

Love Is Our True Nature

Dale Goldstein

One morning many years ago, I awoke knowing that the earth is a loving mother to us all, and that the earth itself is completely surrounded by an infinitely loving universe—and that there is no way we cannot always be enveloped by this Love!

Love is our true nature. When we have completely let go of fear, Love is what is present. It's what is inside of us at the deepest level. In truth, Love is always present—within and without. But we are not always present to Love!

Our heart is the channel through which we experience Love, and our heart is not always open. Human beings are constructed in a way that makes us seek pleasure and avoid pain. When we experience pain in our lives, our natural tendency is to move away from it or fight it—to in some way push it out of our consciousness and close our heart. In so doing, fear is created—the fear of that which we have separated ourselves from. In fact, fear *is* the separation from our experience.

Anger removes us one step further from our true nature by pushing away our fear or pain—often “gifting” it to a loved one. (It is a gift if one is willing to receive what is inside the wrapping.) Because pain, fear, and anger are culturally unacceptable emotions, we tend to suppress all of our feelings and become emotionally numb—about as far removed from our true nature of Love as is humanly possible.

When I first began the deep feeling part of my journey, I started writing a book entitled *Cheap Insights*. I made all of one entry into the book: “I used to think that when I got through my fear that I would come to life. Then I realized that my life was in my fear!” By allowing myself to feel my fear completely, I lost my fear of being afraid and I began (after a few decades of emotional anesthesia) to allow myself to re-experience the full range of human emotions—fear, sadness, anger, and *joy*! I began to come back to life in my feelings.

We live on a continuum between love and fear. The way I define the difference between an adult and a child is that when a child experiences fear, he or she pulls back from it, whereas when an adult experiences fear, he or she moves into and through it. When we

HEARTWORK INSTITUTE



know through repeated experience that we are able to move through fear, we then are able to live in our true nature and accomplish whatever we are destined to accomplish.

Our true nature is who we really are, beyond all of our ideas, images, and beliefs about who we are. It is us, just as we are—absolutely naked and pure. And, paradoxically, our true self is no self! When we experience who and what we really are, we realize that the whole idea of a self was simply that—an idea. In reality, there is no self. This means that there is no self separate from anything else in the universe—that our true nature is self-and-other.

When we come to know this truth, we may experience Unconditional Love. Only Unconditional Love is true Love. All other forms of love have some expectation, need, desire, or fear in them and so are not true. Unconditional Love means love with no conditions attached to it. It is the natural expression of an open heart. When I first experienced Unconditional Love, my wife (who was struggling to come to terms with the transformation I was in the process of undergoing) said to me, “You love Zonk’s (our cat’s) shit as much as you love me!” And she was right! I absolutely loved everything unconditionally and completely. In my purist understanding, if Love isn’t unconditional, it isn’t really Love.

In 1981, out of a desire to help others find a way to re-member their true nature that included both the psychological and spiritual aspects of their being, I created a way of working through the psychological to access the spiritual. (I had seen and experienced far too many personal/spiritual growth processes that excluded one or the other of these aspects and had therefore created a lopsided development.) I call this method Heartwork, a process of letting go, with awareness, into the truth of one’s being-in-the-moment. It is essentially a very simple process—kind of like falling asleep, except that in Heartwork, you fall awake—but it is not easy. It is simple because all you have to do is find the yearning in your being (to be free, whole, connected, fully alive; to know who and what you are; to realize what reality is—whatever form it takes for you) and let go or surrender into it and let it take you back home to your authentic, true self. It is difficult because letting go into unfamiliar places inside ourselves is scary. We are used to controlling our emotions, our lives, other people, our environment, and anything else we think we need to control.

Why is it so scary? For a good reason. Most people think they’re afraid of the unknown. Actually, that’s not true because it’s not possible to be afraid of the unknown. The unknown is unknown; it is not a thing that one can fear. What we are really afraid of is what we think we might encounter on our journey inward: our fear, anger, pain—everything that was too much for us to feel when it happened, so that we had to wall it off from our consciousness. That could include negative self-images and beliefs, aloneness, emptiness, nothingness, existential angst, or even the much-talked-about dark night of the soul. And the truth is that we usually have to go through all of these to come home to ourselves.

