

Introduction

Your Transformation Begins

I am inviting you on the most important journey you will ever take: the journey back to a heartfelt connection with yourself and a trust-filled connection with your life. This journey will show you that there is a sense of well-being with you always, no matter what is happening in your life.

If you are like most people, you have only sporadic glimpses of this well-being. This may be because you, like most everyone else, have a deep belief inside of you that says you are not enough. You may also have been conditioned to believe that if you just fix yourself or your life, you will be “enough” and thus know the peace and happiness you long for. You have become an ongoing project, and this causes you to struggle with your compulsions, your finances, your relationships, and your health. Rather than peace and joy, you may very well be living with a low-grade sense of unease that periodically flares up and plunges you into turmoil. Your life has become a series of problems to be solved rather than an adventure to be lived. If you are honest with yourself, you recognize that this fixing game has never brought you peace, well-being, or ease.

I too lived from this place of struggle for many years, so I intimately know the deep pain and heartache that comes from the fix-it mode. I was very compulsive, at times suicidal, and felt that I had no value. Most of the time, I experienced a sense of unease, and often it would flare up into dread, hopeless despair, and overall anxiousness. These feelings would show up as relentless struggles in my mind, knots in my stomach, and debilitating headaches that came from an

intense longing to run away from my life. I gained a huge amount of weight, washed a lot of the food down with alcohol, and took every pill I could get my hands on.

Since I perceived myself as defective, I tried to get rid of the parts of me I didn't like and hold on to the ones I did. But these parts seemed to have a life of their own, appearing when I didn't want them and disappearing when I wanted them to stay. I also desperately tried to understand it all, but that just kept me caught in my head.

It wasn't until I discovered how to listen to myself that I began to open up again. Rather than always being in fix-it mode, I learned how to meet myself exactly as I am, opening into the place beyond judging, fixing, getting rid of, and trying to understand. I learned the art of being present for my own experience, no matter what it is, and the art of meeting myself—even the so-called unacceptable, unmeetable parts of myself—in my own heart.

Slowly, just as the morning light dispels the dark, I came back to myself. I also discovered how to show up for the great adventure of Life—not just life in the everyday sense, but the intelligent process unfolding in and through everyone and everything. Instead of always trying to create a better reality, I showed up for Reality with a capital R. (When capitalized, the words *Life* and *Reality*—as well as *Love*, *Intelligence*, and *Presence*—all refer to the interconnected, intelligent field of being that is Life.)

Rather than being in a constant state of unease, I came to know more and more joy, trust, and love. Did this make all of my vulnerabilities go away? No. These feelings will always be a part of me, for vulnerability is an essential part of being human, and vulnerabilities are the doorways back into peace, joy, and love. Now mine are nestled in the spaciousness of my own heart. And when they get reawakened through this sometimes fierce process called Life, they don't take over any more. Instead, they open my heart even more.

I tell you this so that you know what I am offering you here comes from having actually lived it. Rather than letting me stay lost in the depth of darkness I'd taken on, Life itself showed me the pathway from contraction and struggle to connection and well-being. Since I

began sharing my journey more than thirty years ago, I have guided thousands of people on their own journeys back to themselves and back to Life. And each of them, in turn, has helped me to see more clearly the pathway back to Life.

In this book, I am inviting you on a journey back to ease and well-being. In this exploration, you will first discover how to see through the game of struggle so you can know the joy of being fully alive. Struggle is like a cloud bank of stories that cuts you off from your natural state of joy and peace, and you have been conditioned throughout your life to believe in these stories. Struggle is based on fear; it is held together with judgment, and it leaves you vulnerable to sadness, anger, loneliness, and despair. Your struggling self doesn't only grapple with the big challenges of Life; it resists the smaller things, like the length of the stoplight, the spot on your shirt, or the shape of your nose. You will learn how not to get seduced by your mind's addiction to struggle, how to see the particular stories of struggle you were conditioned to believe, and how to give them the spacious acceptance they need to let go. You will learn how to unhook from all of the fears, longings, irritations, and sorrows that struggle generates. Rather than turning to your compulsions or fighting with the people in your life, you will be able to simply let it all pass through you, knowing that at any given moment only a small part of you has a problem with Life. The rest of you is at peace.

You will also learn how to meet yourself exactly as you are, weaving every part of yourself—even the parts you think are unlikable and unlovable—into your own heart. You will move beyond being a victim of the challenges of your life so that you can gather the treasures that always accompany them. You will come to see that your life, rather than being a series of events that are happening *to* you, is all happening *for* you. Everything in your life—especially your challenges—is tailor-made to help you see your stories of struggle. Whatever is in the way *is* the way! You will learn how to listen to your challenges, rather than striving to overcome them, so they can lead you back to your heart.

And finally, you will rediscover how to be open to Life again—right here, right now, feeling at home no matter where you are, no matter what is happening. Everything you experience on this journey will allow you the safety to show up for the great adventure called Life—not an idea of what it should be, but the real thing. This is what you deeply long for: an intimate connection with Life. At your core, you yearn to show up for what Life is offering in this moment rather than wanting your experience to be different than it is. You long to let go of trying, resisting, and constantly evaluating how you're doing so that you can relax into your life and know the joy of being fully available and present for Life.

Joseph Campbell, the much-loved mythologist and writer, said in *The Power of Myth*, “People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I don't think that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's all finally about.”

What Campbell is alluding to is the heart of this book. It is an invitation to fully experience Life so you can again know “the rapture of being alive,” which is all about connecting with what is right here, right now.

Chapter 1 shows you how your stories of struggle become clouds in your mind that eventually surround you, cutting you off from seeing the meadow of your own innate okayness and from Life. You will also meet “the storyteller,” the voice that spins the ongoing tales of struggle, and discover the power of compassionate curiosity to quiet your storyteller. In chapter 2, we explore the qualities of the meadow in more detail. Chapter 3 examines fear, which is the core movement of your storyteller, and you'll discover that it is possible to see through its stories. In chapter 4, you take the essential step of discovering that you are not the one in charge of this transformation process, you are not alone, and help is only a question away.

With this foundation, in chapter 5 we'll explore the power of being curious about your immediate experience. Chapter 6 guides you in discovering *how* to bring the power of curiosity into your daily life.

In chapter 7 we look at your heart's ability to heal. Then, in chapter 8, you'll learn how to touch even the deepest of holdings inside of you with the healing of your heart.

In chapter 9 you will reconnect with your natural state of trust. In chapter 10, all that we have explored will be brought together into four guidelines that will help you to be with whatever Life brings you. By the end of this book, you will discover that what we are exploring in these pages has the power to transform the world.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK

Understanding what is being offered here is an important step, but the doors into being fully alive open through *experiencing* what is being offered. You may have some resistance to opening to Life, for while this is what we all deeply long for, we are also afraid of it. Direct experience, even of the resistant part of you, can help you get past any resistance that may come up. In this book, I have incorporated two means of helping you move through resistance and connect with the truth beyond the words.

First, throughout each chapter, you will be invited to pause to connect with what is being offered in that moment. These are invitations to let go of the world of struggle and open to Life here and now, to dip the finger of your attention into the river of your experience and let Life in. You can stay at just the level of understanding the words, and that can be an important phase. But there comes a time when we become ready to move beyond understanding into actually experiencing what the words are pointing to. You don't have to figure out what that is; you simply discover that you can let go of the game of struggle and connect with Life in the moment.

