

Chapter 8: The Practice of Healing

Loving Our Pain

In the first three practice-focused chapters, we learned how to bring acceptance to our anger and upset; courage and loving self-discipline to our fear; and honest self-awareness to our repression and self-deception. We learned how to face our inner wounds, and how to begin to open our darkness up to the Light.

So now what? How do we heal the pain that lurks beneath our repression, anger, and fear? How do we work with our suffering, not just at its branches, but at its roots?

By learning to love our pain and forgive our judgments.

This chapter focuses on healing our pain, and chapter 10 will cover self-forgiveness.

In exploring these topics, we're venturing in to some of the most sensitive, private and sacred areas of life. Wounded animals will often crawl away in to the woods, to either heal or die alone. Similarly, some of our deepest wiring tells us that it's better to "lick our wounds" in private, rather than to show our pain to others. As social animals, we naturally fear showing any vulnerability that could cause us to lose our status in the pack. As school children, we quickly learn that being different or vulnerable can open us to attack. And from an early age, we're often taught that "*real men don't cry.*"

Then as we grow, as part of the gift of repression, we find ourselves wanting to hide our pain not just from others, but also from ourselves. We naturally find ourselves storing our pain in our shadow, and carefully avoiding anything that might touch on these most tender parts of our core. Yet in our brokenness we are

inexplicably divine. And somehow, in the depths of our pain, our soul still sings out a sacred hallelujah.¹

As a divine being having a human experience, I salute you for your strength and courage, and I thank you for your willingness to share this journey with me. Particularly in these last chapters, I write to you not as “the expert,” but as a fellow being, seeking to open my heart one day at a time. I write as a witness to our greatness and to our pain. And I write in gratitude to those who have held such a remarkable space for my own growth and healing.²

The Miracle of Healing

Remarkably, **it is our love that opens us to pain; it is our pain that calls us to remember our Love; and in turn, it is Love that heals our pain.**

As such, healing is ultimately not something we do, it’s who we Are. Healing is not a goal we achieve, it’s a Reality we open ourselves to. And healing is not something we perform for others, it’s a space of love and safety that we hold – a space in which Love does the real work.

Healing is a sacrament of Love, where we bring our greatest Light to our deepest darkness. It’s a testament and a triumph, where in the midst of our suffering, we open our hearts. It’s an act of spiritual alchemy, where we sacrifice our smallness on the altar of who we most Are.

“Many people will live a painful life filled with shame, rage, and dread, and thus avoid feeling something really scary, like the wondrous depth of their own magnificence.”

– Richard Gordon

And, while no one can do our healing for us, healing is a miracle that becomes much easier when we share it with others.

On my own, and even in my closest relationships, my fear over my mother’s death kept my pain silent for years – so silent that I didn’t even know it was there. It took a major crisis before I realized there was something wrong. It took a year of suffering

before I became willing to ask for help. And it took finding a remarkably safe and loving space before I was able to open myself to the miracle of healing.

After years spent running from my shadow, I found myself in an environment that was so safe it allowed me to connect with my pain, and so loving it created the space for healing to occur.

Of all the topics in this book, healing is the one that most involves working with others. While it is possible to heal on our own, and in partnership with the divine, healing usually involves being in relationship. For it involves opening our hearts to love.

Connecting With Our Pain

Healing is the application of loving to the places that hurt.

If we look at this statement, we see that there are two pieces to the process of healing: connecting with the places that hurt, and then bringing loving to that pain.

The first step involves connecting with our pain. This means being willing to let it come up and sit with it, instead of attacking it, avoiding it, or projecting it. As such, healing is a process of practicing **acceptance, courage** and **self-awareness**, and it’s facilitated by connecting with people and environments that help us feel **loved** and **safe**.

Now, this does not mean that we have to feel all our pain in order to heal it. The miracle of grace is, well, miraculous. And when we open ourselves to grace, sometimes our wounds just heal, seemingly of their own accord. What it does mean is being **willing** to feel our pain. It means stepping away from our inner wars, and learning how to love **all** of who we are, including the places where we hurt.

Until we’ve done a certain level of healing, this can be hard to do, and so healing **often** involves feeling our pain – but it doesn’t **have** to. And while this may seem like a scary prospect, it’s not nearly as hard as it may seem. For when we stop fighting our pain, and embrace it instead, it goes away.

If you remember from an earlier section, we discovered that **suffering equals pain times resistance**. Most of our pain comes from our resistance to our wounds, rather than from the wounds themselves. Even if our pain is a level 10, and we meet it with a level 1 resistance, this is much less painful than if we meet a level 5 pain with a level 5 resistance ($1 \times 10 = 10$ vs. $5 \times 5 = 25$).³

Think of a time when you've experienced grief, perhaps over the loss of a loved one, or over a romantic heartbreak. If you think back, what actually felt worse? The times when you were in a wave of grief and let yourself cry it out, or the times of resistance leading up to the wave? In my experience, it's usually the latter.

