact, I hope that it would look like a heart that was wide-open to all the suffering of this world and longing to extend unconditional love out to all the sentient creatures dwelling on this beautiful planet of ours.

By the way, it is really simple to meditate on gently opening your heart. First of all, sit quietly and imagine that you are breathing slowly and deeply in and out at the heart level. Then, feel or imagine a bright light descending on you from the beyond and feel that light gently opening your heart, or heart centre. If it helps, think of your heart as a beautiful flower opening up all its petals in bright sunlight. Finally, sit and feel love energy going in and out of your open heart, and if you feel inspired to do so, end the meditation by sending unconditional love to all your loved ones and then to all sentient beings on the planet.

I now do this meditation several times a week and it is gradually transforming my whole life for the better. Even if you do not do this meditation, if you just keep pausing every few hours of so to breathe in and out of your heart as you go through your day, I am sure your days will begin to be filled with more and more love and joy and I sincerely wish that love and joy are your closest companions as you travel onwards and upwards on this amazing journey that we call life!

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