

RADIANCE

Experiencing Divine Presence

Gina Lake

<http://www.radicalhappiness.com>

This book and others by Gina Lake are also available in paperback.

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Excerpt from another book by Gina Lake: *From Stress to Stillness*

Preface

Many of you already realize your oneness with the Divine and All That Is. You already know you are much vaster than who you think you are. It is possible to experience the mysterious truth about yourself by paying close attention to the many signs that reveal this great Mystery. The purpose of this e-book is to point out these clues so that you can more easily recognize yourself as the Divine—that which is creating and has created this *you* that you think you are and all that this *you* is experiencing. This book was given to me by my nonphysical teacher.

Gina Lake
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Chapter 1: The Divine Is Everywhere

You Are Not Who You Think You Are

Who are you, really? Are you so-and-so with a certain past and a certain body and personality and certain roles talents, weaknesses, dreams, fears, and beliefs? You may define yourself to others in these ways, but that is not who you really are. Who you really are can only be discovered through deeper questioning and exploration and through a more subtle experiencing of that which is beyond all ideas about yourself. It can only be discovered when the mind is quiet and no longer telling you who you are. When all the ideas about yourself are stilled, then what remains is who you really are: Consciousness, Awareness, Stillness, Presence, Peace, Love, the Divine. You are that which is Nameless and yet has been given a thousand names.

To those of you who are not so sure about who you really are, you are not alone. Even those who have realized this are not always certain. The realization of who you are comes and goes to some extent depending on what you pay attention to. Even those who have realized the truth, that there is only one Being in all of existence, can temporarily forget who they really are when they become lost in believing their thoughts. The mind is very compelling, and giving your attention to it, will bring you back to the experience of yourself as separate from the rest of creation.

Nevertheless, you are not who you *think* you are. Thinking gives you the illusion of being someone, but you are not some-one but rather Oneness itself, the Divine masquerading as an individual. This masquerade is for the purpose of exploring this physical reality and for having the unique experiences you are having as some-one. The Divine is enjoying the experiences it is having through all of creation, even experiences you would consider unenjoyable. What the Divine enjoys is experience—any experience. It created you just for that, or rather you created *you* just for that.

You may think you are not enjoying an experience, but if you touch deeply into yourself, you will discover enjoyment in even the most unpleasant experiences. The joy from these experiences comes simply from the ability to have them, the ability to be alive and experience them. The Divine is enjoying life and celebrating in every moment through every creation, regardless of what is being experienced. Therefore, it is possible for you to find joy in any experience as well when you align yourself with the divine Self in you, or *Essence*, instead of the personal self, or the *you* that you think you are.

This *you* is very difficult to please. It can be having a very nice experience and still not be happy. The *you* is programmed for unhappiness because it is programmed to seek that which can never bring true happiness. It goes after more and better and different from whatever is actually present, and that creates ceaseless searching and dissatisfaction with whatever is found. This is a very unhappy predicament, and yet this is the human condition.

This is why humans suffer, but you are not actually human, so it isn't necessary for you to suffer this way. Once you discover your true nature, it is possible for suffering to end, or at least be greatly diminished. The Divine doesn't suffer in its experience of life, and you don't have to either. You can experience the joy the Divine has in life in any moment if you turn your attention to the moment (where the Divine, as Essence, resides), but you have to want to and you have to make that choice. This is the greatest obstacle to happiness of all. Many experience the Truth that

lies in the moment and turn away from it again and again because there is nothing in it for the *egoic mind*, which is the mind that is driven by the ego, or illusory personal self—the *you* that you think you are. The egoic mind is the familiar voice in your head, the ongoing mental commentary that accompanies whatever you do.

This *you* thinks of itself constantly. It is constantly forming thoughts about itself, which is how it creates itself. It describes itself to itself and to others, and that gives the *you* a sense of actually existing, when in fact, it exists only as a description. This description—this *you*—is made up of a jumble of ideas that are not even consistent, since they change from moment to moment, day to day. This *you* believes one thing one day and another thing the next. It likes something one day and the opposite the next. It sees itself one way one day and another way the next. And yet it seems so solid, so real, that this *you* is willing to argue with others over what it thinks, what it believes, and how it sees things. Where do all of these ideas come from?

They are just there. Stop a moment and look. The ideas that arise in your mind that define this *you* arise from nowhere and disappear into nowhere, only to be replaced by other ideas. They have no more reality or truth in terms of defining you than the last set of ideas or the next set of ideas. Ideas come and go, and they are as meaningless and random as what happens when you flip from station to station on the radio. It is just that certain ideas come and go more frequently on your particular radio station than on someone else's, but that doesn't make them any more real, true, or capable of defining who you are.

Who You Are

Who you are cannot be defined by words. Who you are lives in the space between words, in the Stillness that is ever-present and known only when the mental chatter has stopped or is no longer given attention. Who you are cannot be described; it can only be experienced. However, the experience of it is often missed because attention is being given to other things, particularly ideas. These ideas, when you are identified with the mind, seem more real and interesting than who you are because the mind is only interested in things it can understand, describe, and categorize.

Since there are plenty of things and ideas for the mind to get absorbed in, this *you* that is identified with the mind is very busy paying attention to things and to the thoughts that arise in the mind. When you are identified with the mind, you often give thoughts more attention even than things. This *you* that you think you are not only thinks itself into existence, but also everything else, in the sense that what it thinks affects how it perceives actual things and other aspects of reality. Thus, the mind filters and colors experience and gives experience its own spin.

The Divine intends it to be just this way. It created the mind to do exactly what it does. In order for the Divine to have a unique experience through every human being, it was necessary for every human being to have a separate sense of self and to forget the Oneness that is everyone's true nature. Thus, you have traded in the remembrance of your divinity for experiences. You learn and grow in love as a result of your experiences, and that is also intended by the Divine. It also intends that one day you will awaken to the truth of your divinity and express that in life, which will bring experience of a different kind as well as further evolution.

The goodness, or divinity, in you drives you forward in your evolution until you express that goodness increasingly in your actions and speech. The ego, which does not seek goodness and love, but pleasure and avoidance of pain, also drives your actions and creates experiences, many of which cause pain, but also evolution.

Eventually, you realize that love and goodness are what bring lasting happiness, and you find your way to living from the Heart, from Essence, more than from the egoic mind. When your identity shifts from the egoic mind to the Heart, where your divinity lies, you are said to have awakened to your true nature. It is the most significant point in your evolution because you are finally free of the domination of the egoic mind, and life is lived from a very different place.

Being Awake

Being awake doesn't mean you never identify with the egoic mind; it means you no longer believe the mind, even when you do find yourself identified with it. This may seem contradictory because identification with the mind usually entails believing it. When you are awake, however, the experience of identification is more like you know you are playing the role of someone who is believing the mind, while you know yourself as what is observing the entire drama. So although identification with the mind happens after awakening, identification doesn't last long, and it isn't a problem when it does. You know yourself as other than the self that is momentarily identified, and you spend most of your time in the experience of the moment.

After awakening, because you never lose sight of who you really are even when you are identified with the egoic mind, life feels very different. You can enjoy the play of consciousness as it moves in and out of identification. What does it matter what you are identified with once you know the truth? Consciousness enjoys playing the part it is playing in this lifetime. Once you awaken, it is really possible to enjoy this life, this character you are playing, and everything that happens to it because you know it is just a story that is being played out. That is why mystics and sages describe the world as a dream. From the perspective of someone who is awake, life feels very much like a dream in which you are aware that you are dreaming.

Such detachment allows you to enjoy life in a way that wasn't possible when you were attached to the outcome of the story you are living. When you are identified with the egoic mind, you have ideas about how you want the story of your life to go in all the presumably important areas: career, relationships, health, home, and family. You envision your life being a certain way, and you try to make it be that way. These thoughts are what the egoic mind, posing as the *you* that you think you are, is preoccupied with, and this can keep you very busy.

On the other hand, once you have awakened, you don't require life to be a certain way in order to be happy because you are already happy and you know that what you *thought* you needed to be happy isn't necessary for your happiness. You are happy because you are aligned with the divine Self that lives in and expresses itself through you: Essence. And, unlike other things of this world, Essence is eternal and eternally available and eternally fulfilling.

To know true happiness, all you have to do is choose to be aligned with Essence instead of the egoic mind. What the egoic mind chases after is often unattainable, and even when it is attained, it is never enough. The egoic mind always wants more, better, or different than whatever it already has. Its prescription for happiness leads only to unhappiness, discontentment, and suffering. Given this, choosing Essence over the ego would seem like such a clear choice. But there's a catch.

The Need to Choose

If it were easy to choose Essence over the ego, everyone would be happy and free from suffering. This choice is difficult because you are programmed to be attracted to thoughts and to

the objects of the world. Without that programming, you would be born knowing your divinity, and you would miss out on the experience of feeling you are an independent entity with a will, and you would miss out on all the experiences, learning, and growth that go with that. This Mystery is designed to veil the truth of your divinity and the existence of only One so that that One can have experiences. It is through giving you a mind that is programmed in the way it is programmed that this is accomplished. So the catch is that you are programmed to choose the ego over Essence until a time comes in your evolution for the realization of the truth to surface.

Given that you are reading this now, it is likely that the time is approaching for this realization, if it hasn't already arrived. When the time comes to awaken, Essence calls to you in a number of ways, and you begin to experience Essence more often and for longer periods of time. What we will be exploring are some of the many ways the Divine calls to you and makes itself known. Some of these ways are so obvious that they are overlooked or discounted. Other ways require diligent looking before the Divine's face is seen.

The desire to experience the Divine and the choice to look for it come, of course, from the Divine itself, since there is no other. At a certain point in a person's evolution, the Divine seeks itself. It calls to itself and awakens itself so that it can live and breathe more fully through that body, mind, and personality. It beckons itself Home. In the coming chapters, we are going to take a look at some of the ways the Divine does this. But first, it is important to realize that the Divine is everywhere and in everything, including within every experience.

Everywhere You Look

There is nowhere that the Divine is not. Stop a moment and really take this truth in, because the mind has a very different perception. If really grasped, this truth will change your life. Everything you see, everything and everyone that exists, and everything that happens is a manifestation of the Divine. The Divine is not only behind every good act, but also behind every evil one, which is what happens when the *you* that you think you are is lost in fear and the illusion of being separate. The Divine is both the perpetrator and the victim, the lover and the hater. It plays every role that has ever been played because there is no other. There is only the illusion of other.

Imagine that—there is no other! The mind is so good at imagining, but it has difficulty imagining Oneness because it goes against its programming. So when Oneness is experienced, as it is momentarily many times even in one day, it isn't acknowledged. Oneness goes unnoticed, unappreciated by the mind. Worse than that—Oneness is rejected by the egoic mind because acknowledging it would threaten its existence. The ego doesn't exist in Oneness; it can only exist in separateness. The ego is created by and perpetuates separation. That is the very definition of the ego. The ego and Oneness are at odds, or so it seems. However, Oneness designed life to be this way, so Oneness has no problem with the ego, although the ego has a problem with Oneness.

Everywhere it looks, the ego sees separation. It translates all the differences it sees as separation: The ego sees a tree, and because the tree is different from the ego's image of itself, the ego sees itself as separate from the tree. But is that true? Where did this definition of self come from, in which anything that is different from itself is seen as separate from itself?

It is the ego's own definition that creates the idea of separation: Different equals separation by the ego's own definition. The ego sees boundaries between things and people. It even creates boundaries conceptually through language and in terms of time and by holding certain beliefs. This is just how the egoic mind digests life. All these differences are seen by the ego as

potentially dangerous and problematic. The ego is constantly on the defense, trying to protect itself from everything out there that is different from itself. Its world is full of fear, anxiety, jealousy, hatred, anger, and pain. This viewpoint and the sense of being separate is at the base of all suffering.