For example, the catharsis of grieving my mother's death actually felt like a tremendous relief, because such much-needed healing was happening. In contrast, I found that the days leading up to a wave usually felt much worse. During those periods, I often felt like a civil war was churning inside me, without being able to do anything about it. One piece of me was determined to bring the pain up for healing, but another piece was equally determined to keep that from happening. My pain wanted to be let out of the closet so it could heal, but my fear was terrified that if I truly let myself go in to that grief, I might never come out. I literally felt like I could die from the pain.

But this wasn't the truth. My fears weren't real. As the saying goes, "*F.E.A.R. is nothing more than False Expectations Appearing Real.*" Yes, the pain hurt, but once I was actually in the pain, it wasn't all that bad. My fear of my pain had become much worse than the pain itself. And going in to the pain came with such a payoff! For on the other side of each wave of healing, I found myself ever more connected to the love and peace I craved.

After we connect with the places inside of us that are hurting, the next step is to **bring loving to those places**. This loving can come from our hearts and Authentic Selves. At the same time, when we're in our pain, it's often easier for this love to come from another source. It can come from our friends and loved ones, from trained professionals, from sacred groups, and from Spirit.^{4-blue}

In fact, while connecting with our pain can feel completely unnatural, loving another's pain is an almost automatic response. Think of a child who runs to his mother after skinning his knee, or a woman who turns to her husband for a hug after a particularly hard day. Like both my mothers displayed, we naturally know how to help others heal, by loving them in their pain.

Chances are, you've already had many experiences of healing, and of helping others heal. We all have an innate ability to help others heal by loving them in their pain. And at the same time, let's explore two aspects of this process that are less widely understood: fields of loving, and the power of inner child work.

Fields of Loving

The more of this work I do, the more I'm shifting from seeing the world as a set of "things," to seeing it more as a set of "fields."^{5-orange} In particular, I'm learning to sense Love, not as something I get from something or someone, but as a field, a presence, a resonance, or an invisible Light.⁶ This can be a hard concept to explain, so let's look at a few examples.

Research has discovered that most communication is nonverbal. A commonly quoted statistic is that 7% of communication comes from the words we speak, 38% comes from the intonation of those words, and 55% is nonverbal.⁷ If your partner says "I'm okay" while they're clearly fuming, are you more likely to trust their words or the clenched muscles in their jaw?

What science has so far struggled to understand or quantify is that much of this non-verbal communication actually happens at a far deeper level. While we often don't realize it, **we automatically resonate with the emotional fields around us**. If we have anger within us, and we're around someone who's angry, we naturally tend to get angry too. Performers and public speakers often talk about "*riding the energy of the audience*," or of "*taking their energy in, and feeding it back to them.*" Similarly, the experience of watching a movie with 100 people, or a concert with 10,000, is often much more powerful than seeing it on our own.

Given this resonance, **groups have a strong tendency to become emotionally and energetically synchronized.** As dictated by the spiritual law of attraction, **like attracts like.** For good or for ill, our energetic fields feed on each other, like emotional reactors.

This can create exceptional fields of loving, as explained by the scripture *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”*⁸ The energy in a spiritual community, or in a group worship session, can hit peaks far beyond what an individual can typically experience on their own.

And on the flip side, this dynamic can also create tremendous suffering, as demonstrated by the speed with which a group of caring, reasonable people can turn in to a lynch mob, or fall sway to an extremist leader.⁹

If you strike a tuning fork near a piano, the piano string that plays that pitch will start to resonate. And if you then strike that key, the two sounds will reinforce and amplify each other. Our emotions work in a similar way.^{10-green} It’s like we each carry a set of tuning forks at different emotional or energetic “itches,” and when one person strikes a tone, any nearby tuning forks at that frequency will also start to vibrate. In response, we may then “strike that key” and add to the sound. As more and more people join in, like a chorus singing the same note, a shared field is created whose “sound” can dictate the groups’ response.

When terrorists struck the World Trade Center on 9/11, the first dominant tones, heard around the world, were ones of grief – and ones of love. People came together. We sat together, cried together, prayed together, and healed together. We inspired each other. For the first time in its history, NATO invoked its mutual defense clause, as an unequivocal way of proclaiming *“we stand with you.”* In the face of an unspeakable atrocity, the world came together –

“Our true identity is to love without fear and insecurity. Our higher potential finds us when we set our course in that direction. The power of love and compassion transforms insecurity.”

– Doc Childre

and in that moment, we won. The goal of terrorism is to create fear, but in that moment, we met violence with love. We refused to give in. We became a world of heroes. We refused to meet fear with fear.

However, over the following months and years, the tone in America changed. Instead of holding to our love, we started to feed our fear. We moved into victim consciousness. We focused on what the next attack might be, and how vulnerable we were. We got caught up in worst case scenarios, and negative future fantasies.

