

SUFFERING IS OPTIONAL: A SPIRITUAL GUIDE TO FREEDOM FROM SELF-JUDGMENT AND FEELINGS OF INADEQUACY WORKBOOK

Just reading about the exciting possibility of being free of the identity of lack and inadequacy is not nearly enough. Here are the exercises, experiments, and reflections. I encourage you to work with them so you can untangle your own limiting identities. The more you actively engage with the ideas presented here, the more you'll melt into the truth of who you are. You get to know, without a doubt, that you are not the pained and diminished person your thoughts tell you that you are.

CHAPTER 1

DISCOVERING FREEDOM

Here are the four guiding principles and the five core practices that help you find freedom from self-judgment and inadequacy. Refer to them often and know that you can always apply them to your in-the-moment experience.

The four guiding principles:

1. The identity of “I am not enough” is made up of distorted thoughts that view the self, others, and the world through a lens that is limited and false.
2. No matter how real it seems, the identity of unworthiness is optional. You don't *have to* be defined by it.
3. You have control over shifting your attention to different parts of your experience.
4. There is more to your experience in any moment than your thoughts and feelings.

The five core practices:

1. Turning toward your experience
2. The safe haven of being aware
3. Losing interest in thoughts
4. Welcoming feelings
5. The sacred return

Open to Life

Here is your first journaling exercise. At the top of a blank page or on a blank screen, write “What do I really want?” Let that question come alive in you, then spend at least five minutes writing out whatever arises. In this exercise, you're starting to connect with the deepest part of you, which is already free.

CHAPTER 2

EXPLORING IDENTITY

Know Your Story

Reflect on these questions. Sit quietly and think about the answers or write about them as much as you'd like to.

- ☯ What conclusions did you draw about life from the experiences you had when you were young?
- ☯ Did you learn that you could trust others or were you left feeling insecure?
- ☯ How are you playing these messages about trust and lack of trust out in the world?
- ☯ Can you see that this way of being in the world was learned, that there was a time prior to all of these events when you existed without it?

Deeply Understanding the Separate Identity

Start becoming aware of how your conditioned patterns affect you with this journaling exercise. At the top of a page or on a blank screen, write a few words that describe one idea or belief about yourself that defines you or keeps recurring in your mind. Spend 10 minutes writing about how this self-definition limits you.

Can you find:

- ☯ Compulsive thinking?
- ☯ The story that's all about "I?"
- ☯ The tension that tells you something is wrong?
- ☯ The tendency to search outward into the world for what you think you're missing?
- ☯ The unconscious and automatic quality that defines conditioned habits?

Repeat this exercise for three more beliefs you hold about yourself.

Running from Your Experience

Get to know how you resist your experience. Complete these sentences with as many responses as come to you.

I believe I am...

I believe the world is...

I believe people are...

Holding onto these beliefs makes me...

I avoid what I'm feeling by...

The things I do too much are...

I avoid being still by...

I think too much when...

I go numb when...

CHAPTER 3

CORE PRACTICE #1: TURNING TOWARD YOUR EXPERIENCE

The Value of a Conscious Breath

Try a conscious breath right now. You'll naturally breathe more slowly and deeply than normal. Consciously expand your ribs in the front, sides, and back as you inhale, and let all the breath go as you exhale. Pay attention to the sensations in your body as you breathe. Now try it one more time...slowly and deeply.

Keep conscious breathing as a tool in your back pocket. It puts the brakes on your conditioned patterns and opens you to the experience available right now beyond any separate identity.

Openness

Let's experiment to get a taste of openness. First, close your eyes, and take a deep breath. Now, bring the experience of open space to your body. Imagine space permeating your muscles and flowing through your brain. Let space in to any tension you're experiencing.

As you breathe space everywhere, your shoulders drop, and your belly softens. Let the sense of yourself open beyond the boundary of your body.

Now, bring to mind a situation that feels stuck in your life. With this open brain and body, free of stuck beliefs, brainstorm new ways of responding.