HEARTWORK INSTITUTE



Many people are afraid to make this journey because they believe that what is at the deepest level inside themselves is bad, some “original sin,” and they don’t want their belief to be confirmed. (I distinguish between “belief” and “faith” in that faith is based on direct, personal experience, whereas belief is merely a thought.) How could we live with ourselves if we knew that our true nature was really awful? So many of us don’t ever look deeply enough to uncover the truth of who or what we really are, which is absolutely the antithesis of awful (but it is awe full!).

When we split our consciousness off from our feelings, we feel disconnected from ourselves, others, the universe, and God. We cannot let Love in or out; we cannot appreciate the exquisite beauty and awe of life. We feel, as A. E. Housman once suggested, alone and afraid in a world we never made.

So how then can we do the impossible—let go into the very places that so terrify us, the places we have separated ourselves from for decades? Actually, the way it usually happens is that the opportunity catches up with us—we don’t have to go looking for it! For most people who do this challenging work, life has become unbearably painful, difficult, and/or unsatisfying. And at that point, they have two options: either take the journey inward or medicate with prescription drugs or other addictions to deaden themselves. (This is not to say that psychopharmacologic medications are never appropriate and necessary for one’s journey; but the reality is that we frequently use them as crutches to avoid our issues rather than as tools to support us in working with those issues.)

Here’s how it works. Picture a funnel. Our true nature is a single point at the bottom of the funnel, whole and undivided. We first split from this wholeness when we get the idea that we are a self that is separate from others and from the universe/God. We call this split the formation of the ego. I’ve been asked why we make this split in the first place. The only answer I’ve ever heard that’s worth repeating came from my Zen teacher, who said we split from wholeness so that we can experience the joy of coming back home to ourselves! With the formation of the ego, we have moved one layer up the funnel away from our true nature.

With the ego come the notions of space and time. We perceive space because now we see an inside (the ego, or the “I”) and an outside (the universe), whereas before it was all one thing. We perceive time because while the universe will seemingly go on forever, the self will not. And because it is untenable to live in the awareness of our ultimate demise, we split from ourselves once again and tell ourselves that while our bodies will die, our mind/consciousness, our soul, or our spirit (or who we convince ourselves we really are) will not—it will go on forever. And so we make another split as we separate our physical selves from our soul or our spirit and move up the funnel away from our true nature.

HEARTWORK INSTITUTE



Now to make matters worse, certain parts of our mind or soul or spirit are unacceptable to our parents and our culture. I've come to understand that we have four fundamental emotions—joy/love, sorrow/pain, fear (the movement away from sorrow/pain), and anger (fear or pain projected outward because we are unwilling to feel those more vulnerable emotions). Of these, only joy/love is truly acceptable in society. (And actually, we only say it is; look at how we react to people exuberantly enjoying themselves!) But guess what happens to our joy when we cut off the other three feelings? It gets cut off, too, because you can't have real joy unless you accept pain. Is it any wonder that we see so few truly joyous human beings in our culture beyond the age of 2 or 3? We also judge as unacceptable certain desires (such as greed, lust, and envy) and even certain out-of-the-ordinary states of awareness (such as ESP, intuition, channeling, and psychosis).

And so we split again into what Carl Jung called the persona (those parts of ourselves that we believe are acceptable to our culture and that we are willing to express publicly) and the shadow (those parts we believe are unacceptable to others and that we consequently try to hide from the world as well as from ourselves). Now, the problem with the shadow is that it has to somehow find expression or life. After all, it is called the shadow because it sticks to us wherever we go, yet it remains hidden and dark. Because we won't let it breathe fresh air, so to speak, it sneaks out in some other way, unconsciously, hurting others and ourselves.

To make matters even worse, certain things happen to us as we are growing up (and "growing up" continues even when we're 80 and beyond) that are just too painful or too frightening to fully experience at the time. So we wall these experiences off in our unconscious mind, where we store those events and aspects of our being that we protect ourselves from experiencing. Thus we move one step further up the funnel to the point where we are living our lives—on the upper rim.