As we became afraid, we became angry. What started as a quiet, united, determined resolve, turned into the angry roar of a wounded animal. We started looking for targets. And when our leaders found some, we cheered. We invaded Afghanistan, and riding high on that emotional wave, we moved on to Iraq. The dominant tone was a bad-ass *“who’s next?”* and dissent was seen as unpatriotic. But in giving in to our fear, the terrorists won after all – at least for this round. Or more accurately, instead of mastering this learning opportunity, we added to the suffering on the planet. For, while discipline is one-half of love, and it’s important to stand up to abuse, we’re slowly learning that we can’t use fear to win a *“war on terror.”*

I include myself as part of this group hysteria. I remember watching the footage of missiles flying in to Baghdad, and quietly celebrating. Innocent people were dying – and I was cheering. I remember how eager I was to buy in to my smug rationalizations about weapons of mass destruction. And I remember how my grief and love turned to fear.

My point isn’t that invading Iraq was right or wrong. Instead of talking about the actions we took, I’m talking about the energy with which we took them. For as the University of Santa Monica explains, *“how we are with the issue is the issue.”*¹¹ And “how we are with the issue” is greatly influenced by the “emotional resonances” or “energetic fields” we’re part of at the time.¹²

I remember sitting in a room one weekend, shortly after the Iraq invasion started, while a teacher humbly and quietly explained *“I*

don't know whether the current events are good or bad. However, what I do know is that the one sure way to add to the peace on this planet is by adding to the peace within ourselves.” For as Gandhi invited us, our opportunity is to *“be the change you want to see in the world.”*

In doing so, one of the most important practices involves healing our own pain. And this process is greatly supported by disconnecting from fields of negativity, and connecting with fields of loving instead. Whether through connecting with a group healing session, a church, a child, a sacred place, a spiritual teacher, loving friends, our deepest Self, or a pet – healing happens when we bring our pain up out of our shadow, and expose it to a loving field.

As another example of an energetic field, when we talk about “empathy” or “women’s intuition,” we’re not talking about a magical skill that somehow defies natural law. What we’re talking about is simply having **conscious awareness** of the fundamental emotional dynamics we’re constantly enmeshed in.

Have you ever walked in to a room, and felt yourself getting tense for no apparent reason? Or had a “gut feeling” about someone’s trustworthiness? Similarly, have you ever noticed what great emotional mirrors children are? I had a friend tell me that he sometimes apologizes to his children when **they** act out, because he sees how they’re reflecting his own stress and negative patterns.

We all have the capacity for empathy. It’s just that some of us are more aware of what our body is “picking up” than others are. And we all have the capacity for healing. It’s just that some of us have better learned how to work with our pain.

Connecting with a Loving Field

When we talk about how *“healing is the application of loving to the places that hurt,”* the “loving field” is what really does the work of healing. So how do we connect with this field?

There are many ways.

One way is to connect with someone who brings a loving field into the relationship. For example, Carl Rogers founded the school

of humanistic psychology on the importance of bringing “unconditional positive regard” to the client. He discovered that healing occurs when therapists hold a loving space for their clients – even if they do nothing else. Interestingly, research on the effectiveness of therapy has consistently found that progress is much more determined by who the therapist is, rather than what type of therapy they use.¹³ And much of the power of good parenting, counseling and coaching comes from creating situations where *“my love is greater than your fear.”*¹⁴

Or we can reach out to someone close to us. Men, when a woman in your life is hurting – don’t fix her, just love her. As hard as this can be for us to understand, when women tell us they just want us to listen to their pain, they know what they’re talking about! In one relationship workshop, the facilitator asked the women to have compassion for the men, because *“men are like emotional Hellen Keller’s – missing many of their basic senses.”* I thought this was a funny exaggeration, until I started developing my own emotional intelligence and sensitivity. Wow. Guys, there’s tremendous healing power in just listening with compassion. Often times, we really, truly don’t have to do anything except listen and care.

A second way is to tap in to the power of a spiritual teacher, avatar, or being. Grace is a manifestation of one of the most powerful loving fields – the infinite Love that we may call Spirit or God. While we can’t control or understand it, grace is always available, particularly when we invite it in. And the energy of a sacred

“In this state of inner connectedness, you are much more alert, more awake than in the mind-identified state. You are fully present. It also raises the vibrational frequency of the energy field that gives life to the physical body.”

– Eckhart Tolle

teacher can greatly assist in this process, sort of like an intermediary, or a “step-down transformer.” Prayer, intention, meditation, sacraments, acts of devotion, sacred spaces, invocation, scripture,

chanting, fasting, dancing – much of the history of religion is the history of finding ways to connect with this loving field.

A third way is to connect with the power of loving community. My “highest frequency” experiences have come not from individual or paired experiences, but from the power of a group. One of the greatest strengths of the Mormon Church is the exceptional way that they build loving families and communities. One of my greatest challenges in leaving the Mormon Church was my pain over losing this experience of loving community. And one of my greatest gifts was discovering some new groups and processes that create a loving field, by bringing people together in a shared intention of love, learning, healing and growth. I’ve experienced extraordinary healing in group seminars and retreats, in large part because they helped me create **awareness** of my shadow, helped me feel safe enough to **connect with my pain**, and then brought this together with an exquisitely **loving field**.