Curiosity

Turning your attention toward your inner experience, be curious. Bring a sense of wonder to your questioning. Focus more on the questions without being so concerned about the answers.

- ☯ What is present right now?
- ☯ Letting go of labels and just experiencing it, what is it? How does it feel?

Don't answer these questions in your thoughts. Instead, just be with what you experience and notice what you feel. If you think anything, try, *Oh, it's this*, or *Oh, it's like this*.

Here are some more questions for your reflection:

- ☯ What am I actually experiencing right now?
- ☯ Can I be with these physical sensations without distracting from them?
- ☯ Can I make space for these emotions to be as they are?
- ☯ Can I let go of struggling right now and see things as they are?
- ☯ Are these thoughts actually true?
- ☯ Is there anything else that wants to be seen?

Kindness

Can you turn toward your inner experience right now and befriend what's here with the deepest acceptance and compassion? If you were to be infinitely kind to yourself, what three things would you do? Journal about your answers below.

Dedication

Complete these statements:

The way the conditioned identity of feeling inadequate and worthless affects me is...

The fire for freedom feels like...

If I were sincerely dedicated to finding peace, I would...

CHAPTER 4

CORE PRACTICE #2: THE SAFE HAVEN OF BEING AWARE

Moving Attention Around

Even though it may not feel like it, we always have control over where we place our attention, and this choice is monumental. Notice that instead of thinking, you can pay attention to sensations in your body, look at what's around you, or open to hearing sounds that maybe you haven't noticed before. Try moving your attention around right now.

I know that challenging thoughts will continue to grab your attention. But just for now, notice that it's possible to have a little control over where your attention goes. Be patient with yourself as you get used to having this choice.

Where Does Your Attention Go?

Notice where your attention goes. Without doing or changing anything, commit to taking a few hours to notice where your attention goes. Maybe set an alarm on your phone to go off every half hour, and when it rings, simply notice where your attention is. Are you thinking? What thoughts are you thinking? What stories are you telling yourself? What patterns of thinking do you notice? What emotions are you experiencing?

If you're like me, you may be very surprised by what you find.

Aware of Awareness

This is a three-part exercise. First, take a few conscious breaths with your attention on the sensations in your body as you inhale and exhale.

Now let go of focusing on the breath, and open up to all of your experience. Notice that objects (thoughts, feelings, and sensations) are arising, changing, and passing away.

Make a simple shift to bring your attention to the field of being aware that these objects are arising in. As this awareness, realize that you're awake, alive, and peaceful. You notice the objects, but they don't affect you. Be like the sky, vast and open, as clouds of thoughts and feelings move through.

Beyond Survival of the Human Body

Reflect on a time recently when you felt afraid or threatened. Recognize that:

- ☯ The limbic system in your brain perceived danger.
- ☯ Your nervous system automatically started firing to prepare you to fight or flee.
- ☯ The thinking processes were interpreting the situation to help you protect yourself.

Now, shift your attention to the safe haven of being aware. Just for a moment, let go of engaging with the threat, anxiety, and pressured thoughts. Have compassion for the fearful one who tries so hard to be safe. Recognize that you can notice these reactions while you're also peaceful and aware. Be this noticing presence.

CHAPTER 5

CORE PRACTICE #3: LOSING INTEREST IN THOUGHTS

Memories

Think of some recurring memories. Start playing with hearing them as a series of sounds that play in your head instead of statements of absolute truth that mean something important about you.

Now write down some of these memories as brief sentences. Look at the words and see the letters as shapes with no meaning attached.

Judgments and Opinions

Journal for a page or two on these questions:

☯ How do the judgments I hold about myself and others affect me?

☯ How do my opinions support or interfere with happiness?

Expectations

Come up with three expectations you commonly layer onto reality about what you wish, hope, or think will happen. These sentences might start with “I expect that...” or “I know that...” Write about these questions:

☯ How do these expectations resist what is?

☯ How does this resistance show up in your thoughts?

☯ What is the effect on your body?

