

## CHAPTER FIVE | THE GREAT LIBERATION

*Come to the edge  
We can't we are afraid  
Come to the edge  
We can't, we will fall  
Come to the edge  
They came  
And he pushed them  
And they flew!*  
— Guillaume Apollinaire

Sometimes we need a push to break away from the insecurity of our fabricated self and experience our own exquisite power. Why does insecurity have such a hold? Are we afraid of achieving our highest potential? So it seems.

The following quote by Marianne Williamson has been attributed to Nelson Mandela to the extent it has become an urban legend; its enlightened plea an anthem for humankind to challenge these fears, to liberate our self and others:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be

brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightening about shrinking so that other people won't feel unsure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.<sup>30</sup>

As we continue to explore ways to rekindle our light, we keep in mind this journey is both thrilling and frightening. For too long, we have been condensing life into thought. Rather than living awake and aware, with intentionality, we have found comfort and solace in intellectualizing, dramatizing and *awfulizing* — based on a lifetime of well-rehearsed, ego-driven scripts. The familiarity of these scripts binds us to mediocrity, repeating the same stories over and over again. When we give up these scripts, we get scared. Are you ready for that push off the edge?

### **Beyond Fear**

*Whether you think you can or can't, you are right.*

—Henry Ford

Why is it we feel discontented, constantly looking for diversions or excitement, ways to fill the void, objects or people to make us whole? Is it fear? If so, what are we afraid of: failure or success, rejection or acceptance, judgment or obscurity? Are we afraid of finding or not finding a partner? What about the fear of aging: wrinkles, physical infirmaries,

mental incompetence, death? Do we worry about reaching the end of our lives without a sense of purpose?

What might it look like if we got beyond our fear? Have you ever experienced the liberation of doing something so pure, invigorating and natural, you felt transformed? If so, you realize what it's like to act from love, where nothing holds us back and causes us to second-guess ourselves. These are the times when we jump off the proverbial edge, knowing we are connected to the Source.

### *Discussion*

Bonner: *Let's talk about why we call this chapter 'The Great Liberation.'*

Kathleen: *One of my deepest fears is I am powerful beyond measure. In the first four chapters we looked at where we are and how we got here. What we haven't faced yet is why we deliberately hide behind our self-imposed or other-imposed 'norms.' Are we afraid to rekindle our own light? What would life be like if we unshackle ourselves from our ego fear and experience what must be The Great Liberation?*

Bonner: *Since fear is a defining emotion for many of us, what do you see as the antidote of fear?*

Kathleen: *Before we talk about antidotes, it's important to distinguish between 'being in fear' and 'detecting danger.' We are equipped with an innate radar system to detect danger, which signals our flight or fight response to avoid harm. We must pay attention to these signals.*

*But, 'being in fear' is a mental and emotional habit that immobilizes us, keeps us from expanding our*

*boundaries, exploring the world or otherwise moving forward with decisive, love-based action. To me, love is the antidote of fear. When I act from love, I am not afraid — I have courage to move toward truth.*

*Bonner: How does being in fear affect our outlook and actions?*

*Kathleen: In fear, we are ridiculously myopic. In fact, I sometimes entertain myself by replaying fear-based reactions in my mind because they are so 'cloak and dagger' fantastical! Fear takes us out of the moment and pulls us into a swirling vortex of anxiety fueled by imagination — radically diminishing or disguising our options and sabotaging our efforts to co-create our lives.*

*Bonner: You sometimes refer to Divine Intelligence. Is there a Master Plan?*

*Kathleen: Divine Intelligence is interchangeable with the Source, God, Spirit, Ultimate Reality – all terms used to express the spiritual essence of one's true nature. Part of this essence involves an individuated volitional power to co-create our lives. If there is a Master Plan, I'm sure it includes this creative power to influence the quality of our experience. As we said earlier, whether we access Source power or not, we are all co-creating our experience every day.*

*Bonner: What catalyst moved you toward your personal liberation?*

*Kathleen: I've had many small awakenings in my life. These moments have led me inexorably — albeit slowly, incrementally — to liberation. For most of us,*

*The Great Liberation is gained over many years and opportunities to free ourselves of self-imposed and other-imposed burdens. My most dramatic liberation occurred about six years ago. In this chapter's story box, The Outlier, I share experiences that highlight the profound healing power of the universe.*