A fourth way is to connect with the power of nature. Whether watching a sunset, strolling along a deserted beach, or hiking deep in a pristine forest, Mother Nature carries a very clear, very strong, very peaceful Presence. Similarly, it’s hard not to light up when we’re holding a baby, kitten, or puppy.

A fifth way is to connect with the love inside our heart, and the Love inside our Authentic Self. This can sound like a strange concept – how can one piece of our self heal another piece? Yet when we visualize a loved one, perform an act of service, experience a sense of gratitude, meditate, breathe deeply, watch an inspiring movie, or practice seeing through the eyes of compassion, we often find ourselves shifting inside.

We experience a “change of heart,” and suddenly the world looks different. We shift from a less mature, more physical, more pain-filled piece of our self, to a wiser, more spiritual, more love-filled piece. We move more in to the place of Love that already exists as our core. In this place, we have the opportunity for healing. And among other things, this process can include using our “Inner Parent” or “Inner Counselor” to love and heal our “Inner Child.”

The Power of Inner Child Work

When combined with the love of my family, and the wisdom of my many great teachers, I now count my birth mother’s death as one of the greatest gifts of my life. For it gave me a remarkable opportunity to learn how to heal the different aspects of myself. And after facing and healing Little Brian’s wounds, everything else has seemed almost easy.

When I first reconnected with the pain of my mother’s death, it came as quite a shock. One moment I was sitting in a seminar taking notes. Then suddenly I was engulfed by a wave of grief rising up from my core. While part of me witnessed this with acceptance and curiosity, the rest of me **was** four years old, reliving the pain of my mother’s death. This fascinating experience was to be repeated dozens of times, with many different aspects, over the next six years. I became a master at letting my pain and upset come forward, and “*giving it a voice*.”¹⁵ With the help of skilled counselors and teachers, I learned how to create healing dialogues between my “Inner Counselor” and the aspects of myself that were upset. And in doing so, I utterly transformed my experience of life.

“Life is like an onion. You peel it off one layer at a time, and sometimes you weep.”

– John Dryden

For **when we think that “who I am” is a single voice, the conflicts inside us rarely make sense**. When we make this assumption, we then tend to assume that we “should” be able to control our thoughts and feelings – and we tend to beat ourselves up when we can’t. We may fight back tears, because that “wouldn’t be mature.” We may focus solely on the external world, because our inner world is too scary or confusing. Or we may try and numb out, blame others, or pretend that the whole messy situation just doesn’t exist. *“I mean, if there’s just one of me in here, than how can I be at war with myself? Surely it must really be someone else’s fault! If not, then oh boy, what would that mean about me?”*

But when we realize that we have many different aspects inside us, and that our Inner Children can carry some of our deepest wounds, then we can start to bring a new level of compassion to our plight. In doing so, it makes it much easier to see how each aspect of our selves is doing the best they know how. And it makes it much easier to let our younger aspects express their hurt emotions. Anger, fear and pain are normal for a four year old. Our inner children don't need to be punished, feared, attacked or repressed – they just need to be loved.

Deep down, we all wish that we'd had perfect parents, and we keep projecting our childhood dramas on the people we attract to us, in an attempt to "get it right" this time. For example, if we were abused as a child, we'll tend to attract a partner that abuses us, or that we abuse. And if our parents were distant and cold, we'll tend to attract people that keep us at a distance.

While he was buried in my shadow, Little Brian was forced to seek out healing in unconscious, fairly unproductive ways, such as by replaying his wounds in romantic relationships. But as my higher aspects have connected with him, and helped lovingly "reparent" him, I have healed and grown, and my life has improved in remarkable ways.

Again, I realize that without a direct experience, this can be a hard concept to grasp. For many years, the idea of "hearing voices" was considered a sign of mental illness,¹⁶ and so the whole topic can seem frightening. Yet inner child work has tremendous power. We all have multiple sub-personalities, each with their own voice.¹⁷ And working directly with these sub-personalities has become an integral part of many schools of healing, such as Psychosynthesis,

*"People have enormous reservoirs of what I have called **original pain**. Original pain contains the feelings that we were not allowed to express in childhood and that were repressed."*

– John Bradshaw

Gestalt Therapy, Imago Therapy, Voice Dialogue Therapy, John Bradshaw's inner child work, and Cranial Sacral Therapy.

A Note on Recovered Memories of Abuse

In the last decades there has been tremendous controversy around the topic of recovered childhood memories. On the one hand, many people have found great healing through inner child work. On the other, there have been numerous cases of inaccurate "recovered memories" of childhood abuse, often encouraged by an over-zealous or incompetent therapist, which have then torn families apart with unfounded accusations. Healing childhood wounds can be an extremely powerful process, but it can also come with very real dangers if handled poorly. So let me state some crucial caveats about the practice of healing, and in particular, around the topic of recovered memories and abuse.