Doubts

Next time you catch yourself going back and forth in doubt, ignore the thoughts for a moment and be quiet. You might immediately notice fear or contracted places in your body. And maybe you'll notice the quiet, confident voice of knowing that gets drowned out by the doubt. Notice that you don't *have to* feed the doubt.

Interpretations/Adding Meaning

Think of your life story as a movie script. Write down the main story lines. Then, for the person in the starring role—you—reflect on how the meaning you've given these stories affects how you view yourself, others, and various situations in your life. Consider that the stories, and the meanings you've given them, are all thoughts. If your stories stop defining you, what remains?

I-Thoughts

I-thoughts are so common that we don't realize how much they color our reality. Take a day to become aware of any thoughts that contain the word "I." Set your alarm to ring every hour, and when it goes off, reflect back to notice the I-thoughts. Here are some examples: *I need to get that done. It just started to rain—I wish it were sunny. It's too noisy for me. I don't think she approves of me.* If you're like me, you'll find this kind of commentary running almost nonstop.

How Thoughts Affect You

Now I'd like you to be super honest about how these thoughts impact you. Make a list of the thoughts that bring you pain and suffering. Take your time with this, and be as thorough as you can. Look for memories, judgments, opinions, expectations, doubts, labels, stories, wants, and needs. Your clue will be any thought that somehow refers to you as a personal "I." Now, let yourself feel how these thoughts affect you. What are the consequences for you, other people, and how you handle situations?

Play with viewing these thoughts as a series of sounds without any meaning. They're mental noise. To help with this, pretend the sounds are appearing in a language you can't understand. Are these sounds you—or are they objects that come and go in the space of being aware?

Inquiring Into Thoughts

Bring to mind a single thought that grabs your attention and disturbs you. Go through these inquiry questions one by one to dismantle its power over you.

- 🌀 What is this thought? How did it appear? What is it exactly? (Remember that a thought is made up of sounds that you've learned have a certain meaning.)
- 🌀 Do I need this thought? Is it essential?
- 🌀 Does it serve me or anyone else? Is it helpful or useful?
- 🌀 Is the content of this thought agitating, neutral, or relaxing?
- 🌀 Can I lose interest in the content of this thought?

And try these:

- 🌀 What is most alive in me right now?
- 🌀 What can I surrender right now that isn't serving?
- 🌀 How does life want to move me?
- 🌀 What false beliefs am I taking to be true?
- 🌀 What am I avoiding that wants to be welcomed?
- 🌀 Can I stop, breathe, and simply be aware?
- 🌀 Who or what am I?

Be innocent, like a child, and surprised at what you discover.

The End of the Mind-Driven Life

Try out these experiments to get a taste of the end of the mind-driven life.

- ☯ Set aside an hour or half a day when you have no plan for how to spend the time. Sit quietly, and listen. Don't know what's going to happen, if anything. Let yourself be surprised by how you're moved.
- ☯ Go to the grocery store with no idea about what you'll purchase. Buy items only when you feel an inner Yes.
- ☯ Next time you're deciding among different options, stop, let go of thinking, open to the space of aware presence, and listen patiently for what comes.

CHAPTER 6

CORE PRACTICE #4: WELCOMING FEELINGS

How to Welcome Feelings

Here's how to practice welcoming feelings. Right after you read this, close your eyes. First, focus on your breath for a few inhales and exhales, then let yourself be the welcoming space for whatever sensations are appearing. Even if the sensations are very strong, let them be free to be here in whatever way they want to. And be so receptive that subtle sensations receive the invitation that they're welcomed in conscious awareness. If you notice that you're judging your experience or you want it to change, welcome these tendencies as well. Continue welcoming sensations as long as you'd like to until you feel the movement to open your eyes.

Adding in Context

Think of an emotion that arises frequently in you. Reflect within, and see if you can give this emotion an age, by simply asking, “How old are you?” Now practice welcoming the emotion with this added context.

