

GIFTS WITH NO GIVER



a love affair
with truth

poems by
nirmala

What others are saying about *Gifts With No Giver...*

I first picked up this gem of a book about a decade ago, around the time I was discovering Nirmala and his teachings in the non-dual tradition. Here Nirmala shares his beautiful experiences of Awakening through his own unique heartfelt words. Enlightened spiritual poetry not unlike other mystical offerings like Rumi, the Songs of Kabir or Lao Tzu's sayings. I continue to find fresh inspiration whenever I open these pages, and with an open heart dare to let myself be touched.—Akash, BC

At a meditation retreat I was leading at Harbin Hot Springs, a participant handed me your free book of spiritual poetry, *Gifts with No Giver*. From the moment I opened it, my heart soared into the realms of Silence that your words invited. Tears of truth touched my soul. I have so wanted to savor each poem that I have been reading only one every few days. I love squeezing the juice out of each poem! Thank you for the depths that you have traveled inside yourself that allows your words to thrust me inward.—Peter Rengel, Retreat Leader and author of *Living Life in Love and Seeds of Light*

If you are looking for a book of spiritual poetry to help light your spiritual path, this book will be a good choice. The subtitle of the book, *A Love Affair with Truth*, describes well the theme of this collection of spiritual poems. Nirmala's depth of insight is well represented. -Gloria Achterberg

GIFTS WITH NO GIVER

a love affair with truth

Poems by Nirmala

Nirmala offers these poems in gratitude for the love and grace that flow through his teacher, Neelam, and in gratitude for the blessings of truth brought to this world by Ramana Maharshi and H.W.L. Poonja. In addition he would like to thank Donald Turcotte for his generous assistance in the design and production of this collection, and also Pamela Wilson for her help with editing.

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To Neelam: the blue sapphire flame in my heart

(Note: There is a [free bonus](#) at the end of this book of an excerpt from *Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self* by Nirmala)

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GIFTS WITH NO GIVER

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your hand is always in mine
your whispered endearments are my constant companion
you have never turned your face from me
no matter how many times I have turned from you

now I vow undying love
I meet you in the secret places I used to hide from you in
I hold you with tenderness I used to reserve for my pain
I would give you my life and my breath in an instant

for you are my true love
the one with no form
the one who has never been anywhere, but right here
in the singing of my heart

∞

-2-

why fear this moment
when no thoughts come
at last I lie naked
in the arms of experience

why fear this moment
when no words come
at last I find rest
in the lap of silence

why fear this moment
when love finds itself alone
at last I am embraced
by infinity itself

why fear this moment
when judgment falls away
at last my defenses
fail to keep intimacy at bay
why fear this moment
when hope is lost
at last my foolish dreams
are surrendered to perfection

∞

I may think I feel love but it is love that feels me
constantly testing the woven fibers that enclose and protect my heart
with a searing flame
that allows no illusion of separation

and as the insubstantial fabric of my inner fortress
is peeled away by the persistent fire
I desperately try to save some charred remains
by escaping into one more dream of passion
I may think I can find love
but it is love that finds me

meanwhile, love becomes patient and lies in wait
its undying embers gently glowing
and even if I now turn and grasp after the source of warmth
I end up cold and empty-handed
I may think I can possess love
but it is love that possesses me

and finally, I am consumed
for love has flared into an engulfing blaze
that takes everything
and gives nothing in return
I may think love destroys me
but it is love that sets me free

-4-

the past is long gone
from here
there is no way back
how could there be

the present is over too quickly
for feeble desires
to have any effect
except to hide peace

the future races ahead forever out of reach
of dreamy wishes
and useless plans

and yet when I rest in the endless now
every need is satisfied
in ways never imagined

∞

I have fallen in love with truth
I only want to be with her
I cannot stand to be apart
I would gladly go to the ends of the earth
or I would never again move from this spot
just to be sure to inhale her fragrant perfume
with my dying breath

I have fallen in love with truth
her every wish my command
I simply must obey
for she has captured my soul
and taken complete control
of even my innermost thoughts
freeing me to find repose in her unadorned splendor

I have fallen in love with truth
with exquisite tenderness she shows me
the perfection in my every flaw
no need for pretense
for she knows everything about me
and yet takes me in her arms
with complete abandon
until only she remains

-6-

sunlight burns
shadow cools
there is no difference

earth is still
grass is moving
there is no difference

wind rustles
sky is silent
there is no difference

spider drifts by on a silken web
and I remain
there is no difference

∞

where is absence of desire
once I dreamed there would only be bliss
now I am in awe of the ordinary
now I am content with longing or no longing
desires do not disturb the source of all desire
life and death carry on as they always have
and always will

only the dreamer is gone
behind the flow of imagination
beyond any effort to be still
dancing in the ebb and flow of attention
more present than the breath
I find the origins of my illusions

only the dreamer is gone
the dream never ends

-8-

river of voices
eternal mantra of foam
meaningless words swallowed in a humming roar
thoughts arise and are splashed away

river of music
sacred song of motion
nowhere to go but downstream
actions arise and are swept away

river of sounds
laughing and crying
impossible to bring the depths to the surface
emotions arise and are washed away

river of silence
flowing through everything
peace beyond even the absence of sound
nothing ever arises

∞

-9-

I don't know what to say
I never know what to say
yet there is great power in not knowing
knowing I can never know
the mystery constantly deepens
overwhelming my sense of what is
the mystery speaks without words
taking the breath away
leaving no air for words
in silence there is room for pain and bliss
in unlimited measure

∞

-10-

love is a dream that does not stop
when you awaken
but constantly surprises
no strong emotions stirring up dust
and clouding your vision

love is more than it seems
and has a purpose
you cannot see
and yet cannot hide from

love is an inescapable reality
that knocks you senseless
takes your breath away
and leaves no heart beating but its own

∞

nobody is my lover
I searched for her for lifetimes
and finally noticed she was always at my side
nothing is my heart's true desire
but something used to always get in the way
now emptiness fills me to overflowing
as I fall into my lover's embrace

I can love you or ...
I can love love itself
and thus love you truly
letting illusion rest at last
has freedom spoiled me for any other lover
or is there room for the one in the infinite

questions fall away in the embrace of my true love
join me in her arms
and rest at last

I am carried
like a mother holding her infant child
tender, yet firm
I am provided for
with caring attention that anticipates every need
and yet
I am swallowed whole by this love

-12-

no longer my hand that moves
no longer my voice that muses
no longer my eyes that fill with tears
at the simple beauty of a hazy afternoon

who could contain this rapture
who keeps this heart beating
who could keep this heart from breaking
at the loss of everything it foolishly held dear

questions have lost their fascination
longing has surrendered to fullness
gratitude is enough
even with the loss of everything foolishly held dear

∞

endless traces of memory
fill in empty moments
stealing my peace
and robbing my happiness
they cannot take the real treasure
beyond peace and happiness

behind every memory
is simple awareness
of this ordinary moment
a body breathing a mind making comparisons
and yet something more
is always present

this simple moment
a body still breathing
mind still chasing dreams
what is the something more
that fills the ordinary with magic?
the full recognition
of what was always longed for
in the heart

through emptiness
peace is born
no painful labor required
an easy birth
an easy life an easy death
the peace flows from the depths
the heart can only be broken
when the object of love is gone
but true love has no object

through emptiness
awareness is born
it grows untended
filling the emptiness with eyes
and ears and noses
and more hearts
to be broken and mended
broken and mended
until they can no longer be broken
only mended

through awareness
birth is ended
what never ends needs no beginning
love is too large
for a heart to hold
yet the opened heart
rests in this largeness
until fear is also ended
knowing the heart has always been unbroken

-15-

no poem
no song
no ritual
captures the simple beingness of a stone
let alone a mountain of stone

but let the stone write the poem
let the mountain sing in your heart
let the rituals fall like gentle rain to nourish the gods inside every stone
and every mountain
let your soul rise above the mountain
above the rain
above the clouds
the journey home requires no effort
only willingness to release your claw like grip on the familiar ground

then the stone speaks unspeakable truth
then the mountain fills your heart with a silent song of peace
and rituals sprout wings of surrender in your soul
and you arrive
here

∞

-16-

like a green desert
life has burst forth
in this empty container
spilling over
and moistening the parched soil

no need to store the bounty
the supply is endless
the source is at hand
the fruits of no labor
within easy reach

feast on this feed the deepest longing
drink until thirst is a distant memory
desire itself is consumed
when the heart finds nourishment