So that's the bad news. Here's the good news. For some of us, it becomes apparent at some point that we are suffering and cannot find a way out of it—not through drugs and alcohol, sex, money, power, success, religion, or any of the other addictions or distractions with which we try to fill this nagging emptiness inside ourselves. The reason we get to this point is that our deepest yearning is to regain our lost wholeness and connectedness, and in its great wisdom, our unconscious mind repeatedly creates situations that remind us of the places where we originally split from ourselves. It does this not to punish us but to get our attention, so that we can stop running away from those parts of ourselves that we have split off from. If we are willing to face ourselves, we can then "take the hit" (feel those feelings we've repressed) and feel all the way back to where the original pain and fear occurred so we can heal the wound at its source. As my dear friend Cis Dickson has embroidered on the back of her Crooked Back Ranch caps, "Go Within or Go Without." When we get to this point in our lives, it is actually easier to let go into the yearning than to keep running away from the fear of facing what lies within ourselves. And so the journey homeward begins!



The primary tool that opened for me in the development of Heartwork is one I call Guided Heartwork. I am including the process here so that those readers who wish to take the journey down the funnel back home to their true nature, opening their hearts to Love in the process, may have the opportunity to do so. The process is described in detail below. May your path be blessed with Grace!

Guided Heartwork

Guided Heartwork gives you an opportunity to directly experience the “classical” Heartwork process of surrendering into and through layer after layer of your false self until you arrive back in your true home. You can do this exercise alone or with another person facilitating your process.

In working with a facilitator, you may choose either to share your work or to work entirely internally, signaling the facilitator (with a pre-arranged signal) when you are ready to go on to the next step in the Heartwork process. Please refer to “Facilitator’s Role” below for suggestions about working with a facilitator. (Note: In the event that you choose to do this exercise by yourself, the sequence is recorded on the CD included with my book, *Heartwork: How To Get What You Really, Really Want*, or you can order the CD separately from the Heartwork Institute, Inc., by visiting the institute’s website, www.awakentheheart.org.)

The Heartwork process enables you to find your own unique way of looking into yourself. The following sequence, while representative of the stages that generally unfold during the course of a Heartwork session, may vary from person to person:

Getting Comfortable:

In doing Heartwork, it is very important that you are physically comfortable. Being able to forget about your body as much as possible will allow you to focus all your attention on your internal process.

First, make any necessary adjustments in your environment. Where in the room would you be most comfortable? Where do you want your facilitator to be in relation to you, and in what bodily position? (It must be one that the facilitator is comfortable with.) If the room is too warm or too cool for your maximum comfort, adjust the temperature. If the room is too bright or dark, change the lighting. Adjust anything that interferes with your maximum physical comfort.

Now find the most comfortable position for your body. You may be most comfortable sitting erect, slouching, lying down (on your back, side, or stomach), or in some other position. Ask your body what position it would most like to be in right now, and assume that position.

Settling In:

Now close your eyes, take a few deep breaths, and allow yourself to relax as much as possible. If you have difficulty letting go of some of the surface tensions, just watch your breath come in and go out for a few minutes until you feel as relaxed as you can be at this time.

In the Heartwork you are about to do, it is very helpful to adopt an open, friendly, curious attitude towards whatever you encounter on your inward journey. This welcoming attitude will allow you to "witness" your process non-judgmentally, making it easier to see whatever is there because you have a more aware and less "attached" mind-state.

Defining the Problem:

Now define your problem as clearly and concisely as possible. Or ask yourself, "What is it I would like to change as a result of doing this process?" If you enter into the Guided Heartwork process with no clearly defined issue, you can simply ask yourself, "Of all the issues that are present in my life, which one most needs my attention right now?" and allow the issue needing attention to choose itself by coming to the foreground. Another way to do this step is to ask, "If I had encountered a genie who was willing to grant me one wish, what would that wish be?" If some problem other than the one you had intended to work on demands your attention, even if it seems irrelevant to the original problem, trust it and go with that issue.

