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“Nirmala is a beautiful communicator of authentic spiritual insight and loving wisdom. I say this because I know from my own experience that his observations mirror that of not only my own experience, but also those of the most powerful and eloquent of spiritual teachers. This book is a particularly on point presentation of heartfelt wisdom.”

“Often our inability to make breakthroughs in the spiritual life is on account of our assertion that we ‘exist’ only in our heads. This book takes us out of that constricted dimension and into the broader and warmer dimensions of the heart, where real connection is made. I very strongly recommend this book to anyone seeking more balance, harmony, and most importantly connection in their life.”

“This book is really well written, clear and precise. If the exercises are sincerely followed, you will be amazed at the experiences. This book will point you in the right direction. If you're willing to journey, you will not be disappointed. What I enjoyed most about this book was it went into good instruction and reasoning without being watered down, redundant, or confusing. If you are someone interested in self-improvement/self-realization, this is a must-read. Relax, open your heart and enjoy!!!”

“A prolific and inspiring read. Few authors are able to balance a topic of profound depth with practical daily living. Nirmala has accomplished such a feat. With examples and exercises to guide one toward tuning into one's heart, it allows the reader to experience life on a level beyond mundane cultural conditioning. This book speaks to the one just beginning his/her spiritual journey as well as the seasoned traveler. It guides one out of the maze of the mind and into the clarity of the heart.”

“I've read quite a few books about non-duality, and this is one of the clearest ones. Highly recommended.”

“I just finished reading *Living from the Heart*. What a wonderful book. The chapter called ‘Love is for Giving’ was mind blowing. It's like I woke up in a new world this morning. It's like a wonderful game where I get to play with giving love to all that is around ‘me’ as it appears before me, even the hardships. I feel like it could change everything, from how I will walk to talk to eat. I will do it all with awareness, space, mindfulness, presence, and love. I will change not because someone is telling me to do something more ‘moral’ or ‘correct,’ but because it is deeply satisfying to surrender into being an instrument of love. It's the ultimate perfect equation where the more you give love, the more you feel love.”

# LIVING FROM THE HEART

**Nirmala**

Endless Satsang Foundation

<http://endless-satsang.com>

For more info or to purchase Nirmala's other books on various ebook stores:

<http://endless-satsang.com/free>

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The poetry is from *Gifts with No Giver*, a collection of nondual poetry written from the heart by Nirmala, which is available for free at <http://endless-satsang.com/free>

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## Introduction

For centuries, spiritual teachings have pointed us to the Heart as the source of wisdom, truth, peace, and love. We call it the Heart because these deeper realities are experienced most strongly in the region of the physical heart. However, the spiritual Heart is not limited to a location in your body. The Heart is the totality of your connection with the essential qualities and greater dimensions of your true nature as limitless Being. Any full exploration of the larger truth of your Being must include a discovery of the capacities and qualities of this tender, loving, and wise aspect of your true nature.

This book consists of three related pieces that explore living from the spiritual Heart. Part One, *From the Heart*, offers simple ways to drop your awareness into the Heart and thereby shift into a more open, allowing perspective, and to more fully experience the world and your true nature as aware space. It goes on to explore dropping awareness into the belly and ultimately into the larger spiritual Heart, which includes the mind, heart and belly. These simple shifts in perspective can profoundly alter your experience of life and its challenges. It turns out it doesn't matter what you experience, what matters is where you experience it from.

Part Two, *The Heart's Wisdom*, explains how the Heart is a wise and accurate guide to the truth. The truth is whatever opens your Heart and quiets your mind. This simple definition cuts through any confusing ideas and beliefs to the direct source of wisdom and guidance available in your own Heart.

Part Three, *Love Is for Giving*, points to the true source of love in your own Heart. The essence of love is the spacious, open attention of our awareness. Awareness is the gentlest, kindest, and most intimate force in the world. It touches everything but doesn't impose or make demands. Surprisingly, this awareness, or love, is experienced most fully when you give it to others, not when you get it from others. The more love you give, the more love you experience. It is by freely giving love that we are filled with love.