∞

-17-

your smile
morning sun on new fallen snow
melting the icy chill
unveiling a blue sapphire flame in my heart
burning memory into ash
revealing bliss

your eyes
dark liquid pools of grace
causing a whirlpool of emotion
carrying me to the depths
drowning me in joy

your touch
gentlest breeze
passing through skin and flesh and bone
healing so complete
leaving no scars
where once were deep wounds

your form
graceful flight in empty sky
giving me birth
naming me
ruling me forever
yet your only command: setting me free

your voice
birdsong and distant thunder
inspiring quiet so vast
thinking no longer finds refuge

your love
a rain swollen river overflowing its banks
washing away all cherished possessions
leaving an empty cup
full of peace

∞

-18-

I never knew tears could feel so good
until I opened my heart and found they come from the same source
as boundless laughter

instead of blurring my vision
they bring beauty into focus

instead of burning my cheeks
they wash away dusty dryness I used to hide behind

let sorrow have me now
for surrender has freed me to savor the bittersweet nectar
that flows in measureless abundance
from within

∞

I bathe in holy water
wash myself clean in the sacred river
nothing has changed
yet senses are now clear
and I hear what she is saying to my heart:

give me your foolish thoughts...
you don't need them anymore
give me your every desire...
they will never fulfill you
give me your deepest fears...
what use have they ever been to you
give me your very soul...
you have always been too large
for its tight confines

so once again I plunge into Ganga's embrace

once for my thoughts
once more for my desires
and a third time for my fears

she has always had my soul

and once again, nothing has changed....
nothing always changes

-20-

no deep rooted fears
fear exists on the surface
fear is the surface dive deeper and fear is swallowed
in the depth of knowing

nothing to fear in this moment
even when a gun is held to your head
the thing most feared has not yet happened
once an event has occurred
fear is too late

fear has no home here
where all is as it is
Breathe the tranquil air
and discover the fragrant serenity

∞

-21-

thoughts dance their enticing moves
before my entranced inner sight
but the spell is broken
when I wonder
who is entranced

memories beckon seductively
with all the luster they can manage
yet their shine is swallowed
in the light
behind my eyes

there is one dancer
I cannot resist
her only movement is utter stillness
I find no memory
in her transparent gaze

∞

romance is a simple mistake
finding true love
in the arms of one other
is like capturing a waterfall
in a tiny cup
thirst is slightly quenched
why not just step into the source

romance is a beautiful distraction
taking you beyond your dry concerns
yet what good is an open heart
with room for only one when that one is gone
the heart is empty and dry
and tears fall on empty ground

romance is a single drop
in a torrent of love
why settle for one sip at a time
the sweetest tasting water is deeper than the surface
dive into the current
and as you are swept away
drink to your heart's content

nothing seen is wasted
the sight of every eye
increases the range of vision
of that which sees

every sight is a gem
of pure perfection
in the inner eyes
of that which sees

each viewpoint
lives on forever
nothing can die
within that which sees

look deeply into any eye
beyond your reflection
come face to face
with that which sees

abandon appearance
let go of pretense
you are naked and exposed
before that which sees

do not turn away your gaze
no need to hide
only love shines in the eyes
of that which sees

-24-

all may have a mind of their own
but thoughts are gifts of grace
touching mind for an instant
like melting snowflakes
every place can be home but rest is a divine blessing
when effort falls away
like the setting sun

the heart may burn with emptiness
but love comes in waves
smoothing away doubts
like a tide erasing footprints in the sand

∞

-25-

in the dream I always play the fool
in the dream
my defenses always fail
in the dream
my desires are never fully satisfied
in the dream
my heart is broken over and over

wide awake
I always play the fool
wide awake
my defenses always fail
wide awake
my desires are never fully satisfied
wide awake
my heart sings its endless joy

∞

-26-

what should we do
what is the purpose of life
here is the endless task
to do nothing well
here is your purpose
to be free of any purpose

why do we suffer so
how can we end the pain
here is the source of suffering
in the desire to end suffering
there is no end to pain
nor an end to joy within the soul of freedom

∞

-27-

my longing was never deep enough
to touch this empty well
my effort was never great enough
to move this unmovable mountain
my understanding was never broad enough
to contain this silent truth
my dreaming was never real enough
to shape this formless presence
nothing is always enough
when nothing is needed

∞

-28-

the mystery
of this simple moment
cannot be spoken
yet all of history
occurred to arrive here

the mystery
of the endless terrain of self
cannot be mapped out
countless new frontiers
are born with every breath

the mystery
of awakening
cannot be achieved all that is needed
is to notice inner eyes that never close

the mystery
of sweet undying love
cannot be understood
the heart already knows
what the mind can only long for

the mysteries
always remain
untouched by worried thought
ready to welcome us home
when we abandon our dreams

∞

-29-

take my hand
feel the vital grip
that love lends to this flesh
listen to my voice
hear the catch in my throat
of awe that can't be expressed
gaze into my eyes
see tears welling up
as I recognize my long lost self in your smile
rest in my arms
find refuge in my embrace
until you know you are forever safe
join me now
here where we have never parted

∞

-30-

no word is real enough
to conjure up a crumb of bread
still we try to find nourishment
in endless musing

no thought is thick enough to cushion a fall
yet we pursue idle distractions
while tripping on obstacles in our path

there is a silent voice behind the words
there is a quiet source of every thought
listen without your ears
ponder without your mind

rest your senses and your sense
for just one moment of this stillness
will sustain and uphold you forever

∞

-31-

it is here
in the breath
it is here
in the stillness between breaths

it is here
in the active mind
it is here
in the resting mind
it is here
in the dream's panorama
it is here
in each moment of awakening

it is here
when all is well
it is here
when fear has nothing left to fear

even then
there is pure noticing even then
there is no need for doing

no frantic searching
can find the obvious
no seeking needed
to find that which seeks

it is here
where it can never be lost
or found

∞

where does willingness come from
willing to do anything
although nothing can be done
willing to surrender everything
although nothing is mine willing to be exposed although there is nothing to hide

where does lovingness come from
loving the flaws in us
although we are perfect
loving the simplicity although feelings are so complex
loving you although no one is there

where does gratefulness come from
grateful for the laughter
although the joke is on me
grateful for the beauty
although eyes cannot truly see
grateful for the bounty
although hands are forever empty

truth is a living being
that must be nourished and fed
and loved
then it grows and blossoms
filling the air with pure aroma
making us gasp with delight

truth is a friend
that asks for loyalty and acceptance
then it enters our hearts
dissolving the boundaries freeing us from loneliness

truth is a demanding lover
that requires constant affection
and endless gifts
then it rewards us
with a glimpse of indescribable beauty
making us faint with satisfaction

and finally truth is an empty hand
that asks for and requires
nothing

-34-

the obvious signs
a playful smile
absence of pretense
disregard for convention
respect for truth

listen when they speak
look where they point
follow where they lead
abandon hope and faith and dreams
accept nothing less than all they have to give
your share in the infinite is infinite

come claim your birthright
return to the place never left
return and let the seeker rest
subside in the unending peace

let the seeker rest
let that which you seek find you
let the seeker rest
the task is finished
let the seeker rest
let the seeker rest

∞

-35-

behind closed eyes
the world falls away
a whirl of empty sensation
with no boundary
drowning thought in a silent symphony
burning the body
in painless effigy
when eyes open again
the world is cleansed
only perfection remains
the room is resplendent
with the absence of illusion

∞

-36-

grateful
for grace
that fills mind with visions
of the invisible

grateful
for time
that expands to embrace
stillness

grateful
for breath
that seems to require
no breather

grateful
for gratitude
that breaks the soul wide open
freeing love

∞

in a timeless instant
before a painful idea appears in my mind
an ever present softness, a gentle hand reaches into my thoughts
and soothes them
until they reflect only empty sky

in a timeless moment
before a desire burns in my heart
an inexhaustible peace, a whispered silence
quells the storm
of fruitless wishing
leaving me breathlessly still

in a timeless lifetime
before my story is wrenched from silence
a wordless honesty, an unflinching gaze
shows me my face
without shadows of doubt
dimming the fire within

in a timeless eternity
before my soul is torn from infinity
a passionate tenderness, an enfolding embrace
leaves me alone
with the source of sweetness
even closer than a kiss

welcome home
welcome to the home never left
you have always lived here
will always live here
this is home, forever...
so stop now
no effort is required
even during all journeys
you have always been here
this is home, forever...
so relax now
the fire is in the hearth
this inner fire is keeping you warm
the storms outside cannot touch you
this is home, forever...
so rest now
everyone loved is right here
we have always lived here will always live here
this is home, forever...