Second, I have designed a ten-week introspective process to allow you to fully experience the offerings of each of the ten chapters. This process is found in the section called "Remembering" at the end of each chapter. This name reflects that everything offered in this book you already know and have just forgotten. But this process also contains an element of re-mem-bering: we no longer see ourselves as a separated part of a dismembered whole, but rediscover the

cohesiveness of Life and how we are necessary components of it. The more we clear out our stories of struggle, the more we re-member, or put ourselves back into, this great flow of Life.

You will be given a “Remembering Statement” that captures the essence of what was explored in each chapter. These truth statements come from the place beyond the struggling self. They will help you, as you move throughout your day, to reconnect with what you have learned. You can write the truths on sticky notes and place them around your environment. Or you can associate them with something you do many times a day, such as using the bathroom or answering the phone. You can even use them as a mantra during your times of conscious breathing.

These truths will also be helpful in getting to know your struggling self, which may at times argue with the core remembering. Notice when your mind is open to them, and notice what it says when it is not. Remember that when your mind is arguing with a truthful statement, this is just your struggling self.

If the statement that is chosen for the week doesn't call to you, ask yourself what touched you the most in the chapter. Then put it in a few words that you can come back to throughout the week, reminding yourself what you are remembering.

You are also encouraged to spend some quiet time with yourself every day, learning to see and listen to your inner experiences rather than being seduced by the game of struggle. I call these times “Remembering Sessions.” Through them, you are invited to bring what we are exploring in each chapter into your immediate experience.

These sessions may look like meditation, but in the traditional sense, they are not. Rather than trying to make something happen or get to a better state or change what is, you are strengthening the muscle of your attention. With attention, you can be curious about what is going on right now in order to discover how to relate to your immediate experience rather than turning it into a problem. For it is when your attention and your immediate experience come together that you rediscover your innate sense of ease, peace, and well-being beyond the clouds of struggle in your mind.

Your Remembering Session is a powerful place to get to know your mind. If you are like most people, your mind will have times when it struggles with the sessions. It will try to do them right and judge itself for how it is doing. It will often get bored or just space out. Most people think they are failures at what is called “meditation” because they’re trying to do it “right.” But your experience would be completely different if you knew that whatever shows up in your daily Remembering Session is exactly what needs to be there, and that when you can be curious about it, you step out of the game of struggle.

On the first day of each week, I suggest you read through the instructions for the chapter’s Remembering Session and then close your eyes and go exploring. The abbreviated version at the end of the instructions can guide you for every day of the week after that.

Many people find it helpful to connect with themselves in this way as early in the day as they can, so it sets a tone for the day. If this doesn’t work for you, find a time when you can regularly explore the Remembering Session of the chapter.

You can also sprinkle a minute or two of becoming curious about what you are experiencing as you move throughout your day. As with the Remembering Statements, it can help to connect this curiosity with something you do a number of times during the day, like eating, using the bathroom, or answering the phone.

I have designed the Remembering process to span ten weeks, so you can spend seven days connecting with the core discoveries of each chapter and your experience of them. But I encourage you to take more or less time, as you feel called to. You could spend several weeks on one session or move through two in one week. Also, while the sessions do help you integrate on a deeper level what is being offered here, if you are not called to do the sessions, honor that. You will still receive from the book what you need to receive. Trust yourself and open to these sessions if and when it is right for you. Even though there is a tried-and-true pathway from *doing* Life to *being* Life, you have your unique expression of that path. So it is important that you take in what resonates with you and leave the rest.

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The core of our journey together is about opening what has been closed inside of you, so that the energy that has been bound up in your struggling self can be released and you can again know the joy of being fully alive. Well-being is here right now. You don't need to search for it, you don't need to fix yourself to know it, and you don't even need to change anything in your life. Your innate sense of well-being is revealed as you learn how to unhook from your struggling self.

On behalf of all the people who live on this beautiful, blue-green jewel that is our planet, I thank you for your willingness to take this journey back to Life. This gratitude comes from knowing that as you discover and live from the meadow of well-being, your life will be transformed. And as your life transforms, you will transform the lives of everybody you meet—or even think about—for the rest of your life. When you are not caught in the world of struggle, you are *here*, open to the amazing majesty and mystery of Life, radiating the presence of well-being. And a human being who has discovered how to be here becomes an invitation to all beings to unhook from the mind's addiction to struggle and open back into the joy of being fully here for Life. For the healing of all beings, Life is bringing you home.

Are you ready to embark on the journey from struggle to well-being? If so, let's begin.

1

It's All Okay—It's Truly Okay

Imagine a day when everything was okay—not just okay, but *really* okay. You may have just fallen in love or received something you have wanted for a long time. Or maybe you are on vacation with no pressures, lying on a beach in deep contentment. Allow the images of your okay day to fill you up. Go for the gusto—let in that *okayness*. Let it flood your mind, your body, and your heart.

Now notice what you are experiencing as you use your imagination to open up to the joy of everything being okay. In your mind there is probably a sense that nothing needs to be any different than it is. In your body, there is likely an experience of deep relaxation that allows for the glow of joy. Your heart is open, spacious, and light. *Abh!*

What would it be like if you knew that everything was always okay? That doesn't mean there wouldn't be challenges. It just means that you wouldn't turn them into problems, so then you would be able to respond to them from a clear place. What would it be like to live from this open, relaxed, engaged, and spacious place? Isn't this what you deeply long for—to no longer struggle with Life and instead be available to the experience of Life as it is right here, right now? This is possible! In fact, everything in your life is a part of the journey into recognizing and living from a place that is beyond struggle.

THE MYTH OF NOT BEING OKAY

We all long for this okayness, and yet it seems very elusive. If you step back and look at what is going on inside of you all day long, you would see that rather than resting in the ease of okayness, your mind is often doing the opposite. It is searching for something better—a better body, a better mate, a better meditation, a better car, a better mind. This kind of mind hopes that if you can just get your life the way you want it to be, then you will feel okay.

You can also spend a lot of energy trying to get rid of the parts of you that you don't like. You hope all of this wanting and resisting will finally soothe the raging beast of the voice in your head that says you and your life need to be different than what they are in order to have everything be okay. When struggling with your life doesn't bring you lasting satisfaction, you look for it through the numbing world of compulsions.

When you look honestly at your search for a better experience, you will see that it doesn't work. Or the better way to say it is that it does work, for brief moments, but it keeps you caught in the belief that if you just do it right—if you change yourself and your life enough—then you will know that illusive okayness you so deeply long for. But haven't you noticed that every time your mind feels that it has gotten yourself and your life together, they haven't stayed that way?

It is very important to understand that the mind is not being put down here. It is an exquisite creation of Life that took 13.8 billion years to form—since the beginning of the universe. Life created the mind as a tool for maneuvering through Life, not to be in charge of it. The mind is a wonderful servant, but it is a horrible master. Giving it the task of being in charge of Life has created the world of struggle that most people live in all day long, keeping them cut off from peace and joy.

The more you can learn how to use your mind rather than having it use you, you will discover that okayness is your natural state and that it is always with you no matter what happens in your life. You just don't see it because you are always trying to find it. And you can't find it, for you have never lost it. You could be angry, deeply despairing, or even very afraid, and your natural field of well-being is also there at

the same moment you are caught in struggle. You can learn how to recognize and live from the place beyond struggle, no matter what is happening in your life.