But reality is not as the ego supposes. There are no boundaries. There is no separate self in opposition to the world. There is only the Divine creating each moment fresh from itself. Everything is the Divine expressing itself as tree, as dog, as person, as thought, as emotion, as light, as sound. No boundaries. No one. Only One. Only the Divine creating and expressing itself through life.

Chapter 2: The Windows to the Soul

Seeing Radiance

If the Divine had a face, it would be a radiant one. How do you know? Because its reflection on the physical plane is light and radiance and because that's what you see when the Divine, as Essence, looks out from your eyes. The world looks different when you are awake and aligned with Essence. It shines, it glows, it shimmers, it sparkles. People, plants, animals, and objects radiate the light of Being. They always have, but not everyone notices it. The ego doesn't. It's too busy comparing, judging, labeling, and evaluating what it sees to notice the radiance. When Essence looks out of your eyes, however, everything shimmers and shines.

This seeing is not like the usual seeing. It is subtler, but it is still experienced as seeing. It is as if the usual seeing becomes infused with light: The radiance of the Divine spills out of everything. It erases all boundaries and reveals that all is light. All is itself as light. All of creation shimmers as One Being.

Just as the objects in a painting belong to the painting rather than to themselves, the distinctions between objects are no longer seen as real, but as part of the design within a larger whole, which contains them. The painting would not be the same were anything left out. So it is with life: The differences create the Whole; they don't stand apart from it. Furthermore, as in a painting, everything in life is made from the same substance. It is all the Divine.

The mind sees boundaries between the objects in a painting. But by stepping back, the picture as a whole can be experienced, and that is what makes art powerful. Those who love art don't pick it apart and analyze it, but respond to it emotionally and spiritually. So it is with life: The mind picks it apart, and the Heart responds to it spiritually and emotionally (with love).

To see this radiance requires the lenses of perception to be purified, cleansed of the conditioning that perceives boundaries between objects and, moreover, cleansed of the mind's tendency to evaluate what it sees according to its conditioning. Eyes that are directed by the ego look for validation of the ego's viewpoint and threats to its safety and identity. The ego views the world and its contents, including people, from the standpoint of how something will affect its goals: Will it advance my goals or not? The ego is busy with its own inner mental world, not the real world. When it does see the real world, it is through the lens of desire: Will it get me what I want?

The process of healing your conditioning results in a gradual cleansing of the lenses of perception. You gradually come to see more radiance and less according to the ego's desires and goals. This coincides with greater happiness, peace, and contentment with life. The quieter the egoic mind becomes and the less dominant it is, the happier you become. This evolution takes place over many lifetimes. The endpoint is radiance itself: not only do you see radiance everywhere, but you also become radiant.

Being Radiant

As the lenses of perception become purified, the gateway to your soul is opened and the Divine begins to shine forth. It does this through the eyes. Once what comes into the eyes is no longer

being filtered and distorted by the ego, the eyes become the means by which the Divine receives the world and, in turn, touches it.

The Divine receives the world and everything about the world with acceptance and without judgment. It loves the world. After all, the world is itself, and it has no reason to reject the world. The Divine loves creation for the possibilities that creation provides for experience. Through creation, the Divine has the opportunity to interact with itself, which as Oneness wasn't possible. What a great adventure and experiment this world is! Not even Oneness knows what its creations, who have lost touch with Oneness to some extent, will do.

This love for the world can be seen in the eyes of those who are in touch with Essence, and it is seen as radiance, love, peace, and joy. Those who see this in someone's eyes are attracted to it because love, peace, and joy are what everyone wants. All the seeking and striving on the part of the ego is an attempt to acquire love, peace, and joy—happiness. The ego just makes the mistake of looking for happiness in the wrong places. In fact, the egoic mind is the only thing in the way of happiness. It is the problem, not the solution. When the mind is quiet, all there is, is love, peace, and joy.

That truth is apparent in the eyes of those who are in touch with Essence. They convey this truth to others through their eyes. And looking into their eyes can cause others to drop into Essence and experience the same love, peace, contentment, and joy that is the nature of Essence. Wisdom, kindness, and good acts flow from Essence as well. Once the lenses of perception become clear, you become a conduit and catalyst for peace, love, and joy in the world.

The biggest clue to the mystery of who you really are is in the eyes. The Divine gives the secret away by appearing in the eyes. Nowhere else is the Divine more apparent than in the eyes of those who have already discovered the secret: There is only one Being here! When you look into another's eyes, you can feel your commonality with him or her, your Oneness. You don't have to be enlightened to have that experience, and either does the other person. Oneness shines through in the eyes of everyone.

Eyes can bring you Home if you allow them to. If you allow yourself to drop the thoughts that intervene between you and another for just a moment, then there You are, right there in the other's eyes! What a surprise. You experience this most often during sex and with others you love deeply, such as your children and pets because, with them, your defenses and judgments are diminished. Gazing into another's eyes while affirming your Oneness with that person can help bring about the experience of Oneness.

Exercise **Seeing the Divine in Another**

Take fifteen minutes or so to sit quietly with someone and look into one another's eyes. Get very comfortable and set aside all issues, concerns, judgments, and any other thoughts to just be present with this person. As you are looking into each other's eyes, just stay with that experience. If a thought comes up, notice it, and then go back to just looking. If your mind wanders, just bring your attention back to the eyes. When the mind isn't being identified with, Essence shines through the eyes. Notice this, without thinking about it or telling any stories about it. Notice the beauty of Essence in your partner. This is his or her true self. This is the Beloved. Beyond conditioning, all there is, is This.

Often, all that is needed to experience Essence is the willingness to. Essence is available in

every moment. You just have to notice it and not turn away from it. You are much more willing to do this with people you already love, but it's possible to experience Essence and Essence's love with anyone if you choose to see the truth about him or her.

Even just one person who is doing this in a room full of people can change the atmosphere because Essence is contagious: Essence brings out Essence in others. If you align with Essence, you will become a catalyst for peace, love, and joy in the world. Have you noticed how contagious anger and negativity are? Fortunately, love is equally contagious and a much more rewarding experience.

Practice cultivating loving interactions with others by choosing to see their divine nature, no matter what they are doing or saying or how they look, and you will not only live in peace and joy, but also bring others to peace and joy. Just by noticing the Divine in their eyes, this transformation in you and in others can take place.

Transformation really is this simple, but the ego will come up with all sorts of reasons to discount what it sees in someone's eyes and avoid looking for the Divine there or anywhere else. The ego doesn't believe the Divine exists. It asks: Where is the proof? The ego is afraid of what it sees in the eyes of others. It doesn't know what to think of this. It has no words or explanations for what it sees because that doesn't fit into the ego's paradigm or even into most religious belief systems. The ego doesn't believe there is a Mystery here, because the Mystery is not something that can be quantified. All the ego knows is what it wants, and that becomes the reason for doing and saying what it does.

Moving from the Ego to Essence

Everyone experiences Essence several times a day, but the experience is often so brief that it doesn't affect the egoic state of consciousness that most live their lives in. When Essence is experienced for longer periods of time, it can shift you from ego identification to Essence, which is your natural state. The more you experience Essence, the easier it is to choose it, so you naturally move, over the course of many lifetimes, from ego identification to Essence because Essence is a much more pleasant state. To live more continually aligned with Essence, the habit of ego identification needs to be broken, which isn't so easy.

Because you are programmed to pay attention to the egoic mind and believe what it tells you about yourself, others, and life, most people's lives unfold according to the ego's ideas, desires, and demands—their conditioning. The problem is that happiness can't be found in following the false beliefs and values of the ego. Unhappiness is the certain result of allowing the egoic mind to run your life.

Essence sees life more truly. When you are identified with Essence, you see life more as it really is, without the filter of your conditioning. From Essence, life is interesting, challenging, fun, beautiful, touching, and rich. Experiences aren't categorized, judged, or labeled as good or bad. They just *are*, in all of their richness and complexity, because in truth, a thousand stories could be told about any experience, and those stories would still not reflect the whole experience. The ego attempts to define experience in words, according to its conditioning, which divorces you from the complexity and reality of the experience. It turns experience into ideas, which sap the life out of life. Living from the mind is like eating a picture of food instead of the real thing. No wonder so many people feel empty and unfulfilled. Only reality truly satisfies.

Seeing from Essence's Eyes

Seeing from Essence's eyes is a lot like how very young children see. They don't have the degree of conditioning, facts, and concepts yet that older children and adults have, which filter and color experience. The interchange between young children and their environment is much purer. When you are aligned with Essence instead of the ego, conditioning still exists, but it doesn't interfere with experience as it used to. Your thoughts are recognized for what they are: conditioning that is mostly untrue and not helpful.

For the most part, your conditioning takes you down the path to unhappiness, not happiness. So unhappiness and the desire to be truly happy ultimately drive the choice to become aligned with Essence. What stands between you and happiness is essentially just a choice, the choice to be aligned with Essence instead of the ego by saying yes to Essence's perceptions instead of the ego's. Here is an exercise that will help you see from Essence's eyes:

Exercise **Seeing from Essence's Eyes**

Look at something in your environment and notice how quickly the mind comes in with a judgment, analysis, or some other comment about what you are looking at. Move your gaze from one object to another and just look and notice what the mind does. As long as you continue to just look without thinking about the object you are looking at, you will see as Essence sees. But the moment you begin to think, you lose contact with the object and with the moment, and you become identified with the ego and its perceptions. Essence doesn't evaluate as it looks; it experiences without evaluation. This looking is joyful and uncomplicated by the negativity of the mind. What a relief it is to be Home! This way of looking can become your ordinary way of seeing and being.

Essence perceives life as a whole and as essentially good. It accepts and loves everything simply because it exists. Essence doesn't demand that life be any way other than the way it is. When you are accepting and loving toward life and your experience, you are experiencing Essence and its love, peace, contentment, joy, and acceptance.

If you stay in acceptance long enough, you will begin to notice the radiance that accompanies the love, peace, and joy you are experiencing. There is a visual accompaniment to being aligned with Essence, which gives objects a shimmery glow and subtle fluidity. Objects are experienced more as flowing into each other rather than having distinct boundaries. The more you pay attention to this subtle visual experience, the longer it lasts and the deeper it becomes. Usually, it's only noticed briefly, but it actually never disappears. Whenever you turn your attention to it, there it is. You can train yourself to see this way more continually, and once your identity shifts more permanently to Essence, that is the experience.

Seeing in this way produces a softness in your eyes and demeanor because Essence's relationship to life is nonviolent and peaceful. Essence takes action when action is called for, but it doesn't try to force or manipulate life to conform to ideas, as the ego does, because Essence is free of ideas about the way things should be. To Essence, the way things are is exactly how they should be.

Essence may have intentions for the next moment, but it doesn't try to change the current one. Essence does influence and shape life, but during it, not after the fact. It flows with life and shapes life while life is moving where it is moving. This is very different from the ego, which

opposes whatever is showing up and tries to change what already is.

Those who are strongly identified with the ego often have a hardness and dullness in their eyes, which reflects their determination of will and lack of contact with reality. Nevertheless, Essence shines in those eyes too, behind that hardness and dullness. It flickers in and out, depending on how intensely they are involved with ideas about how things should be. When they are more quiet mentally and relaxed physically, Essence is there in their eyes. Essence is behind everyone's eyes, but it is covered over when mental activity is very strong. You can actually see people thinking.

When you are aligned with Essence, it becomes apparent that Essence is behind your eyes, not only to others, but also to yourself because you feel Essence there. Essence is felt as Consciousness, or Awareness, looking out through your eyes. That Awareness feels like who you are, and your body feels like just a vehicle for moving in the world. Although Awareness isn't limited to the head and eyes, it's often strongly felt in that area because Awareness tends to become localized there.