Conscious Breathing

Close your eyes and put your attention on the sensations of breathing as you inhale and exhale. Exhale completely, then from your low belly, feel the ribs expand around your whole body as you inhale to fill your lungs with breath, then take your time to exhale. Make your exhale a little longer than your inhale. Inhale to a count of four or five, then exhale to a count of six or seven. If it feels helpful, place one hand on your heart and one on your belly and take normal breaths in between each deep breath. There's no rush, so take your time with this.

Only if you feel ready, see where the breath can take you. Play with letting go of paying attention to the breath and become aware of any other physical sensations that might be present. Stay there for a few seconds, or longer if it feels okay. If this is scary for you, go back to focusing on the breath.

Physical Soothing

Feelings can sometimes be too distressing to meet directly. When they are, give yourself some physical care. Hug yourself, or stroke your arm, neck, head, face, or shoulders. Focus on the physical sensations that occur as you do this. And you might even add some calming statements, such as “You’ll get through this,” or “You’re okay.”

Now it’s your turn to try it in your own unique way. What areas of your body are asking for physical soothing?

Grounding in Your Environment

When emotion overtakes you, start naming what you're perceiving through your senses—the air on my skin, birds chirping, trees moving in the wind, a table and chairs, and so on.

Or stand up and feel your feet firmly on the earth. Then take some conscious breaths or place your hands on your heart and belly and feel the connection with yourself. Notice what's coming in through your senses. Slowly name what you see, hear, taste, smell, or touch.

Orienting to Your Heart's Desire

Once you're aware that you're in a moment of turmoil, reflect on what you really want for this moment. How do you want this moment to be? Repeat whatever words resonate for you like a prayer—peace, calm, relaxation, steadiness, stillness.

How You Resist Feelings

Make a list of the reasons why you resist turning toward your feelings. With great kindness, go through each one and let it be present in you. Instead of going with the movement to resist, you're welcoming it. It's okay to feel scared as you explore feelings.

CHAPTER 7

CORE PRACTICE #5: THE SACRED RETURN

What Is Real?

Think of a recent time when you experienced an unpleasant emotional reaction. Go through the first four core practices, applying them to this experience. Now play with settling your attention in the field of awareness in which objects arise. Close your eyes and don't think about or look for anything. Just be—open to the pure aliveness that's here, the sense of peace that comes from being one with what is.

Your imagination may help you. Imagine what it would be like to have no sense of separation with anything. You're not contracted into a body—the essence of who you are is everywhere.

The Shift from Doing to Being

Think of a situation that triggers you, and find the sense of lack or fear that drives you. Feel into the personal doer who wants to control and fix the situation. Now imagine coming from pure being that is already whole and needs nothing. You're just here as openness, with no fear, lack, need, or agenda. The moment feels so fresh! Reflect on these questions.

- ☯ How do you look at the situation now?
- ☯ How do you experience your body and mind?
- ☯ How do you experience the other people involved?
- ☯ What do you feel moved to do or say from this loving place free of conditioning?

Reality Is Beyond Time and Space

Go out into nature, and find a place to sit quietly. Choose one object and contemplate it deeply.

- ☯ Realize that in this moment, there is no past or future.
- ☯ See this object as a temporary expression of the life force, the source of all things, including yourself.
- ☯ See through the form of the object and contact its source—the luminous nature of pure awareness shining through it.
- ☯ Feel the sense of nonseparation.

Perfectly Natural

At the end of a day, take some time to reflect on the things you did. You got out of bed, took a shower, put on some clothes, ate breakfast, drove to work, and so on. As you look back on the day, notice how many things happened without your mind being involved. Even if the mind produced a running commentary, these actions would still have happened whether or not you were thinking.

Reflect on the fact that there is a flow to life that unfolds without the intervention of your personal sense of self.

Now go outside and take a look at a tree. Realize that without any effort of any kind, the seed sprouted, leaves grew, and the tree is here moving in the wind.

Contemplate that there is a perfectly natural way that life unfolds that has very little to do with the content of our minds. Take out a piece of paper and write about this question: How can I get out of the way of this unfolding and let it happen?

Empty and Full

Journal about these questions:

☯ What am I attached to?

☯ What are the sticky parts of my personal self?

☯ What would it be like to release those attachments and be empty?