I must follow this thought
all the way
let the mind have its way with me
but only with me
not with the quiet presence
the voice behind all thoughts

I must feel this emotion
with my whole being
and as it sweeps me off my feet
enjoy the sensation of falling
falling endlessly into the arms
of no lover

I must, I must
for this dream demands no less
than total suspension of disbelief
total surrender for the dream and the dreamer
are one and the same

I have never been more than a dream
and the dreamer
is awake

-40-

endless poems wait to be written while all has been said before
this truth cannot be spoken and so I try again
just to get a little closer
to the unspeakable reality

forever gently teasing just out of reach
forever invisible at the edge of perception
forever tranquil in the maelstrom of feelings
forever present in this moment's eternity

∞

-41-

it doesn't matter
what I do
mind judges
then judges itself for judging
that's just what minds do
when I let it have its way
it surprises me by stopping
and in the vacant interlude
the mind finds no grip
and falls effortlessly into the deep pool of silence
it never left

∞

-42-

rain falls
within the endless awareness
the sun still shines
behind the clouds

loss rips
at the heart of love
empty peace still rests
at the source of tears

floods wash
away the precious hillsides
life rises to the surface
for another breath of joy

thoughts race
across the mind's attention
quiet still sings
from the throat of nowhere

pure freedom remains
when all else is
swallowed in the river of time

∞

-43-

mind always wins
every thought an artful trap
leading further into dreams
resistance speeds the entanglement
surrender, the only option

then what surprising silence
entanglement becomes a tender caress
dreaming dissolves in wonder

mind continues the endless game
jumping in to claim peace as its own
creating a new identity to play with
as if it could find something solid in empty space laughter, the only response

then identities come and go
mind plays on the surface
silence enjoys it all

∞

-44-

all I have ever wanted is wanting
all I have ever had is having
all I am is all there is
and wanting and having are always here
in equal measure

all I have ever loved is love
all I have ever loved is loving
all I am is love
and loving is always here
in infinite measure

∞

-45-

quite ordinary desires
come and go come and go
never needing to be fulfilled
their satisfaction made irrelevant
by the shining beauty of a rain soaked forest
the rain washing away thoughts
of something lacking

what could be lacking
in this explosion of life
that grows in each nook and cranny
of the infinite heart
the moisture of love
seeping down to nourish the roots
of every being
or dancing in streams and rivers
all the way home

∞

-46-

die a little
with every disappointment
or find what never dies
and has no preferences

try a little
and keep illusion going
or see the futility of effort
and stop pushing on nothing

be happy a little
now and then when circumstance allows
or rest in the source of happiness
now, then and always

believe a little
that you are someone
or notice there is no separate one
nor any limit to being

love a little
with half a heart
or let love have it all
filling the heart to overflowing

∞

-47-

the dance of emptiness
goes on and on
colors, shapes and forms
arrayed in courtly splendor
on the dance floor of infinity

the patterns of the dance
will hypnotize if watched too closely
while the entire view
ends all trances
and frees the dreaming mind

now join the dance
its irresistible ebb and flow
swallows your pride
in the pure joy
of moving stillness

∞

-48-

this voice is inadequate
to express the abundant wonder
of this endless moment

this body is insufficient
to embrace the sweet infinity
of this lover's bodiless form

these eyes are unable
to capture the invisible beauty
of a cloudless sky

and yet I sing with joy,
caress the air with tenderness,
allow beauty to fill my eyes with tears,
and know that the love in my heart
is always enough

∞

truth is too simple for words
before thought gets tangled up in nouns and verbs
there is a wordless sound a deep breathless sigh
of overwhelming relief
to find the end of fiction
in this ordinary
yet extraordinary moment
when words are recognized
as words
and truth is recognized
as everything else

-50-

a quiet room
empty of profound thoughts
in this moment
no need to uncover deep truths

the chairs do not mind the silence
the rug is not burdened by the lack of weighty ideas
only the thought, "there must be something more"
cries out in pretended anguish

the chairs pay no attention
the rug only lies more quietly
until the pretended suffering
can't help but notice
there is always more
that does not need to be revealed

∞

-51-

laughter stops thought
and fills the space behind the eyes with light
such simple delight
to find nothing is knowable

I can only give everything
to this nothing
and am overjoyed
to let it tear down the barricade in my chest
and steal my heart

∞

the room is empty
except for these saddened eyes
that find refuge in emptiness

friends come and go
lovers come and go
but love itself never wavers

emptiness is my refuge
emptiness is my resting place
everywhere I turn
the end of boundaries awaits

take sadness now
take happiness also
leave only clear vision

the room is still empty
except for these opened eyes
that find refuge in fullness

early in the morning
asleep in a dream
only to awaken in another dream
why disturb the quiet mist
with imaginary forms
the heart is never fulfilled
with dream lovers

for there is never enough
of what does not satisfy

so let the mist have it all
I have moistened my cheeks long enough in this fog of dreaming
I will not move again until my true love appears

when at last the sun burns away the haze
no one is there
what relief. . . to find her waiting

mind finds a path
to struggle along
never reaching the goal
heart knows it already rests
in the path of something wonderful
it cannot escape

mind seeks to hold onto
a still point
of final understanding
heart knows it is being held
by an unmoving whirlwind
that it will never comprehend

mind tries to feel safe enough
to allow love
out into the open
heart knows love is never cautious
and cannot be kept secret
once all hope of refuge is abandoned

-55-

simply resting
from a full day of resting
feeling too rested
to even consider anything more

simply quiet
staying in the silent pauses
no thought
not even the idea: no thought

too busy
doing nothing
to stop long enough
to do something less

∞

excitement stirs the blood
yet only nothingness is ever palpable
imagined pleasures always fall short
compared to the simple reality
this bird in the hand
is worth a million in the bush
sensations have their say
promising satisfaction
as if they could stay
long enough to fulfill endless desire
yet always ending in a reverberating empty stillness
this deafening calm
is cherished by the core of being
as the true source of infinity

-57-

light through a prism...
a rainbow
love through my heart...
the spectrum of feelings revealed
red anger to blue sadness
yellow fear to black despair
allow them back into my heart
and the prism works in reverse
turning the most deeply tinted pain
back into pure white love

∞

-58-

foolish to chase after imaginary pleasures
they love to dance out of reach
giving only tastes of slight satisfaction

simpler to give heartfelt attention
to the source of contentment
and find there is never anything missing
in this moment

then the rising water of devotion
takes the weight out of these hands
and dissolves the dreamlike boundaries
of desire itself

∞

-59-

a world of endless contradiction
sad smiles and joyous tears
the heart is torn in two
by feelings that never fail to pull in opposite directions
torn in two
by dreams that forever dance out of reach

until at last the contents of the heart
spill out in an endless flood
of sad smiles and joyous tears
that no longer have any ambivalence
because of their shared source

∞

-60-

words do not come
there is no need for profound utterances or deep truths
here is an ordinary evening
why spoil it with dramatic overstatement

the silence amidst the noise
the gem at the core of every experience
is polished by simple attention
into shining magnificence

∞

-61-

every taste
every sensation
every possible pleasure
is already present
in the timeless
awareness
that is beating my heart
what use
in chasing dreams
that have already
come true

∞

-62-

who would have guessed
this empty feeling in my chest
is the door to eternity

who could have known
this longing
is what I longed for

how is it possible
thoughts of freedom
only hide freedom

why don't I care
about answers
when questions never end

who would have guessed
this empty feeling in my chest could be so full

∞

-63-

what kind of fire has no preference for fuel
gladly burning thoughts, feelings,
bodies and souls
yet it is a cool flame
leaving the core untouched

it flares whenever I give it attention
or has it always been burning this brightly

∞

-64-

sleep comes in the afternoon
and then wakefulness never truly returns
drinking in rest like cool water
cold outside does not touch it
yawning does not disturb it
thoughts of friends in pain
can only make it more obvious
here in this quiet house
the totality comes out to play