When you are aligned with Essence, you know yourself as that localized point of Consciousness that is connected to your particular body, mind, and personality. It's clear that the body, mind, and personality are not who you are, but only something that makes it possible for Essence to function in the world. This detachment from the body, mind, and personality makes it possible to see the connectedness and perfection of all of life. It makes it possible to truly love.

When you are aligned with Essence, your eyes have a look to them that is recognizable as Essence but difficult to describe. They have a depth, intensity, and fire about them and a piercing, yet gentle, and infinite quality. An actual energy is transmitted from this gaze, from Essence through the eyes, that can bring others into alignment with Essence to the extent that they are willing to have that experience. This is well known in spiritual circles headed by spiritual masters or gurus. Photos have the same capacity for transmission, even ones of deceased spiritual masters.

In part, this transmission is made possible by the desire and openness of the recipient, who puts himself or herself in a position of receiving by being in the presence of a spiritual master or guru. Doing this is an affirmation of the willingness to experience Essence, and this prayer is always answered, at least to some extent.

The eyes are one of the ways the Divine brings itself Home. They are its calling cards. The eyes indicate the existence of the Divine as well as transmit a frequency that causes those who are ready and open to resonate with their divine nature. The eyes not only provide a visual experience of the Divine, but also have the ability to shift your consciousness.

Those who have experienced the eyes' ability to shift consciousness know the truth on a deep level and need no more convincing, while those who haven't have difficulty believing what they haven't experienced, and understandably so. And yet the Divine is not only experienced through the eyes, but also in many other ways in the world, if only the ego would notice and open to those revelations.

Chapter 3: Love Is Everywhere

Love Is Your Nature

You can tell that love is your nature because love is what you experience when you are still and your mind is quiet. Then the Heart naturally opens, and it expresses itself as love. This love is not romantic love, but more like acceptance, joy, gratitude, and contentment with life. It's subtler, softer, gentler, and less personal than romantic love, which has a giddiness and an excitement about it.

With romantic love, you “expect the world,” in the sense that you expect love and the beloved to give you everything you want. With this love, you know yourself *as* the world. With romantic love, your focus is on the other; with this love, you know yourself as the other. With romantic love, there are two; with this love, there is only One.

Your natural state is a state of love, acceptance, peace, contentment, and quietude. Gone is the need to get, keep, improve, and think. In this Stillness, there's little desire for thought or anything else. When you experience love, acceptance, peace, and contentment, it means you have dropped into Essence and are no longer identified with the egoic mind, which can be recognized by the opposite qualities: a lack of love, acceptance, peacefulness, and contentment.

At your core, you are love, acceptance, peace, and contentment. These same qualities are at everyone's core, although they are often obscured by identification with the egoic mind. Ego identification is the usual state of consciousness, but not the natural state of consciousness. The natural state of consciousness is love, and you are here to discover that. Your programming, which gives you the impression that you are the ego and the mind, conceals this truth.

Love is the glue that holds the universe together. This is an esoteric statement that can't be understood by the mind. You have to take this truth on faith. Once you do, you begin to see love everywhere. Your beliefs have a powerful impact on your experience of life. They filter your perceptions. For example, if you believe that love is everywhere, which it is, then you'll experience that. If, on the other hand, you believe that evil is everywhere, that is what you'll see, no matter how much love is in front of your eyes.

It's important to acknowledge that love is everywhere because doing that counteracts the ego's assumption that love isn't everywhere and that life isn't safe and supportive. The importance of counteracting the ego's negative beliefs is that, unless you do, you are likely to remain identified with the ego. To wake up to your divine nature and live in alignment with that instead of the ego, you have to train yourself to see life as Essence sees it instead of as the ego sees it. The more you do this, the more Essence will begin to live through you, and you will express Essence in the world instead of the ego. The reward for this is true happiness and peace and the capacity to bring others to true happiness and peace.

Every Act Is an Act of Love

Mother Theresa is remembered and revered for her great service to humanity and her ability to see the Divine in everyone. When people think of love and the service that naturally flows from love, she often comes to mind. However, love has many other faces. It is visible in the simplest gestures and acts performed by very ordinary people living very ordinary lives: Love pushes a

child on a swing, love drives safely, love shops for food, love listens, love greets, love waves, love touches, love smiles, love laughs, love kisses, love sings, love plays, and loves creates.

Exercise Noticing Love

Notice all the ways you express love in your life. Notice the ways others express love. Love is everywhere, quietly and simply behind the scenes, being expressed in every moment. The ego's world is absent of love, and when you are identified with the ego, you see only problems and lack. The ego overlooks the evidence that love is behind and driving all life. Love is the juice that fuels life. You love to move, to breathe, to be alive. You even love to fight and have problems. Essence loves it all, even the chaos, messiness, and challenges. No matter what is happening, it is possible to experience Essence loving it. Love is really the only constant in the universe.

In fact, everything that people do is an act of love. Even those who choose to steal from or harm others are doing so out of love for themselves because they believe they need to do that to be safe or happy. Not all acts appear loving, but at their core, those who do them have the intention to do good at least for themselves, although possibly at the expense of others.

Harmful acts are attempts, although misguided ones, on the part of those who do them to preserve their own life or get something they feel they need to be happy. As you evolve, you become concerned about preserving the lives of those you love in addition to yourself. This circle eventually widens to include all of humanity, perhaps even at the expense of your own life.

If you were able to see love in every action, there would be no cause for judgment, which only leads to more separation, hatred, retribution, and suffering in the world. Dropping all judgments doesn't mean you would allow evil and not stand up for justice. Rather, it means you wouldn't be contributing to the separation and hatred that support and feed the sense the ego has that it must oppose others to keep itself safe.

When egos receive love and compassion, they resonate with it and express love, perhaps not immediately if there's a great deal of wounding, but eventually. Love heals, and it helps you evolve out of the fear that is part of ego identification into the peace of Essence. On the other hand, judgment, hatred, and retribution separate you, which confirms the ego's suspicion that it needs to do everything in its power to protect itself and get what it wants from a hostile world. This negative attitude is contagious, and it creates a very unpleasant world. You can do your part in turning this negativity around by seeing love in every act and remembering that every human being is inherently good.

Affirming someone's inherent goodness allows you to feel compassion for the suffering that person is creating, for himself or herself and everyone else involved, out of ignorance of the truth. As a result of such an affirmation, you become more interested in dispelling ignorance and healing those involved than judging or punishing the wrongdoer. The human condition is such that you are not able to choose well because you don't understand who you really are and what is needed to find true happiness. You make choices that bring suffering to yourself and others. But this is all part of your spiritual evolution. No one ever became enlightened who wasn't first lost in the illusion of separation and hurting himself or herself and others. Everyone passes through this stage in evolution, and the responsibility falls on those who've already passed this way to help those who lack understanding.

Love Is All Around

As difficult as it may be to see love in certain acts and to see the goodness in certain people, it isn't difficult to find loving acts and loving people in this world. Love shines through in everyone to one degree or another because it can't be hidden or suppressed. Some have discovered the joy of loving acts and practice love consciously. Although most people may not be operating at this level, most do try to be loving to others, especially those close to them. In nearly every interaction, you see people making an effort to be loving. Politeness, smiles, consideration, helpfulness, receptivity, and attention are all ways people show their love and good will. Just because those expressions aren't always pure doesn't diminish the fact that love is driving them.

Although the ego is motivated to get its needs met and most people are identified with it, the Divine is alive and well within everyone and inspiring every person to express love. What interferes with expressing love is the tendency to be absorbed in your mind and thoughts about yourself and what you want and need rather than about how you might express love.

You can train yourself to counteract the ego's tendencies. When you decide to dedicate yourself to expressing love, you choose in each new moment to express love instead of following the egoic mind. Very few people are this committed to love, but that is where spiritual evolution is taking you. It is taking you toward expressing of love in every moment.

Attention

Giving attention is a very basic form of love, which can be seen everywhere, and a way that love can be expressed very simply in the world. What you give your attention to is what you love. If you are giving your attention to the egoic mind, you are loving it and joining with it. If you are giving your attention to others, you are loving them and joining with them. Asking yourself, "What am I giving my attention to?" can be an excellent spiritual practice, and it will help you break the habit of identifying with the egoic mind.

Giving your attention to others is often at odds with giving your attention to your mind because the mind isn't interested in others. It's only interested in itself, its thoughts, its opinions, and its perceptions. To give your attention to others is a gift of love, because to do this, you must override the ego's tendency to give attention to itself and its needs. It takes some effort to overcome the programming to be self-focused and to become more other-focused. When you give your attention to others, you are expressing love in a most basic and simple way.

Giving attention to someone can be a powerful force for good. When you give attention to others, you are channeling love energy to them, regardless of how you might feel about them from the level of your personality. The choice to give attention to others is a loving choice. It connects them with the love energy that is their true nature and yours, and that's a gift. This all happens on very subtle levels, but it's still felt by people, who welcome attention and are often deeply touched by someone paying attention to them. Giving others attention is a way of acknowledging your Oneness with them and catalyzing the experience of Oneness in them, however subtle that experience might be.

Giving others attention causes them to feel love, and that feels good and comes back to you and goes out to others as well, so giving your attention to others is ultimately much more rewarding than giving your attention to the mind. Everyone wants love more than anything else, because being in touch with your true nature is satisfying, unlike many of the other things the ego tries to attain that bring only fleeting satisfaction. As a result, giving attention to others

becomes easier the more it is practiced.

Giving attention is equally rewarding when you give it to whatever you are doing. The ego draws you into its unreal world of thought. It entices you to pay attention to the mind with juicy thoughts about the past, fantasies about the future, and thoughts that build up the ego and sense of being special, which often involve tearing other people down. Giving your attention, instead, to whatever is going on in the moment is an act of loving life rather than rejecting the moment by escaping into the ego's mental world.

Whenever you give your attention to what is actually going on in the present moment, you are rewarded by experiencing love, peace, and contentment. Giving attention to real life instead of to the mind aligns you with love. However, you are programmed to move away from the moment. To counteract that programming, you have to learn to give your attention to what is real, to what is showing up *now*. When you do that, you become free of the egoic mind's ceaseless discontentment, negativity, and judgment. All you have ever had to do to be free of suffering is turn your attention away from the mind, away from what is not real, and onto the present moment.

The present moment is where your true nature and the qualities of your true nature can be experienced. Only when you are in the moment fully can you experience real love, acceptance, contentment, peace, and joy. All you have to do to experience those qualities is put your attention on what is happening *now* instead of on your thoughts.

Acceptance

One of the reasons you turn away from the moment is that you are programmed to reject life as it is. You want life on your own terms, but it can never be that way. Even if the ego could have life on its own terms, which the ego does experience briefly and occasionally, it would soon want more or different or better than that. The ego doesn't accept life, which is one reason the ego doesn't want to give life attention.

The ego would rather give attention to its fantasies, dreams, memories, opinions, judgments, and even fears than to the actual reality of any moment, which in addition to being imperfect (from the ego's point of view), is impossible to control or predict. The unpredictability of life and the ego's lack of control of it are deeply disturbing to the ego. Touching into reality makes the ego very uncomfortable because it is faced with the truth that it's not the one making life happen. As long as the ego remains in its made-up reality, it can play at being king. It pretends that it can make life go its way. It denies the obvious reality and chooses to believe what it wants to about reality.

Accepting whatever is happening drops you into Essence and into a state of happiness, peace, and contentment. That state is immediately uncomfortable for the ego, so the experience of happiness and peace doesn't usually last long. The ego finds fault even with peace, declaring it boring, and drums up a problem to think about and solve. If you agree with the ego's assessment of the moment, you are back in identification with the ego instead of with Essence. Fortunately, acceptance can bring you right back into the moment. Once you are aware of the power of acceptance to drop you into Essence, you can use acceptance more consciously to do that.