✧ Close your eyes for a moment and listen. There are all sorts of sounds happening right now. To keep your mind engaged, count how many different ones you can hear. When you are done, open your eyes and recognize something very amazing: for a moment, your intention wasn't to think about Life. It was to directly experience it by listening to it. There is a big difference between thinking about Life and actually experiencing it. ✧

THE MEADOW

Imagine a beautiful meadow on a sunlit morning. In this meadow is a rainbow of wildflowers, along with the heart-opening music of birds. The smells of the heather and the pristine beauty of the surrounding mountains bring forth a deep sense of peace.

This meadow represents the experience of okayness that is at the heart of Life, and because you are a part of this wonderful, mysterious unfolding that is Life, the meadow is at the core of your being too. You knew and lived in this okayness when you were very young. You may have no memories of this kind of well-being, but there was a time when there were no thoughts in your head. Past and future had no meaning for you, so this moment was all there was. Because you weren't searching for a better state, you were open to Life—all of it—and Life was okay exactly as it was. Even when there was pain and discomfort, you fully experienced it rather than turning it into a problem in your mind.

Now imagine yourself as a young child living in the meadow, fascinated by the newness of every moment, open to everything. Clouds in the sky come and go, as do laughter and tears, so everything inside of you and outside of you flows.

As you grow, thoughts begin to fill your head as you start to tell yourself stories about yourself and about Life.

Clouds in the sky begin to lower and circle around your head. At first they are just wispy clouds that don't fully block your experience of the meadow. But over time, usually by adolescence, the clouds completely surround you and fill your head, so much so that you can no longer see the meadow. All you can see are the ever-shifting clouds in your mind.

This is where most people live: in a cloud of ideas about Life. And most of the time they struggle with Life rather than directly experiencing it. Most of the struggles are small—not liking how your hair looks or the length of the stoplight—but sometimes struggles become so big that they end up in loneliness and despair. When you were young and first saw a bird, you saw it in all of its mystery. You experienced it not as an object of your mind but as a living experience all throughout your being. As you grew up, you began to experience it as a thought: “Oh, that is a bird.” As you became more and more caught in thoughts about Life rather than directly experiencing Life, you were slowly conditioned to struggle with Life: liking/disliking, wanting/resisting, should/should not, good/bad, right/wrong. And struggle is what makes up the clouds that separate you from the meadow of okayness at the heart of Life.

It may be difficult for you to see that you are identified with the clouds in your mind because it has been a while since you spent an extended period of time in the meadow of well-being within you. Like most people, you have probably become used to chronic, low-grade struggles—to believing that your thoughts are true and that if you could only get those thoughts to be the way you want them to be, then everything would be okay. You can win the lottery, think happy thoughts until the cows come home, meditate for hours every day to find the states of mind you like, get plastic surgery to make your body look “perfect,” yet none of that is enough, because *all of these things are not the meadow*. They are just attempts to find the meadow, and they will only thicken your clouds in the long run, leading to still more struggle.

THE STORYTELLER

The storyteller is the voice of your clouds of struggle. You know what I mean—that voice in your head that talks all day. If you had a little

door on your forehead that you could open up, you would see the storyteller voicing an opinion about everything. It comments on what it likes and what it doesn't like. It tells you what you should do and shouldn't do, and often it changes from one to the other in a matter of seconds. It judges unmercifully—not only other people, but also yourself. And it is afraid—afraid of Life, afraid of its own fear, and deeply afraid of being alone.

Because the storyteller is constantly trying to do everything right, it manipulates, tries, expects, wants, rages, and resists. It generates all sorts of feelings, such as fear, sadness, self-judgment, anger, doubt, confusion, irritation, and despair to name just a few. It also generates feelings of love, kindness, and peace, but these usually show up only when the storyteller is getting what it wants. As soon as it doesn't, any feelings that generate from the heart are usually closed down.

If you watch closely, you will see that the storyteller is lost in an endless game of struggle—struggles with everyday things like the length of the line at the grocery store, the color of your new makeup, your mate changing the TV channel, the two pounds you gained. But at times it leads you into big struggles, such as “He rejected me, and I can't stand to be alone,” “I found a lump in my breast and am going to die,” “If I don't get a job, I will lose my house and will have to live on the streets.” The storyteller is very good at “awfulizing,” which leaves you in contraction and reaction, unable to respond to the challenges of your life in a clear way.

The storyteller comes from being disconnected from Life. It comes from believing you are separated from the meadow and thus have to *do* Life rather than *be* Life. The thoughts the storyteller uses are exquisite tools for maneuvering through reality, but they are not Reality. The storyteller is not the meadow. It creates ideas about the meadow, trying to get back to it, which is only more struggle. It also has a tendency to react to Life rather than respond to it.

Now imagine an alien arriving from another planet and landing beside this meadow. He sees you in the meadow, surrounded by and permeated with clouds, struggling with Life rather than being open to it. He can see, sticking out of your clouds, feet and hands. As you

run here and there around the meadow, he notices that you are holding a butterfly net in one of your hands. He instinctively understands that you are trying to catch butterflies because you believe that if you capture enough of them (enough money, enough success)—and they must be the “right” ones (the right mate, the right body, the right hair, the right job)—then you will be happy.

The alien also notices that in your other hand you hold a fly swatter. Again, he instinctively understands why you are carrying this with you. He sees that you believe if you get rid of what you don't like—your big nose, your mate's irritating behaviors, or your anxiety—then you will finally feel everything is okay.

As he watches you careen around the meadow, trying to get to what you like and away from what you don't like, the alien notices that all of your seeking and resisting may bring you moments of okayness, but in the long run your actions only thicken your clouds of struggle. He also sees that over and over again your desire for your life to be different than how it is results in times when you become frozen or lost in despair because you haven't been able to control your life into what you think it should be. This confuses the alien because he can clearly see that you are struggling with nothing more substantial than clouds. On top of that, he can see that you are already in the meadow of peace you are so desperately trying to find. He knows that the meadow of your natural okayness is always with you; you just don't recognize it.

The core truth being offered in this book—and I will say this over and over again because our clouds of struggle can seem so thick—is that *you are always in the meadow*. You usually don't notice it because you have been conditioned to pay attention only to the stories—the clouds—in your head.

Lasting peace is your natural state. Everything you long for and everything you truly are is to be found right here in the meadow of *this moment*. You access the meadow by simply being open to Life. Being open means having a direct experience with whatever you are experiencing—no matter what it is—including the easy and the difficult, the joyous and the sorrowful. It is showing up for the life that you've been given rather than endlessly trying to make it be different than what it is.

✧ Open to the possibility that you are in the meadow right now as you are reading this book. ✧

REOPENING YOUR HEART

It is an amazing awakening to realize you have been chasing pleasant states your whole life and resisting the unpleasant ones, and this has never brought you the peace you long for. Rather than searching for the ultimate experience of your life, how would it feel to settle into the flow of Life enough that every experience (even the difficult) is the ultimate experience of your life? This radical acceptance opens you to the meadow of well-being.

It is your heart that knows how to be open to it all. When you are caught in the clouds of struggle, you are experiencing your life only through your mind, which clings and resists. When you thin your clouds of struggle enough, you begin to experience your life through your heart, and that is the key to remembering that the meadow is always here.

It is important to expand our definition of the heart beyond the fairly limited view that permeates our culture. Many types of wisdom—from ancient ayurvedic medicine to the modern HeartMath Institute, which helps people bridge their hearts and minds and deepen their connection with others—teach us that the core of our being is the heart. Not the physical organ, but the energy essence of the heart. Your heart is not just about feelings. It is literally an energy center that resides in your chest, and when it is open, it fills your whole being with its wisdom energy. Pull up a memory of someone you deeply care for and allow yourself to really feel how much you care. If you pay attention, you will notice that the energy in your chest opens up. Now call up a time when you were angry and reactive, and notice that the energy in your chest closes down. Pull up the first memory and allow your heart to glow again.