Throughout, there is a pointing beyond the experience of the Heart and its wisdom, peace, and love to the possibility of recognizing these essential qualities as who and what you are. The Heart with all its joy, satisfaction, peace, love, and wisdom is not just something you can experience more fully; it is what you have always been and always will be. In recognizing your true nature as this fullness of Being, you can ultimately rest from all seeking and effort, and just be who you are.

## PART 1

### **FROM THE HEART: Dropping out of your Mind and into your Being**

#### CHAPTER 1

#### **WE ARE ALL BABYDUCKS**

You may think it matters what happens. But what if the only thing that matters is where you are experiencing from, where you are looking from? What if you could experience all of life from a spacious, open perspective where anything can happen and there is room for all of it, where there is no need to pick and choose, to put up barriers or resist any of it, where nothing is a problem and everything just adds to the richness of life? What if this open, spacious perspective was the most natural and easy thing to do?

It may sound too good to be true, but we all have a natural capacity to experience life this way. The only requirement is to look from the Heart, not just figuratively, but to look from the subtle energetic center located in the center of the chest instead of looking out from the eyes and the head—and not just to look, but to listen, feel, and sense from the Heart.

In some spiritual traditions we are encouraged to look in the Heart, and yet what does that mean exactly? Often we are so used to looking and sensing through the head and the mind that when we are asked to look in the Heart, we look *through* the head into the Heart to see what is there. Usually we end up just thinking about the Heart. But what if you could drop into the Heart and look from there? How would your life look right now? Is it possible that there is another world right in front of you that you can only see with the Heart and not with the mind?

In what follows, you are invited to explore this radically different perspective and to find out what is true and real when the world and your life are viewed from the Heart of Being. It may both delight and shock you to find that so much richness, wonder, and beauty lie so close and are so immediately available to you. But don't take my word for it. See for yourself if your experience fits with this simple, yet profound, way to shift in awareness to a more complete view of your life, your world, and ultimately your true nature as that openness, wonder, and beauty.

As an aside, some people are more visual, some are more auditory, and some are more in touch with feelings or physical sensations. One or two of these modes are referred to in the exercises that follow. Feel free to translate and use whatever mode is most natural to you. For instance, you might find it easier to listen with your head or Heart rather than look from your head or Heart. You may want to experiment with the other senses also.

#### **Your Nature as Awareness**

Right now as you read these words, who or what are you really? Are you the body, mind, and personality? Or are you the spacious awareness or aware space that these appear in? What you are is this space. It is a remarkable space that is alive and aware. You could say this is what you are made of: You are aware space.

**Exercise:** *Take a moment to sense behind your eyes. Turn your attention to the space behind*

*your eyes. What do you sense there? If you only refer to your experience in this moment, what do you find in the space behind your eyes? Does this space have a capacity to experience sensation? Is there awareness in the space behind your eyes? Don't worry for now what this awareness is like or what you are aware of. Simply check if you are aware of anything right now, anything at all. If you let go of any ideas about what awareness is supposed to be like or what is supposed to happen in awareness, then you can begin to explore this simple miracle of awareness going on behind your eyes.*

That aware space is the real you. It is what you are made of, what you exist as here and now. It also turns out that everything that really matters in life is found in this aware space. This is where love, peace, joy, compassion, wisdom, strength, and a sense of worth are found. These are qualities of your true nature as aware space. These are qualities of the real you. Everything you might ever need, including everything you need to know, is to be found in that spacious presence behind your eyes.

I invite you to play in this spacious awareness. If you wanted to find out about the nature of water, it would be helpful to play in it whenever you had a chance. So if you want to find out about this aware presence that you are, you might want to explore along as we splash around in the space of awareness.

One bit of good news: It doesn't matter at all for the purposes of our exploration what you are aware of. It doesn't matter what you are experiencing. It doesn't matter if you are happy or sad, healthy or sick, rich or poor, enlightened or suffering, expanded or contracted. However, the only place you can play in awareness is where awareness is right now. So as you explore the awareness, you need to refer to whatever is happening right now... and now... and now because that is where awareness is found.