∞

hot sun fills the eyes to overflowing
while a cooling breeze of freedom lifts sweat from the brow
every experience from the past that visits now
is recognized for what it has always been
pure food for the dreaming oneness
the banquet continues with each breath

I feast now even on heartbreak and loss
as they burst the limits I held so dear
freeing me from resisting appetite
for fear of a taste of sour fruit

I also welcome the sweet dessert of quiet moments
truth with no trimmings
a simple meal of limitless portion
every tender morsel of silence
more filling than the last

-66-

desire
pure unadulterated longing
tears at the chest with such force it seems the soul might leave
just to find relief

sadness
bittersweet taste of emptiness
weighs on the shoulders
like a burden
too heavy to bear

surrender
swallowing all pride
collapsing from all effort
only to find rest again
in the depths of pain itself

why was I running from this profound
silent joy

∞

-67-

sweeter than any kiss
the taste of eternity
lingers on my lips
tasting me

only the slightest pause
before her passion
overwhelms my feigned resistance
and takes everything I have to give

if this lover breaks my heart
there will be no pieces left

∞

gratitude burns in the chest
glad tears run down the cheeks
strange illusion fills the eyes
the hum of life thrills the ears
no more sense of mine to senses
the body no longer belongs to anyone
leaving no one in the way
of all a body can contain
and all a body cannot touch

wonder awes the mind
inspiration raises the spirit
silence soothes the doubts
intuition speaks to the soul
no more idea of someone with ideas
knowing needs no knower
freeing truth to expand
into all mind can contain
and all mind cannot even imagine

-69-

when I am held in your arms
even pain is pure bliss
dark thoughts of separation and lack
are waves of pure pleasure
unfulfilled desire is complete ecstasy

thank you
for never having let go

∞

-70-

the truth catches up with me
I am not enough
never have been
never will be
what relief to admit this finite container
can never contain infinity
what joy to find infinity needs no container

∞

the tears flow freely now
the mind quiets and the heart breaks wide open
all the hopes and dreams of a lifetime, many lifetimes
gently washed away

longings that have burned in the mind for ages
suddenly flare up, but are quenched
the dying embers of illusion
gently washed away

and the soul thus unburdened of pretense
can barely stand to open its watery eyes
sights so intense, and yet so unreal
gently washed away

finally, a voice that speaks the simplest of truth
intermingled with sweet blissful sighs
all the remaining fears and excitements
gently laughed away

the tired wanderer
loses the strength to go on
and in surrendering to hopelessness
is surprised to finally feel at home

the hurried creek
pauses in a cold, stony pool
and in sudden stillness
arrives at the distant ocean

the frightened warrior decides
"I am ready to die"
and in willing abandon
becomes immortal

the fitful breeze
fades to calm in the afternoon heat
and in catching its breath
is reborn as undying tradewinds

the troubled philosopher
finds nothing to believe in
and in unexpected silence
just smiles at the still unanswered questions

the restless sea
becomes smooth and mirrors the clouds
and in ceasing all motion
rejoins its own depths

the saddened lover
faces the loss of illusion once again
and in dying to passion
falls in love with love itself

the weary sun
sinks into the embrace of the horizon
and in resting at last
welcomes other shores to a new day

-73-

memories of true love
are useless in filling empty moments
for this lover never shows the same face
always a new disguise
keeping mind in suspense
and senses alert

surrender to perpetual surprise
and find her waiting once again
in emptiness itself

∞

body is pure doing
beyond doing there is mind
mind is pure knowing
beyond knowing there is heart
heart is pure being

mind is more than the brain
the heart of being is infinitely more
than this physical beating in the chest
all resides in this heart
the pulse of all life depends on its endless rhythm
lifting us in moments of simple awareness
beyond the limits of doing and knowing
directly to the source of our most tender feelings
and beyond even limitless love

where all is merged
in silent wonder

-75-

the passion for freedom
swallows the source of passion
if twoness could lead to oneness
we would all be faithful lovers

no reason to dream of love
for it is already here in the waking heart
find it now
in the sweet infinity
of this moment's
eternal embrace

∞

the flower can only wait for the bee to arrive
yet passion appears from nowhere
to play hide and seek with peace
all that is gained is lost once again

timeless dreams are swallowed
in the yawn of an awakened sleeper
yet spring rises like a phoenix
from the ashes of winter
all that is lost was never real

is the heart big enough
for the source of weeping
is the heart big enough
for this pure delight

-77-

mind plays its oldest trick
sighing woe is me
so lonely so lonely....being someone

what's this
a sweetness
in the embrace of loneliness
what deeper longing is being satisfied

∞

I always thought you would come to me
in the shape of a beautiful lover
I never dreamed you would steal my heart
with no shape at all

I always pretended I needed arms to hold me
and lips to kiss away my pain
yet I find fulfillment
in the embrace of empty space

I always wished you would speak to me
with words of tender sweetness
now I know you whisper silently
of your undying love

I always knew I would find you
although I foolishly looked with my eyes
you were here all along
hiding just out of sight in my heart

a lasting marriage
when devotion has claimed you for its own
no longer any chance to stray
a brief fling with illusion no longer satisfies
the truth demands utter fidelity
with no possibility of divorce

all pain must be faced
and embraced as the true countenance of
your beloved

all fear must be met
and recognized as the thrill of tasting
the unknowable

all joy must be surrendered
and acknowledged as a gift with no giver

this union only requires telling the truth
even when the truth shatters your dreams
even when the truth leaves you emptied out
even when the truth reveals your counterfeit existence
then there is no other possibility
than happily ever after

-80-

fire may burn the wood
the ashes do not mind

∞

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About the Author

About Nirmala: Who are you really? Are you your body, mind, and personality? Or are you the spacious awareness in which they appear? Questions like these point us to the infinite Presence that is the true source of peace, happiness, and fulfillment. Nirmala is a spiritual teacher in the Advaita tradition of nondual wisdom and the author of several engaging and practical books about our spiritual nature, including *Nothing Personal*, *Living from the Heart*, *Meeting the Mystery*, *That Is That*, and *Gifts with No Giver*. Nirmala offers a unique vision and a gentle, compassionate approach, which adds to the rich tradition of nondual inquiry into the truth. He also offers Nondual Spiritual Mentoring, or spiritual guidance, in one-on-one sessions in person or over the phone. More information is available on his website at: <http://endless-satsang.com>

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an experiential exploration of who we really are, not only through the transmission in the words, but through the many thoughtful questions it raises.

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What is the source of the aliveness and awareness, which are fundamental to all life? What is the nature of desire, and how do our desires relate to suffering? How do we know what is true? What is the nature of belief, and how do our beliefs affect our ability to experience the deeper reality that is always here? And in the midst of these mysteries, how do we live our daily lives in the most satisfying and integrated way? *Meeting the Mystery* explores these questions and will help you discover new dimensions and possibilities in your life.

Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self

In this concisely edited collection of satsang talks and dialogues, Nirmala “welcomes whatever arises within the field of experience. In the midst of this welcoming is always an invitation to inquire deeply within, to the core of who and what you are. Again and again, Nirmala points the questions back to the questioner and beyond to the very source of existence itself—to the faceless awareness that holds both the question and the questioner in a timeless embrace.” –From the Foreword by Adyashanti.

Note: A free excerpt from *Nothing Personal* is included with this book and begins on the next page.

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NOTHING PERSONAL:
Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self

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PART 1

**MOVING FROM THE MIND
INTO THE HEART**

mind finds a path
to struggle along
never reaching the goal
heart knows it already rests
in the path of something wonderful
it cannot escape
mind seeks to hold on to
a still point
of final understanding
heart knows it is being held
by an unmoving whirlwind
that it will never comprehend
mind tries to feel safe enough
to allow love
out into the open
heart knows love is never cautious
and cannot be kept secret
once all hope of refuge is abandoned

Finding What Doesn't Come and Go

We all want the same thing: we all want to be happy. We look everywhere for happiness—in experiences, in possessions, in other people, in pleasures, in success, but we come up empty-handed because they are not the *source* of happiness. We have to go to the source. But how? How do we find the source? All of these things we are chasing after come and go, so we must look to that which doesn't come and go—that is the source. It turns out that the source of everything is also who you are. You are the source of everything, but don't take my word for it. Let's discover this together. Since the source of everything doesn't come and go, it must be here right now, in this very moment. So, let's look into this moment and see what is present in it and what, among the many things that are present, does not come and go.