Locating the Problem:

In the witness state of mind, now look around in your body to find the area where the problem is centered—experienced as blocked energy, stress, anxiety, tension, or pain. ("Body" refers to that place where you experience not only physical sensations, but also senses in a more subtle way.) Notice how deep inside your body it sits. You can work with thoughts or mental metaphors, sensations, feelings, or visual images in this process.

Clarifying:

Keeping your attention focused in this inner feeling-space, describe in as much detail as possible what you experience here. If you have difficulty getting in touch with what is happening in this place, you may find it helpful to ask curious questions, such as: How big is it? What's its shape? What color is it? What is it made of? What is the texture of its surface? What does it smell like? What is the feel of this thing? What's it like? What would this part of me say if it could talk? Vivid visual imagery, memories, and intense feelings often arise at this stage of the inward-looking process.

Focusing:

Now slowly and carefully move your awareness toward and ultimately into the very center, or point of greatest intensity, of this feeling-space. You may find it helpful to follow these steps:

Start by allowing your awareness to get close enough to the feeling-space to be able to experience the energy coming out of it. (Kind of like feeling the heat a hot stove gives off when you walk past it.) What is emanating from this place inside you that you have spent most of your life avoiding?

Then make direct contact with the “surface” of the space. Can you get close enough to this thing inside yourself to actually “touch” the surface of it with your awareness? What is it like? How does it feel?

Then “move” into the surface layer. Can you find a way to get inside it, to become one with it, to experience what this surface layer that splits you in two is like from the inside? See if you can determine exactly what it is made of. Take your time so you can experience every step of this most incredible journey. In so doing, you will begin to see exactly how you work and who you really are—beyond all your ideas, beliefs, and images of who or what you thought you were.

Then move through this layer into the interior while still being in contact with the surface (only now from the inside). What is it like to be inside it? How does it feel? What do you sense in this space? Rest here for a few minutes and let yourself be. Let whatever wants to come into your consciousness arise—thoughts, feelings, images, memories, or sensations.

Allow yourself next to let go of your grip on the surface layer and let yourself be drawn inwards, downwards, towards the center or bottom or other end of this yearning space—much like a magnet would draw you toward something. Let yourself go—slowly and with great awareness, allowing whatever wants to be revealed to you to come into consciousness.

Penetrating:

As you move inward, you may become aware of reluctance, resistance, hesitation, or fear that prevents you from entering into the next space. Work with each barrier that you encounter, gradually softening into the resistance. Or you may find a different way to get through the barrier, such as plunging into it, embracing it, merging with it, being filled by it, looking directly at or into it, caring about it, or surrendering to it. Ultimately, it makes no difference what means you use; the moment you make the decision to face the barrier directly, the barrier begins to open by itself.

And by the way, don’t assume extensive spiritual practice or years in therapy are prerequisites. Sometimes people who have never done a stitch of inner work in their lives come all the way home in one session. And sometimes those with the most experience have the most difficulty because they think they know what to do. As in all things, it is helpful to avoid expectations as much as possible.

Keep letting go, through layer after layer, until you get all the way to the center, bottom, end, or other side of the inner space, or until you have gone as far as you feel you can go at this time.

Discovery:

When you pass through this last barrier, you will usually enter into a wide-open space—experiencing a deep sense of peace, wholeness, and oneness with the universe. Once you arrive here, or when you have gone as far as you can, rest in this space for a while. Remember what you went through to get here so that you can find your way back whenever you want.

Look back at where you began this journey. Start with the problem you wished to change, as you originally defined it, and see how the work you have done relates to that problem. See how you created the suffering for yourself—how you moved out of this place of wholeness, connectedness, and peace; how you forgot your deepest truth; and how you became lost in fear, confusion, and delusion. How can you relate differently to this problem when it arises in the future? Let yourself know that you can always return to this place whenever you are willing and that you can take however long it takes to come back again.

Re-entry:

Now check to see if you wish to go further in the process of opening more deeply into the center of the problem. If you do, repeat any of the previous steps that would take you deeper, and continue the process until you are totally satisfied that you have gone as far as you can for now.