### **How Awareness Is Imprinted**

Realizing your true nature as awareness would be incredibly simple except for one thing: This awareness that you are can be shaped. Just like water takes on the shape of the container you pour it into, the awareness that you are is shaped by your thoughts, feelings, desires, hopes, dreams, worries, sensations, and experiences. It is shaped by everything that happens. Sometimes this shaping is so strong that it seems the awareness has gotten very small and that you have gotten very small. This is not really a problem as the awareness itself is not harmed, and it can always expand again.

This awareness is not only temporarily shaped by experience, but can become imprinted onto an experience or an object in awareness. You may have heard of how baby ducks become imprinted in the first few hours of their lives: They will follow whatever or whomever they are first aware of, usually the mother duck. However, they can also be imprinted on anything, including a scientist who is studying them, in which case, they will follow the scientist around.

There is nothing wrong with this; it helps baby ducks survive in the wild to follow their mother wherever she goes. It is an inherent capacity of all awareness to become imprinted, or conditioned, in this way. Every time an experience leaves a lasting impression in your awareness, you have been imprinted or conditioned by that experience.

However for humans, this imprinting is more complicated than for ducks. You can be imprinted onto many different things. One of the things you are most imprinted on is your body. You are so strongly imprinted onto your body that most of the time, your awareness follows your

body wherever it goes—just like a baby duck follows its mother. Check it out: Get up and walk into another room. Does your awareness stay in the room you just left or follow your body into the other room? We are all baby ducks when it comes to our bodies.

Another thing you are profoundly imprinted on is your own mind or thoughts (from here on when thoughts are mentioned, it will refer to the entire range of internal experience: thoughts, beliefs, feelings, desires, hopes, fantasies, etc.). So when a thought, a fear, or a longing arises, your awareness flows to that. Check it out: When you stop thinking one thought and begin thinking another, does your awareness stay on the original thought? Or does it follow your thoughts wherever they go? Isn't it kind of like a baby duck following its momma across the pond, out onto the meadow and into a creek?

You have been imprinted onto your physical body and your mind. This isn't bad. Just as with baby ducks, it has some benefits for your survival, although not always: Just as a baby duck will follow its mother onto a busy freeway, your awareness will follow your thoughts into all kinds of silly and sometimes dangerous places.

Since you are almost always aware of your body and your mind (because awareness follows your body and mind around), you come to the mistaken conclusion that you *are* your body and your mind. You fail to recognize that what you are is the empty, spacious awareness that the body and mind appear in. You assume, since they are almost always here, *I am the body and the mind*.

This is a simple and completely understandable mistake. Unfortunately, it is also a colossal mistake and the source of all your suffering. It's as if you had a fly on your nose that stuck around so long that you decided you were the fly. Imagine how confused you would feel and act if you believed you were a fly. You would spend all day eating rotten food and trying to mate with other flies!

Well you are making as big a mistake when you conclude that you are the body and the mind. It's not that there is anything wrong with the body or the mind; it's just that they are not really who you are. All the problems you experience are only problems for the body or the mind. The spacious awareness has no problems. How can space have a problem? It can't be harmed or diminished in any way. You can set off a bomb in space, and when the dust settles, the space will be completely unharmed.

This mistaken identity as the body and mind creates all of your suffering. If the body or mind were having an experience that you considered a problem, but you realized that you were not the body or the mind, would you suffer from those problems? Right now, are you suffering dramatically over the problems of someone you have never met? Probably not, since they aren't your problems. So what if none of your problems are really *your* problems? What if the spacious awareness that you really are can't have problems?

**Exercise:** *Consider for a moment something you are experiencing that seems like a problem. Without changing your experience or even your knowledge and understanding of the problem in any way, check if the space in which the thoughts or circumstances of the problem are happening has any difficulty with those thoughts and circumstances. Does the space in which the difficulty is appearing have a problem? Can space itself ever have a problem? If for just a moment, you identify with the space that both you and the problem are in, do you have a problem? Can you as the space ever have a problem?*

Recognizing yourself as aware space is a radical shift in your usual identity or sense of yourself.