Your heart, rather than your mind, is the source of wisdom, healing, and love, and it is very smart. It is the heart that can feel Life, connecting with it through resonance. It knows how to include rather than exclude, to accept rather than judge, to allow rather than resist.

Your experience of Life is completely different when you learn how to feel it with your heart rather than thinking about it with your mind.

You lived with an open heart when you were very young, but like most people, you were scared out of it. In order to not continually suffer the pain of a broken heart, you ran away to your head. You were like Sleeping Beauty, pricking your finger on the spindle of your thoughts, falling asleep to the power of your heart.

But you, like Sleeping Beauty, can wake up again. As you discover how to listen to your heart and trust it again, you will discover that it is the wisest guide and friend you will ever have. Your heart is the gatekeeper for the energy of aliveness that you really are. The more closed your heart is, the more depressed you feel, and the more cut off you are from the flow of Life. The more open your heart is, the more you have access to your natural state of peace, well-being, and ease, no matter what is happening.

It is possible to live a life in which your reactive mind does not close down the wisdom of your heart, and this is what this journey we are on is all about. When you have seen through your clouds enough that your heart feels safe to open again, rather than being an object in your mind, Life becomes the subject of your heart. Every single part of you—even the so-called unacceptable parts—is woven back into your heart. Also, rather than experiencing people through your wanting and resisting mind, you experience them through your heart—even difficult people.

✧ Bring your attention to the center of your chest and breathe in and out through your heart center. If you have never done this before, imagine breathing through a little nose in the center of your chest. Now see inside your chest a tiny flame, and every time you breathe in, the flame becomes brighter. ✧

THE POWER OF COMPASSIONATE CURIOSITY

How do you rediscover the meadow of okayness rather than living in the reactions of your mind? It isn't about trying to get back to the meadow—that is just more struggle. Besides, you never left the meadow; you just think you have. The key is getting to know your

clouds of struggle rather than trying to fix them, change them, or get rid of them. And the key to getting to know your clouds is learning how to be curious about what is going on in your life, both inside of you and outside, so you can see what the storyteller is doing inside your head. The more you look, the less you take these stories personally, and the easier it becomes to unhook from them. I call it “look to unhook.”

Imagine being so lost in a wave of fear that your mind is whirling and you feel like there is a tight knot in your stomach. Then imagine curiosity kicking in. You notice that your belly is tight and your mind is spinning. Rather than falling into the fear, you can be with it: “This is just fear, and I can be curious about it.” In that moment, rather than being lost in your mind’s resistance to what you are experiencing, you have turned your attention toward what is actually happening—not an idea of it, but the living experience of it.

Reconnecting with *what is* means making contact with what you are actually experiencing before you think about it. This may not seem very powerful, but it is. Instead of being caught in fear, you have stepped back and have *related to* fear rather than being lost in it. Your ability to be aware of what is going on inside may last for just a moment before fear takes over again, but that moment matters. Learning to see what your mind is doing rather than being lost in it is an important step toward unhooking from the game of struggle.

This ability to be curious about what you are experiencing opens you to the wisdom of your heart, where you can safely meet all of your stories and the feelings they generate. If you are like most people, you are either ashamed of or afraid of the stories that make up your clouds, so you hide them deep inside. If they do make it to the surface of your awareness, you judge yourself for having them, and then you spend your energy ignoring them or getting rid of them. But thoughts are just like people. They react when they are judged, and they let go when they are listened to.

You can learn how to bring compassionate curiosity to all of the stories in your head. The more you bring the light of your compassionate attention to the stories you have been caught in most of your life, the more they thin, like clouds touched by the warmth of the sun. And as the clouds thin, it’s as if a doorway opens through which

you can once again experience the meadow, which is the place where everything is okay, no matter what is happening in your life.

✧ Take a moment to listen to Life again. Notice that the sounds are different than when you listened a few pages ago. In these few moments you are using your mind to be curious about Life rather than just thinking about it. ✧

WHAT'S IN THE WAY *IS* THE WAY

The more you are curious about what you are experiencing, rather than trying to change it, the more you discover an amazing truth: you naturally know how to partner with Life instead of always trying to change it. You also see that no object, person, or experience will ever bring you the deep and lasting peace that comes from simply being open to Life. You then become less interested in trying to create your reality and more willing to show up for Life as it unfolds.

As your ability to be curious increases, it becomes evident that Life is *for* you. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to see this truth when you are caught in the clouds of struggle. We will be exploring this truth in more depth toward the end of the book, but know that the more your clouds thin, the more you can see that Life is trustable. It is not always likable, but what's in the way *is* the way, and it can be trusted. Trust does not mean trusting that you will get what you *want*. It means understanding you will get what you *need* in order to come out of the clouds of struggle. So trust doesn't just trust the easy, it also trusts the difficult. Trust knows that the challenges of your life are for you. They are the yellow highlighter of Life showing you the clouds of your reactive mind so that you can thin them with the sunlight of your own compassionate attention and thus rediscover the meadow of this moment.

As compassionate curiosity develops inside of you and brings you to your natural state of trust, you will be able to relax and allow Life to flow through you rather than resisting or trying to hold on to it. Your life then becomes an adventure, and every moment is an invitation to either engage with the joy of being fully alive or stay lost in your

stories of struggle. The more your clouds thin, the more your energy opens up. The more you open up, the more you connect with Life.

✧ Let go of all that we have been exploring here and use whatever senses are calling to you to make direct contact with Life. Hear it, see it, touch it, feel it coursing through your body. This is a brand-new moment in your life. You have never experienced this moment before and never will again. The quality of light is different; the sensations in your body are different; even the sounds you are hearing are brand new. There is an intelligent flow going on here, a flow that you can consciously feel through the wisdom of your heart. Stay with this flow as long as it interests you, whether it is for two seconds or ten minutes. ✧

KEY POINTS

At the end of each chapter in this book there is a list of the chapter's main points, along with space for you to write down what ideas touched you most. This list will be helpful in keeping in the forefront of your awareness the shifts of perception that are happening as you go through the Remembering process.

- No matter what your mind says, everything is and always will be okay.
- You have a storyteller in your head that talks all day long and doesn't recognize this okayness.
- The storyteller tries to do Life rather than being open to it.
- Everything you long for and everything you truly are is always right here, right now.
- The doorway to freedom comes from your willingness to be curious about your own clouds of struggle.

- The more you bring the light of your compassionate attention to the stories you have been caught in, the more they thin, just like clouds thin when touched by the sun's warmth.
- Life is completely different when you learn how to feel your way with your heart rather than thinking about it with your mind.
- Life is trustable. It is not always likable, but what's in the way *is* the way.
- This trust is not trusting that you will get what you *want*. Trust understands that you'll get what you *need* in order to come out of the clouds of struggle.
- The challenges of your life are for you. They are the yellow highlighter of Life showing you the clouds of your reactive mind so that you can thin them with the sunlight of your own attention and thus rediscover the meadow of this moment.
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REMEMBERING Week 1

This week's Remembering Statement:

Right now, this is Life, and it's okay.