The tools in this book – and particularly in this section – are designed to be used by high-functioning, mature adults. **If you are dealing with serious mental health challenges, or if you suspect that you might have been abused as a child, please get competent professional help.**¹⁸ Appendix A provides some guidelines that can support you in doing so.

Then in doing any healing work, even if you are working with a therapist or other licensed professional, please watch out for two major pitfalls.

First, **it is not appropriate or beneficial to use anything that arises as a reason for blame or judgment.** The whole point of healing is to release our stored pain, and any blame that is causing it. As such, **100% Personal Responsibility is a required foundation for all healing work.** Our emotional memories are opportunities for freedom, not for more war.

In particular, when dealing with childhood memories and wounds, there is a tremendous difference between the accuracy of the **emotions that are experienced**, and the accuracy of the **content that is remembered.** Our emotions are ours, and they are inherently valid. We have every right to feel any emotions that

come up in our lives, and the essence of healing involves bringing loving to the places that hurt and forgiveness to our judgments. At the same time, to a child, Santa Claus is real, there are monsters under the bed, and our parents seem like omnipotent giants. Children don't live in the same world as adults, our recollections are often highly colored and confused, and it's irresponsible to take the historical content of recovered memories at face value.

As such, I've found great value in assuming that **any pain or judgment is a real opportunity for healing and growth**, while also assuming that **any recovered memories are not historically accurate, unless proven otherwise**. If you do come across painful memories from your childhood, I suggest you treat them as just that – your memories. Accept them, listen to them, love them, heal them, and forgive them, while also holding to your practices of loving self-discipline and 100% Personal Responsibility. The goal of inner child work is to heal any repressed wounds through re-parenting and love – not to have the inner child take control of our lives, or to go to war over a new set of victim stories.

Second, **it is not appropriate or beneficial to go searching for specific, hypothetical childhood wounds**. It's one thing to take our current upset (“*I'm upset because...*”) and use this as a golden thread which we follow back to the roots of our pain, by taking 100% Personal Responsibility, looking in The Mirror, and Tracking it Back. It's quite another to have a therapist suggest that we may have been sexually abused as a child, and to go searching for memories that support this idea. **Given a space of positive intention, acceptance, safety and loving, the next healing opportunity will naturally come forward**. Life already provides plenty of opportunities for growth and healing. We don't need to “push” to find more – we just need to learn how to effectively embrace and work with the opportunities we already have.

So with that introduction, let's take a look at five power tools for healing.

Power Tool #16: Heart-Centered Listening

Of the Five Core Practices of spiritual psychology, healing is the practice that most involves opening ourselves to the love and support of others. As such, where most of the other power tools are based on the individual, most of the power tools in this chapter are based on relationship. As such, they are best practiced with a partner. If you have a friend or loved one who is also committed to personal and spiritual growth, you can invite them to try out these tools with you. You can also practice Heart Centered Listening, Holding Space and Service in almost any relationship, whether or not the other person reciprocates. And as you begin mastering these skills in relationship with others, you can also start using them in relationship with yourself.

The first of these relationship-enhancing tools is called Heart-Centered Listening. Listening is one of the most basic of all life skills. It's the foundation for communication. It's at the core of relationship. Done well, it's a hallmark of authentic leadership. Done from the heart, it's one of the principal expressions of love.

And yet, most of us rarely really listen.

Most of the time, what we call listening is more like a pause we take while we're waiting for our next chance to speak. We may approach it as another way to push our personal agendas. Or it may be a pretense we put on while we think of something else.

In contrast, “*Heart-Centered Listening involves being present in our heart as we listen carefully both to what someone says, to*

“Unless you're influenced by my uniqueness, I'm not going to be influenced by your advice. So if you want to be really effective in the habit of interpersonal communication, you cannot do it with technique alone. You have to build the skills of empathic listening on a base of character that inspires openness and trust.”

– Stephen Covey

who they are as they say it, and to the meaning behind their words.”¹⁹ It involves giving others our full attention, and holding the intention of listening from our heart. As such, it is a gift of love.

In the words of M. Scott Peck,

“The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person’s growth. When we love ourselves we attend to our own growth.”

“By far the most common and important way in which we can exercise our attention is by listening. We spend an enormous amount of time listening, most of which we waste, because on the whole most of us listen very poorly.”

“Listening well is an exercise of attention and by necessity hard work. It is because they do not realize this or because they are not willing to do the work that most people do not listen well.”

True listening takes effort. As with any skill, it becomes easier with practice. And the connection it creates can be remarkably uplifting and energizing to both the speaker and the listener. Yet particularly at first, learning to listen can be hard work. As such, please feel free to Baby Step your way to Heart-Centered Listening success.

The University of Santa Monica describes Heart-Centered Listening as follows.