Closure: Do you feel complete? If not, take the time to say, feel, or do whatever you need to in order to complete this experience. You may need to express feelings, integrate and assimilate insights, or simply remain quiet.

Guided Heartwork - Facilitator's Role

I have included here notes for the one facilitating another's Guided Heartwork experience:

In working with a facilitator, you may choose either to share your work or to work entirely internally, signaling the facilitator (with a pre-arranged signal) when you are ready to go on to the next step in the Heartwork process.

The most important aspect of the facilitator's role is the creation of a safe space in which the person doing the exercise may look inward. To best facilitate the work, it is important that facilitators:

HEARTWORK INSTITUTE



- * Maintain a nonjudgmental attitude. This means valuing equally every aspect of the other person's work and being and placing no expectations or demands on the person to do something that he or she is unwilling or disinclined to do.
- * Clearly convey to the person doing the work that he or she is in complete control of the entire process from beginning to end, including setting the pace, determining the timing and direction the work takes, and deciding when the work has gone far enough for a particular time.
- * Communicate caring by being totally attentive to what the person doing the work is experiencing in the moment. This means temporarily shelving the intellect, which analyzes, labels, and compartmentalizes what it perceives. Occasionally, the facilitator may (with the person's permission or by request) support, encourage, and add energy to the other person's work by placing his or her hand(s) on the area(s) of the person's body where the attention is being focused.
- * Be creative and keep the process moving. Engaging intuition, the facilitator balances probing with silence in moving with the other person toward the center of his or her experience. The degree to which the facilitator is in touch with the center of his or her own being is the degree to which the facilitator is able to guide the person to his or her center.
- * Maintain an awareness that the thoughts, feelings, and sensations that arise are not who we really are. Remaining fully attentive, but not attached to the content, the facilitator communicates to the other person that it is possible to look at and be with what is happening without being overwhelmed.
- * Be willing to be "real" with the other person—that is, to acknowledge one's own humanity and refrain from creating an illusion of perfection. The facilitator needs to be willing to admit to, and openly deal with, the "mistakes" generated by his or her own shortcomings. When a facilitator pretends omniscience and sets himself or herself above the other person (even when the facilitator is a professional counselor and the other person is a client), the facilitator reinforces any sense of powerlessness and low self-esteem that the other person may already have.
- * Sometimes it is helpful for the facilitator to share some of his or her own growth process. If, in the name of "professional distance," a counselor is unwilling to experience with a client the common humanity they share, both are robbed of the opportunity to share compassion (which means, literally, "to have passion with").
- * Be aware that the facilitator is, at best, a catalyst for the other person's self-healing. In fact, one benefit of Heartwork is that it is reciprocal—providing both the facilitator and the person doing the exercise equal opportunity for looking inward.

Love in Human Relationships

I have a friend who served as a medic in Vietnam during the war. He was stationed up in the mountains with the Montagnards—the “primitive” South Sea islanders who came onto the mainland and were pushed up into the mountains by the Vietnamese people. My friend told me that these people would give a special bracelet to someone they considered to be a friend. Their definition of friendship was someone you would give your life for. Most people had one or maybe two bracelets. The chief had a few more. If you have ever known that you would give your life for someone, you have experienced an aspect of Unconditional Love in that moment.

When I was growing up in the ‘50s and ‘60s, there was a popular song with the following lyrics: “To know, know, know him is to love, love, love him.” From my experience, the truth is the flip side of this: “To love, love, love him is to know, know, know him.” When you love someone unconditionally, you can know things about that person that even he or she is unaware of. I cannot tell you how this works, but I know that it does.

Love is the total acceptance of everything in myself and, therefore, in others. I can only love in others that which I have come to love and embrace in myself. Anything that I don’t love in others is something I have not yet come to love in myself. Anything other than love and compassion that I feel toward another is my own unresolved, self-alienated stuff. This is why relationships are so wonderful. They are mirrors that show us all the places we have yet to heal (or make whole) in ourselves.

Through decades of working with couples in therapy, workshops, and relationship intensives (from one to ten sixteen-hour days of looking deeply into the unconscious barriers a couple has created that prevent them from sharing Love), a number of tools have evolved that I have found most useful in healing relationships. Before I describe them in detail, I’d like to say a few things about how I see relationships.