Let's start simply by noticing the sensations that are present. Just for a moment, be present to the ongoing flow of sensation. One of the things you'll notice is that sensations are always changing. Your sensory experience is never the same from one moment to the next. Nevertheless, there is a continuity to them; they flow from one to the other. So, while sensations do not qualify as something that doesn't come and go, they are woven together in a way that gives an impression of continuity.

In contrast, notice the lack of continuity in the experience of thought. Thoughts are very fluid. When you are present to your thoughts, you discover how unsubstantial, incomplete, and disjointed they are relative to the experience of sensations. Memories, which are just thoughts about the past, are a good example of this. You never have a truly complete memory of an experience because it would take as long as the experience itself. Most of our memories are like still photos or a series of photos highlighting something that was important or stood out about an experience. They are whittled-down, highly-edited versions of what happened. Like an amateur movie, they are jumbled and patched together, often without even a thread to the story line.

Notice for a moment how these highly-edited thoughts differ from sensations. Like sensations, thought is always changing, but the changes can happen much more quickly. In thought, you can move the furniture around instantly. Thoughts allow us to play outside the boundaries of space and time; however, thought is not as well constructed as sensory data or the material world.

Another difference between thought and sensory data is that thought is always either a memory about the past or a fantasy about the future, while sensory impressions happen in the present. Thoughts appear in the present, but their content is always about the past or future because there is never enough time in the present to have a thought about the present. You can't think that fast. By the time you think about an event, it is already in the past.

The difference between thought and sensory data is obvious to us, but it's not to everyone. Some people in mental hospitals can't tell the difference. Many of their thoughts are real to them. They can't distinguish between a thought and a thing. The ability to distinguish this makes it possible for us to function in the world. Some thoughts are so convincing that we scare ourselves, but we can usually tell the difference between thought and sensory data. The reason that thoughts can be very convincing is that they are often based on previous sensory experience.

It's good to notice that thoughts and memories don't have as much solidity or consistency as we'd like to think. They are always changing. I challenge you to have the same thought for even fifteen seconds. Even your memory of a particular event is always changing. For example, the memory of your first date with your spouse will not be the same after twenty years of marriage

as it was a week after you met and certainly not the same if you divorce. Many studies have shown how surprisingly inaccurate memory is. When ten people witness an event, you get ten versions of it, none of which match the actual event. Thoughts or memories definitely don't qualify either as that which doesn't come and go and therefore cannot be the source of happiness, peace and love.

Now, just for fun, I invite you to have a particular thought—the thought of “I” or “me.” Really experience this “I.” Does it have the quality of something real or is it more like a memory, something that is incomplete? What does your character look like in your internal movies and how accurate is that? Has it ever been several days since you looked in the mirror, and when you did, it surprised you because it didn't match your idea of what you look like? You'll notice that you can never get a consistent image of this “I”; you can't pin it down. You can't find it, any more than you can find the thought you had five minutes ago.

Another thing you'll notice is how the “I” fluctuates. Sometimes you have a positive self-image and sometimes not. We have all had moments of being caught in the idea of being a hopeless nobody. You're really believing that, and then an attractive person shows interest in you, and you forget all about that story of being a nobody. Or, have you ever been walking along with an upbeat “I” thought, when someone criticizes you and suddenly you're stuck with a dejected “I” thought? This “I” thought has the same fluidity and amorphous quality of every thought and memory.

Although the “I” is often associated with the body, it can't be the body because we say things like “I have bad eyesight” rather than “I am bad eyesight.” Whenever we refer to the body, there is still something called “I” present as well. Clearly, the body is a part of physical reality; it's a thing that can be referred to. However, the “I” doesn't refer to any *thing*. You can have an elaborate story about “I,” and you can refer to that story and worry about how that story is going, but there is no thing that all of that refers to. “I” is just a lot of memories patched together to make what we call a self-image, which is an accurate description of it—it's an image. It turns out that the “I” is just thoughts about “I.”

Really notice this moment's experience of “I.” No matter how hard you try, it is nothing more than a movie clip. What is even stranger is that you are usually included in the movie clip, when you rarely actually see yourself, except in a mirror. Most of us have never seen ourselves eating breakfast, for instance, but we all have images of what we look like doing that. We completely manufacture images of ourselves doing things. We manufacture memories and call them “me.” Then, we work at improving our self-image, when all that that can accomplish is to improve this memory! In our culture, we focus on creating a positive self-image, as if an image has any power. No one's self-image has ever accomplished anything.

We also have a fantasy that our self-image is what people see, when what they see is *their* image of us. No one relates to your image of you—they can't see your internal image. Somehow, we think that our self-image will protect us or make us well-liked. The truth of this moment is that your self-image isn't doing anything. Your self-image isn't what is hearing these words or having the thoughts you are having; your self-image is itself a thought. No matter how polished your self-image is, you can't send it to work while you stay home. Hearing and thinking are present, but the mystery is: who or what is doing these things? If you are honest, you can't assign credit for that to what you call “I” or “me.”

Have you also noticed that there are big gaps in this thought called “me,” when you forget to be somebody? You get engrossed in something and forget to maintain your self-image. Even when people are holding a self-image of being depressed, there are moments when they forget to

feel depressed because their attention is elsewhere. If we're looking for that which doesn't come and go, this "I" certainly doesn't qualify. It qualifies even less as the source of happiness than anything in sensory experience, so all the time spent trying to improve it doesn't pay off. It's not the object of our search.

So, what else is present right here, right now—besides sensations, experiences, thoughts, feelings, and "you"—that doesn't come and go? What is it that notices the sensory data? What is it that hears the internal dialogues? What is it that notices the self-images and isn't fooled by them? What is the source of all the thoughts, even the "I" thought? It's not something you can sense. You can't find it in the body or in the brain, and yet it is here, right now. And—here's where it gets even spookier—you can't even think about it. Your thoughts about who you are will never adequately represent who you are.

There is this Mystery that thinks and sees and feels and has a body. This Mystery has the fundamental quality of awareness: it is aware of thought, feeling, and sensation. So, even if you haven't been paying attention to anything I've just said, I guarantee that paying attention has still been happening. There was something mysterious that was aware of the sensations and thoughts that I asked you to be aware of. There was something checking your present experience or your memories to see if what I was saying was true for you. Even if that wasn't happening, there was something that was paying attention to something else. It turns out that it is not "you" who is noticing these sensations or noticing this poorly produced movie called "me." It's not "you" that is watching the movie called "me," and yet watching is happening.

This mysterious something is like a flashlight. I call it that because there is a quality of brightness to it. Whatever you bring your attention to becomes lit up by this Awareness. If you become aware of your hands, a brightness comes to your hands. But this brightness is not yours; it's not "you." There is something that is either hearing my words or ignoring my words. What is present even when you are distracted by some irrelevant thought? What is noticing the distracting thoughts? What is this mysterious brightness that is experiencing the endless variations of thought and sensation? What is present in all of these experiences?

If you assign a "me" to it, you create a middleman. This "me" is never the experiencer; it can only be an added layer of experience in the form of a thought about "me." The experiencer doesn't go away; it just experiences this moment with an extra layer called "me." In some ways this truth is very humbling. It's a big demotion for the "me" to discover that it is just an additional, poorly formed layer of thought, which can never be made to be consistent or reliable. No idea you have ever had about yourself has ever lasted.

No matter how elaborate your fantasy of being someone is, you have never succeeded in completely hiding that which does not come and go *and* you have never done any harm to it. "You" can't mess this life up because "you" aren't living it. We think that if there isn't this "me" taking care of life, it's going to fall apart, but it never has been "you" that has been taking care of your life. So, what will you trust? Will you trust this fantasy that has never accomplished anything or this Mystery that has actually been living every moment of life?

∞

But thought is powerful.

Thought is powerful in the realm of thought. Thought can do serious damage to your self-image. So what? Just take your self-image right now and dress it in tattered clothes. Now you have a

self-image of a homeless person. The thought, itself, is not the problem but how caught you are in it. If you are caught in it, it doesn't matter if it is a thought of heaven or hell. People suffer just as much over their thoughts about how wonderful things might be as they do over their thoughts about what might go wrong.