Without those attachments, what remains? Feel the pulse of life in this now moment.

Revisiting the Guiding Principles and Core Practices

Think of a way that your beliefs about yourself and others distract you from being happy. Realizing you're in a moment where you're believing limited thoughts about yourself, stop and take a breath. Then:

- ☯ Turn toward your experience with openness, curiosity, self-compassion, and the dedication to know what's true.
- ☯ Center your attention in the space of being aware, noticing the thoughts and feelings that make you suffer.
- ☯ Lose interest in the content of thoughts.
- ☯ Lovingly welcome any physical sensations that are present.
- ☯ Now you are poised to discover the vast space beyond thought that is stable, alive, unmoving, and completely at peace with itself.

Living the Qualities of Being

Be on the lookout for these naturally-occurring qualities of awakened consciousness.

- ☯ Peace
- ☯ Happiness
- ☯ Wonder
- ☯ Intelligence
- ☯ Gratitude and appreciation
- ☯ Enthusiasm

When you experience these qualities, look beyond the object or situation that seems to have triggered them and be fully alive in your in-the-moment experience. Relax into a taste of your true nature.

CHAPTER 8

A FRESH RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PAST

Trust and Your Early Life Experiences

For this exercise, I'm asking you to reflect on your early experiences in life. Some of us had a tough go of it, so be gentle with yourself, and if this exercise feels like too much, please skip it.

Take your time with these questions, and revisit them as often as you like. Feel free to write your reflections in a journal. Looking back at your first relationships,

- ☯ What did they feel like?

- ☯ Were they reliable and secure?

- ☯ Were there any breaks in trust, where you somehow learned that you couldn't rely on others for comfort and support?

- ☯ How did your parents respond to you when you were sad or afraid?

- ☯ From these experiences, what did you learn about yourself, others, and the world?

Now, as an adult,

- ☯ How have these relationships affected you?

- ☯ What patterns were laid down in these early relationships that bring you suffering now?

- ☯ What relationship do you have with your own emotions?

Applying the Principles and Practices

Refer to your journaling from the last reflection. Take one familiar reaction that developed in your childhood that still brings suffering. Consider it in terms of the four guiding principles:

1. You're veiled by thoughts that are distorted and false.
2. Believing these thoughts is optional.
3. You don't have to be locked into this way of thinking. You can shift your attention to different parts of your experience.
4. You can explore your experience beyond your thoughts and feelings.

And apply the five core practices:

1. Turn toward your experience with openness, curiosity, kindness, and dedication.
2. Meet it from the safe haven of aware presence.
3. Lose interest in the content of these limiting thoughts.
4. Welcome feelings and sensations with love and acceptance.
5. The separate identity dissolves as you experience the sacred return to pure awareness. Enjoy your natural self, relaxed, still, and free of conditioning.

Dynamics in Your Relationships

Coming from a place of compassion and clear seeing, let's get curious about what you bring to the dynamics in your relationships, especially when they don't feel harmonious and peaceful. Take your time completing the following statements.

I want people to...

When I think of connecting with people, I feel...

I'm most relaxed with people when...

I feel most anxious around people when...

In relationships, I'm usually...

I feel I don't matter when...

I get angry at people when...

I withdraw from people when...

I seek out people when...

Find the patterns you play out, and bring them to the guiding principles and core practices. Be open to any discoveries that appear.

Identifying as the Victim

Just as an experiment, play with losing interest in the victim story. Become aware of the thoughts that support it and how you feel when you think these thoughts. Use these inquiry questions.

🌀 What is this thought? How did it appear? What is it exactly? (Remember that a thought is made up of sounds that you've learned have a certain meaning.)

🌀 Do I need this thought? Is it essential?

🌀 Does it serve me or anyone else? Is it helpful or useful?

☯ Is the content of this thought agitating, neutral, or relaxing?

☯ Can I lose interest in the content of this thought?

Now are you ready to meet the feelings you've been avoiding? With great compassion, turn toward your feelings. Be the welcoming space that allows them all to come to the light of conscious awareness. Giving up the victim story paves the way for resolution, space, and peace.