First, relationships are a matter of multiplication, not addition. Two “half people” (people divided in themselves) make one-quarter of a complete relationship, not a whole one. Only two whole people coming together in true Love make a whole relationship. Since very, very few people are whole in themselves, it is very, very rare that a relationship is whole to begin with. However, if both people in the relationship love each other, are willing to do their own work in and through the relationship, and have access to tools such as these that have the ability to move them through their internal barriers to sharing Love, I guarantee that they can have the most intimate, loving relationship of anyone they’ve ever known.

HEARTWORK INSTITUTE



For this to happen, a few prerequisites exist. First, both people must be willing to take full responsibility for what they have created and are going to create in the relationship. Relationships are not a 50-50 deal; they are a 100-100 affair. Both people are equally and totally responsible for creating the relationship. It must be so. Just think about it for a minute. It takes two people to fight. If one person stops arguing, the argument ends. If the other person tries to continue the argument, it's like he or she is "spitting straight up in the air!" Each party has the power to end an argument at any moment.

If you really think about this, you'll realize that we are each, in every moment, creating our own reality. Reality is simply what is happening! But each of us makes something out of that reality, according to our beliefs (As the late Anais Nin said, "We don't believe what we see; we see what we believe."), cultural and familial conditioning, wants, desires, aversions, etc. There's an old Talmudic saying: "We do not see things as they are, we see things as we are." In other words, we project our beliefs onto reality and think that it is real. Mostly, it is just our ideas about who we are, what other people are, and what the world is that we call real. For example, what is real in this moment is a bunch of black lines of different shapes on a white piece of paper. You are, in this moment, visually taking in those lines and creating a reality in your mind based on those black squiggles. Each person reading this paragraph is making something different—however slightly—from everyone else reading it. We are all creating our own reality every moment of our lives, believing it is the truth.

Seeing this clearly opens the door to a new possibility—the possibility of wanting to know the truth of any given situation, to be more committed to the truth than to protecting your own cherished ideas, opinions, and beliefs about what is real. Then, a couple in relationship who share this understanding can look at issues that arise in their relationship together, from the same side. No longer is it important that someone be right and someone else be wrong, that one wins and the other loses. All that is important is that the truth be seen and the two people can bridge the gap that kept them from sharing Love. Two become one in Love. Love is the force that unites; fear is the force that divides.

One last thing—the real secret: Love is stronger than fear! If you love fear (whether your own or someone else's) long enough, it will transform into Love.

In doing any process meant to heal a relationship, it is always best to start by connecting in the Love that you share with your partner. Then, whenever either person feels the bond of Love being broken, stop immediately and wait, however long it takes, until you can reconnect in Love before continuing. The fear that arises in relationship work can quickly spiral out of control, so it's wise to heed this advice.

What follows are some of the tools I've used in my work to help couples build deeper, stronger, more intimate relationships.

THE Relationship Commitment

When I work with couples individually or in seminars, I like to first have them connect in their Love for each other, or perhaps more accurately, in Love with each other—a subtle but essential distinction. (After all, Love is always present, but we aren't always present to Love; we most often and most easily open to the presence of Love in and through our connection with our beloved.) I suggest that they be always watchful of this connection and that when they feel it being lost, they stop whatever they're doing and get reconnected. Then, I invite them to honor something I call THE Relationship Commitment. These two precursors to their relationship work create an environment in which they can most safely and trustingly do their inner work together.

THE Relationship Commitment says: "We commit to being honest and kind in all our communication with each other and to helping each other honor this commitment."

Honesty means knowing what you are thinking and feeling as well as sharing every thought and feeling that would create distance if it were withheld, even if that thought or feeling is difficult to share. Withholding thoughts and feelings creates separation in the relationship. By being more committed to seeing and sharing the truth than to protecting your own position, belief, or self-image, you create trust in a relationship.

Kindness promotes openness and vulnerability and creates a safe space for compassionate speaking and listening—the ability to hear and be heard.