If you mistake your thoughts for something that doesn't come and go, they can be very convincing. The story called "me" is like a record you play over and over again. We think, "that must be me because that's what I think of when I think of me." We get lulled by the habitual nature of thought. But if you are honest, you'll see that there are moments when you forget the story—you forget that particular train of thought called "me"—and Awareness is still here, even when "you" are not.

∞

I feel tense because I feel like I always need to plan.

The simplest way to address this is for you to check: can you find this someone who has to have a plan? Can you find her right now?

No.

So, if she isn't here and has never been here, then there is this mystery: who has done all that planning? Where did all that come from?

It came from fear.

But who experienced this fear? If this "you" doesn't really exist, then what we are calling fear is not something you did either. That also is something that just happened. This is really good news: you are not to blame even for the "you" that is afraid. This is a big relief. You're off the hook.

Beyond that, there is also the possibility of getting curious: who or what is hearing these words right now? It's obviously not "you" but something much bigger. *That* has always been the one deciding when to plan and when not to, and it will decide if you will plan tomorrow or not. Just get curious about *that*.

∞

What about free will and choice?

Once you recognize that there is no "me," then there can't be something called "my" will. But there is will—it's just not "yours."

You mean, I'm not making any choices?

What you think you are has never made a choice, and yet choices are being made all the time.

Who's making them?

This is a good question! This is a huge mystery, which has been going on every day of your life. Choices have happened without your having anything to do with it. This raises the question, who or what is living your life?

The Truth About Thought

Let's take a look at thought. Do you have a choice about what thoughts come? Do you decide to have a thought and then it shows up, or does it just show up? If you have never decided to have even a single thought, can you still call them "your" thoughts? How can they be your responsibility if they aren't yours? They just showed up. Just notice the nature of thoughts and where they come from. Then look even closer: how many of your thoughts are even true? How reliable are they?

Once you realize that most of your thoughts are lies and not worthy guides, you lose interest in them. Some thoughts and words are useful, such as "please pass the butter," but most do not refer to anything real or serve any purpose. Once you see this, you can't be bothered with them anymore. They can't compete with the richness of the present moment. The difference between thoughts and the present moment is like the difference between fantasy and reality. As nice as a fantasy might be, it never has the aliveness, vividness, or dimensionality of reality. Thoughts actually cloud reality, forming a layer of illusion between ourselves and the present moment. Thoughts—even pleasant fantasies and dreams—are like a veil, hiding the true beauty of this moment.

Thought is just a sliver of the now, so if you are too focused on that, you miss everything else that is arising in the now.

∞

You say it is important to be present to everything. So, should you be present even to this illusion called thought?

Yes. Then, it becomes possible to consider who is having these thoughts. It is just being honest to admit that they aren't "your" thoughts. When you actually look in this moment, you can't find such a thing as "you."

When you are fully present to your thoughts, they don't change, but you are more able to be present to everything else—to the rest of the Mystery. When thoughts are finally recognized as just one aspect of experience, they naturally get relegated to a minor, supporting role. Thought can be a handy tool, but it has never been the whole story. Of course, the mind will put up a fuss over this demotion. Find out what happens if you just stay present even to this. Then it is possible to realize that thought, itself, is an incredible mystery.

Mind Games

The source of suffering is the discrepancy between our thoughts (including the thought "me") and the truth of here and now. You would think that we wouldn't be that interested in something that causes so much suffering, and yet we spend a great deal of time sprucing up our thoughts and fantasies.

Just as we are entranced by television, we are entranced by the mind. Have you ever noticed how similar television is to the mind? Just like in the mind, on television, something new is always appearing to grab our attention. Because the mind's job is to scan the environment and notice anything new and different, it is no wonder the mind finds the constant change on the television screen engrossing.

In the real world, on the other hand, life unfolds slowly and organically. If you took a video camera with you on a 30-minute walk and left it on, you'd have a really bad movie. Can you imagine renting that at Blockbuster video?—"Life at Normal Speed." Just notice how attracted the mind is to special effects, drama, and speeded-up versions of life. Even though our thoughts and fantasies are the basis of our suffering, we become engaged with them because, like television and movies, they are entertaining.

Eventually, as with any other addiction, we come to see that our thoughts and fantasies are not very satisfying or fulfilling. Like watching television for hours on end, they leave us feeling empty. Fortunately, there is a handy alternative to the emptiness of thought: here and now. All that is required is to show up in your life. If you go for a walk, show up for the walk; if it is time to brush your teeth, show up for that. To show up in your life, you just have to pay attention to it. Just notice *what is* right now, without referring to some memory of it. Showing up is very simple—no preparation is needed and you can't get it wrong.

Spiritual practices are the opposite of MTV. They help you tune down the noise and distractions. The mind is like a galloping horse, always off after the next enticing fantasy or memory. It is endlessly grasping after something that isn't real. Spiritual practices rein in that galloping horse, and that helps you show up in your life. What's so surprising is how satisfying that is. It's like the difference between eating a dozen cookies and eating a nourishing meal. As one of my teachers, Richard Clarke, once said, "You can never get enough of what does not satisfy."

Nothing the mind presents is satisfying or nourishing. There is nothing in the mind to compare to this moment as long as you take in all of the moment and not just some highly-edited version of it. That is where you will find real nourishment and aliveness. The joy of what is here right now far surpasses any memory or fantasy.

∞

Is the mind always confused, and why do we listen to it?

Let me ask you, is your mind always confused?

More and more.

When you start yearning for the Truth—yearning to know who you really are—then the mind spends a lot of time in confusion. Why do *you* keep going back to it?

Habit.

Yes. That is really the truth. Is the Heart present right now?

It must be.

The mind can figure that much out. Tell me, what do you want?

Freedom, but I'm afraid of the giving up, the letting go, the change.

How badly do you want it? Is it worth feeling confused much of the time? What if that was just the nature of the mind's experience of Truth. What if the confusion never gets resolved in the sense that there is finally a knowing? What if the not-knowing just gets bigger and bigger?

That's scary.

To the mind, that is very scary because it has less of a role. It means letting go of dreams and hopes and desires too. Is it worth it? Do you want Freedom that bad?

My heart does.

That's the truth. The one thing I can do is reassure you that it is very normal to feel confused and afraid.

That makes sense. There's so much to let go of. I guess there is a part of me that doesn't want to.

So, let's make it simpler: everything that you are talking about letting go of—have you ever really *had* any of it?

I've never had any of it!

Did you have to let go of believing in Santa Claus?

No.

But there was a certain point when the truth about Santa Claus was seen. Did you lose anything really? You had a fantasy of Santa Claus, but what did you have really? Letting go makes it sound like a big struggle, but what is it you have to let go of? Just a lot of ideas.

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It's funny that we think the mind is going to help us figure out how to become happier or enlightened, when the opposite is true. We're so busy listening to it that we miss what's here in the moment, which is the only place where life can be experienced. And the mind is so clever at convincing us that the moment is not "where it's at" but in some fantasy or idea. It is so ironic. What a funny Mystery this is!

It's easy to make the mind into the bad guy. The mind is not the problem but rather the mistaken idea that it can free us by figuring things out. If you make the mind the bad guy, then you are just beating up the mind with your mind, and you're still not in the moment!

Embracing the moment—diving into it with your whole being and saying yes to everything that shows up in it can be done even with the mind. When you find the mind frantically trying to figure things out, you just get curious about that: “Wow, look at that. What an amazing thing!” The mind goes a thousand miles a minute through a million variations of this moment. What is this expression of the Mystery we call the mind? It’s like the Mystery on speed!

The point I want to make is that the mind doesn’t have to be left out. It doesn’t have to be stopped or obliterated—and it can’t be. If you are no longer fighting the mind and its hyperactive, obsessive behaviors, then it is possible to become curious about what is aware of the mind. What are we referring to when we say “my mind”? What does *my* refer to? Or when we say “I have a mind”? Who or what is this I? And what is the mind, itself, this thing so like Curious George the monkey in the children’s story, which never seems to rest and is always poking its nose into things and causing trouble?

The trouble is we think that the mind is who we are and that it has something important to tell us.

It’s good to be clear that that is the only problem. The mind, itself, is not a problem. Monkeys are cute! Although you still might want to keep an eye on them so that they don’t get into too much trouble.

And once in a while, it comes up with something useful.