Your own statement:

Remembering Session

Let us now strengthen the muscle of your attention so you can discover how to be present for your own experience. Find a comfortable spot where you won't be interrupted by people, phones, or pets. We will start by relaxing the chronic holding in your body, and then we will bring your attention to the circle of your breath. Your breath is the mother rhythm of Life, and it has been with you since the moment you were born. And it is always here no matter what is happening in your life.

✧ Begin by closing your eyes and taking a moment to recognize that all of the millions of moments of your life have brought you to this unique moment. You are not watching television, taking a shower, or eating your breakfast. You are sitting with your eyes closed, with the intention to become curious about what you are experiencing right now. Notice what you can notice about this moment of your life.

On the next in-breath, tighten your muscles. Tighten, tighten, tighten. Then slowly—very slowly—relax everything on your out-breath as you say the great sound of letting go: *Abh!* Feel the deliciousness of deeply letting go, coupled with the power of *Abh*. (If you are in a place where it's uncomfortable to make sounds, say *Abh!* silently to yourself.) Play with this sound, as there are many different ways you can express it.

This act of tension and release melts the chronic holding that shows up in your body and mind all day long. Repeat for at least three breaths.

Now allow your breath to be as it wants to be, and be curious about how different an in-breath is from an out-breath. An in-breath lifts and opens you up from the inside. As it comes to its end, it turns, becoming

the relaxation and letting go of the out-breath, a much different experience than an in-breath. Then comes a pause, then another in-breath fills you up.

To remind yourself that you are riding the waves of your breath, say silently to yourself, “In . . . out. Deep . . . slow.” Say *in* on the in-breath and *out* on the out-breath. Say *deep* on the next in-breath and *slow* on the next out-breath. As you are learning to add these words to your breath, it can be helpful to write them on a card that you keep beside you. Leave space for two more pairs of words; we will add them in the coming Remembering Sessions.

There is no need to judge every time you drift off into your storyteller again. You have been paying attention to your thoughts for most of your life. Simply bring your attention back to being curious about the circle of your breath and these calming, focusing words. Stay with this as long as it interests you.

At the end, open your attention to include your whole body and notice what is different now that you have given yourself the healing of your own attention.

When you are ready, open your eyes. ✧

Abbreviated Version

✧ Close your eyes and dip the finger of your attention into the river of your experience, noticing what it is like to be you right now.

For at least three breaths, tighten your muscles on your in-breath. Then slowly—very slowly—relax everything on your out-breath as you say the great sound of letting go, *Abh!*

Now be curious about the circle of your breath as you say silently to yourself, “In . . . out. Deep . . . slow.”

Every time you drift off into your thoughts again, without judgment, bring your attention back to the circle of your breath and the calming, focusing words. Stay with the breath and the words as long as you are interested.

At the end, expand your awareness and be curious about what is happening inside of you after a few minutes of conscious breathing.

When you are ready, open your eyes. ✨

2

Getting to Know the Meadow

When you are identified with the storyteller in your head, which is the voice of your clouds of struggle, you live from a tight and small place that's disconnected from your heart, disconnected from the amazing beauty and mystery of Life. To unhook from your storyteller is to become spacious and open—the opposite of the world of low-grade struggle that you are accustomed to. In unhooking, you discover how to use your mind for the exquisite tool it is rather than letting it be in charge. Let us take a few minutes to explore the amazing creativity of Life in order to get a feel for what it is like to unhook, so that you can connect with the spaciousness and openness that is the meadow of well-being within you.

Imagine being transported to the moon—brown dust and rock. Now as you look at Earth before you, be stunned by how the creativity of Life was able to explode into a mind-boggling array of forms and colors—all the way from jungles filled with colorful parrots, to pristine icebergs floating majestically in silent waters, to miles and miles of coral beds, to waves of grass dancing in the wind, to herds of baby seals with their liquid-brown eyes.

This universe where you find yourself has been unfolding for billions of years, birthing stars, exploding stars, and then creating out of stardust this magical and mysterious planet we call home. If you start

from the beginning and fast-forward, watching the unfolding of Life like a movie, you will see that forms—a planet, a mountain, a ladybug, a human being—continuously appear and disappear.

In the process of all this appearing and disappearing, you have shown up. You have been given the gift of experiencing a tiny slice of this 13.8-billion-year process. What a valuable gift that is! Imagine that there is a single turtle in all the seas of the world, and that turtle surfaces from the water only once every hundred years. Now imagine there is also a single golden hoop floating on the seas, tossed this way and that by the winds and currents. How often would the turtle, on its once-a-century visit to the surface, put its head through the golden hoop? It has been said that to be given a human life is just as rare as that happening.

For a moment, allow your whole being to open into the joy of that miracle. Life has been evolving for billions of years before you arrived, and it will continue long after you depart. For a few precious years you get to experience this constantly unfolding river of Life. The doorway back into consciously connecting with Life is this moment. This is the only moment that matters in your whole life. This moment in which you are reading this book is the place where you can rediscover all of the joy, the creativity, and the Love that is at the heart of Life.

✧ Dip the finger of your attention into the river of your experience by lifting your eyes and simply open to your life as it is right now. See it. Hear it. Fully experience it. This moment is uniquely different from any other moment of your life. ✧

Now realize that you have missed the full experience of Life most of your life. You, like most people, withdrew from Life when you were very young, crawling into a conceptual world that keeps on churning out ideas about Life. But rarely, if ever, did you allow yourself to experience the real thing. Before you became immersed in a conceptual world, when you saw a cat, you really saw it; you really experienced the cat as a unique and amazing creation of Life. As you became entranced with the world of thought, you stopped fully experiencing

Life. Instead, you experienced your ideas about it. As a Zen teacher once said, “No matter how many times you say the word *water*, it will never be wet.” In other words, no matter how much you think about Life, it isn’t the same as truly experiencing it.

So you walk around caught in your thoughts, homesick for a direct experience of Life. You long for it, but you are also afraid of it. You retreated into the world of your mind when you were young because Life was big and unpredictable and scary. Your mind said, “Let’s figure out how to control Life, and then we will be safe.” So you have occupied your time trying to *do* Life and do it right, not realizing that in the process, you turned into a human “doing” rather than a human being, trading the direct experience of Life for the illusion of control.

You stay caught in your mind, afraid of becoming fully who you are because you are not quite sure what that would look like. But I can assure you that seeing through your clouds and coming back to Life is the safest thing you will ever do, for it is all about coming home. What that looks and feels like will become clearer as we explore the qualities of your essence and you learn the skills needed to relate to your clouds rather than from them.

THE QUALITIES OF THE MEADOW

On our adventure together, we are exploring, step by step, how to see through the clouds of your mind so you can clear a pathway back into the meadow of well-being within you. Before we start clearing your clouds of struggle, however, it is important to take a look at how you will experience Life living from the meadow. We need to do this because you were so conditioned to be afraid of Life when you were very young that if you don’t recognize the safety and the joy of being open to Life, you will resist what is being offered here.

There are five core qualities that are the essence of the meadow, and as you relearn how to open into Life, you will live from these qualities. They are:

- flow
- spaciousness

- light
- Love
- stillness

These qualities have always been within you; they are with you right now as you are reading this book. But you haven't noticed them because they have been covered over by the clouds of struggle. So you don't really need to find them. All you need to do is learn how to thin your clouds of struggle, and there they are.