*Bonner: Are you willing to share more of the fears you wrestle?*

*Kathleen: I mentioned my mother-lode fear of being powerful beyond measure. Another life-long struggle is my fear of emotional intimacy. As you know, I had the pleasure of sitting with a Buddhist-trained spiritual leader in a number of satsangs and individual sessions over a one-year period. During one of our individual sessions, he suggested my relationship with you was being lived out in my head. I laughed so hard I cried and immediately asked you to examine this with me. Of course, he was right. I, like so many others, 'live out' relationships in my head, imagining the truth. My fiction was telling myself my male partners were afraid of intimacy — not me. What I discovered was my own fear kept me from opening up. I was 'protecting' my heart by all the thoughty<sup>31</sup> mind-driven exchanges necessary to perpetuate this fairy tale. As you know, I am much better at living 'out loud' these days, risking intimacy.*

*What about the fears you wrestle?*

*Bonner: I began my spiritual journey so late that one of my greatest fears is I won't have time to fully explore life awake and aware. Of course this makes no sense when I consider my infinite, timeless nature. Writing*

*this book looms as a new fear! I continue to scare myself each time I sit down to compose, edit or critique our collective work; I am infected by self doubt and ask myself who am I to presume I have something worthy to say? Ah, my ego. Each time I jump off this cliff, contribute my work and realize I didn't crash land, I'm liberated to take the next step and the next.*

*Bonner: Having known you for some time now, I think one of your strengths is your awareness. What role does awareness play in gaining a sense of liberation?*

*Kathleen: In my growing awareness, I can no longer ignore myself, play small or hide behind the many fabricated stories about who I am. I struggled with this at first because I quite enjoy my fanciful and imaginative head-trips, my refuge in many storms. What I'm discovering is once we become aware, it's very hard to pretend. Authenticity is the liberator.*

*Bonner: If we co-create our reality, can we co-create our liberty?*

*Kathleen: I think we reclaim our liberty. Letting go of our fear and insecurities helps us rediscover our authenticity and connection to the Source.*

*Bonner: We've talked about the 'perfection' of humankind while at the same time suggesting each of us is 'flawed and fragile.' How do you reconcile these two observations?*

*Kathleen: I think we are perfectly imperfect! Our spiritual self — our oneness with the Source, God, Allah — is perfect. And, because we have the volitional power to co-create our lives, we make choices. If we*

*give up our volitional power to ego-driven drama and fear, we experience life as flawed and fragile beings. If we choose to access Source power and manifest love, we move toward order, balance and harmony. Both outcomes depend on choices we make. As evolutionary beings, both lead to new experiences and awareness.*

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Great leaders and wisdom masters have long recognized the power of overcoming fear and uncertainty as a way to liberate our self, to reach our highest potential.

In his first inaugural address in 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt spoke of the Great Depression and rallied the nation by saying, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” He understood a country paralyzed by fear would not be able to pull itself up. Through this awareness, he helped mobilize a nation.

In his book *Power vs. Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior*, David R. Hawkins, M.D., Ph.D. discusses the influence of fear on wellness and the disease process, stating:

In spontaneous recovery, there’s frequently a marked increase in the capacity to love and the awareness of love as a healing factor.... Recovery from any disease process is dependent on willingness to explore new ways of looking at one’s self and life, which includes the capacity to endure inner fears when belief systems are shaken.<sup>32</sup>

What if we moved beyond our fear and tapped into the Source? How would this change our perspective, our experience, our capacity to reach our highest potential? Is it enough to think we can?

## *The Outlier*

*About nine years ago, I woke up with a horrible pain in my shoulder after playing three rounds of golf that weekend. Within a few days, the pain became worse and migrated to both my wrists and hands. After a number of visits to different specialists and a series of diagnostics, I was referred to a Rheumatologist who diagnosed my condition as Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). By the time I was seen, I had lost significant flexibility in my wrists and strength in my hands. It took both hands for me to turn the key in my ignition or turn a standard doorknob. I used a side-body push to open swinging doors. I was exhausted most of the time and my business travel became a hardship. My body seemed to be collapsing in on its self. We tried many different pharmaceuticals, including steroids. Nothing seemed to help.*