It may be a while before you can really believe or, more importantly, consistently experience your identity as aware space. We are profoundly conditioned or imprinted onto our usual identification with the body and mind. You may discover you have a deep and abiding conviction that you really are the body and your inner life of thoughts and feelings. We don't give up our deepest convictions easily.

As you read this, you might want to hold open the possibility that you are mistaken. Try out the possibility that you really are the space, and see for yourself if this fits more with the evidence of your experience. If you can temporarily set aside the conviction that who you are is your physical body and the flow of mental activity, you will be better able to sense for yourself the truth being pointed to here.

### **What It Is Like to Look out from the Head**

As you were growing up and everyone was teaching and conditioning you to follow the experience of your body and mind, your identity moved into the body and head. Since your eyes, ears, nose, taste buds, and brain are all located in your head, the awareness and the identity also became localized there. Since the head is where your awareness became located, that is where you now look, feel, and sense from.

As a result of awareness flowing through your head, it becomes shaped by your thoughts. This wouldn't matter if you only had a thought occasionally, but most of us have very busy minds. As a result, awareness is profoundly shaped and limited by its tendency to flow through the head. Every little thought that arises takes your awareness for a ride through inner landscapes of doubt, worry, hope, and conjecture.

Most of the time these inner landscapes have only a slight correspondence with what is really happening, and often they have absolutely nothing to do with reality. Have you ever thought someone was mad at you, only to find out he or she just had a stomach ache? So why do we pay so much attention to our thoughts? Because every now and then, they are right. Every now and then, a thought does correspond to something out there. As any psychology student knows, an intermittent reward, or success, is more powerfully reinforcing than a constant one.

So you end up with your awareness flowing through your head and through your thoughts. What is awareness like when it flows through thoughts? What effect do your thoughts have on awareness itself?

Thought itself is a very small phenomenon. All of your thoughts fit between your ears, so how big can they be? So when awareness flows through thoughts, it becomes very small. Consequently, your sense of self becomes small because fundamentally you are the awareness. So when awareness contracts onto a thought, it takes on the size and shape of that experience.

However, when awareness gets focused onto something it also magnifies it. Try it out: Pick up an object and focus all your attention on it. Does it appear smaller or bigger when you focus on it? It tends to look bigger. When you habitually focus on your thoughts, the content or meaning of them is magnified, even as your awareness and the sense of self is contracted. When your awareness is flowing so constantly to your thoughts and through the head, your awareness becomes chronically narrowed and limited.

This is not bad and even has some value at times for survival, but it is also limiting and narrow. When your awareness is narrow and limited, you miss a lot of what is happening. Much of reality is simply not noticed because when awareness is contracted, unawareness is expanded.

**Exercise:** *For a moment, put your hands around your eyes like a set of blinders. Does your awareness of the room you are in get bigger or smaller? The room doesn't get smaller, but your awareness of it shrinks—you are seeing less of the room. Now notice: Does the part of the room that you aren't seeing get bigger or smaller? Of course what you aren't seeing gets bigger if you are seeing less.*

The net effect of being imprinted onto your body and especially onto your head and your thoughts is that you tend to look out from your head: You live in your head and look out from it. You see, smell, hear, feel, sense, and ponder life with your head. That means that what you are seeing, smelling, hearing, sensing, and pondering is limited by and filtered through your thoughts. Your thoughts mediate between you and reality and interfere with seeing it more fully and purely. They color it, change it, and include only part of it. In a sense, you are living in a dream, all because you are looking out of your head and your thoughts.

This is so common that you don't even notice that this shaping of awareness is occurring. You get used to it. Just as you assume that the body and mind must be what you are because they are always present, you also assume the world you see through your mind is the real world. You assume that things really are the way your mind perceives them.

While it may be difficult to distinguish the effects of this imprinting, you may be able to sense how typically narrow or tight or contracted your perspective is. Because of the magnifying effect of this narrow perspective, the content of your thoughts can seem quite huge and even overwhelming. This is how you make a mountain out of a molehill. For a moment, see if you can sense directly the shape of the awareness in this moment—not the content of your thoughts—but the flow of awareness itself.