THE Relationship Commitment fosters presence, allowing each member of the couple to see in self-and-other what gets in the way of giving and receiving Love and how to move through these barriers. THE Relationship Commitment moves you in the direction of taking full responsibility for what you create in the relationship. It opens the possibility of working together with your partner to resolve conflict in a non-adversarial manner, working from the same side instead of opposing sides. These are essential ingredients in creating a loving, emotionally and spiritually intimate relationship.

THE Relationship Formula

I believe 95 percent of all conflicts in relationships are due to both people being unconsciously needy at the same time and colliding at the "needy intersection." If you base your relationship life on this simple, profound tool, you will absolutely transform all your relationships.

* Ask yourself, "What am I feeling right now?" (And let yourself know what that is!)

* Ask yourself, “What do I need right now?” or “What does this feeling need right now?” (It is good to see that most if not all of the time, when a couple has a fight, both parties are needing something each is not asking for.)

* Ask for what you need.

* Deal with the consequences.

If you hold back (from yourself as well as your partner), you create a gap that will widen over time until the inevitable separation (emotional and/or physical) occurs. For this reason, it’s especially important not to hold back the things that are difficult to share. I am a huge believer in impeccable honesty.

An excellent book that describes this process in detail is *Nonviolent Communication* by Marshall B. Rosenberg (PuddleDancer Press, 1999).

Time Out

When things get heated as they do in any alive relationship between two people, taking a time out—a temporary cessation to the fighting—is often a good idea. To be most effective, the couple agrees beforehand that whenever one of them says or signals that he or she wants a time out, the two will go separate ways with the sole purpose of seeing how—and why, if possible—they created the fight. When either party is ready to share what he or she has discovered, that person offers to reconvene the discussion. When both parties are ready, the conversation continues, with each party sharing what he or she has seen and helping each other see more about his or her role in the creation of the conflict. The one condition to this tool is that whoever calls the time out will come back to discuss the issue within 24 hours (or whatever number of hours the two people have previously agreed upon as the maximum time tolerable).

Freeze Frame

Freeze Frame is a wonderful tool that allows you to use the material of your daily life to access the deeper issues that keep you from having what you really, really want in your life. To do this most effectively, set aside a period of time each day (usually near the end of the day) to review the events of the day and see what happened that created some level of dis-ease in your being. It is usually best to begin with the issue that you had the most intense reaction to.

In any conflict between two or more people, each of the individuals involved is 100 percent responsible for the creation of the problem. Freeze Frame creates the

possibility for two (or more) people to look together—from the same side—at an incident that caused a painful rift in the relationship. It helps both to take full responsibility for creating the problem, ending the blaming who’s-right-who’s-wrong dance. It lets each see how and why he or she created the issue to begin with. Both parties need to commit to discovering the truth in themselves, as opposed to taking, holding, and defending a position. Here’s how it works:

Partner A relates an incident needing healing to Partner B in as much detail as possible, paying particularly close attention to what he or she was feeling, especially immediately before the moment that person felt hurt by Partner B.

Partner A replays the few moments immediately before the hurt, this time in very slow motion, paying even closer attention to what he or she was feeling.

When Partner A gets to the precise moment where the hurt happened, Partner A “freezes the frame” at the point where Partner B dealt the blow. Partner A does not move his or her awareness away from this awe-full moment in time, but instead drops all defenses, stays totally open, “takes the hit,” and sees what it touches in his or her consciousness.

That pain, if Partner A allows it to take him or her where the pain wants to, will eventually take the person back to an earlier (usually much earlier) pain that needs healing. Partner A will see how he or she co-created the pain so that he or she could open the door to heal the old wound. Have you ever noticed how we recreate the same pain over and over in our lives until we finally stop running away and turn around to see what it is trying to tell us? This exercise is all about exposing that pain and healing it once and for all.

Once Partner A has seen into the source of his or her pain, it is also possible from this place of open awareness to look at Partner B in precisely the same “freeze the frame” moment and see and feel where Partner B was coming from. At this point, all that is in Partner A’s heart is compassion, understanding, and forgiveness.