*Three months later, on my way home from work, I could almost taste the bitterness and dread of getting home and having to turn off the ignition and open the back door. I felt victimized, succumbing to pain and fear. Just then, I caught my eyes in the rear view mirror and saw a fragile, crippled woman I did not recognize. From a place deep within my being, I said, 'Screw this! I am NOT a victim and I am NOT going to live in fear.' After this, I took charge of my care and began to assert my power, connecting to the Source and banishing fear. The results were almost immediate. My Rheumatologist is still baffled, unable to explain why I continue to test positive for RA but have no symptoms of this unforgiving disease. He tells me to continue doing whatever I am doing.*

*During a trip to New York with two friends, we walked 7 to 10 miles per day, reminiscing about our friendships. One, a medical doctor, has known me for almost 30 years. She said she always has a hard time describing me to her professional colleagues. When I asked why, she said I am what they call 'an outlier' — someone who recovers from progressive, chronic, disabling diseases and rebounds from surgeries without any scientific medical explanation. She tells her colleagues it's as if I am able to heal myself.*

*Does this reflect my capacity to endure inner fears when belief systems are shaken? Did my willingness and determination to explore new ways of looking at my self and my life contribute to my changed reality? Is this one of the mysteries, or are we able to access the Source to co-create our experience and heal our self?*

—Kathleen

Once we begin to recondition the ego, discard our fabricated self and access the Source, we will no longer be able to play small and pretend. This is the cost of awareness. When we liberate ourselves from fear, we take on the prodigious responsibility of achieving our highest potential.

To be sure, our highest potential does not equate to a singular purpose. We know many people who have been frustrated by the popular myth of 'finding one's purpose' — discovering a vocation, avocation or public service specifically intended for their life on Earth. Although some people think they have found their purpose, we believe each of us is capable of multi-purposes and achievements far beyond our ego-limited imagination. Some of us may choose to specialize in one area of work or service; however, many

of us are generalists with a wide range of interests, abilities and knowledge. In our exploration, we find job satisfaction has more to do with the love we manifest in our work than the work itself. Whether you earn your living as a rock star or stonemason, what you do is not who you are.

As one consciousness, we believe all knowledge that was or ever will be exists within us all. When we begin to access Source power and co-create our lives through intention, we open ourselves to the higher vibration levels of Divine Intelligence, pure consciousness and pure love. It is then when we discover we are powerful beyond measure and any perceived limitations were solely of our making.

### **The Unpossessed**

*Many of us lust after some possession, only to feel a nagging emptiness once we attain it. We try to ignore this emptiness, thinking that the next object will somehow fill us. But it never does.*<sup>33</sup>

—Wayne Teasdale

In the Prologue, we talked about ancient people who saw themselves as *inhabitants* of the world rather than *inheritors* and suggested the fundamental difference between these two concepts is far reaching, affecting the development of social and cultural structures for the past 10,000 years. Ownership of real, intellectual or artistic property and other possessions may create civil order; however, the possession of property has also been the source of wars, mayhem and crime. In our discussion of liberation from possessions, it is not to undo centuries of property law, but to free ourselves from our *attachment* to property and possessions.

When Janis Joplin sang, "...freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose," she suggested a seminal truth that freedom requires we liberate ourselves from our attachment to possessions. This is not to propose we take a vow of poverty to attain spiritual awareness; property and possessions are an integral part of our society. But, rather, to consider how our attachment to property and possessions has the effect of holding us hostage to living life at ordinary levels of consciousness.

Throughout history, there are a number of references to ancient people who considered themselves stewards of nature's abundance and cultural treasures. Stewardship is about taking care of entrusted gifts. Although indigenous people and Buddhists seem to be best known for their sense of being inhabitants rather than inheritors of the Earth, many religions teach the importance of stewardship in protecting our precious resources.

Embracing the idea of stewardship rather than ownership is a liberating experience. For many of us, money, possessions and the trappings that accompany wealth or poverty<sup>34</sup> somehow begin to define our life and misdirect our energy. Then, when we attempt to build relationships around the accumulation or absence of stuff, we learn very quickly the cost, energy and attention to material things does not produce the desired results. Financial stress is typically one of the top three reasons offered for the dissolution of relationships. The other two are sexual relations and family relations. Isn't it odd financial stress is right up there with the more complex, contentious human aspects of relating?

In the movie *Fight Club*, the character Tyler Durden, played by Brad Pitt, says to Cornelius, played by Edward Norton, "What you own ends up owning you." Beyond the financial

burden, beyond the occupied space, beyond the maintenance and repairs, beyond the insurable risks, there is a cost when our self-image or self-worth is appropriated to our ownership status.