**Exercise:** *Awareness is flowing in this moment. Just check, are you aware of anything at all? Really anything at all will do for this exercise, including a thought arising in your mind or simply the words appearing on this page. So if you are aware of something right now, where is this awareness flowing from? Can you sense where the awareness is coming from? Is it coming from your big toe, the ceiling, or does it seem to be coming from your head?*

*What is the awareness itself like in this moment? Is it expanded, open, and flowing freely, or is it more focused and narrow? There is no right answer, and awareness is always subtly changing, becoming narrower or more open. What is awareness like right now, not the content of your experience, but the experiencing itself? It may be the usual awareness that is shaped by flowing through your head, but just notice what that is like.*

Awareness that is shaped by flowing through the head and by thoughts is typically tight and constricted. Just as a muscle requires effort to stay contracted, this tightness of awareness has an effortful quality. It is often not very satisfying, like trying to drink through a very narrow straw. You can never quite get enough of what is happening, so naturally you try harder: You think harder and try to understand what is happening, which only narrows the view even more.

Awareness that flows through your mind creates an underlying sense of there not being enough. Even if you are having a wonderful experience, there is a sense of not being able to absorb it all, so you may want to hang on to it or try to capture it some way (e.g., in a snapshot or home video) so that later you can get more of the experience. This is all the result of looking through your head. It is so habitual that it seems normal to feel so dissatisfied and incomplete.

But what if there is another way of looking that shapes the world in a completely different

way—so differently that the world doesn't even appear to be the same world? What would it be like to look from your Heart?

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## CHAPTER 2

### **ANOTHER WAY TO SENSE YOUR WORLD**

#### **The Flexibility of Perspective**

Despite the habitual tendency to look out from your head, it is actually quite simple to move the point where your perspective originates from. Some have suggested that dyslexics have an unusually flexible perspective that moves so freely that, in a sense, they can see words on a page from both the front and back. As a result, they can see letters in their usual order and also from the opposite side, which makes them appear backwards. For a dyslexic, there are benefits to learning to stabilize, or fix, their perspective, where they look from.

However, for the rest of us, moving our perspective around can free it up. In many of the therapeutic interventions used in Neuro-Linguistic Programming, a person is invited to see himself or herself from the outside. This gives a unique, and often useful, perspective on what is happening.

Without moving the perspective outside the body but simply down into the Heart, you can profoundly alter the shaping of your awareness.

#### **The Shift into the Heart**

The center of your chest, which is next to your physical heart, is often considered the spiritual center of your Being. For many centuries, it was believed that thinking happened in the heart rather than in the brain. What would it be like to experience the world from this energetic center instead of from the head? What effect would that have on your experience of the world and of yourself?

**Exercise:** *Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment: the sounds, a thought, the objects around you. Notice if you are looking or listening or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently drop your sensing down into your Heart. This is not a matter of sensing the Heart or feeling what is in your Heart, but feeling your surroundings from the center of your chest. At first, it can be helpful to rest your hand on the center of your chest next to your heart, to help orient yourself to looking from this place. Allow what you are seeing to be seen by your Heart instead of your head. What is it like to sense, listen, and look from your Heart? Pick an object and sense it with your Heart instead of your head. How is that?*

The key is to allow awareness to flow from the Heart. Especially at first, it's not important to sense the Heart itself. It's simpler at first if you just sense an ordinary object, like a piece of furniture, *from* your Heart. The important thing is where your awareness seems to be located. Because of the strongly imprinted tendency to look from the head and through your thoughts, you may find at first that you are looking *into* your Heart, or you may be *thinking* about what it would be like to look from the Heart. If you are just imagining what that would be like, your awareness would still be shaped by thoughts—in this case, a thought about this new way of looking.