Acceptance is synonymous with love. Love accepts. You could say that acceptance is the definition of love. So when you accept what is happening, you land in love's territory. However, to stay there, you have to keep accepting what's happening, and that can be challenging because the mind comes into nearly every moment with a reason to leave it. You must say no to the mind

again and again before its hold is loosened. The more you say no to the mind, the weaker it gets, and the more you say yes to it, the stronger it gets.

Detaching from the mind takes diligence, commitment, and choice, and you are the only one who can make that commitment and choice. To some extent, your spiritual evolution is in your hands. Other factors determine how and when you will unfold spiritually, but how fast you advance is largely up to you and your choices.

Accepting what is happening isn't as difficult as you may think. You only have to accept what is happening in the present moment, not in every moment throughout time. The ego has difficulty accepting what's happening because it spins a negative story about what it means for future moments. For instance, if you are feeling sick, the ego causes you to suffer over it by telling you how awful being sick is and what a negative impact it will have on your life. The stories it spins are all lies. It never predicts the future accurately.

Accepting what's happening is also not as difficult as you may think because accepting it doesn't mean you have to like it. All you have to do is accept that you don't like what's happening, if that is the case. Accepting what's happening just means you are willing to let it be the way it is. After all, what other choice do you have, since it is the way it is?

The only other choice is to argue with what's happening, complain about it, try to ignore it, or try to change it, which is what the ego does in nearly every moment. This is a recipe for suffering and doesn't change what is happening; it only makes what's happening unpleasant. By allowing whatever is happening to be happening, you align yourself with life instead of opposing it, and that makes every moment, regardless of what is happening, peaceful.

When the moment is okay just the way it is and your energy is not taken up in opposing it, you can really be present to whatever is happening. What you discover is that every moment has much more to it than what you like or don't like about it. Every moment is rich with complexity, dimension, and beauty. The ego paints the moment as black or white, good or bad. It has a simplistic view of what is happening according to its likes and dislikes, but the moment is not simple in the least. It's interestingly changeable, unpredictable, and intelligent. Who knows what will happen next? You never know. From the perspective of Essence, life's unpredictability is delicious, exciting, and fascinating. When you are in acceptance, you feel that way too about life.

When you are accepting, you are expressing Essence. And when you are accepted by others, you are experiencing Essence. Think of all the times in one day you are either accepting or experiencing acceptance from others. Every time acceptance happens, Essence is showing up in your life. Love is everywhere in the form of acceptance: You accept the sky, you accept gravity, you accept your breathing, you accept the color of the trees, you accept the silence between sounds, you accept the space between objects. You accept the majority of what is. This is You loving life and allowing it to be the way that it is.

The mind interrupts this peace, this love, by telling you that something is not right, not good, not desirable: "That dog shouldn't be barking. The sun shouldn't be so hot. It shouldn't be so windy." If you agree with the mind, you suffer. If you don't, you stay in Essence, in allowing whatever is to be the way it is.

The egoic mind will tell you that accepting life means you won't ever do anything. It tries to scare you out of accepting by making acceptance equal to passivity, laziness, and a lack of discrimination, which the ego deems dangerous to survival. Acceptance is dangerous to the ego's survival, but it's not dangerous to your survival. Acceptance is a more effective strategy for survival than anything the ego has to offer. Acceptance is love, and love connects you with everything because it connects you with who you really are, which is everything. What could be

more beneficial to survival than being connected to everything and knowing you are everything? Is there any reason that You, as the Divine, would not take care of you, as the creation? You are being taken care of and so is everyone else. The ego not only can't take credit for your survival, but it has interfered with it more than it has helped.

Something else besides the ego is living your life, and the more you allow it to do that, the more it will take over. Essence has been living through you and expressing itself through you as much as you have allowed it to. Every person is an expression of Essence to a greater or lesser degree. The Divine is moving, speaking, doing, creating, laughing, playing, and working through each of you to the extent that you allow it to, but it is there in everyone. If you want to have an experience of the Divine, you are having it! And so is everyone else.

You are not separate from the Divine. The ego is the sense that you are a separate person apart from the Divine, but that is just an idea. The ego is just the idea, "I exist as a separate entity." It isn't true. You are the Divine in disguise as a human being. The more you come to see that you are not who you think you are, the more you will experience who you really are and who everyone else really is. The Divine is everywhere.

Chapter 4: The Divine in Action

The Divine Lives Through You

The ego is not the only thing moving this body of yours. Many times in one day, the Divine moves you to take action and speak, while you are under the impression that *you* are doing these things. You are programmed to feel that you are separate, and part of this programming is the sense that *you* are doing what you are doing rather than being moved by an Intelligence greater than this *you*.

Many of you do have a sense that you are being moved through life, which being aligned with Essence feels like. The more you are aligned with Essence, the more you feel this. However, most people are identified with the ego most of the time, and for them, the sense of being moved by something beyond them is more rare and fleeting. Nevertheless they feel it too, if only occasionally. When it is felt, it is very rewarding. Moving through life with so little resistance feels good. It's a welcome relief from the usual struggle inherent in ego identification.

When action or speech is inspired by Essence, it flows spontaneously and easily. You feel compelled to do or say something without thinking about it ahead of time. You don't question it; you just do it. Your action or speech feels effortless, natural, and authentic—without ego. It feels like it isn't *you* doing or speaking, but more like it is coming through you, and you are just the vehicle for it. The result feels good, clean, and right.

Everyone has had this experience, but not everyone acknowledges it as the Divine, or Essence, moving through them. The more it is recognized, the more it will happen. The Divine expresses itself through you only as much as you allow it to. Those who recognize divine Presence are more likely to express it. Those who don't recognize it tend to find this experience unsettling. They distrust it because they don't understand it, and are therefore likely to interfere with it in the future. Gradually, the Divine makes itself known in every life, and it patiently waits for you to be ready to express it more fully in your life.

Meanwhile, the Divine does whatever it can to influence your choices. Since the egoic mind is the prominent voice for most people, the Divine has to find a way to circumvent it or work with it. So that is what the Divine does: It works within the life the ego is trying to create. Essence speaks to you mostly through your intuition and by nudging you toward action. What you choose to do is based on listening to either the egoic mind or your intuition and these nudges. These two different voices, or impetuses toward action and speech, coexist. You get to choose which one you will respond to.

Most people are used to responding to their thoughts rather than their intuition, so the ego often ends up shaping decisions more than Essence. As you evolve, this shifts, and the egoic mind becomes less prominent, and Essence becomes more prominent. This shift happens in part because you discover that following the egoic mind doesn't bring real happiness and fulfillment, while following the intuition (when it is accurately followed) does.

As you evolve, you become better at interpreting your intuition, since intuition is developed through experience. Through trial and error, you learn how to decipher Essence's communication. Eventually, you will become so good at it that you will only depend on the mind for the practical things the mind was designed for, such as reading maps or following directions.

Seeing the Divine in Your Actions

What moves your hands? What breathes your body? What laughs? What wakes up? What jumps out of bed in the morning? These kinds of actions are mostly spontaneous. For the most part, you don't decide to do these things; they just happen. A lot just happens. Think about it. Notice how many of the things you do just happen without having given them a thought beforehand. Many of the things you do without thinking are inspired by Essence. Some of your automatic reactions and responses are conditioning, but just notice all the times they aren't. Where do these spontaneous actions arise from? Why do you get out of bed one moment and not another? Why do you pick up the phone to call someone one moment and not another? What determines when you do these things?

The Divine has more to do with the timing of your actions than you might realize. You know you will get out of bed sometime, because that's what people do in the morning, but why in that second? Maybe the mind made a decision, and you complied with that. But if getting up just happened without making a decision, who chose to get up then? The mind chooses much of the time, but begin to notice all the times the mind doesn't choose, and action is still taken and words are spoken. When you look, you will see that there is a very great mystery here, and that mystery points to who you really are.

There is something else living this life that has been masquerading as the *you* that you think you are. This *you* is just a thought, while this something else is real, but it isn't a being or a thing, and it is not separate from anything else. It cannot be touched, seen, or defined because any definition could not contain the whole truth. It is too vast and mysterious to comprehend, and you aren't meant to. Your mind cannot comprehend this Mystery, and that is what keeps it a mystery.

However, as with any great mystery, there are clues that point to it. One of these clues lies in the mystery of who chooses to act or speak. It is clear enough when the mind chooses to act or speak because thoughts precede that choice. But what about all the times when you act or speak without thought or conditioning driving those actions or speech? If you pay close attention, you will discover that you act or speak spontaneously more often than as a result of some thought you had.

These spontaneous actions and speech can tell you a lot about your true nature and what this Mystery intends for your life. You will notice that these spontaneous actions and speech never harm anyone, but rather support and enhance life. You will notice that love, kindness, gentleness, joy, and truth are expressed by this Mystery that is the real you. You will notice that it loves life and doesn't resist jumping into it and taking action when that is needed. It speaks when speaking is called for, and it speaks with wisdom. When words are not necessary, it is silent. When action is not necessary, it rests. The Divine expresses itself even in the absence of action and speech. Sometimes it just rests in whatever else is happening without intervening. It moves in and out of interaction with life: Sometimes it acts, and sometimes it is still. But it is always present.

This Presence can be felt, whether it is actually moving through you, moving through someone else, or just resting quietly. It is felt as energy, consciousness, or awareness, as if someone is present and looking on, either out through your eyes or someone else's, or presiding over life from a distance. For many, this Presence is subtle; for others, it is felt strongly. As you become more aware of it and acknowledge it, the experience of Presence strengthens. Eventually, your sense of self becomes identified with Presence instead of the ego. You come to

know yourself as Presence, Essence, rather than the *you* that you think of yourself as.

Until you come to see yourself as Presence and identify with that, you experience Presence as something outside yourself, as if God is watching over you. This stage naturally precedes the discovery of yourself as Presence. This stage acts as a bridge between identification with the ego and identification with Essence. During this stage, the goodness of Essence is attributed to something outside yourself, to God, rather than to yourself. The ego is more comfortable with this attribution because it gets to remain dominant. You still get to be someone with problems that need to be solved by the ego. Once you awaken and your identity shifts from the ego to Essence, the ego loses its sense of reality and its power. It doesn't disappear, but it is no longer the dominant influence and the central player.

Seeing the Divine in the Actions of Others

The Divine is equally apparent in the actions of others, especially when that person is strongly aligned with Essence. When that happens, that person acts as a conduit for Essence, bringing those around him or her into alignment as well. Actions from Essence are not only satisfying and fulfilling, but also powerful. They have the power to draw others into Essence, and for those who aren't used to experiencing Essence, it is a profound experience.

You can recognize Essence in action in others by how you feel around them. You feel uplifted, positive, happy, and strong. Life feels good and right, and what they are doing or saying feels good and right. You may feel moved or touched by something they said. You may even feel chills or tingles, which seem to confirm your feelings about what they said. These kinds of actions and communications happen more frequently than you may realize. Once you become more aware of them, you see they happen all the time.

The Divine works through you and through others to make the world go around. Through others, it brings you information, insight, comfort, help, truth, wisdom, healing, support, and whatever else you need to evolve as you are meant to. You do the same for others. The Divine uses you to express and accomplish what it intends to, and it uses others the same way. You don't have to be enlightened to be used this way; you only have to be alive.

You have always been a vehicle for the Divine to some degree, mostly without being aware of it. Once you become aware of this phenomenon, you can ask to serve more in this way, and it will happen more consciously. There is no limit to what can be accomplished when the ego is set aside and you are aligned with that which moves all of creation.