Blame and Resentment

If you blame others as the cause of your suffering, contemplate that this viewpoint leaves you believing you lack what you need to be at peace.

What if you instead turned your loving attention to embrace your own experience? With openness in your mind and body, bring your experience to the four guiding principles and five core practices. What insights do you realize? How do you see things differently from the perspective of awakened awareness? What remains in you that is asking for loving attention?

Do You Need to Forgive?

These stories of being wronged hold on tightly and moving past them can take time. Whenever they appear and you feel caught, don't feed them with your attention. Instead, do something to shift your experience.

☯ Stop

☯ Open

☯ Breathe

☯ Notice

☯ Explore

☯ Welcome

☯ Befriend

☯ Accept

☯ Embrace

☯ Be

CHAPTER 9

THE PAIN OF TAKING THINGS PERSONALLY

Self-Betrayal

Contemplate self-betrayal. Before you get out your journal, take a moment to close your eyes and find kindness and acceptance within. Write continuously for at least three minutes. Here's your question. *How do I betray myself?*

Then write about this question. *What situations trigger self-betrayal?*

Sit quietly and reflect on what you've discovered. What would it be like to trust yourself?

How Relationships Are Affected

Take some time to reflect:

☯ How do you protect yourself from being rejected or abandoned?

☯ How do you relate to others when you feel wounded by their actions?

Bring each of these expressions of the separate self to the guiding principles and core practices. Putting these tendencies aside, brainstorm fresh ways you might show up in your relationships.

Muting Your Zest for Life

Here are more questions for contemplation or journaling:

- ☯ How has taking things personally affected your life? What impact has it had on your relationships? Your career? The way you spend your time? Any other effects?

- ☯ If you didn't believe the conclusions you've drawn about yourself and you return to your natural innocence, what would you do? How would you express yourself in the world? What are you enthusiastic about? Let yourself be surprised by what you discover.

The Promise: Not Taking Things Personally

Refer to your responses to the reflections you did earlier. Choose one or two ways that you take things personally. Bring to that identity the four guiding principles and five core practices.

Take your time and keep this process real. Experience it not in your mind, but fully alive in all of your being.

Know What You Can and Can't Control

Reflect on what you can and can't control with this journaling exercise. Write at least a page on this question: What have I been doing to try to fix the hurt that I feel? Write freely without stopping to think as you go.

Look back on what you've written. Which actions are focused on things you can't control? On things you can control?

From a place of clear seeing and intelligence, make a list of at least five things you *can* do to move through hurt feelings. These support you to shed the self-identities that diminish your happiness, leaving space for the simple joy of fully living now.

Untangle the Story

Spend some time reflecting on these questions. Look at the facts of the stories you hold onto from your past that make you feel personally wounded or at fault.

- ☯ What facts have you ignored?
- ☯ What interpretations are you living under that aren't true? Consider that you may have misinterpreted others' actions. Go to the facts instead.
- ☯ Look at the situation from everyone's point of view.

If you're having trouble seeing things objectively, don't hesitate to ask a trusted friend to help you or consult with a counselor in your local area.

Uncover Hidden Beliefs

Think of a situation that troubles you, and find the beliefs at the core of your suffering. Picture the scene in your mind of what it's like to hold onto each belief and feel the effects in your body. Then picture and feel how things would be for you if you let go.

Notice that I'm not asking you to let go. Just feel into the possibility of not having this belief affect you.

Navigate with Care in Relationships

Here is something for you to experiment with that I do often. Go to a public place such as a café or mall. Sit for a few moments, finding the space of pure being beyond your personal self. Be empty and transparent. Look around you and take in each person as an expression of the one consciousness. Let your heart open endlessly to everyone.

Then bring this same openness and insight to your close relationships.

CHAPTER 10

LIVING THE AWAKENED LIFE

The Fear Body

Experiment with this practice when you feel afraid, tense, or anxious. Sit quietly and take three to five slow, conscious breaths. Inhale and exhale in a rhythm that feels natural to you.