Legal Dump

When one partner is feeling upset with or angry at the other partner and simply wants to unload his or her feelings on the other person to become fully conscious of the content, that partner may ask for permission to do a “legal dump.” If the other person is open to receiving the dump, the first partner may then go ahead and “blow it all out” at his or her partner. It is often best for the partner receiving the dump to be sitting down in a chair, being as open and vulnerable as possible, with the “dumping” partner standing over him or her and just letting it all fly, totally uncensored. It is advisable to follow the dump with

another tool that will help the “dumper” access where the anger was really coming from in himself or herself.

Just Listening

Perhaps the greatest, most healing gift we can give another is the gift of unconditional presence. One way of working with the emotional material that is released through the previous exercises is a tool called “Just Listening.” This exercise creates a spiritual and emotional environment wherein one person can unburden his or her soul in the sacred space provided by the other’s Love and compassionate listening. It is one of the best tools I know of for opening to and moving through the deep emotional material that prevents us from having what we really, really want. If used regularly (at least weekly), it will transform your life.

As with the previous exercises, “Just Listening” is fundamentally a very simple tool. The goal is simply to let go as deeply as possible into your feelings around whatever issue is up for you. While the technique is very simple and straightforward, it is very easy to get lost in thoughts about the issue instead of feelings, and people often need to try the exercise a number of tries before they master it. The instructions below are for doing “Just Listening” with a partner:

1. Create a (physically) “sacred space” and set aside at least four hours where the two of you can be completely undisturbed.
2. Partner A lies down (experiment with the position that allows for the greatest ease of opening). Partner B sits next to Partner A, without touching or looking at Partner A, unless Partner A requests it.
3. Partner A allows any and all feelings to be expressed that need to come out, not holding back anything, regardless of content or intensity. Partner A allows this releasing process to unfold until he or she feels absolutely complete or finished.
4. During this process, Partner B just listens. Just listening means hearing the words of and feeling the feelings with Partner A. (Compassion, after all, literally means “to have passion with.”) If Partner A is expressing difficult feelings toward or about Partner B, Partner B listens as if Partner A was talking about someone else and is just there for Partner A. Partner B does not spend even one second preparing a defense or rebuttal to Partner A’s expression of feelings. This exercise is absolutely not about being right. It is about getting to the heart of the matter for each individual. Partner B provides the safety of a compassionate external witness to allow Partner A to explore uncharted and oftentimes frightening territory within. The only time Partner B may say anything during this time is to remind Partner A to explore his or her feelings. One possible way to



accomplish this is for Partner B to gently say to Partner A, “That’s a thought, not a feeling. What are you feeling?”

5. When Partner A is done, the partners switch roles. Partner B now has an opportunity to explore and express any and all feelings he or she needs to.

6. When Partner B feels complete, Partner A may have another opportunity to further explore his or her feelings.

7. When Partner A is done, Partner B may have another turn.

8. Partners A and B continue going back and forth until each feels satisfied that he or she has done everything possible at this time.

Please remember as you approach this Heartwork that it is a process and not an event. The work we must each do to open our hearts to the Love that *is* us and flows *through* us is work we must do on a regular basis if we want to continue to feel connected to that Love. Some days and some issues are easier than others, so be kind to yourself on this journey into your heart. For each of us, our progress as we open to Love and our retreat as we step back from it create a unique dance that is beautiful exactly as it is. Only in loving our whole selves, what we perceive to be “good” as well as what we perceive to be “bad,” can we be fully present to Love. It is in this balanced place that we can see ourselves and our lives from a different perspective that allows us to set aside our fears and gives us the chance to heal. I’ve had the great honor and privilege over many years of witnessing this magnificent unfolding countless times with thousands of clients and students. It is my greatest hope, wish, and desire that at least some part of this writing will help to alleviate some of the reader’s suffering and transform his or her life, as well.

Note: Portions of this article have been excerpted from *Heartwork: How To Get What You Really, Really Want*, by Dale Goldstein, and from the website of the Heartwork Institute, Inc. (www.awakentheheart.org).

© 2014 Dale Goldstein, All rights reserved