Through each of you, the Divine works uniquely and distinctly. Everyone has certain talents and strengths that are being developed and expressed in this lifetime. The Divine has a plan for you for this lifetime, and that plan is unique to you. The Divine works through every person differently, depending on his or her skills and talents. It will use you in the ways it intends, and that is what will most fulfill you.

Some plans have very simple goals, such as learning to be a better mother or developing musical talent, while others have more grand goals, such as helping to solve the population problem or discovering a cure for a disease. Whatever your plan is, it will be conveyed to you through your intuition and through drives, inspiration, and urges to take certain actions. Essence guides you to fulfill its plan by causing you to be attracted to certain activities and not to others. You will feel drawn to learning or doing whatever you need to fulfill your plan.

The ego can interfere with this plan either by sidetracking you with its goals or through judgments or other disparaging remarks that may block you from moving in the direction that

would be most fulfilling. Other people may block you as well. Those who are strongly identified with the ego, may tell you what you should and shouldn't do, as if they know, because that is how the ego interacts with others.

The ego assumes a position of rightness, and it tries to impose its views on others. It doesn't experience or trust any other force in the universe but itself. Although the egoic mind is ill-equipped to give advice about life, it assumes that it is and that doing that is its job. Believing the mind leads many astray for a time, until Essence is once again able to bring its influence to bear. Essence nearly always prevails, at least to some extent. Very few are totally lost to the dictates of the egoic mind—fortunately.

The way you can tell if your actions are aligned with the ego or Essence is how you feel. Do you feel happy, hopeful, excited, and enlivened when you think about or pursue a certain direction? That is Essence saying yes to that. If you feel confused, unsure, negative, fearful, and unexcited about a direction, then that direction is probably not right for you, or at least not at this time. Is your ego or someone else's telling you that you *should* do that? Following *shoulds* won't bring you happiness, while following the deeper drives of Essence will.

The ego generates desires to move you, while Essence generates drives. The ego's desires and Essence's drives are very different. They are experienced differently, and they bring different results. When you follow the ego's desires, you learn, grow, and evolve as a result of the circumstances you create. You won't find much lasting happiness in fulfilling those desires, but you may get some satisfaction from learning something from pursuing those goals. The Divine seeks experience, learning, and growth through you, so it allows you to follow the ego's desires. The ego leads you to believe, however, that fulfilling its desires is the route to happiness, which it isn't.

Essence, on the other hand, produces drives to pursue certain goals and do certain things. Following these drives and accomplishing these goals brings deep fulfillment. Happiness is a byproduct because, in aligning yourself with Essence's goals, you also become aligned with Essence's qualities, and happiness is one of these qualities. If you want a happy and fulfilled life, align your actions with Essence's intentions for you. This is not as hard as it might sound. Just listen to your intuition and Essence's nudges instead of the ego's fears and *shoulds* and *should nots*. Listen to your intuition instead of your mind.

Aligning Your Actions with Essence

Thinking is what most stands in the way of knowing what actions Essence would have you take. This is true for two reasons: 1) You are programmed to believe that thinking has the answers to how to live your life, so you look to the mind for them, and 2) When you are busy thinking, you don't notice the intuition and nudges that come from Essence. Nevertheless, it's easy enough to tell when your actions are being driven by the ego and when they are being driven by Essence.

When Essence is driving your actions, those actions are fueled by a deep sense of dedication, regardless of how things might turn out. That dedication is marked by a willingness to live in the unknown, take risks, and make sacrifices. Those actions are driven more by passion than willfulness, and action is taken for the joy of it and less for the possible reward. There is a sense of needing to do something, which at times can seem irrational. The ego, on the other hand, is very rational about what it pursues, often pursuing things solely for the dream of a particular reward. Its actions are driven by wanting the things it values: power, money, safety, material things, security, comfort, pleasure, recognition, and success.

There is also a difference in how Essence and the ego pursue things. While Essence moves with the flow of life, taking advantage of opportunities that present themselves, the ego pushes and tries to make things happen according to its ideas and in keeping with a particular timetable. The ego makes a plan and tries to implement it. When you are aligned with Essence, on the other hand, you uncover Essence's plan and follow it as it naturally unfolds. *You* don't make the plan, but rather tune into the plan that already exists. These are two very different ways of living, and they bring very different experiences. Living in alignment with Essence brings much more happiness—and ease.

When you are aligned with Essence, action comes about naturally, organically (out of the moment and circumstances), easily, and clearly. When action comes from Essence, it is clear, positive, and usually carried out with ease. Things fall into place. When action comes from the ego, on the other hand, it is often confused and uncertain, although willful. It may run into unforeseen problems and roadblocks. The ego tends to disregard the current reality and focus on the desired outcome, sometimes to the exclusion of important facts. The ego sees what it wants to see and makes choices based on that, so its choices are often not wise or well timed.

To discover Essence's plan, you have to pay attention to what is coming out of the moment because the plan is unfolding in every moment. You can't go to a book and read about it. You can't figure it out by thinking about it. You can only discover it by paying attention to the present moment. What is happening? What inspiration, urges, and drives are coming out of the moment? What do you feel moved to do now? What *are* you doing now?

You are never done asking these questions because each moment is new and different. To find out what to do next, you have to keep looking into the present moment. However, it is best not to look into it with your mind. Just notice what the *experience* is. What is moving? What are you experiencing? What intuitions or ideas give you joy when they arise? Those are the ones to follow. Where is your energy going? Where does it want to flow? Do that and see what comes next. Then do that and see what comes next.

You can't know the plan ahead of time. It is revealed step by step in the moment. You have to trust what feels right and what you are drawn to doing and keep following that. The ego isn't comfortable with living that way, so it will try to bring you back to its plan. But just keep paying attention to the moment instead of your mind. You know you are on the right track when you feel joy. Let that be your guide.

The ego is guided by ideas, but what are ideas and where do they come from? How reliable are they, really? You are programmed to believe your ideas are true and trustworthy, but are they really? Essence is far more trustworthy. It has brought you all the joy you have ever experienced. What has the mind brought you? Mostly pain. Once you see this, the choice is really clear, but you have to be willing to see this. There is a choice to be made: Will you pay attention to your mind, or will you pay attention to what is coming out of the moment?

Chapter 5: The Divine Speaks

Talking to the Divine

It is easy to talk to the Divine because you have a direct line to it. You are never apart from it. No matter how apart you may feel, the Divine is right here with you, sharing and participating in this life with you, because the Divine *is* you and everything else. It doesn't abandon its creations, but lives inside them, silently and unobtrusively. It makes itself known in every moment, but it is hidden from plain view by its subtlety and non-demanding nature, and it is overshadowed by the prominence of the egoic mind.

Because it is undetectable by your senses and incomprehensible to your mind, the Divine is not felt to be real; and yet, it created all that you consider real. It is the matrix behind all life. You can't see it or touch it, but you can and do experience it. You are never *not* experiencing it because you are its hands, eyes, ears, legs, and mouths in the world. It moves you through life, has experience through you, and evolves as a result of those experiences.

The Divine is more real than this *you* that you think you are, which is more like a dream that the Divine conjured. The Divine allows the dreamer to manipulate the dream, but ultimately, the Divine creates the dream and determines when it will end for the dreamer. The Divine determines the setting, the general plot, and the characters this dreamer will meet, then it allows the dreamer to respond as the dreamer will. There is free will inside this dream, although outside of it, there is only one will that chooses to have the experience of the dream, whatever that might be.

One characteristic of this dream is that the dreamer can realize it is a dream while still inside it. After that, he or she is freer to co-create with the Dream Maker. The dream goes better at this point because the dreamer makes wiser choices, has access to more resources and helpers, and has more power to influence the dream and its characters. The dreamer becomes more like a superhero in the midst of any trouble that arises in the dream because now the dreamer knows his or her true nature and no longer falls prey to fears and false ideas. The problems that arise are easily conquered because they are known to be unreal, created by one's own mind. The challenges brought by the dream are welcome and only serve to strength the dreamer.

One reason the dream goes well once the dreamer has realized that it is a dream is that the lines of communication between the dreamer and the Dream Maker are open: The dreamer can talk to the Dream Maker, and the Dream Maker talks back. Before that, the dreamer was unaware of the Dream Maker and felt alone and didn't ask for help. Help was available, but the dreamer didn't know it. The dreamer had to learn to ask for help and then listen for the answer. Once the dreamer did this, it made it possible to wake up out of the dream while still inside it.

The lines of communication between you and the Divine are always open, but until you open them on your end, you can't receive the full benefit. If you don't know that communication is possible and already happening, you are likely to miss it because you won't be listening, and you won't be taking advantage of it by asking for help. The Divine communicates to you constantly, but when you are involved with the mind, you often miss it. When your mind is quiet, you just might catch it. But if you don't believe the message is real and helpful, you may disregard it.

Recognizing that such communication is possible is a big step in your evolution. It is a real

breakthrough for the Divine because it gives the Divine an opportunity to have more of an influence. Before this, the mind is expected to guide your life. After this, it is possible to see that something else is guiding your life. You will still have challenges, but they will be ones designed by the Divine for your growth, not problems your egoic mind has made up or actually created.

It is more important to listen to the Divine than to talk to it because it is always conveying something to you whether you talk to it or not. Nevertheless, talking to the Divine—especially asking questions—sets the stage for listening and can bring you specific insights you might not ordinarily catch. Talking to the Divine opens up the channel of communication and makes it more likely you will receive the insight and understanding you need to move through life more easily. You can ask for guidance on specific issues, and you will receive it. For instance, if you are trying to make a decision, you can pose a question and wait for a response, which will often come energetically, intuitively, or occasionally through words. The answer to any question may change over time, so it is important to keep checking to see if the guidance you received still holds true.

Prayer is another word for talking to the Divine. But rather than pleading to God to deliver what *you* want, you ask the Divine to reveal what *it* wants. Those are two very different approaches to the Divine. One assumes that getting what you want is the goal, regardless of what is best for the Whole; the other asks the Divine to help you play your part in the Whole. The personal self is recognized as a vehicle, or an instrument, for the Whole rather than a separate entity pitted against it. You surrender your will to the Divine's because you recognize that what seems like your will actually belongs to the false self, the ego, and can't be trusted and isn't a worthy guide.

What makes this kind of prayer powerful is the underlying assumption that you are not the ego or the mind. In affirming your allegiance to the Whole rather than to the ego, you are affirming your desire to be aligned with Essence over the ego. When you pray for that, Essence responds and becomes more obviously present and active in your life. Eventually you will come to know yourself as That. Acknowledging that you want to be aligned with Essence instead of the ego is a very important step in bringing this about.

If you pray for nothing else, pray for this, and the rest will be easy. This prayer, alone, has the power to bring you into alignment, where all the answers you need will be revealed.

Listening to the Divine

The Divine speaks in a number of ways. To hear it requires listening in some unusual ways because it rarely speaks in actual words. It speaks mostly through the intuition, which comes through the body and the mind.

When an intuition comes through the body, something is just known. You don't know how you know it; you just know it. This kind of knowing is usually accompanied by an energetic experience, somewhat like a solidness or heaviness, usually in the chest area. No thoughts preceded that knowing and none follow it, just a solid sense of certainty about an answer that arose from nowhere.

When an intuition comes through the mind, there is a similar knowing that was neither preceded nor followed by thoughts. Rather than occurring in the body, the intuition comes to you more like an idea, although one that isn't fully put into words. It is as if information was downloaded into your brain, and you just know. The intuition stands on its own, apart from the mind. Usually, you try to put this knowing into words. Intuition that comes through the mind is

similar to symbols or pictures, which contain a lot of information and then must be interpreted. This is where some distortion might occur. The same is true of intuition that comes through the body: The information is as if it is condensed, and when it is reconstituted and put into words, it may become distorted.