When we let go of our attachment to possessions, we change our mindset. We are no longer defined by what we own, where we live, or the composition of our kitchen counters. We begin to choose well and act as stewards. When we make this shift, we begin to liberate ourselves from unhealthy attachments — become more attuned to who we are, what we want in our lives, and consciously decide how much energy we are willing to give inanimate objects. With this awareness, we will no longer appropriate our self-image to stuff. Imagine the sense of liberation. It's like losing thousands of pounds!

### **Losing the Joneses**

One of the more pathological aspects of attachment to possessions is the mythological practice of keeping up with the Joneses. Driven by ego's effort to encourage competition, many of us have had the experience of striving to attain possessions and improve our status or social standing. Some who are taming their egos say the risk here is almost like checking out of 'life' as we know it!

#### *A Progeny Story*

#### *Falling Apart or Falling in Place?*<sup>35</sup>

*Taming the ego is equivalent to checking out of life — at least the life I lived before I became aware of my ego. The jolt from blindly operating through the ego to more consciously making choices has had an immediate and profound impact on my life.*

*Early in my efforts, there were times when making choices without the support of my ego felt like a unique form of depression. In spite of feelings of happiness, gratitude and joy, I began to sense I had little in common with people I had interacted with for years. Conversations about new things, bragging about our kids, competing on the tennis courts or speculating on recent gossip held little appeal. I no longer cared about keeping up with the 'Joneses,' managing a team at work or maintaining a string of engagements on my social calendar.*

*The best analogy to describe the internal change of taming my ego is moving a car from the fast lane to the slow lane while driving down a highway. Although the car is still moving at about the same speed I enjoy the journey instead of trying to stay ahead of traffic, as if I was competing for a pole-car position at the Indy!*

*This change has not been easy. Taming the ego takes a lot of work and effort. On a daily basis I remind myself (via 'self talk') of my true essence versus my ego. Looking back over the years, it is when I listened to my ego that I traveled down the wrong path, got myself into trouble or landed in situations that provided no joy or satisfaction. Letting go of the ego has also led to moments when I thought my life was falling apart, but soon realized it was falling in place. These outcomes may not have been what I envisioned or intended at the time, but I'm sure they are what my true self wanted and needed all along. I am just now beginning to experience a sense of liberation.*

—Kirsten McLean

Losing the Joneses is liberating, and as Kirsten suggests, it also signals a transition to a different way of being in the world, of connecting with others and choosing how we spend our time and energy. The transition is sometimes unsettling; however, we find the resiliency of spirit and power of love helps us create favorable conditions to retain old friendships and connections in our growing awareness.

### **Good Vibrations**

The Beach Boys sang about ‘good vibrations,’ and we have all had the sensation of what we might describe as positive or negative energy. This experience can be as simple as walking into a funeral home and feeling the energy of grief or sitting in the bleachers while fans explode with cheers when the hometown team hits the winning run. We feel these vibrations in our self when we are depressed or excited. Like a battery, we talk about feeling energized or depleted.

In Chapter One we observed that the cosmos, including the intricate realms of the sub-atomic world, consists of energy. We are *bundles of energy* and we resonate energetically with one another and our environment. Over the years, there has been significant research by scientists, clinicians, alternative therapists and environmentalists who look at the effects of energetic force on behavior, health, and the habitability of this planet. In more recent history, studies have also included the effect of technology on the planet and the life it supports.

As reported in his book *Power vs. Force*, Dr. Hawkins’ interest in this subject was inspired by a number of awakenings in his youth, including a near death experience that led to what he described as:

... a transformation of such enormity had taken place that I was struck dumb with awe. The person I had been no longer existed. There was no personal self or ego left — just an Infinite Presence of such unlimited power that it was all that was.<sup>36</sup>

In his studies, Dr. Hawkins explored the energetic influence of different levels of behavior and awareness. Using the science of kinesiology,<sup>37</sup> he developed a method to measure the energetic levels of spiritual evolution. For example, he attributes an energy level of 20 to feelings of Shame, 100 to Fear, 250 to Neutrality, 500 to Love and 700–1000 to Enlightenment — with each new ‘awareness’ resonating at higher vibration levels. Dr. Hawkins supports this fascinating study by scientific validation; however, he captures many of his findings in the following simple quote:

We are life. It’s a scientific fact that ‘what is good for you is good for me.’ Simple kindness to one’s self and all that lives is the most transformational force of all.<sup>38</sup>

Our life force is the energetic projection of who we are. The more we embrace and promote our true selves in our actions and dealings with others, the more our vibrating energy aligns with the Source. Who we are and how we project ourselves becomes synchronized. This is harmony.