See if you can do this, if only for a moment—just look or sense from your Heart. What is that like even if it only lasts briefly? Does your awareness open up and expand? Do you sense things in a different way? Most people find that their awareness becomes softer, wider, and more open. This is simply the way awareness flows when it's not being so narrowly shaped by the mind. Just as a muscle naturally expands when you aren't contracting it, awareness expands when it's not being shaped and constricted by your thoughts.

**Exercise:** *Take some time to play with this new way of sensing and looking. What do the objects around you look or feel like when you look at them from the Heart? How do you experience other people with your Heart? What are sounds or music like when you listen from the Heart? What about your thoughts? They may still be arising in the usual way, but what if you listen to and watch them from the Heart? Do they seem as important, or are they just passing words and pictures in a large open space? See how the world looks and feels from here. It is another world. Explore this new world. Discover what your day-to-day experiences are like when they are sensed from the Heart.*

As mentioned, it can be helpful to close your eyes at first when sensing from the Heart. Because the eyes are located in the head, when you are seeing, the tendency is for awareness to locate itself in the head rather than in the Heart. So until you get the hang of *looking* from your Heart, it might be easier to simply *sense* objects and people with your Heart with your eyes closed. Then slowly add listening and, finally, looking with your eyes open.

Keep checking to notice if the awareness is actually flowing from the Heart or if it has moved back up into your head. If it does, that's fine—no harm is done to the awareness. But when it does shift back into the more habitual perspective of looking from the head, notice what that is like. Does it stay open and expanded, or does it become narrow and focused, like a magnifying glass or a microscope? Then you can gently move the perspective back down to the Heart and check for yourself what that's like. Does the awareness open up again and relax?

At first, there may be so much momentum to looking from the head that you may only be able to sense or look from the Heart for a few seconds at a time. That's fine. Just notice what you can about the quality of your awareness whenever it is actually in your Heart. With time, you should be able to extend the time you listen, look, or sense from your Heart. Maybe you will find you can listen to an entire song from your Heart or watch a sunset from your Heart. What if you were to watch TV, wash the dishes, or talk on the phone while looking and listening from the Heart? You may find yourself thinking about your life or planning your weekend, but for a change, notice these thoughts from your Heart.

Your awareness can flow from more than one place at a time. At times, it may be flowing mostly from your head, and at other times, mostly from your Heart. If the awareness is flowing partly from your head and partly from your Heart, the qualities of the awareness will be somewhere in between. It might be more open and allowing than usual, but still have a degree of focus and direction.

### **The Qualities of the Heart's Perspective**

Here are some clues that awareness is flowing at least partly from the Heart: The awareness will be wider and more open, the boundaries between the awareness and the objects in awareness will seem less substantial, there will be more of a sense of oneness and connection with whatever you

are sensing, and thoughts will be of less concern or not noticed at all. When something is very small, it can be easily overlooked, and thoughts are actually very small realities.

Most of the time, you experience thoughts from the head. This is like having your nose up close to a TV screen. The content of your thoughts is right in front of your awareness. When you drop into the Heart, thoughts continue to occur, but you will be experiencing them from down in the Heart. Now it is as if that TV is playing up in the attic instead of right in front of you. This puts the content of your thoughts into perspective. When experienced from the Heart, they are not such a big deal.

When awareness is flowing through the Heart, it also includes much more of what is happening. As a result, the experience is much more satisfying. Instead of trying to take life in through a narrow view, you can drink to your Heart's content. There is a richness and fullness to even very ordinary experiences.

If the opposite qualities are predominant, that would mean you have returned to looking from your head. So if the view contracts, the boundaries seem more real, you feel separate or dissatisfied, and thoughts suddenly take up the entire screen of your consciousness, chances are you (as awareness) are residing in the head again.

**Exercise:** *Pick something in your environment and then sense it first with your head and then with your Heart. How are these different? The contrast between the two modes of looking, listening, and sensing will allow you to notice the differences in the awareness itself as it flows from the head and then from the Heart. For this exercise, keep your awareness on the same object, sound, or thought. Then any difference will be directly related to where you are sensing, listening, or looking from and not due to experiencing something different in your environment.*

### **Feelings and Emotions**

What about the emotions that might arise in the area of your heart? Just as with thoughts or objects in your environment, what matters in terms of your emotions is where you are sensing them from. You can use your Heart to sense, look, and listen to any feelings that may arise and be felt in the heart area.