*“Listening happens at three distinct levels. The more obvious one is listening for information. We call this listening at the **content level**. We think we have heard when we can more or less parrot back what has been said. However, the **content** information is only about 10% of most messages. The other 90% involves listening to the **person** which occurs quite independently of the content being shared. It is in listening to the person that really good listeners excel. If you are the person being listened to, your experience is one of feeling **you** are truly heard.*

You’ll tend to feel that the other person really understands you and you’ll probably find yourself wanting to spend more time talking with them.

*The third level is that of **meanings**. We recommend setting the following intention when listening: ‘My intention is to listen not only to **what** you say, but also to catch the deeper levels of **what you mean**. I know I will learn the most about you by listening to your point of view while giving you my complete attention.’”²⁰*

With couples, a great way of practicing this skill is to set up a “listening appointment” together. During this appointment, the partners take turn listening, either for a set amount of time each, or until they feel heard.

This can be aided by having a symbol of your love, like a heart or a small box that contains photos of your family, and then passing it back and forth. The person holding the object is the speaker, and the other person is the listener. While in the role of the listener, your job is to practice paying attention, listening at all three levels, and asking simple, open-ended questions, such as “*Can you tell me more about that?*” You don’t have to agree or disagree with anything that is being said – your job is simply to help the other person feel heard. Statements such as “*I hear you and I hear what you’re saying,*” confirm that we’re listening, caring, and validating their experience, without having to comment on whether or not their point of view is the same as ours.

“It as though he listened and such listening as his enfolds us in a silence in which at last we begin to hear what we are meant to be.”
– Lao-tse

When we express our loving through Heart-Centered Listening, and hold a peaceful space of acceptance for someone’s experiences, we create a magical opportunity for growth and healing. This skill is at the core of effective counseling, and it’s at the core of being in loving relationship.

We can also use the same process with our selves. For not only do we tend to listen poorly to others, we also tend to listen poorly to our selves. For example, we all have access to the voice of intuition, inspiration and spiritual guidance.²¹ Yet without careful practice (and without healing our shadow) it can be difficult to pick out when this still, small “voice of our heart” is speaking, as opposed to the voice of our fear or the voice of our mind.

And when we extend the skill of Heart-Centered Listening to our selves, we can create an opportunity for our own healing – an opportunity that can be deepened, both for ourselves and for others, as we learn to Hold Space.

Power Tool #17: Holding Space

Remember back to a time when you were with someone who made you feel totally safe, loved, and accepted. Perhaps you were with a parent, a lover, or a friend? Where were you? See your surroundings. Listen to any words that were said. Sense your body. How did you feel?

Now remember a time when you were with someone who inspired you with their presence. Perhaps there was a teacher, a counselor, or a spiritual leader, whose presence helped open your heart? When was it? Were there others there with you? See this person. Notice what it is about them that inspires you. Notice how you felt in their presence.

Now remember a time when someone came to you in pain, and you sat with them, listened to them, and opened your heart. Perhaps there was a child who felt upset, a friend who needed a shoulder to cry on, or a loved one going through a hard time? Again, anchor yourself in this memory. See yourself there. Hear what was said. Sense their feelings, and how you were as you provided comfort for their pain.

These exercises provide a few potential reference points for what it means to Hold Space – to create a place of love, safety, and consciousness, which lifts people and opens a place for healing. Where Heart Centered Listening is something we can do, Holding

Space is a way of being. It’s how we are. When we Hold Space, we’re resting in our loving, in a way that people sense at a very deep level, whether they’re conscious of it or not. When we’re with someone who’s Holding Space for us, we tend to feel safe, loved, accepted, and inspired. It’s like someone is witnessing whatever arises for us, while silently letting us know that we’re doing fine, and everything’s going to be all right.

In this place of love, acceptance and safety, healing happens, as a loving field is created that gets applied to our hurt. Holding Space is not about sympathy, or making someone’s experience wrong. It’s about empathy and compassion, where we’re able to sit with others in their humanness, while also remembering that they are divine beings having a human experience, and that they already have all the answers and resources they need within them.

Holding Space is simultaneously one of the simplest and most profound things we can “do.”

If we go back to the tuning fork analogy, instead of striking a note of judgment, upset, or fear, we strike and hold a note of openness, acceptance, and love. Instead of meeting fear with fear, or pain with pain, we meet “lower” emotions with a higher response – with the vibration of love.

*“You cannot transform yourself, and you certainly cannot transform your partner or anybody else. All you **can** do is create a space for transformation to happen, for grace and love to enter.”*

– Eckhart Tolle

Many of my most profound healing experiences have come as the result of people who have come together to Hold Space for me. And in “paying this forward,” I’ve regularly volunteered for groups where my primary role as an assistant is to Hold Space for a room. While the participants may not even consciously be aware of my presence, I’ve learned that the most valuable thing I can offer is to quietly hold for them, and to help create a space where Love can do the real work.

While Holding Space is an innate capacity we all share, it's also a skill that can be developed with time. As we release our shadow, we naturally spend more and more time resting in our loving. As we learn to listen and meditate, we naturally find ourselves becoming more present. And as we practice serving, we naturally grow in our ability to Hold Space – a capacity that's sometimes known as “holding the light” for others.^{22-blue}

When we practice holding the light, what we're really doing is opening ourselves to the spiritual energy that we may call Love or Light, and letting it run through us. Like a candle in a dark room, when we let our light shine, and allow it to set fire to others' candles, the world becomes a brighter place for all.