### **Embracing Our Oneness**

*Disciplined practice is essential to the spiritual life; yet spiritual attainment is not the result of one’s own efforts, but the result of the experience of oneness (unity) with Ultimate Reality.*

—8th Guideline<sup>39</sup>

Once we begin to see beyond the ego version of self, we move to the edge and glimpse the reflection of Ultimate Reality and light. This recognition of our oneness with all living things allows us to surrender, unafraid, to our true self. This is the experience Apollinaire describes in his poem. When we come to the edge, we prepare ourselves for flight to a higher vibratory level and expression of self. We are one with the Source. Here, we discover our power and beauty is the manifestation of our love and not the mastery of our work.

“Is there a way to explain the purpose of hawks gracing the sky with perfect pirouettes; the softness of a cat in quiet repose; or the timbre of aspen leaves chiming the wind?”<sup>40</sup> When we embrace our oneness, we embrace the love, splendor and mystical expansiveness of the universe. We are not alone because we are not separate.

*... what transforms us is not what we do but our integration with what is. What we do in the way of our spiritual effort, our habits of prayer, meditation, compassion, and love are all important; but the cause of change is the inner mystical process of union with the source. That, and that alone, is what brings about inner change and carries us into the everlasting roots of our expanded identity with the divine.*<sup>41</sup>

—Wayne Teasdale

### **Celebrating Our Otherness**

Celebrating our otherness may seem alien to the concept of oneness. However, there is a clear distinction between uniqueness and separateness. The perfection and beauty of the universe is found in its infinite expression of nature. Consider the seemingly endless varieties of plant and animal life, the earth’s topography and geothermic activity, all the

shapes, sounds and images in a world teeming with millions of life forms — and, we humans, all different in attitudes, opinions, shapes, sizes, skills! Our uniqueness doesn't mean we are separate. It means we are perfect in our otherness.

Rather than trying to change our companions to be more like us, or more like our perception of how they should be, consider how relationships would be if we embraced one another's otherness. This does not mean we welcome every person's action, inaction or comments. We will still need agreements to sustain and manage households and agreed upon ways to resolve conflict. It does, however, mean we honor *otherness* as a gift and quit the insanity of trying to change one another. Friends of ours, married for over 50 years, attribute their successful partnership to retaining their otherness, with the wife stating, "There was no way I wanted him looking in the mirror and seeing me!"

When we embrace our oneness and celebrate our otherness, we liberate our self from the very scary prospect of trying to remake our self or our partner based on our ego-driven, fabricated sense of the perfect mate. Hallelujah!

### **Love Is Not a Commodity**

When we quit treating one another like projects, we may begin to appreciate one another's life force. Both of us have been in relationships that seemed to demand reciprocity as a condition for tenderness, support, sexual connection and, it seemed, love.

Many otherwise mature adults act as if love is a commodity to be bargained for, offered or withheld. If we haven't personally experienced it, we likely have friends who treat love as a commodity — setting up conditions for the

relationship. I will love you, make love to you, treat you with kindness, if you (fill in the blank): take the high-paying job, buy me a new (house, car, jewelry, boat, motorcycle), take me on this trip, stop going out with your friends, get a (haircut, shave, lose weight, work out), pick up your socks, cook dinner, etc.

As we listen to friends who have signed up for Match.Com, eHarmony or other dating services, the conditions seem even more specific and dogmatic. We know people who ruled out a potential match because of facial hair, style of clothing or eyeglass frames. Perhaps love has become a commodity! People are shopping for potential mates by leafing through catalogs — smiling faces of mostly good, kind people — who provide a ‘profile’ of who they are and what they want in a mate. Although this method has proved to be a good way to meet people who share interests and values, there seems to be a greater opportunity and temptation to select potential mates based on superficially ascribed commercial values.

When we treat love as a commodity we are likely acting out of fear — fear of intimacy, fear of giving too much or not getting enough, fear of making the wrong choice in partners, fear of not getting the love we want and need. When we stop treating love like a commodity and move beyond our fears, we find we create the conditions that allow love to be experienced.