Return to normal breathing, and shift to being the still and silent awareness. From here, you are now knowingly aligned with the welcoming presence that allows all physical sensations just to be.

Since there's no goal to achieve, there's no defined endpoint to this practice. Stay with it for as long as it feels right, then move on to the next thing. Any time you're feeling anxious, you can breathe and open to whatever sensations are present.

The Fear Mind

Reflect on how fear affects your thinking. Take out four blank pages. On the first one write, “How I Worry,” on the second, “How I say ‘No, I Can’t,’” on the third, “How I Doubt Myself,” and on the fourth, “How I Experience Dread.”

Take a few of the statements you’ve written that you think are true about yourself, and bring them to the understanding of the guiding principles and the wisdom of the core practices listed in the appendix. Keep returning your attention to the pure field of awareness. Notice here you’re free because it’s empty of any personal concerns or limiting ways of thinking about yourself.

The Sacred Return from Fear

Here are some questions for you to contemplate.

- ☯ What negative outcomes or results do you assume will happen? Experiment with saying, “I don’t know what will happen.” Take your time and feel the experience of not knowing in your mind and body.
- ☯ What natural impulses or movements want to be expressed in you that you’ve been suppressing? What actions would you be willing to take to express them?
- ☯ What would it be like to embody peace, openness, and enthusiasm for what is appearing in the moment?
- ☯ Try this: close your eyes, and open them as if you’re seeing whatever is in front of you for the first time with no memory or history.

The Art of Asking Questions

Sit quietly, and take a few conscious breaths. Then introduce any of these questions. Read them slowly, pausing after each one.

- ☯ What is most alive in me right now?
- ☯ What can I surrender right now that isn't serving?
- ☯ What false beliefs am I taking to be true?
- ☯ What am I avoiding that is asking for my attention?
- ☯ Can I say "Yes!" to what's happening right now?
- ☯ Can I welcome what's happening in my body right now?
- ☯ What is life asking of me?
- ☯ Can I stop, breathe, and simply be aware?
- ☯ Who or what am I?
- ☯ Can I open to what is here right now?
- ☯ Where is my attention going? Is this supporting peace?
- ☯ How can I be more aligned with what I really want?
- ☯ Instead of fear driving you, ask, "What would love do?" or "How does life want to move me right now?"
- ☯ How can I bring kindness to this moment?
- ☯ How can I bring ease to my experience in this moment?

Tap into the Inner Coach

Is there an inner coach wanting to steer you toward the deepest truth? See if there is a helpful phrase that arises naturally in support of awakening from the spell of unworthiness. And if nothing appears, let this one go, and see what other forms of guidance spark your interest.

Surrender

Imagine bundling up everything personal to you into a lovely gilded box. What do you put into the box? Fears, expectations, judgments, memories, self-criticisms, and ideas about what is and isn't okay. Add in your familiar life stories and their associated emotions. Honor all of it for its attempts to help you function—and realize the wisdom of removing it as the filter through which you view yourself and the world.

Put the box away into safe storage as you surrender everything to do with your personal self. Where does that leave you? What do you notice?

Now bring the box back and open the lid. You can reactivate the personal filter of emotions, defenses, identities, and needs—or rest consciously as the clear, open space of aware presence. What do you choose?

Turn Toward Qualities of Awakened Awareness

Why not consciously turn toward these already-existing manifestations of awakened awareness? You know them as moments of unbridled joy, free flowing heart connection with no barriers, laughing uncontrollably, or being immersed in the flow of an enjoyable experience. In these moments, although we may not notice it, the commentary of the mind stops, and we experience ourselves as inseparable from whatever is arising. There is just the all-encompassing reality of what's here, and no separate person who is doing anything or making anything happen.

All conditioning falls away, and there is direct experiencing of the expressions of pure consciousness. It's a delightful way to live!

The Fire for Awakening

Contemplate the power of making a commitment to the freedom you really want.

Commit fully to who you are beyond all stories, and see what wonders are set in motion in your precious life.