Whether intuition comes through the body or the mind, there is a rightness, clarity and solidity about it that rings true. It makes sense. You trust it. You just know that it is the answer. You feel excited, happy, relieved, and at peace. You are no longer struggling to find a solution, but resting from all struggle to know because now you do know. It feels like a big "Ah-ha!"

The experience of knowing something with the mind is just the opposite. The egoic mind is rarely sure of a decision, and it is easily swayed and confused by various viewpoints. This is because the ego bases decisions on conflicting and sometimes contradictory information and because the ego wants contradictory things—it wants it all. With nearly every decision, the ego struggles. The egoic mind causes you to feel confused, unhappy, uncomfortable, and ill at ease. It wants a solution, but it can't find one, and that causes a lot of suffering.

Part of the problem is that there is a right time for every solution or answer, and the mind doesn't want to wait for a solution or answer to arise naturally. When the solution does arise, it arises through the intuition. Finally there is relief from the mind's struggle to find an answer! Unfortunately, sometimes the solution or answer comes too late because the mind has already made a decision just to ease its discomfort. In this way, the mind can lead you down a path that is not the best one for you.

When this happens, Essence does its best to work with that choice, and it continues to steer you toward creating a situation that will be more fitting and fulfilling. It continues to deliver messages intuitively, and it uses other means to communicate its plan. The Divine, through Essence, fortunately has many other voices besides the voice of intuition. One of those is the voice of others.

Essence within you collaborates with Essence within others to help bring about your plan and everyone else's. Essence within you inspires Essence within others to give you the messages, help, information, advice, support, comfort, love, and encouragement you need to unfold your plan. If you aren't accepting the guidance Essence offers you intuitively, it will have others voice it. Getting advice and information from others is generally more acceptable, credible, and trustworthy to the mind.

When you are not in touch with your intuition or not listening to it for whatever reason (usually your mind or someone else is telling you not to), Essence tries to get your attention by using other people to voice its guidance. It inspires others to say what you need to hear. You have had this happen countless times, and you have been a mouthpiece for Essence countless times. It happens more than you probably imagine. You pass on and receive not only life-altering information, but also information that can make life better in small ways.

The most meaningful and fulfilling interchanges between people are ones that involve Essence. One sign this is happening is that you feel good afterward and often inspired to take some kind of action. Interchanges between egos, on the other hand, leave you confused, defensive, feeling bad, or at best unchanged.

Essence changes lives for the better because it moves people in directions that are meaningful. The ego can't do this because it doesn't know what would be meaningful for someone. And what the ego assumes would be meaningful probably would not be. The egoic mind is not in a position to be able to guide life, and yet it is what most people turn to for answers.

The Divine also speaks through events. Sometimes it creates events to make you question or change your direction. When things aren't going well, it may be that the situation is not aligned with Essence. Essence may try to convince you to surrender to its plan by not allowing you to have what you want or to continue to go in a particular direction. People suffer greatly when this happens, but once the new direction becomes established, their lives will be changed for the better.

If this seems to be happening to you, it is good to consciously surrender, that is, make a statement of surrender and ask what is wanted of you. Putting yourself in a receptive mode rather than feeling like a victim will shift your consciousness and allow you to receive the insight you need to move things in a different direction. You may have to do this repeatedly over a period of time before clarity arises.

Essence often needs time to bring you the information, people, and opportunities that will help you be open to a new direction. Without these, intuitive suggestions are likely to be rejected because they may seem too abstract and implausible. Life often has to make you aware of and get you thinking about some possibility before you will trust your intuition enough to act on it. Intuitions concerning major life changes nearly always go hand in hand with events and opportunities that also point to it.

So Essence speaks to you both by blocking certain directions and by making it possible to move gracefully in certain directions. You can recognize the direction Essence intends because you will experience the following:

1. Numerous pointers to it. For example, you are told about it by several people, someone gives you a book about it, you see a TV program about it, your close friend is doing it, you have a dream about it, you get excited when you think about it.
2. Support and opportunities to move in that direction. For example, someone offers you a job or offers to pay your schooling or train you, family members or close friends are doing it or encouraging you to do it.
3. Ease in moving in that direction. For example, you already have the skills for it, no other opportunities are presenting themselves, no one is discouraging you, nothing is in the way, there is no reason not to.

If the direction you are moving in is short on obvious pointers, opportunities, support, and ease, it may not be right for you at this time. This doesn't mean you should change directions whenever something is difficult. Life is difficult at times, and sometimes persistence is required to achieve Essence's goals. However, if your direction is aligned with Essence, you will have the strength, motivation, courage, inspiration, and assistance to overcome the challenges. If it is not, you will feel dispirited and not have the inspiration, motivation, and courage to continue or the assistance you need to succeed.

So whether your direction is the right one for you or not is revealed by your feelings about it: The right direction feels right no matter what difficulties are encountered. The wrong direction feels unfulfilling no matter what degree of success is encountered.

Expressions of the Divine

The Divine expresses itself in the world in ways other than just by guiding and shaping your destinies. It expresses itself, like you do, for the pure joy of it. It created this world to grow, learn, and evolve, and for the opportunities the world provides to be creative. The Divine evolves not just through work and overcoming challenges, but also through play and creativity. Creating is one of the ways the Divine grows, learns, evolves—and enjoys life.

The Divine creates primarily through you because, of all its creations on earth, humans have the most potential to be creators. Unlike other creatures, which are far more limited in their expression, you have a capacity for very diverse and complex experiences. You hold far more potential for exploration than any other life form on earth. For one thing, you have the ability to create such things as the automobile, airplane, and computer, which expand your experiences beyond what the body alone is capable of. And you have adapted to live nearly everywhere on the globe.

Each of you is a unique instrument for the Divine. No one else has ever been or will ever be exactly like you, nor will the times and circumstances you live in ever be the same. This allows for a completely unique experience through every one of you. This diversity and uniqueness is evidence for a purposefulness behind creation and, consequently, for the existence of an Intelligence behind creation, one that is also participating in creation and enjoying it.

There is no way of proving this, of course, but those of us who have evolved beyond the physical plane know this to be true. It is part of our work and service to you to explain this. Hopefully, this understanding will help you cope with the difficulties and challenges that are part of this marvelous plan.

The difficulties and challenges spur creativity on. Without them, you might not use the talents, gifts, and intellect you have been given. A Garden of Eden is really not ideal—for you or for the Divine. A world based on duality, one that has both good and evil (ignorance), offers a richer and much more interesting experience. The Divine loves a heroic story, one in which the hero is pitted against ignorance or difficult circumstances and must use his or her ingenuity, strength, and love to overcome those difficulties.

This life is all about such stories, which are also evidence for an Intelligence guiding life. The Divine guides life in a specific direction—toward greater goodness, strength, courage, compassion, tolerance, kindness, patience, wisdom, and love. Humanity is evolving in this direction, not the opposite, and that is no coincidence or accident. Love is what life is all about. Life is intended to bring you back to Love.

Conclusion: The Return to Love

Humanity is evolving, and it is evolving toward love. The evolution toward love is evidence of the Divine in the world. It is being accomplished through challenges, which teach love. It may be difficult to see how this is possible; challenges so often result in suffering and defeat. But when they don't, they reap the opposite: love, strength, compassion, wisdom, understanding, patience, and tolerance.

Over the course of your many lifetimes, you learn to turn challenges into strengths. Every challenge has a positive potential—every one. Equally, every challenge has a negative potential: It can result in fear, hatred, anger, blame, hopelessness, vengeance, ruthlessness, cruelty, or abuse. Even mildly challenging circumstances can result in terrible experiences of pain and suffering.

What makes the difference is what aspect of yourself responds to the challenges—the ego or Essence. In any one moment, one or the other steps up and reacts. What most determines what reacts is your level of evolution, but many other factors are also involved. Even older, more advanced souls might react negatively to trying situations under certain circumstances, especially initially. The ego is often the first thing to kick in whenever you or someone you love is threatened. For example, even very gentle people can become very angry at drivers whom they perceive as threatening.

However, during stressful and difficult times, particularly in emergency situations, many people also experience a strength and power moving through them that is beyond them. Even those who are very entrenched in the ego may get taken over by Essence in extreme situations when that is necessary to save someone's life. The Divine often steps in and saves life. Those who experience this describe it this way too. Most heroes don't feel they can take credit for their heroism, and that is why. The ego can't take credit for it. The Divine saves life when that life is meant to be preserved.

This is what is usually thought of as heroism. But if heroism is defined as goodness prevailing over the ego, then heroism happens countless times every day. Every time goodness (God-ness) prevails, that is Essence taking over life—that is the hero in you overcoming the challenge of the ego, slaying the dragon of untruth.

Notice how often this happens in your life and in others' lives in just one day. Notice all the times you or someone else chooses love, kindness, generosity, helpfulness, and attentiveness over selfishness and self-concern. That is Essence living through you and living through them. The Divine is everywhere in disguise as ordinary human beings of all kinds.

There isn't a human being on this planet who has less access to Essence than another. Essence is an equal opportunity employer—it is equally accessible to everyone. It may seem less accessible to some because it is buried by ego identification, but it is only less visible. The instant anyone chooses love over selfishness or self-concern, there Essence is, regardless of how evolved or spiritual that person is. You don't have to be aware of Essence or believe in it for it to be living through you. It lives through all people regardless of their beliefs because *it is who they are*. They cannot *not* express Essence. It is what moves them, and it allows the ego to step in and move them as well. Every time the ego speaks or acts, Essence is allowing it.

Essence allows you to have the experience you choose to have, for the most part. Sometimes

Essence overrides the ego briefly to steer life in a particular direction, and then it steps back again and allows you to identify with the ego again, if you choose to. This dance between Essence and the ego is ongoing in everyone. Some choose to express the ego more than Essence, and some choose to express Essence more than the ego. But eventually, everyone expresses Essence more than the ego because that is the direction of evolution.

Love is the only satisfying choice, so eventually everyone chooses it over the ego. Everyone overcomes the programming that causes ego identification. Without exception, that is where everyone is headed. No matter how heinous a crime someone has committed, he or she will end up a saint in some other lifetime. The story has a happy ending. The hero slays the dragon once and for all.

The egoic programming is overcome because the suffering caused by it becomes unacceptable. Solutions to that suffering are sought, and the truth becomes known: The ego is an imposter *and* the source of all suffering. Seeing the truth frees you only somewhat from your programming because the program is still running. It can still draw you back into ego identification and suffering—and it does, even once you become strongly aligned with Essence. Evolution continues for quite a while before Essence becomes established as the state you live from most of the time.

Choosing Essence over the ego is a heroic act because it is not the easy choice. The easy choice is to follow your programming, your thoughts. It turns out that following your thoughts is not so easy, really, because ego identification is so unsatisfying and ultimately leads to unhappiness. Still, this has to be seen and a choice made to forego the temptations of the ego and "settle" for peace, love, and contentment, which are not nearly as glamorous as what the ego promises.

The ego promises riches, beauty, acclaim, success, and adoration. These are its ultimate goals, which it believes it needs to be happy. It reaches for unattainable goals that will never deliver the happiness that is promised even if they are attained, which is what people do discover. The ego tells you that you can never be happy with simply being, loving, giving, and accepting. It tells you the opposite of the truth.

To discover the truth, you have to go against that programming and the programming of others, who reinforce these lies, and that is a heroic act. Heroes are not afraid to stand up for the truth, to buck the crowd to do what feels right and good. They have the courage to make the difficult choice, which ends up being the easiest choice in the world. It is the choice that has been filling the world with love ever since the world existed. At a certain point in your evolution, it is the only choice left to you. Once you know the truth, you can't go back to living the lie. You can't go on believing that *you* exist apart from everything else. There is only one choice left, and that choice is love.