### **Who’s Keeping Score?**

In many partnerships, there is a tendency to ‘keep score’ in an effort to make sure both partners are making equal contributions to the relationship. When both partners engage in this scorekeeping, it is a set up for ongoing conflict

and disappointment. We have heard young parents say things like *I've had the kids three nights in a row, it's your turn* or *I've (fill in the blank), it's your turn*. With two working partners and the stress of job and family, this kind of scorekeeping is understandable. Yet, when we keep score — scrutinize our loved-one's behavior, judge his/her performance and demand reciprocity — we put an additional burden on an already stressed relationship. When we keep score we are hiding behind a fear. Are we afraid we will give more than we get? If so, is it worth the cost in time, energy and its impact on the relationship? What if we communicated with love rather than bargaining with carrots and sticks? What if we simply asked our partner to take the kids because we need a break?

Consider how this might look if we put down the carrots and sticks and liberated ourselves from trying to manage relationships on the basis of reciprocity and duty. Imagine how our relationships might be if we opened ourselves to a free-flowing, unencumbered exchange between two perfectly unique individuals learning to manifest love for the mutual benefit of one another. Why not?

### **An Eye for an Eye**

*If we practice an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,  
soon the whole world will be blind and toothless.*

—Mahatma Gandhi

Gandhi's message about the futility of 'getting even' is a testament to the futility of non-forgiveness and the liberation of acceptance.

When we carry resentment against someone, the implication is we are exacting an eye for an eye and a tooth

for a tooth. In this ego-driven revenge drama, the non-forgiver generates negative energy and breeds stress-induced toxins. The un-forgiven may experience a sense of loss or confusion, but in cases where s/he is no longer in contact with the non-forgiver, s/he escapes the influence of this drama.

Why then do we hold grudges? Recall our ego encourages behaviors to keep up the fiction we are separate, entitled, inviolable or unworthy. What about that mythological sweet revenge? In our experience, the ego finds revenge sweet for a nanosecond then wants us to extract more, feeding the resentment and fueling the negative energy. When we tame the ego, and act with conscious awareness, we understand resentment is not only toxic to our emotional, physical and spiritual bodies, but also negatively impacts all those who come within our energetic field.

As we move toward living with greater awareness, our perspectives change to match our evolving reality. In Don Miguel Ruiz's book *The Four Agreements*, he tells us, "Nothing others do is because of you. What others say and do is a projection of their own reality, their own dream."

Shifting our perspective from the 'offenses of others,' we are less likely to experience resentment. When we feel resentment, we have an opportunity to practice forgiveness — a conscious, volitional act that helps us maintain emotional integrity and spiritual health.

Wayne Teasdale offers:

The spiritual journey only begins in earnest when we no longer experience the need to judge others, when we begin to take responsibility for our own inner development.<sup>42</sup>

What would life be like if we were more accepting of one another? Would we learn to appreciate one another's unique qualities without judgment? Is acceptance of one another's differences essential to our own spiritual evolution? We think so. When we accept and forgive one another, we express our compassion for the beauty of both our oneness and otherness. We may not *forget* the events, the indiscretions or breaches, but our willingness to accept and forgive also strengthens our resolve to let our own light shine.<sup>43</sup>

When we open our heart to acceptance and forgiveness, we liberate ourselves from petty grievances, grudges and resentments — we get out of our way!

### *The Runaway*

*I was in my early thirties with three beautiful children, a loving husband and a successful career in labor relations at General Motors. We lived in a lake neighborhood with good friends and enjoyed an active social life. By all outward appearances, I was happy. If asked, I would have said 'life could not be better!' Why then, did I want to escape?*

*My job was a twenty-minute commute along a non-descript highway south of Flint, Michigan. On my way home from work, I would often fantasize about passing my exit and not turning back. In fact, there were a number of times when I was ten miles past my exit before I realized I had not made the turn! Did I think I would find liberation by running away? What was this all about?*

*I had forgotten about these forays until my daughter told me there have been times when she thought about*

*picking up her kids from school and driving until she reaches one of the coasts with the idea she will spend the rest of her life on the beach. She said, 'the craziness of such thinking is I don't like beaches — the desire to run away seems less crazy!'*

*Why do we engage in these fantasies? Is this our way of coping with the pressures of life or could it be our true essence stirring to be liberated from the collection of attachments, patterns, expectations, possessions and mindless routines that seem to be the collage of life in our thirties and forties?*