As we explore these five core qualities, it is important to recognize that there is violence and chaos in Life. There is also death; everything in Life appears for a time and then recedes back into mystery. In the meadow there is no resistance to violence, chaos, or death. The five qualities of the meadow embrace these aspects of Life rather than fighting or resisting them. True joy comes when we can be with what is—no matter what is! And if you look closely, you will see that new life is born from all of these five qualities.

Flow

Everywhere you look, Life flows. Rivers flow from the mountains to the sea, clouds flow across the sky, oceans flow in waves and tides. As air flows around this planet on the jet streams, wind dances through the trees. Blood flows throughout your body due to the pulsing of your heart; at the same time, information flows along your network of nerves.

In the great circle of Life, flow shows up in the dance of day and night and changes from one season into the next. Death is also a part of this flow. Life arises out of mystery, expressing itself in an amazing variety of forms, and each and every one will dissolve back into mystery. Even the invisible world flows. Light shows up as waves of energy, and each color is a wave with a different frequency. Sound is simply waves of vibration touching your eardrum.

Imagine the meadow a hundred years ago and fast-forward the unfolding of this little piece of the planet. You will see that over and over again day flows into night and back again. Clouds come and go; sounds arise and pass away. Winter flows into spring, plants appear

and dissolve, animals are born and die. Everything in the meadow is about flow. Now expand your view, and see this flow happening everywhere on our planet.

If you look closely, you will also see that Intelligence permeates the flow of Life. This Intelligence is so creative that you begin as just one cell, too small to see with the naked eye, then it unfolds into trillions of cells that all work together without a thought from you. When was the last time you had to work to get your hair to grow or your stomach to digest your food or your heart to beat? This Intelligence is also so smart that it knows which tiny seed will turn into a sequoia tree and which will grow into a carrot. It is the Intelligence within the flow of Life that tells each seed what it will become.

The only things in all of creation that don't flow are the clouds of struggle in our minds.

These clouds create the illusion that there is a "me" in here and there is Life out there. The mind believes itself to be separate from the flow of Life and believes that its job is to control everything. It lives from fixed positions: good/bad, right/wrong, liking/disliking. As long as you see yourself as separate, you will view Life as a potential threat and withdraw from the flow of Life into the clouds in your mind.

All you have to do is look at the human condition to see how much suffering our belief in separation creates. Most human beings live in a constant, low-grade struggle inside themselves. This struggle eventually shows up as all the suffering on this planet: greed, fear, hatred, despair, violence, loneliness. This belief in our separation from Life gets stronger as we grow older, which only further cuts us off from the flow of Life. And this separation from Life allows us to act in ways that hurt ourselves and others.

What would it be like to relax again into the flow of Life? Rather than trying to control Life, your intent is to open to its flow. You have known what it is like to be this intimately engaged with Life. Remember falling in love? There is lightness in your step, vibrancy in your being, and no need to have things be any different than they are. Why do you feel this way? Because love has opened you again to Life. This is why most people are so addicted to love. It is one of the

few experiences that can penetrate the clouds of struggle, inviting you simply to be fully here with Life. But as you have probably discovered, this kind of love doesn't last. Your clouds reconfigure, and your life narrows once again to a chronic game of struggle.

It is possible to live from the ease that comes from discovering how to be open to the flow of Life. To open again, it is important to recognize that Life is an intelligent flow. You may not always understand or like it, but you can trust it. You can wake up every morning with a willingness to show up for the great adventure called Life. The key is to discover how to stay open to whatever Life is bringing you. As you do, you will come to the place where it doesn't matter whether you are falling in love, dying, feeling nauseated or anxious, witnessing a beautiful sunset, having a challenging conversation with your boss, or joyfully watching kittens. It is all just Life passing through the spaciousness of who you truly are.

To enter the flow of Life by being open to this moment—no matter what it is bringing you—is to learn how to fully feel, but not hold on to, wonderful states and not shut down and push the difficult ones away. Life will continue to give you extremes of experience—joyful and sorrowful, easy and challenging, beautiful and unappealing. If your happiness is dependent on Life being a particular way, it is a given that the flow of Life will eventually dissolve the circumstances that are bringing you happiness, just like the tide washes away your writing in the sand. And if you are afraid of the pains and discomforts of Life, you will resist them, turning them into suffering.

Joy, your natural state, isn't dependent on Life being any particular way. Joy comes from the ability to be fully engaged with the flow of Life exactly as it is appearing—no matter what that is—and allowing Life to pass through you rather than always trying to make it be a certain way. Peace comes when you discover that you don't have to tighten around the difficult or hold on to the beautiful. As Pema Chödrön, an internationally known author and Buddhist nun, says in her 2009 book *Taking the Leap*, “Peace isn't an experience free of challenges, free of rough and smooth, it's an experience that's expansive enough to include all that arises without feeling threatened.”

✧ Take a moment to lift your eyes from the book and see with new eyes. Everything you see is Life flowing, and in that flow, everything in the space you are in has changed since you started reading. It may not look like it's changed, but it is the truth. The sounds around you have changed; your body is a few minutes older. If you are inside, the rug and the lamps are a little bit closer to eventually going to the garbage dump, and if you are outside, everything in nature has altered with the flow of time. This all happens so slowly that we don't usually notice it, but it is happening nonetheless. ✧

Spaciousness

The second quality of Life that permeates the meadow is spaciousness. If you look carefully, you will see that Life loves space. Right now, as you are reading this book, you are sitting on a planet that is dancing through vast oceans of space. For heaven's sake, it is 24.8 trillion miles to the closest star! Then there are stars that are billions of times farther away than that. Can you even begin to imagine how much space that is? And this is all happening in a universe that seems to have no end.

Now let's go in the other direction—into your body. It is estimated that you are made up of anywhere from 70 to 100 trillion cells, and each of those is composed of around 100 trillion atoms. If you blow up one of those atoms to be the size of a major-league baseball field, the nucleus would be a grain of sand in the middle of the field, and the electrons would be dancing around the outside of the stadium. So even atoms are mainly made up of space, and because you are made up of atoms, you are space too. You probably experience yourself as solid, but science says that is just a trick of perception. Space is the truth of your being.

When lost in your clouds, you live in the tight and narrow space of your mind. When you are open to this moment, spaciousness permeates your body, mind, and heart. Imagine a morning that you get up and ignore the to-do list. Instead, you luxuriate in bed. You linger at breakfast, and you follow your heart as to how the day will unfold.

This is a day in which you feel the deliciousness of spaciousness. You unhook from the mental pressure of having to do something, and instead you enjoy Life. This is your natural state, and it can be accessed no matter what is happening in your life. To live from spaciousness doesn't mean that you will want to disengage from your life. It means that you won't be fighting with it anymore.

You can also unhook emotionally to give yourself the gift of space. Imagine a time when you did something that you previously judged yourself for. This time, instead of getting caught in self-judgment, you touch yourself with your own heart, accepting yourself as you are. You give yourself the space to be human, and it feels so much better than being lost in the tightness of self-judgment. Or think of a time when your friend or mate acted in a way that upset you. Imagine instead that you decided not to take it personally and you let your reaction go. In both of these situations, you probably took a deeper breath because you moved from the tightness of reaction to the openness of acceptance.

To experience how tight and small you usually are, think about being frustrated at the length of a stoplight. That frustration may not seem like much tightness, but where is the joy? Then think of a time when you had a headache and you desperately wanted it to go away. Can you feel that when you resist the pain, the tightness in your head gets stronger and affects not only the headache but also your whole body?