The only trick is that that choice has to be made again and again in each new moment. Essence happily makes this choice. Only when you are identified with the egoic mind does this choice seem difficult, and that is when it is most important to choose love. By choosing love over selfishness and self-concern even when it is hard to, you affirm your divinity and the truth that is all around you: The Divine exists right here and now in everyone, in everything. You are That.

If you enjoyed this book, we think you will enjoy *From Stress to Stillness: Tools for Inner Peace*, also by Gina Lake. An excerpt is at the end.

From Stress to Stillness. Most stress is created by how we think about things. *From Stress to Stillness* will help you examine what you're thinking and change your relationship to your thoughts so that they no longer result in stress. Drawing from the wisdom traditions, psychology, mindfulness meditation, New Thought, and the author's own experience as a spiritual teacher and counselor, *From Stress to Stillness* offers many practices and suggestions that will lead to greater peace and equanimity, even in a busy and stress-filled world.

For more information about *From Stress to Stillness*, including where to purchase it, please visit:

<http://www.radicalhappiness.com/from-stress-to-stillness>

About the Author

Gina Lake is the author of over twenty books about awakening to one's true nature, including *From Stress to Stillness*, *All Grace*, *In the World but Not of It*, *The Jesus Trilogy*, *A Heroic Life*, *Trusting Life*, *Embracing the Now*, *Radical Happiness*, and *Choosing Love*. She is also a gifted intuitive with a master's degree in counseling psychology and over twenty-five years' experience supporting people in their spiritual growth. Her website offers information about her books and online course, a free ebook, a blog, and audio and video recordings:

<http://www.RadicalHappiness.com>

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Awakening Now Online Course with Gina Lake: This course was created for your awakening. The methods presented are powerful companions on the path to enlightenment and true happiness. Awakening Now will help you experience life through fresh eyes and discover the delight of truly being alive. This 100-day inner workout is packed with both time-honored and original teachings that will pull the rug out from under your ego and wake you up. You'll immerse yourself in materials, practices, guided meditations, and inquiries that will transform your consciousness. And in video webinars, you'll receive transmissions of Christ Consciousness. These transmissions are a direct current of love and healing that will help you break through to a new level of being. By the end of 100 days, you will have developed new habits and ways of being that will result in being more richly alive and present and greater joy and equanimity.

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Stay in touch with Gina: Gina writes about awakening and true nature on her blog, [Radical Happiness Blog](#). Please stop by for a visit, or you can reach her on [Twitter](#), like her on [Facebook](#), or send an email using her website's [contact form](#).

More Books by Gina Lake

From Stress to Stillness: Tools for Inner Peace. Most stress is created by how we think about things. *From Stress to Stillness* will help you examine what you're thinking and change your relationship to your thoughts so that they no longer result in stress. Drawing from the wisdom traditions, psychology, mindfulness meditation, New Thought, and the author's own experience as a spiritual teacher and counselor, *From Stress to Stillness* offers many practices and suggestions that will lead to greater peace and equanimity, even in a busy and stress-filled world.

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.

The Jesus Trilogy. In this trilogy by Jesus, are three jewels, each shining in its own way and illuminating the same truth: You are not only human but divine, and you are meant to flourish and love one another. In words that are for today, Jesus speaks intimately and directly to the reader of the secrets to peace, love, and happiness. He explains the deepest of all mysteries: who you are and how you can live as he taught long ago. The three books in *The Jesus Trilogy* were dictated to Gina Lake by Jesus and include *Choice and Will*, *Love and Surrender*, and *Beliefs, Emotions, and the Creation of Reality*. The books in the trilogy are also available individually and can be read in any order.

In the World but Not of It: New Teachings from Jesus on Embodying the Divine. From the Introduction, by Jesus: "What I have come to teach now is that you can embody love, as I did. You can become Christ within this human life and learn to embody all that is good within you. I came to show you the beauty of your own soul and what is possible as a human. I came to show you that it is possible to be both human and divine, to be love incarnate. You are equally both. You walk with one foot in the world of form and another in the Formless. This mysterious duality within your being is what this book is about." This book is another in a series of books dictated to Gina Lake by Jesus.

All Grace: New Teachings from Jesus on the Truth About Life. Grace is the mysterious and unseen movement of God upon creation, which is motivated by love and indistinct from love. *All Grace* was given to Gina Lake by Jesus and represents his wisdom and understanding of life. It is about the magnificent and incomprehensible force behind life, which created life, sustains it, and

operates within it as you and me and all of creation. *All Grace* is full of profound and life-changing truth.

A Heroic Life: New Teachings from Jesus on the Human Journey. The hero's journey—this human life—is a search for the greatest treasure of all: the gifts of your true nature. These gifts are your birthright, but they have been hidden from you, kept from you by the dragon: the ego. These gifts are the wisdom, love, peace, courage, strength, and joy that reside at your core. *A Heroic Life* shows you how to overcome the ego's false beliefs and face the ego's fears. It provides you with both a perspective and a map to help you successfully and happily navigate life's challenges and live heroically. This book is another in a series of books dictated to Gina Lake by Jesus.

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.

Choosing Love: Moving from Ego to Essence in Relationships. Having a truly meaningful relationship requires choosing love over our conditioning, that is, our ideas, fantasies, desires, images, and beliefs. *Choosing Love* 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 our Being, where Oneness and love exist, and how to be with others from there.

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.

Being Happy (Even When You Don't Get What You Want): The Truth About Manifesting and Desires will help you discriminate between your Heart's desires and the ego's and 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, *Being Happy (Even When You Don't Get What You Want)* will help you be happy regardless of your desires and whether you are attaining them. So *Being Happy* 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. We are meant to live in the flow. The flow is the experience of Essence—our true self—as it lives life through us and fulfills its purpose for this life.

Getting Free: Moving Beyond Negativity and Limiting Beliefs. 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.

Ten Teachings for One World: Wisdom from Mother Mary is a message from Mother Mary to her beloved children on earth. The teachings are intended to bring us into closer contact with the peace and love that is our divine nature, which has the ability to transform our hearts and our world. Mother Mary's gentle wisdom will inspire and assist you in awakening to the magnificent being that you are.

For more information, please visit:

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Excerpt
From *From Stress to Stillness: Tools for Inner Peace* by Gina Lake

Being Present
(from Chapter 4)

Everyone knows how to be present because everyone knows how to pay attention. Being present simply means giving our full attention to whatever is happening here and now rather than being lost in our thoughts. Being present is being aware of reality, noticing what's being experienced by our body and senses. We can also be present to our more subtle, internal experiences, such as intuitions, urges, feelings, and thoughts.

When we're present to our thoughts, we are witnessing them rather than identifying with them. We notice a thought and then move on to noticing what else is showing up in the moment. When we are present, we notice everything in our experience. Our awareness moves around, taking in the entirety of what is being experienced, without getting stuck in the mind's virtual reality.

The alternative to being present is being identified with the voice in our head. We all know what that's like. When that happens, we could have eaten an entire piece of cake or walked two blocks without noticing anything about the experience. We were lost in the virtual reality of our thoughts. We were still able to function—we still ate and walked—but we weren't present to the experience that our body was having. It's as if we didn't have that experience. Many of us live most of our lives in this state of non-contact with reality. We are asleep to the aliveness and richness of reality, cut off from our essence, our soul, a prisoner to our egoic mind.

Everyone moves in and out of being present throughout the day. Our attention moves back and forth between our world of thought and real life as it is unfolding. We bounce back and forth between being present and being lost in our inner world. Our thoughts are part of reality, but they have the unique ability to draw us into a virtual reality that then colors and at times covers over the experience of the present moment. Like no other aspect of reality, our thoughts draw us out of reality into an alternative reality. This alternative reality is the cause of suffering, as it is the source of our negative feelings. It is the source of the false self.

Being focused mentally isn't always a place of suffering, however. Being absorbed in mental tasks, such as reading, planning, watching a movie, or playing a video game, is generally enjoyable unless the egoic mind is wanting to do something else, complaining, or being judgmental. Whether we suffer or not as a result of being involved in the mind depends on whether we're involved with the egoic mind or simply using our mind to work or play.

As fun as it is to use our mind, if these activities aren't balanced by contact with reality, we'll feel drained and ungrounded. In order to feel good, balanced, and whole, we need contact with reality, which requires being in our body and senses. When we shift from being mentally focused for a long time to being externally focused and in contact with reality, we experience an aliveness, juiciness, and beauty that can't be matched by virtual reality, not even by our pleasant experiences of virtual reality.

Being present renews and energizes us. This is why meditation is so refreshing and particularly necessary in our world, where we spend so much time plugged in to either our egoic mind or our technological devices. Many of us don't fully appreciate the richness of reality

because we go from involvement with the ego's virtual reality to the virtual reality of our iPads, TV, and movies, with very little time spent smelling actual roses.

Being involved in the virtual reality created by our thoughts about ourselves is especially exhausting. Many of us are worn out, not so much because of what we do, but because of all the emotions that are generated by listening to our egoic mind while we're doing what we do. We may think that listening to our mind helps us accomplish things, but more often, it drains us, particularly if those thoughts result in negative feelings.

We need contact with reality. To be mentally and emotionally healthy and even to be sharp intellectually, we need to move out of our egoic mind and the emotions it creates and into reality. Not spending enough time in reality causes us to lose our balance and perspective. We become narrowly focused, zoomed in, on our to-do list or some desire or problem, as defined by the mind, and the rest of reality falls into the background. We need the rest of reality to keep us in balance, to remind us that our thoughts are a very small part of reality, and not a very real part.

The real problem is that the ego thinks that being present is boring and without value. We're programmed to believe the opposite of what's true! How amazing that is. And how will we ever discover the truth if we keep allowing the egoic mind to pull us out of the present moment? We'll never find out how to really live life if we continue to listen to our thoughts. There's another way to live, and that is, very simply, to pay attention to your present moment experience. Notice your thoughts as they arise in the mind, but give your attention to what's actually happening.

Throughout your day, you are present to some extent. But to what extent and for how long? This is key. Are you present to life just enough to not have an accident, for instance, while continuing your mental monologue? How long do you dip into the present moment before you're back in your thoughts?

At times, we do dive into our present moment experience, and those are happy times. The more you are engaged with the present moment, the happier you'll be. Here are some examples of ordinary moments throughout the day when you might find yourself being present and happy:

You suddenly see an eagle flying overhead, and you gasp and feel yourself expand with delight.

Your dog rolls over for you to rub her tummy, and you feel so much love for her. You are taken by her sweetness and innocence.

You see the first flower of spring, and your heart leaps for joy.

You sink into a warm bath, and all of your cares melt away.

Your favorite song comes on, and you're overtaken by happiness.

You gaze into the fireplace on a cold winter night and feel that everything is perfect.

You're walking through the woods and filled with awe at the beauty of the light shining through the trees.

You're lying in a hammock, looking up at the sky and feeling expansive.

You tuck your child in bed and feel tremendous love and gratitude for the gift that life is.

You dive into a lake and feel at one with the water as it slides over your body.

You see two children walking hand-in-hand and feel the love that they are sharing.

You take a bite of your favorite food, and you feel transported.

You put some dance music on and lose yourself in it.

Your lover tells you how much you mean to him, and your heart fills with joy.

You tell your lover how much he means to you, and your heart fills with joy.

What moments would you add to this list? Moments such as these can be extended by choosing to stay in them longer. While even a brief experience of being present is wonderful and refreshing, if you're able to stay present longer, that experience will deepen, strengthen, and become more natural. Being present turns into an experience of Presence when you stay present long enough.

By staying present a little longer, you'll become more familiar with Presence, and you won't want to go back to your old way of being. The ego doesn't want you to taste Presence deeply, because once you do, the Truth can no longer be hidden from you.