*What I find liberating is the realization that these feelings are likely normal, healthy signals we need to give attention to what is important in our lives. I have no doubt others, perhaps more rebellious or desperate, keep on driving, leaving behind family and friends, only to discover there is no way to escape from one's self. Liberation seems to have little to do with where we live.*

—Kathleen

### **Provoking the Pattern**

1. *Quell the Fear*: By now, most of us know the physiological and psychological signs of fear. We are not talking about our innate radar system to detect danger. Here, we are talking about the ego-driven fear that immobilizes us from expanding our boundaries, exploring the world or otherwise moving forward with decisive, love-based action. When we are able to move beyond fear, we liberate ourselves to achieve our highest potential and create conditions for healing, creativity and spiritual growth.

Practice: Pay attention to the physiological and psychological signs of fear. Each time you recognize one of these sensations, breathe deeply and think or speak the words *quell the fear* or *all is well*. Consider the belief system or guidance system that led you to believe you were not competent enough, good enough or smart enough. Consider Marianne Williamson's plea to let your light shine and liberate yourself from fear. Keep practicing.

2. *Stay Soft in the Heart and Soft in the Belly*: More often than not, when we are in conflict or negotiating for something we want or need, our ego tees us up for battle. Kass Atkinson, a very wise therapist in Santa Fe, New Mexico, advises her clients to "stay soft in the heart and soft in the belly." Creating this condition reduces tension and helps us open up as one human being to another. When this happens, the energy shifts and we find ourselves connecting to the person(s) on the 'other side of the table,' experiencing oneness.

Practice: The next time, and every time, you find yourself nervous, tense or worried about conflict, simply remind yourself to stay soft in the heart and soft in the belly. Make it your mantra. It works!

### **The Great Guffaw**

*Life is too important to be taken seriously.*

—Oscar Wilde

Some of us grew up reading or listening to stories from the *Reader's Digest* magazine section *Laughter is the Best Medicine*. Featuring reader contributions about humor in their daily lives, these stories helped us shift our perspective and find comfort in poking fun at ourselves. Over the years

several studies and our own experience demonstrate the positive correlation between laughter, health and healing. Yet, we spend an enormous amount of emotional energy navigating the minutia of daily life — traffic, lost socks, missing keys, cancelled flights, renegade technology! And, it seems, our ego has an enormous appetite for misappropriating energy.

Talk about co-creating our reality! If we examine our life — the events and circumstances, the twists and turns, the serendipities and disappointments — we can either find the humor or feel the weight. The choice is ours.

Letting go of things that oppress us, instill fear in us or paralyze us from acting liberates us to achieve our highest potential as sentient beings. Life's challenges and adversities do not define us or reflect our worth; we are separate and apart from our experiences. As author James David Audlin said, "Even when you experience adversity, it will be understood not as an assault on you, but simply as a part of the story."<sup>44</sup>

The more we let go of things that oppress us — by confronting fear, dismissing anxiety or simply stepping back and viewing them as part of the story — the more we will smile and laugh at the psycho-dramas we weave. Drawing on the irrepressible energy of the Source, the great guffaw dispels any imagined weight and opens us to endless possibilities.

Oscar Wilde is correct, "Life is too important to be taken seriously."

## Love Is a State of Being

*Spirituality isn't child's play. My sentences will tear to pieces anyone who listens to them. After all, what you awaken to is the truth, which shatters the illusion of who you've believed yourself to be.*

—Nisargadatta Maharaj

Zen Buddhism refers to enlightenment as 'The Great Death;' put in other words, enlightenment is 'The Great Liberation.' When we let go of our ego-defined selves and get out of our way, we are able to access the Source — God, Atman, Allah, Buddha, Intention, Spirit — and rediscover our true selves. Still, shattering the illusion of who we are isn't child's play. We need maturity, experience and motivation to let go of our fabricated selves.

For most of us, shattering the illusion of who we believe we are occurs over many years, decades, a lifetime. To do so is the ultimate liberation of our tortured, fictional selves. As we awaken to our true selves, we begin to let go of fear and discover we are love.

In *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle writes:

Love is a state of being. ... You can then feel the same life deep within every other human and every other creature. You look beyond the veil of form and separation. This is the realization of oneness. This is love.<sup>45</sup>

Consider the implications. We do not give or receive love. We manifest love.