As another way of describing how this works, think of a light bulb attached to a battery. In turn, the battery is attached to a wall outlet. If it's a big battery, like a car battery, the light may glow brightly enough to fill a whole room. If it's a small battery, like a AA battery, the light will be more like a small flashlight. Similarly, our ability to add to the loving field around us is proportional to the size of the “light battery” we've built. As we release our shadow and lift in consciousness, we increase our awareness of Love. And with this, we also increase in our ability to Hold Space for those around us.

Now, what happens to that battery as it shines a light for others? If it's connected to the wall by a circuit that carries a lot of resistance (like a dimmer switch turned down low) then only a little electricity will get through to the battery, and it will run down over time. However, as the resistance to the energy decreases (like a dimmer switch being turned up) then the battery will get topped up, and the light will be powered from the overflow. Similarly, depending on how much resistance we have to our spiritual source (such as when we're in judgment vs. when we're in gratitude; or when we have an empty love jar vs. a full one) we can experience the process of Holding Space as being either depleting or energizing.

This can seem daunting at first. Yet even if we start out being resistant (as most of us are) each time we practice Holding Space,

the Light passing through us naturally dissolves our resistance, and increases the size of our light battery as well.

So that gives us some idea of the dynamics behind how Holding Space works. Now, how do we “do” it? Four of the keys to Holding Space are intention, attention, neutrality and breathing. Please note that this is an advanced skill, so please don't worry if this doesn't resonate at first, or if you don't notice immediate results.

- ♥ **Intention.** Intention is like the switch that turns on our “spiritual light bulb.” Some of the ways this can be done include inwardly stating our intention, or silently repeating the prayer “*I love you, God bless you, peace be still.*”
- ♥ **Attention.** Where our attention goes, energy flows. We can focus on the area around our heart, or visualize white light coming in from the top of our head, in to our heart, and out to others. Or we can simply focus our attention on another person, and listen to them deeply. The more that we're able to be present, the more that our heart opens and our “light battery” expands.
- ♥ **Neutrality.** When we go in to sympathy or judgment, we find ourselves getting pulled down to the vibration level of those around us. It's like seeing someone who's fallen in a pit and then jumping in with them. Instead, when we hold to a place of neutrality and acceptance, we're better able to hold in the loving, and throw them a rope. Being in a place of neutrality also decreases our resistance to the spiritual flow, and allows us to be “topped up” as we hold for others.
- ♥ **Breathing.** When our body is stressed or afraid, we tend to breathe in short, rapid breaths – and when we breathe in short, rapid breaths, we tend to feel more stressed and afraid. In contrast, deep, slow, yoga breaths help center us in our loving, and open up the flow of energy. Practice breathing in to your chest for four counts, breathing out for

four counts, and then repeat. Over time, this can become a habit that happens automatically in more and more of your life, particularly as you Hold Space.^{23-green}

Power Tool #18: Exploring Emotions

Heart-Centered Listening and Holding Space help create a safe, loving space for healing. Then in this space, we can practice Exploring Emotions, as a way of discovering if there are any opportunities for healing.

Throughout this book, we've been taking the perspective of a "spiritual scientist." With this power tool, our goal is to take on a similar role by becoming an "emotional explorer." Explorers see new experiences as adventures to discover, rather than as calamities to be feared. They bring a sense of curiosity to life, and accept any challenges that come up as part of the game. In our competitive world, many of us have developed incredible skills as explorers of our external worlds. With this power tool, we turn those skills inwards, and use them to help us explore our internal worlds.

As we've talked about before, suffering equals pain times resistance. When we fight against our emotions, such as when we judge that "crying is weak" or "insecurity is unacceptable," we add to the inner wars within our selves. Our wounded aspects fear that they're going to get abused and attacked again, and so like a young child, they hide out. But their pain can't be stored indefinitely, and so the more we fight our emotions, the more we'll find ourselves acting them out in angry, fearful, unproductive ways.

However, when we practice accepting and loving everything inside us, then our "negative" emotions will tend to come up for healing and then release.

We can aid this process by asking gentle, supportive, exploratory questions, either to ourselves or others. Remember, this isn't about prying or pushing. It's about creating a safe and loving space in which to explore, through questions such as:

- ♥ *It seems to me like you have some emotions present. Are there any feelings you're experiencing, which you'd like to talk about?*
- ♥ *I hear that this was a challenging situation for you. How did you feel during it?*
- ♥ *How are you feeling right now?*
- ♥ *It's okay. Can you just let that come up?*
- ♥ *Do you want to check inside, and see what's present?*
- ♥ *Where are you feeling that? Can you describe it?*
- ♥ *Can you be okay with that?*

Power Tool #19: Give It a Voice

Of all the power tools in this book, Give It a Voice may be the most advanced tool to learn. As such, please feel free to skip over it, or wait to explore it with someone who's mastered its use.