To stay in Presence longer, notice the sensations of opening, expansion, awe, joy, love, and peace and give them some attention. Stay with these subtle sensations a while. Whatever we focus our attention on becomes magnified. Really feel what awe, joy, love, peace, and expansion feel like. Explore them with your awareness. What a mystery! Relish these sensations, knowing that they are the experience of your true self.

This is what it feels like to be alive as your true self. This is how we are meant to experience life. Any moment can be an experience of peace and contentment if peace and contentment are what you give your attention to.

Making Time for Stillness

(from Chapter 5)

In our culture, being busy is the norm. Doing and being productive is our god, a value we've elevated above many others. Because it's valued so highly, being busy makes us feel special, important, and successful. So it's not surprising that so many people seem to be addicted to being busy. They may even actually be addicted to the adrenaline rush that often comes with being under pressure and moving at a fast pace.

If we aren't as busy as everyone else, it can be hard to feel good about ourselves. When I couldn't work and was resigned to doing very little, I assumed that this period of disability was intended for my growth, which I'm sure it was. But why does every moment need to be seen as purposeful? Isn't this just another version of the ego's need to always be accomplishing something in order to feel okay? Why is just *being* considered a waste of time, while doing almost anything is considered worthwhile? Whose assessment is this? Isn't this just the ego's point of view?

Not being busy can feel like a problem for another reason: It often stirs up our fears, since doing is the ego's way of feeling safe and in control. When we are identified with the ego, doing becomes a way of life, since not doing or just being seems dangerous to the ego. Won't we perish if we stop doing things? The ego thinks so.

Survival seems dependent on doing, which to some extent it is. But the ego doesn't acknowledge the survival value and importance to our well-being of resting, contemplation, and connecting with others and with our deepest self. Of course, the ego doesn't really want us to connect with our true self. All of this busy-ness keeps us living the ego's superficial life rather than a more meaningful life, one guided by our heart.

Here are some questions to ponder:

What do you get from being overly busy? Does it make you feel special? Important? Safe? In control? Powerful?

What identity would you have to give up if you slowed down? The winner? The martyr? The achiever? The perfect one?

What negative identity might you give yourself if you slowed down? Lazy? Unsuccessful? A Loser?

What beliefs or fears keep you from slowing down? What are you afraid would happen if you slowed down? Are you afraid that if you are peaceful and relaxed you won't survive or achieve what you'd like to achieve?

What would you have to feel and experience if you slowed down that you don't want to feel or experience?

Is there something in your life you'd like to change that you aren't changing? Instead of doing something about that, are you compensating and trying to feel good by acquiring things and achieving status?

Being relaxed and peaceful is actually a very functional state, not a less functional one. Being overly busy and stressed-out is exhausting and distances us from our creativity and deeper wisdom, which help us perform better. Relaxation is a highly effective state, the most effective state, and periods of relaxation are necessary to function at our best.

Some people are afraid that if they are relaxed and peaceful, they'll become lazy. They imagine that if they stop being so busy, they'll stop doing altogether. But relaxation and laziness are not the same thing at all, although the ego would have us believe that. "Lazy" is a judgmental label that the ego uses to keep us in line and on track to do its bidding. It's a way of shaming us into more activity.

"Lazy" is what we call ourselves or what others call us when we don't want to do something. But not wanting to do something often just means:

- It isn't aligned with our heart,
- It's not the right time to do it (it's not coming out of the flow),
- We don't see it as necessary, or

- It isn't important or of value to us.

If we're feeling lazy or depressed, that is, if we're lacking motivation, it's probably because we haven't connected with our heart and discovered what we're innately motivated to do. Our heart naturally moves us to do what's meaningful for us as well as necessary for our survival. However, our beliefs and other conditioning can interfere with this natural movement.

We might also feel lazy or depressed simply because we're so tired out from being so busy doing things that aren't fulfilling. Taking time to relax is necessary to maintain a balanced, healthy, and happy life. Relaxing is not a waste of time nor a lesser state than being active, but a sacred state in which we are both renewed and in contact with the deepest truth of our existence. Relaxing is *not* doing nothing.

If we learn to relax by taking time to regularly relax, the bonus is that we'll be more relaxed in everything we do. We'll bring this relaxation to our work, our relationships, and our world, which so desperately need this. Imagine what a different world this would be if everyone felt relaxed instead of stressed-out.

When you do just let yourself be, when that is appropriate, doesn't it feel wonderful and right? Doesn't it rejuvenate you and help you face your day freshly and with greater clarity and wisdom? So how can that be a waste of time?

It's important to catch the ego's subtle judgments so that they don't completely shape our life. If we assume that resting, just being, and meditating are a waste of time or luxuries that we can't afford, then of course we won't make room for them, and our life will remain out of balance.

Look what happens when we let the ego's perspective shape our lives: The result is stressed-out, exhausted, and unhappy people and a society that spends its free time consuming and pursuing pleasures and addictions to assuage an empty heart. It isn't healthy for us or for our children to have every minute scheduled. The lifestyle that the ego creates doesn't leave time for creativity, contemplation, spirituality, relationships, renewal, just being, and also being present to whatever we *are* doing.

The heart and soul can be put back into society and into our lives by periodically allowing ourselves to just *be*, preferably each day. Time just being is not only not a waste of time, it's likely to be the most valuable time you spend each day, as it can determine how you'll approach your day, what attitude you'll bring to it, and what you'll choose to do. Just being puts us in touch with our internal guidance system, which is necessary to live a happy and fulfilled life.

Unless we make an effort to include meditation and just being into each day, most people don't make time for these things. In our modern lives, there's no natural or easy stopping point, when we can say, "Okay, I'm done for the day." Even the end of the workday is not the end of work for many people, thanks to technology. It's certainly not the end of their to-do list. There's always more to do, because the to-do list is constantly being replenished.

Life keeps bringing us more to do, more email, and more information to process. We'll always have things that we feel we need to do. If we wait for our to-do list to empty or for an easy stopping place, we'll never make time to just be. We'll never "have time" to do anything but what's on our to-do list.

When do we draw the line and say, "That's enough. Now it's time to stop and rest"? Unfortunately, many of us never do. We don't even see how it's possible. We claim, "I don't have time" without questioning this assertion. Making time for one more thing, like meditating

or resting, seems impossible. Will you ever have time to step off the hamster wheel? When will you finally choose to and find out what happens?

What is the result of never having time to stop, rest, just be, contemplate, and connect within? For many, the result is a breakdown of their body. They keep going until their body gets sick and can't go anymore. Is that when you'll finally let yourself stop? I don't mean to sound accusatory. I count myself among those who couldn't stop working until their body gave out. Illness is a time when many discover that they do, in fact, have time to stop. Because they have to, they adjust their life and others adjust theirs to accommodate their illness.

When we willingly choose to slow down or stop, the same thing happens: Life adjusts to this choice, and you discover that you *can* slow down and you *do* have time to stop. Then that new pace becomes your norm. When we stop for a bit or slow down, life goes on—and it feels better. But you won't discover this unless you give it a try.

Of course there's time. There is always time. Time is a mental construct. It's an idea. And the idea that you don't have time is just a belief, not a reality. For the most part, you create your to-do list and you execute it. You can just as easily change your to-do list and slow down the execution of it. Don't let the ego, the inner time tyrant, push you around.

The way to begin changing the habit of not taking time to stop, rest, and just be is to put resting, just being, and meditating on your to-do list every day! Just as you take time each day to get dressed, feed yourself, and sleep, you can take time each day to check in within and just be.

Just being and spending time going within can be part of a daily meditation practice. Make meditation one of those things that you deem essential to your life, because it is. Put meditation on your daily to-do list, and you'll still have time for the other things. Truly, there are few things that are more important than meditating. It will put everything else you do in perspective and make doing those things more enjoyable.

I'm going to make another, perhaps more radical, suggestion, which will enhance the quality of your life and help you be more centered throughout your week: Take Sundays off. There's a reason that many have followed this custom. The reason is that unless time is carved out to relax and be, including being with family and loved ones, we aren't likely to take the time, at least not enough time.

With technology continually linking us to others and the world, including our world of work, we periodically need to unplug and recuperate. Unplugging ourselves from our technology and to-do list one day a week is a way to ensure that we connect with our spiritual self.

Making this one change will transform your life for the better and help you stay balanced. It will help you balance the doing with being. When doing isn't balanced with being, we become hostage to the ego's desires and fears, its perception of lack (including a lack of time), and its way of being in the world, which is competitive and self-centered.

If we balance doing with being, our doing will flow more from our being. This is why I said that making time to just be will transform your life: It will take the ego out of the driver's seat and make room for your being to move you instead.

The ego and the heart are likely to make different choices and create different lives and lifestyles. What might your life look like if your heart instead of your ego were driving your actions most of the time? We don't have a lot of models for this because we live in an ego-driven culture, meaning that most people are not in touch with their heart to the extent that they could be. Hence, the rat race.

If you're ready to live a more heart-centered life, then making time daily to meditate and taking one day off a week to discover the wellspring of love, wonder, and delight at your core is the place to start. Doing just these two things will transform your life.

Slowing Down (from Chapter 5)

Slowing down is key to living a more heart-centered life, because shifting gears helps us shift our consciousness and become more present. In fact, it's quite impossible to shift out of the ego without slowing down. We can't be present and live as Presence and still rush around, glued to our cell phone while trying to do six other things at once. When you know Presence, you don't even want to live like that, because you realize that you won't stay present for long if you do.

The biggest stumbling block to slowing down is the perception that we won't have enough time to do everything we need to do. But slowing down can actually leave us with more time, not less. Hurrying is counterproductive because it's stressful. Stress creates emotions, and emotions are exhausting and take time to process or cope with. To deal with stress, we might stop at a bakery for a cupcake, call a friend to complain to, or go on a shopping spree. The ways we cope with stress take up time! Hurrying also makes us more prone to mistakes and accidents, and you know what those do to your plans. Besides, hurrying doesn't feel good. So how is hurrying good?

Of course, we have to hurry sometimes, but making that our usual speed doesn't help us achieve our goals; it only wears us out and makes us scattered and cranky. By slowing down and being more present, we can get just as much done or more and feel better doing it, with energy to spare—and no negative emotions to deal with.

When you slow down and become more present, your life won't fall apart—on the contrary. But it could change. You might make some different choices about how you spend your time and end up with more time to do what you'd really like to do. Or maybe you'll continue doing what you've been doing but with more enjoyment. What you choose to do once you slow down depends on whether what you were doing was motivated by the ego or your heart.

Our culture needs to make a similar shift from the ego's values to the heart's. Our culture keeps us locked into egoic values and the materialistic lifestyle that those values create. The unhealthy lifestyle that many of us are living seems normal, even desirable, perhaps because we don't know what the alternative looks or feels like. Or we may know, but out of fear, we don't feel that we can live differently. But, of course, there are already many who are living more consciously. It's important to seek out models of healthy living and move away from people who aren't models of this and who don't support us in making the changes we'd like to make.

Slowing down means doing whatever you do more slowly and with more presence. It also means being less busy by cutting out things that aren't necessary or meaningful. This will make room for things that are more nourishing to your soul. Only you can decide what needs to be cut. You can tell by how you feel when you're doing something. Do you feel excited and happy or at least content doing it, or do you feel contracted? The heart shows us what's true to do and not do in any moment. We are meant to follow our joy. We are meant to enjoy life.

It may seem scary at first to choose on this basis, but what have your choices been based on before? If you are unhappy or leading a stressful life, you've been listening to the egoic mind. There's another way to live, and it begins by slowing down, being present, and following your heart.

This was an excerpt from *From Stress to Stillness*. For more information about this book, including where to purchase it, please visit

<http://www.radicalhappiness.com/from-stress-to-stillness>