**Exercise:** *Notice the emotional quality in your heart area right now. Whether it is quite neutral or strongly emotional, just note what that is. What happens if you experience it from the Heart itself? Does that give the emotion more space to expand and flow? Is it as big a deal? Looking from the Heart allows awareness to flow from a deeper place in your Being, deeper than your emotions and desires. Allow the awareness to flow from this deeper place to the unfolding experience of your emotions.*

### **The Contents of the Head**

What about thoughts? What happens to your thoughts when you look or listen from the Heart? Thoughts are just activity in the mind, and yet you can hear, see, or feel this activity much in the same way you hear, see, and feel the physical world. However this activity is all in your mind; it is not even as substantial as the smallest physical object. Thoughts are actually a very small phenomenon.

Have you ever blocked your view of the moon with just your thumb? Because your thumb is

so close, it can block out a much larger object that is far away. Similarly, when you are looking or listening from your head, your thoughts are right there—up close and right in front of you. As a result, they tend to block your view of everything else.

Imagine walking around all day with a TV hanging right in front of your nose. You might have a tendency to not see and hear much else than the pictures and sounds on the television. Likewise, when you look from your head, you mostly see your thoughts. Furthermore, the content of your thoughts is magnified because the awareness is so narrowly focused when it flows through your head. You watch the television of your mind through a magnifying glass. No wonder we become so engrossed in our thoughts.

Looking through your head and through your thoughts is a drastically limited view of reality, and the content of your thoughts is often not so pretty. The mind is full of judgments, fears, doubts, and worries. It is filled with negative voices and pictures of what could go wrong. Experiencing life through the busy mind is often unpleasant. Even when your thoughts are positive, they aren't necessarily what is really happening, and reality can be disappointing when it doesn't match your positive fantasies.

The good news is that it doesn't matter so much what you are experiencing. What matters is where you are experiencing it from.

**Exercise:** *Notice your thoughts as they arise moment to moment. Now notice where you are noticing them from. If you are listening, watching, and sensing your thoughts from the head, what is that like? How big do they look, sound, or feel? How important do they seem? Now without changing your thoughts in any way, allow your awareness to flow to them from your Heart. What is that like? How big do they look, sound, or feel up there in the head from way down in the chest? How important do they seem now?*

Because the view from the Heart is so wide and inclusive, something relatively small like a thought, belief, memory, fantasy, or idea can be recognized as small. The content of your thoughts may or may not change, but your thoughts won't take up so much of the screen of consciousness when awareness includes much more. Thoughts can be experienced as something relatively small, like a bug walking next to the Grand Canyon. Relative to thoughts, the world is a big and limitless place. When you experience your thoughts from the Heart, your thoughts shrink down to actual size.

Have you ever tried to quiet your thoughts? Usually you just end up thinking about thinking less. But you can quiet the impact of your thoughts in an instant by simply allowing the awareness of them to flow from your Heart. At times the thoughts will drop right out of awareness. When the experience of the rest of reality is so full and complete, you don't notice the thoughts, although they continue to occur. The experience is like first seeing the ocean or the Grand Canyon: Your mind falls silent because you are too busy taking in the vastness to notice your thoughts. Similarly, the present moment and its many dimensions can be an experience even vaster than the ocean when you are experiencing it through your Heart.

**Exercise:** *Allow your awareness to flow from your Heart to everything you are experiencing in this moment. Unlike the mind, which can only think about one thing at a time, awareness flowing through the Heart can take in an infinite number of sensations, thoughts, sights, sounds, and subtle energies. With awareness flowing from your Heart, notice what you are seeing, hearing, and sensing in your body. Now also include the flow of thoughts, feelings, and impulses. Add in*

*all of the subtle or energetic ways of sensing you are capable of. Include the simple presence of limitless space and time. Allow awareness to flow to all of these and more simultaneously. As long as your awareness is flowing mostly through your Heart, you will find you can include much more in awareness than usual.*

### **Resting in the Heart**

In many spiritual traditions, the Heart is recognized as the true center of Being. In the way we are exploring it here, you could also say that the Heart doesn't shape or limit the flow of awareness as much as the head. As a result, you can experience your Being more fully when awareness is flowing through the Heart. Just as you can experience more of the nature of water by immersing yourself in it rather than just experiencing a drop of it, the experience of Being is much more dramatic and obvious when awareness is located in the Heart than in the head.