And a lot of useless entertainment! The mind will never give you the whole picture, though. So who or what is this that has a mind?

The Self, that which is aware of all of it.

And what is that?

I don’t know! The mind doesn’t know.

You don’t know, and yet it is here. Everyone has a sense of this, so it’s not something that is hidden. *Who* has a mind?

The mind can’t speak about it.

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Do judgments and thoughts of better-than/worse-than still appear after awakening?

Those conditioned thoughts still appear, and they are recognized as just thoughts. When that happens, there is the possibility of meeting them with the same gratitude that you would thoughts of love. When you meet judgments with gratitude, they can become a doorway to the Mystery, to something not yet seen, rather than a sticky trap. When judgment is met with passion and gratitude, the judgment, itself, becomes an opening. I have no idea how that works—it’s a complete mystery to me—but it never fails.

However, it doesn't work to do it half-heartedly—accepting the judgment in the hope that it will go away. You have to fall in love with it. Instead of wanting it to go away, you have to want it to stay because you are curious about it. How does it do that sticky thing? How does it create contraction? Of course, as soon as you bring curiosity to it, it loses its stickiness and instead becomes a doorway to the Mystery. Curiosity makes it possible for you to see beyond the disguise called “judgment” that the Mystery has temporarily taken on, and suddenly there you are in the Mystery.

Nothing Personal

What if even your strongest emotions aren't personal? Is anything personal? What if this experience we are having as a body and mind is more like a radio that receives things rather than creates or generates them? You need a radio to play the songs that are passing through this room now, right? All this experience is floating around, and this radio called “you” is playing these songs called desire, fear, love, envy. Even resistance is just one more song called “I want to turn off the radio.” What if your internal experiences are not personal but more like something a musician recorded years ago that is being played now?

Even the love songs aren't personal. Even the very dramatic, very sad, very happy, or very romantic ones aren't personal. There is nothing wrong with them; they just aren't yours. You can still pay attention to them, but there is no reason to get invested in trying to change them or get them to stay around. Every song on the radio eventually ends—even “Bye-Bye Miss American Pie,” which was 17 minutes long. It would go on and on, but eventually there would be another commercial.

A radio is a great metaphor because a radio isn't like a CD player, which you can program to play what you want it to play. What plays on the radio is not up to you. Sometimes, it is a happy song, sometimes it is a sad one, sometimes it is an inspiring one. The Mystery is so wise that it knows exactly what song to put on in this moment. It decides what song gets played, and once it has been played, you can't hang on to it. Just being present while it is being played is the best you can do. That is all you *can* do. Paradoxically, this recognition that everything that arises on this radio called “you” is impersonal makes it easier to pay attention to what is arising because, if it's not personal, there is no reason to hold back from it.

Another huge mystery is: What is aware of what's playing on this radio? Then, you can ask an even stranger question: Is there a boundary between what is aware of what's playing on the radio and what's playing on the radio? Is what is hearing the radio and experiencing all of the experiences actually separate from the experiences themselves? It turns out that the listener who is hearing these tunes is not separate from this Mystery. Rather, the songs are streaming forth out of the Mystery, and the listening is streaming forth out of the same Mystery. There is a huge ground, or Presence, in which everything happens. The surprise is that this ground is not a place of knowing but rather a place of open-eyed discovery. There is no knowing ahead of time what will be played; you just discover in the moment the next song comes on.

Knowing and Not Knowing

There are two kinds of knowing. One kind is the knowing from the past, which includes everything we have read or been told. We have all invested a lot of time and energy into trying to collect enough knowledge so that we will feel safe. We want such a solid knowing that no matter

what life throws at us we will feel like we know what to do. That is the kind of knowing that I'm suggesting is often useless because life is always throwing something at you that is beyond your knowing.

There is another kind of knowing, which is much simpler and wiser, and that is the knowing of the moment—the Heart's knowing. There is a part of you that just knows. This knowing in the moment is present to what is actually coming at you from life. It's not a knowing beforehand but a knowing that arises to *meet* what is actually happening in the moment. It is just present to whatever is happening without the rigidity or preconceptions of the other kind of knowing. As soon as something new arises, it is present to that, and the past knowing becomes irrelevant. Whatever you knew a moment ago is no longer any good in *this* new moment. For example, anyone you think you know—you don't know them *now*. You might have many memories and ideas of what they are like, but to know them now you have to be really present to them now and have noticed that they have changed—because they have.

Being this present, rather than making you foolish, makes you wide awake and intelligent. You are present enough to know what is happening right now because you aren't holding on to a preconceived idea of what *is* happening. Another way of saying this is that you trust the *source* of knowing more than what you know. If you trust what you already know, it will endlessly lead you astray. That's when you find yourself walking into furniture because you didn't notice that someone moved it since you were last there.

The source of knowing is giving you everything you need to know right now. It may or may not be what you want to know or be similar to what you knew yesterday, but everything you need to know for *this* moment is right here. I'm not suggesting that the other kind of knowing is bad and that the best spiritual practice of all is a frontal lobotomy. I'm only suggesting that you trust this fresh, alive knowing that shows up in each moment more than what you know from the past. The only thing you can really know is what is true right now in this moment.

Most moments are pretty ordinary; so this wonderful, alive knowing is often very ordinary and not always profound. Sometimes it is profound, but that doesn't do you any good when, in the next moment, you have to balance your checkbook. Then, you have to surrender again to what is true in *this* moment, which may be that three plus four equals seven. If you're busy thinking "it's all One anyway, so I'll just put down one," you'll get in trouble with the bank.

The truth is that 99% of the time, you act out of this innate knowing: your body breathes out of this innate knowing. This innate wisdom doesn't ignore your memories and other knowledge; it just doesn't give them validity when the truth of the moment is in contradiction to them. When they are applicable, like the memory of how to get home when you are driving home, this innate wisdom draws on them.

One reason we turn away from this deeper knowing is that it feels like not knowing. When you are just *here* without any preconceptions or pre-conclusions, the experience feels like not knowing. In every moment, you step back into *now*, which is a place of not knowing, and then the knowing rises up to meet it. Right now, this innate wisdom is keeping you breathing, it is keeping the blood circulating throughout your whole body, it is keeping every cell in your body doing what it needs to do. These are simple knowings, but they are actually very profound. How does our body know how to do all of this?

So, which will you trust? Will you put your trust in all of your ideas and what you think you know or in that which has been running your life all along, which has always been enlightened—so enlightened that it blinks your eyes when they need to blink? Your wisest moments have been when you have been present to what was happening. When you are present to what is true, what

to do becomes obvious. However, this requires trust because knowing doesn't show up until the moment, itself, shows up—they arrive together. You trust by just giving your attention to *what is* rather than to your ideas about what should be or what you would like to have happen or to trying to figure out what you will say and do ahead of time, which we do in hopes that there won't be any surprises.

The good news is that even before you trust this deeper knowing, it has been working perfectly all along. The difference is that when you trust it, when you surrender to it, you don't suffer anymore. When, instead, you pay attention to your ideas about how things should be or how you want things to happen, this innate wisdom still gets you where you need to be, but because you are so busy with your ideas about it, you suffer. The good news is that this innate wisdom is not something you add or something you do or something you need to master, it is who you are.

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How do I know what to do?

When there is no interest in thoughts, then knowing appears mysteriously from somewhere other than the mind. Test this out yourself: find out what it is like to be present without all your investments, desires, and agendas. When you are present without those, knowing shows up, although you never know ahead of time what that knowing will be and where it will take you.

It's strange to discover what happens when you are just present to life without your personal agendas and investments. When there is no longer any investment in things being a certain way, then you are totally free; you are free of suffering. Every moment feels like you are stepping off a cliff—you are endlessly falling into the mysterious present. This place is very alive and real, and it is actually what's been happening your whole life. However, this might not be what your mind thinks Freedom looks like. If your mind thinks Freedom means getting to do whatever you want, you will be pleasantly surprised to discover how much freer it is to let everything happen the way it does naturally, whether that is the way "you" want it to be or not.

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There are times when my mind says one thing and my feelings say another and my feet just go ahead and do something else. When I go with my feet, there's a feeling of "yes."