Now let's go in the opposite direction. Recall a time when you were delightfully surprised by Life; or remember when a major project was completed, and it felt like a huge weight had been lifted off of your shoulders. Can you feel how your energy expands inside of you? When you are caught in the clouds in your mind, everything becomes contracted. The thicker the clouds, the smaller and tighter you become. When you stay open to Life, you are more spacious, so energy flows freely through you, allowing you to experience the pure joy of being alive.

Your birthright is to be the opposite of tight and small. Your natural state is openness, and it is only your conditioning that causes you to tighten and live small. It is possible to open again and live in spaciousness, even if your mind is caught in judgment, your heart is

sad, and your life is overwhelming. How can that be? Because your natural state is to be the meadow, and from the meadow you can learn how to allow any reaction to simply to pass through the spaciousness of your being.

✧ Take a moment and recognize that right now as you are sitting here, you are completely surrounded by stars. They are above you, below you, to the left and to the right of you. These stars are all dancing together, and our beautiful planet is a part of this celestial dance. If your mind gets scared by the immensity of it all, hold its hand and invite it for just a few moments to become expansive and open. Stay with this feeling, allowing yourself to recognize how delicious it is to experience this spaciousness. ✧

Light

As you reconnect with space and flow, you can know the third aspect of the meadow: light. In the Creation story at the very beginning of the Bible, it says, “And God said, let there be light!” And according to the Book of Genesis, this statement comes before the creation of the sun and stars. We think of light as coming from the sun, but the leading edge of science is now saying that *everything* is made out of light. David Bohm, the grandfather of quantum physics, once said that matter is just frozen light.

In his book *The Planetary Mind*, Arne Wyller reports, “Almost all particles in the Universe are those of light.” He goes on to say, “Light is a vital ingredient in all atoms.” Since everything is made of atoms, it follows that everything—a cat, a tree, a rock, the human body—is made of light.

We have all met people whose eyes twinkle and whose presence radiates a sense of warmth. We often say they glow. That is what you begin to see when you rediscover the meadow of well-being within you and all around you. Everything shines from within, radiating the energy of its presence. You may not see this, but when you get quiet enough, you can feel it.

Most of the time, you dim the radiance of your being by only paying attention to the clouds in your mind. This is true of all human beings: most of us have dimmed our light. The more you are lost in the problem factory of your mind, the thicker the clouds are in and around your head, cutting you off from the radiance of your body and the pure joy of being alive. No matter how thick your clouds become, however, they never stop the truth of your radiance. And it is possible to shine again like you did when you were young.

Take a moment to shake one of your hands vigorously. Now stop shaking, close your eyes, and feel your hand. There is the flow of energy—the tingles, the aliveness. This is an artificial way to experience what it feels like when your energy is open and spacious. It feels good. It feels alive.

The ecstatic Persian poet Hafiz spoke directly to what we are talking about in his poem “My Brilliant Image,” as translated by Daniel Ladinsky in his book *I Heard God Laughing*:

One day the sun admitted,

I am just a shadow.

I wish I could show you

The Infinite Incandescence (Tej)

That has cast my brilliant image!

I wish I could show you,

When you are lonely or in darkness,

The Astonishing Light

Of your own Being!

“The Astonishing Light / Of your own Being”—what a wonderful phrase! You have so much energy within you that wants to be freed from the game of struggle so it can expand and dance, and when energy is free to flow, it shines. This is what you are hungry for—your

own radiance. It's no accident that when a great burden has been lifted or you feel very happy, you often say, "I feel so light!" It is also no coincidence that the word *delight* means "of the light." Even pictures of saints point to what we are talking about. The reason most saints are painted with halos around their heads is because they broke free from the clouds of struggle so their light could shine, and people recognized this light.

There is a saying, often attributed to Plato, that says: "We can easily forgive a child who is afraid of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." We are all afraid of our own light. You need to forgive yourself for being so afraid of opening to Life. You were scared out of it when you were very young. But even though you have been afraid, you can learn the safety of opening again. You can, to paraphrase Jesus, learn not to hide your light under the bushel of your clouds. This is the greatest gift you can give to humanity—to shine from within because you are open to Life. Carl Jung said, "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being." You too can shine and know the joy of your own radiance.

✧ Take a moment and shake your hand again. When you stop, bring your attention to your hand and feel the tingles. As they fade away, expand your attention and feel the subtle tingles all over your body that come from the energy of Life. If they are hard to find, put your attention a foot away from your body and then slowly bring it closer. Notice the difference between the space around you and the actual experience of the energy of your body. That energy wants to expand and glow in joy. ✧

Love

When you rediscover the spaciousness of being open again to the great flow of Life—when you feel energy moving through you rather than trying to control it—you begin to recognize that the word that best describes this movement of light is *Love*. There is great truth in

the song title “Love Makes the World Go ’Round.” It not only makes it go around, it permeates absolutely everything.

In Greek, there are four words for love: *eros* (romantic love), *philia* (the love of friendship), *storge* (the love of family), and *agape* (universal or unconditional love). In English, we are hampered by having only one word for love, so I am capitalizing the word *Love* to point to the truth that Love (agape) is the essence of Life.

Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon and author of the bestselling book *Proof of Heaven*, wrote about what happened while he was in a seven-day coma from spinal meningitis. When asked what was the core of what he experienced while he was out of his body, he said, “Love is, without a doubt, the basis of everything. . . . This is the reality of realities, the incomprehensibly glorious truth of truths that lives and breathes at the core of everything that exists or will ever exist, and no remotely accurate understanding of who and what we are can be achieved by anyone who does not know it, and embody it in all of their actions.”

Brian Swimme, an author and evolutionary cosmologist, calls this essence at the heart of Life “allurement.” This force of attraction can be seen from the very beginning of our universe. The “stuff” that arose out of the Big Bang followed the call of attraction and came together into communities we call atoms. Then these atoms were drawn together into communities called molecules. Then the molecules were so attracted to one another they came together into communities called cells, and then cells followed the call of allurement and became multicellular beings.

This attracting force at the heart of Life then showed up in the mating dance of insects and animals, and in their daily life as well. In Charles Darwin’s book *The Descent of Man*, he mentions “survival of the fittest” only twice, but he mentions “love” ninety-five times when referring to the behavior of the creatures he was observing. He also talks about conciliation and cooperation being the most significant mode of behavior among them all.

This urge to connect at the heart of Life is all about Love. The great mystics of the world have all agreed that when you come out of the

clouds in your mind, what you recognize and fully become is Love. And it is this Love, this allurements, this urge to connect, that brings together all things, whether it is subatomic particles or human beings or solar systems.

Every cell in your being is filled with this Love, and it fuels almost everything you do. But you have been conditioned to search for it outside of yourself, leading inevitably to the often endless, and mostly unsatisfying, search for somebody to love you. What would happen if you recognized that Love is right here, right now? What would happen if you realized that Love is not something you need to find, but who you already are?

Love is what constitutes absolutely everything. The more your heart opens, the more you can feel the energy of Love that animates everything: trees, rocks, birds, clouds, your dog, and even the sun. Hafiz, who was truly awake to this Love that is at the heart of Life, speaks to this truth in his poem “The Sun Never Says,” translated by Daniel Ladinsky in his book *The Gift*:

Even
After
All this time
The sun never says to the earth,

“You owe
Me.”

Look
What happens
With a love like that,
It lights the
Whole
Sky.