As you play more with this possibility of looking from the Heart, you may find that the Heart becomes a familiar and comfortable place for awareness to rest. While awareness through the head is effortful because of the contraction of awareness, when that same awareness flows through the Heart, relaxation and expansion naturally occurs. The awareness can spread out, expand, and simply rest from all the effort of focusing and figuring things out.

Spiritual books and teachers often suggest resting in the Heart. However, if you are looking into the Heart from the head, it's not so easy to rest there. It can seem effortful to keep that narrow focus of awareness on the Heart. But if you allow awareness to flow from the Heart, then it instantly becomes easy to also rest in the Heart. There is no effort required. The Heart is where you reside in those moments, and you can only rest right where you are in the moment.

**Exercise:** *Allow your awareness to flow from the Heart. It doesn't really matter what you are aware of, only where you are aware from. Now simply settle in. Allow yourself to rest here in the spaciousness of the Heart's perspective. From here, there is nothing to do and nowhere to go. You are Home.*



## CHAPTER 3

### **WHAT ABOUT THE REAL WORLD?**

#### **Looking from the Belly**

Looking from the Heart adds richness to experience and opens up whole new dimensions to daily life, and yet often there is resistance to truly resting in the Heart. It can seem impractical or too vulnerable to consistently view the world in such an expanded, open, uncensored way. So we often return to our old habit of looking through the mind and its false sense of being in control. The mind gives us a sense that we know what is going to happen. Even thinking we know what should happen feels reassuring, even though that is irrelevant to what actually does happen.

Moving in the world while looking from the mind has tremendous drawbacks, however. Most of what you think about never does actually happen, and the tendency to focus on the mind's contents can prevent you from fully noticing what is actually happening.

When life is demanding, it is still not necessary to contract into the mind, with its many blind spots and severely limited perspective. There is another possibility, which is to look, listen, and sense the world from your belly. Just as you can allow awareness to flow from the Heart center in your chest, you can allow awareness to sink down even further and flow from a spot a few finger widths below the belly button called the *hara*.

**Exercise:** *Try this exercise first with your eyes closed and then open. Notice what you are aware of in this moment: the sounds, a thought, the objects around you. Notice if you are looking, listening, or sensing from the head, and notice what that is like. Now gently drop your sensing down into your belly. This isn't a matter of sensing the belly or feeling what is in the belly, but experiencing your surroundings from the belly. It can be helpful, at first, to rest your hand just below your belly button to orient you to looking, listening, and sensing from this place. Allow what you are seeing, listening, and sensing to be seen, listened, and sensed by your belly instead of your head. What is it like to sense, listen, and look from your belly? Pick an object and sense it with your belly instead of with your head. How is that?*

The belly is a reservoir of strength and capability. It has a solidity and firmness that can stand up to whatever life dishes out. When you look from the belly, the view doesn't contract and problems don't become magnified like they do when you look from the head. Instead, the view remains open and expanded. There is also a sense of something solid and real that is experiencing all of it. The real you is here and able to do whatever needs to be done.

Awareness is shaped by the belly into a solid and substantial presence that is not easily overwhelmed or even unduly influenced by circumstances. Looking from the belly is a much more effective way to move in the world than thinking. It is a place where action and consistency come naturally.

**Exercise:** *Take some time to play with this new way of sensing and looking. What do the objects around you look or feel like when you look from the belly? How do you experience other people with your belly? What are sounds or music like when you listen from the belly? What about your thoughts? They may still be arising, but what if you listen to and watch them from down in the*

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