Give It a Voice is a technique out of Gestalt Therapy, which has since been adapted to many other forms of healing as well. It's another way of following the golden thread of our upset back in to our shadow, as an opportunity for growth and healing. Where The Mirror and Track it Back followed more of a mental path in to our shadow, Giving It a Voice follows an emotional line of energy (such as fear, anger, pain, or insecurity).

Before trying this skill, it's important to create a safe and loving space through Heart Centered Listening and Holding Space. Then as we Explore the Emotions that are present, we'll often tap in to an inner conflict that's been going on inside. The parts of our selves that are feeling hurt and upset are often in conflict with the parts of our selves that have been judging them, resisting them, and trying to "stuff" them back down.

Giving It a Voice allows the wounded aspects of our selves to speak. It allows us to ask them how they've been serving us in the best way they knew how. And in creating a loving dialog between the aspects that were previously at war, it helps us to heal our inner battles and find peace.

Giving It a Voice starts by setting up two chairs across from each other, like two people having a heart to heart conversation. If someone is supporting you in this process, they can have a third chair that sits off to one side. You sit in one chair, and look at the empty chair facing you. Then as an emotion comes up, set the intention to put that aspect in the other chair, and let it speak. For example, *“my intention is to speak to the part of me that is feeling hurt and betrayed right now.”*

After setting your intention, switch chairs and let that voice speak. Let it express any judgments, feelings, or upset it has. When it’s done speaking, you can switch back to the first chair, and let the “adult you” talk. The “adult you” may then ask the hurt aspect some peace-making questions, such as:

- ♥ *What is it you want me to know?*
- ♥ *How are you serving me the best way you know how?*
- ♥ *What learning opportunity are you trying to show me?*
- ♥ *What do you want from me?*
- ♥ *How can I help you feel better?*

This may sound silly at first, and for some people it takes a while before they can do this as something more than just a mental exercise. However, when it works, it **really** works. For when we’re able to tap into one of our repressed aspects, and let them speak, it can create a very profound healing opportunity. It can allow our more mature aspects to love, support, accept and heal our less mature aspects. It can let our “Inner Parent” help heal our “Inner Child.” And it can help us find peace inside, by letting go of the inner wars that have been unconsciously running our lives.

Power Tool #20: Service

We end this chapter with a mastery level power tool: Service. Founded on the simple dictum of *“love thy neighbor as thyself,”*²⁴ much of Christianity is based on this beautiful practice. When we give to others, we find our gifts returned. For like attracts like, and when we give away our love, it comes back to us tenfold.

However, there are two major challenges to this practice. The first challenge is that when our love jar is empty, service can feel like quite the sacrifice. I remember as a teenager, I knew that I “should” be of service to others, and some of my deepest self-judgments were of how selfish and self-centered I felt I was. Yet no matter how hard I judged myself, I couldn’t get myself to serve in the ways I thought I “should.”

The second challenge, particularly for many women, is that we can become so focused on service that we neglect our own needs. Many a mother has “lost herself” in the needs of her children. And there are many “wounded healers” who are unconsciously trying to heal their own shadows, as projected onto the wounds of their clients.

The answer to both of these challenges is contained in three pivotal ground rules for life.

- ♥ *“Don’t hurt yourself and don’t hurt others.”*
- ♥ *“Take care of yourself first, so you can help take care of others.”*
- ♥ *“Use everything for your learning, upliftment and growth.”*²⁵

The foundation for service starts with the medical school injunction to *“first, do no harm.”* If we can simply minimize the violence we do to ourselves and to others (including the spiritual violence of judgment) we’re way ahead of the game. This frees us to take care of ourselves, and to release our shadow by using everything for our learning, upliftment and growth. Then from this place of abundance, instead of trying to “should” ourselves to spiritual greatness, we naturally find ourselves called to service, and to help take care of others as we give from our overflow.

“You can’t out give the universe.”

– Michael Beckwith

At the same time, love is both selfish and selfless, and these ground rules aren’t meant as a rationalization for eternal narcissism. Service is one of the most mature forms of love, and there’s

tremendous value to be gained from committing ourselves to external structures – such as a noble cause, a supportive religion, or raising children – that push, pull, inspire, and drive us to serve.

Even if we aren't feeling called to serve, it's possible at "*fake it until we make it*" – at least to a certain point. Service opens us to grace. It creates positive karma (a topic we'll cover in the next chapter). It releases our shadow in a profound, powerful, and nearly invisible way. The more I've stepped in to service in the past years, particularly as I've done so with an intention to help lift consciousness, the more I've found my issues clearing, seemingly of their own accord.

The key is to practice service as a **compliment** to our own personal and spiritual growth, instead of as a **substitute** for our self-care or shadow work. The goal is to use service as part of letting our own Light shine. For as we lift others, we lift our selves – and as we lift our selves, so too do we lift others.