Even the sun is an expression of the Love at the heart of Life, endlessly giving forth its light. In the sun’s giving, the entire earth

thrives. In learning how to live from your heart, you become as lit up as the sun, giving forth the warm, radiant energy of Love as you move through your day. Just as atoms, molecules, and cells were drawn together into greater communities, you will draw others into the community of the heart. It is the heart that recognizes we are all unique expressions of the Love that is the essence of Life, and it is the heart that will wake us up to the truth that we are all in this together, floating on a tiny, blue-green jewel of a planet that is dancing through vast oceans of space.

✧ Gently place your hand over your heart and contemplate the possibility that you are the lover you have been waiting for. ✧

Stillness

Look out at the world and see this dance that has been going on for eons—things arising and passing away—mosquitoes, dinosaurs, your great-grandparents, mountains, and even stars. Everything in this dance of Life appears and then eventually disappears. This constant movement of Life extends all the way out to the dance of galaxies and all the way within to electrons dancing around the nucleus of every single atom of your body. But that is only half of it. All of this movement arises out of a vast stillness—a stillness that births all the varied forms of Life.

Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk and a founder of the Centering Prayer movement, wrote in *Invitation to Love*, “Silence is God’s first language; everything else is a poor translation.” If you find a quiet place to sit in nature and allow your mind to quiet down, you can feel the stillness and silence out of which all form arises and into which it returns in the ongoing cycles of birth and death.

This stillness is also within you. Eckhart Tolle, author of *Stillness Speaks*, says, “Your innermost sense of self, of who you are, is inseparable from stillness.” Yet most people know nothing of this stillness within. They have been conditioned not to listen. Instead they are so busy running here and there that it is almost impossible for them to

simply become quiet and allow their thoughts to settle so that they can recognize this stillness and be nourished by its presence. It is possible, even in the midst of a busy life, to rest in stillness, which opens you up to a deep and passionate listening to Life.

Even more than longing for the joy of opening to the great flow of Life, you are homesick for this stillness. Because you were not trained to notice your own stillness, you can't tap into its wisdom. It is as if you have been at a beautiful outdoor symphony your whole life, but one noisy person (your busy mind) keeps distracting your attention from the symphony of your own stillness.

This stillness is not something you can search for. Searching for it is just more conflict—more trying to have your experience be different than what it is. The stillness at the core of your being is the absence of conflict, so trying to find it will only close the door to the stillness. In your willingness just to be curious about what is happening inside of you, the struggling self naturally calms down enough for stillness to reveal itself.

It is not an empty stillness you discover as you turn your attention within. It is full and rich, permeated with the Love and Intelligence at the heart of Life. It is the source of “the still, small voice” that is always with you. It is the place where you discover you are not alone. The presence of stillness, the knowing of stillness, the Love that is inherent in the stillness is always with you. When you recognize this, you are then able to partner with the wisdom of Life.

Being connected to stillness doesn't mean that you sit beside the road of Life, just resting in quiet and peace. In fact, the exact opposite is true. You become more fully engaged with Life, and your responses arise out of this stillness, rather than coming from the busy mind that believes itself to be separate from Life.

✧ For a few moments, close your eyes and watch how busy your mind is. Know that underneath all of that noise is a field of deep stillness. This stillness is always with you, and you can discover how to rest in its embrace. ✧

As you drink in these five qualities that are at the core of who you truly are, it is important to recognize that they are here with you right now. You may not notice them, but they are always with you no matter what is happening in your life. As you see through your clouds of struggle, you begin to recognize these qualities and to live from them, and this brings you to the okayness we explored in the last chapter.

The rest of the book is about accessing these five qualities that make up the meadow. You won't be reconnecting with them by trying to find them. That just creates more struggle. Instead, you will learn how to see through the clouds in your mind so they can thin, and you can discover the joy of living from these five qualities of the meadow rather than from your busy, controlling mind. In doing so, you will discover that the qualities of the meadow are the qualities of your very being.

KEY POINTS

- When you live in the clouds in your head, you live tight and small—disconnected from your heart, disconnected from the amazing beauty and mystery of Life.
- Life has been evolving for billions of years before you arrived, and it will continue long after you depart. For a few precious years, you get to experience this constantly unfolding river of Life.
- The five qualities that are the essence of the meadow—flow, spaciousness, light, Love, and stillness—have always been with you, but you haven't noticed them because they have been covered over by the clouds of struggle.
- As your clouds clear, you begin to recognize the five qualities and to live from them. This brings you to the okayness that is your natural state.
- To enter the flow of Life by being open to this moment—no matter what it is bringing you—is to learn how not to hold on to wonderful states or push the difficult ones away.

- To come out of your clouds of struggle is to become spacious and open—the opposite of the world of low-grade struggle that you are used to.
- You have so much energy within you that wants to be let out of the prison of struggle so it can expand and dance and shine. This is what you are hungry for—your own radiance.
- Love is the basis of everything.
- All of Life arises out of a vast stillness, and this stillness is the essence of who you really are. It is full and rich, permeated with the Love and Intelligence at the heart of Life.
- You can't try to find the five qualities. That just creates more struggle. Instead, you can get to know your clouds so they can thin, and the five qualities will reveal themselves.
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REMEMBERING Week 2

This week's Remembering Statement:

The meadow is here right now or _____ is here right now.

(Name one: flow, spaciousness, light, Love, stillness.)

Your own statement:

Remembering Session

This week we are exploring a powerful way to calm down the stories of struggle that make up the clouds in your mind. This way, it will become easier to reconnect with the five qualities of the meadow. You'll do this by the simple act of deepening your breath through focusing on the out-breath. If you are timing your session, allow about six minutes. If time is not an issue, stay with each step as long as your curiosity is engaged.

Let's begin:

* Close your eyes and dip the finger of your attention into the river of your experience, noticing what it is like to be you right now.

For at least three breaths, tighten your muscles on your in-breath and then very slowly relax everything on your out-breath as you say the great sound of letting go: *Abh!*

Bring your attention to the circle of your breath.

To deepen your out-breath, first imagine a lit candle floating in the air in front of you. Breathe in through your nostrils and then gently blow out through your mouth, imagining you are blowing out this candle. As you become comfortable with this rhythm, allow yourself to enjoy the deliciousness of a long, slow out-breath.

As you become comfortable with a longer out-breath, you can let go of the candle image and breathe in and out through your nostrils, continuing to enjoy a long, slow out-breath. Say silently to yourself on the rhythm of your breath, "In . . . out. Deep . . . slow." Stay with this circle of breath as long as it interests you.

Whenever you notice that you are no longer paying attention to the circle of your breath, no judgment. Simply bring your attention back.

For a few moments before you close, open your attention to include your whole body, and notice what is different now that you have given yourself the gift of your own attention.

When you are ready, open your eyes. ✧

Abbreviated Version

✧ Close your eyes and dip the finger of your attention into the river of your experience, noticing what it is like to be you right now.

For at least three in-breaths, tighten your muscles, and then very slowly relax everything on your out-breath as you say the great sound of letting go: *Ahh!*

Bring your attention to the circle of your breath.

Imagining there is a lit candle in front of you, breathe in through your nostrils, and then blow out the candle, enjoying a long, slow out-breath.

When you are ready, let go of the candle image and breathe in and out through your nostrils, as you say to yourself on the rhythm of your breath, “In . . . out. Deep . . . slow.”

When you notice that you are no longer paying attention to your breath, simply bring your attention back to it, with no judgment.

For a few moments at the end, open your attention to include your whole body, and notice what is different now that you have given yourself the gift of your own attention.

When you are ready, open your eyes. ✧