If you are on to the fact that someone is a pathological liar, you just stop paying attention to him. Your thoughts and feelings are pathological liars. Once you see this, you just stop paying attention to them, and then they aren't a problem anymore. This pulls the rug out from under the way you've run most of your life. We keep thinking that someday we will find a true feeling or understanding, and then we will be done; but there has never been a true feeling or understanding. There is nothing wrong with feelings and understandings; they just aren't big enough to contain the whole truth, and because of this, they are lies. One very artful form of lying is not telling the whole truth. Feelings and understandings are very artful ways of lying because they don't tell the whole truth.

So do you just stop worrying about it and follow your feet? How do you do that?

Any answer I give you is one of these understandings, and it will fall short. It might work the first time or the first ten times, but there will come a time when that understanding will be useless. The problem comes in trying to use an understanding as a formula for life because an understanding is never the whole truth.

It's uncomfortable for the mind to not have any understanding. At some point, however, you just stop caring about this being uncomfortable because the mind has never been comfortable. Understanding is like any other addictive substance: you get a little bit and it makes you suffer even more—you become that much more hooked on it. Like any good alcoholic or junkie, you have to hit bottom—you have to have spent your last penny on understanding and found that, even then, it doesn't take away the suffering.

When you finally admit that you don't know anything, that's when you start paying attention. If you have no idea what is going on, you had better pay attention, right? Rather than trying to find the right idea or understanding, you are just *here* in the moment as all thoughts and understandings come and go. You just stay in this compassionate Presence that allows all of it and is curious about all of it.

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I want to know why the Mystery is doing all of this. Understanding gives me a feeling of silence and vastness.

If I gave you a good answer for why all of this happens, and you experienced one of those feelings of vast silence, you'd probably try to go back to that answer again tomorrow. There is no problem with understanding or with these feelings, but the invitation is to go deeper—to find the *source* of these feelings. Is understanding the source or is it just something you have used to give yourself permission to feel the vast, silent spaciousness that is always here? We think this feeling of spaciousness comes from understanding or knowing, but I invite you to find out what happens when you just let yourself not know.

I don't exist anymore. There's just space.

Isn't that simpler than trying to understand it? Just go directly to the vast space.

So, why don't we all just space out if that is the point?

I would never suggest you stop there—that's what spacing out is. Spacing out is trying to stay permanently in the spaciousness, which you will never be able to do. If you try, in a couple of weeks, someone will come knocking on your door demanding the rent! Or you will go to the refrigerator and it will be empty.

Instead of trying to figure it all out or hang on to these good feelings, get curious: who or what is feeling spacious? What is present when you are feeling spacious *and* when you are feeling contracted? What is present when you understand something really clearly *and* when you are totally confused? What is present in both?

It is the same awareness, but one is clogged up.

Just check. Is there really any less awareness in this state you are calling “clogged up”? Ideas or feelings of being clogged up may be present, but there is still awareness of those, isn’t there?

What’s the big deal about awareness? It’s a mystery, it’s not visible, it’s nothing.

This is just the surface of it. Is awareness here right now?

But what is here? Nothing. I don’t know what awareness is.

That is a truthful answer. That is as far as your mind can take you. Instead of stopping at the blankness of the mind, try looking even deeper into this Mystery. What is this that is present in every state? What is even aware of the blankness of the mind in response to this question?

It’s like a trickster, having a ball at my expense.

It’s definitely at your expense. The joke is totally on “you.”

It’s like a jokester that is playing with form, but I’m not aware of it.

You say you are not aware of it, but if that were so, how could you be speaking about it now? Is there really a boundary between what you call “I,” the one who is the butt of the joke, and the one who is playing the joke? Can you find this boundary in Awareness or is Awareness present in both?

No. There is no boundary.

We’ve all been on this spiritual path looking for answers, and the joke is that answers are not the point at all; the point is to have a blast with the questions. The point is not to hold back from the Mystery just because there is no final understanding. Along the way, incredible understandings come out of the Mystery, but the Mystery, itself, will remain a mystery.

So, it will always remain out of reach?

I wouldn’t say that it is out of reach, but the mind can’t grasp it. In the end, you have to be willing to go beyond recognizing it and even beyond experiencing it to *being* it. There is no little “me” separate from the Mystery. If you sincerely engage in this inquiry, you will discover that it all turns out to be Mystery.

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So, understanding that we don’t understand is true understanding?

By the time anything registers in your brain, it is old news. That is just the nature of knowing—it’s about the past. So, that is not the place to go to for this aliveness. Not-knowing is the place

where life happens. Not-knowing is here right now, isn't it? It's easy to circle around it, but every time you rest *here*, there it is. So, what is always present?

I don't know.

Yes, and when the mind touches this place of not-knowing, it concludes that that can't be enlightenment or the Truth; so we turn away from that and look, instead, for something we *can* know. What happens right now if you just don't know?

It's hard for me to accept.

Yes. When we come up against this, we want to do anything but admit or welcome this seemingly bottomless not-knowing.

Since it is always here, I just invite you to get familiar and curious about this "I don't know." It is much quieter to keep looking into "I don't know" than trying to figure it out with your mind. It's restful isn't it? It's restful to admit that you don't know. Just rest here for a while. Just notice how rich this "I don't know is," how mysterious it is, how much is falling away right now and how much is arising to take its place. But don't forget to rest; you don't have to go back to trying to figure it out.

Oneness and Many-ness

The reason we spend so much time in spiritual circles pointing to Oneness is that differences are so obvious, while Oneness is not. The fact that there is both Oneness and many-ness may seem like a paradox. The way beyond this paradox is to recognize that differences do not necessarily mean separateness. Two things can be different but not separate. An obvious example is your fingers. When you look at your fingers, you see that they are different and they even look separate if you don't look farther down to your palm. When you do look farther down, however, you realize your fingers are part of the same thing—your hand—and even beyond that, they are part of one body.

One of the illusions that traps us is that these bodies seem so separate; but this, too, is just a case of not having looked deeply enough. The trick is not to look with the mind because the mind is not the correct tool for this. The mind is really good at noticing differences—between this finger and that, between this body and that. You could say that this is part of its job description. It is perfectly designed for noticing differences, and it serves consciousness very well in that capacity.

Once that is seen, there is no problem because there is something else that does recognize the Oneness, and that is the Heart. Notice I didn't say "your" heart but "the" Heart. That's why it has no problem seeing the connectedness—because there is only one Heart. It *is* the Oneness. So, now there is no longer any contradiction. The differences are not a problem when their *source* is recognized as well.

Even though the mind can't get it, check to see if something else is present that innately knows the Truth. This is the Heart, that which already knows the Oneness. It is not hidden. It is here right now, this Oneness, this Heart—the source of the differences, the source of all the states, all the emotions, all the thoughts. What a surprise to find it right here!

What is the cause of separation? I went down to the beach yesterday and had the feeling of Oneness, but the minute I talked to someone, a wall went up and I felt separate.

What if neither the feeling of separateness nor the feeling of Oneness is a reliable indicator? What if these feelings are the wrong measuring device for whether or not separation is present? What if feelings are not that accurate? Right now, your leg feels separate from the floor. Feeling is an accurate tool for experiencing differences like this, but then we jump to the conclusion that this feeling means that your leg and the floor are separate.

Where I experience separation is when judgment comes in.

Now we're talking about a thought. What if thoughts are not a reliable indicator either? You started off by asking, What is the source of separation? What if the source of separation is just the mistaken idea that thoughts and feelings mean something?

What I'm doing is having a judgment about the judgment.

Yes. Those are just more thoughts. What if even those don't disturb the Oneness? Then, your thoughts and feelings are free to do what they do best—indicate differences. Distinctions can be useful, but if differences are interpreted as an absence of Oneness, that is a misunderstanding.

Once a thought is recognized as a thought, it doesn't have to go away because it doesn't touch that which is and always has been One. Separation is just a thought, and that is all it has ever been. When you realize that, then there is no problem even with that thought. Notice how very conditioned we are to focus on the thoughts, feelings, and sensations arising in the body/mind. That is where we check when someone asks us how we are. We scan either current thoughts and feelings and sensations or how they have been for the last three months or three days or whatever and report on them—they are our reference for how we are (who we are).

There is nothing wrong with thoughts, feelings, and sensations, but they are only partial truths. A feeling can never be a complete truth: you can't feel everything at once with one hand, for example. Feeling is not an adequate tool for taking in Oneness, and thought is not an adequate tool for knowing Oneness. Thoughts and feelings are only useful for what they are good at. Once you realize this, then they are no longer so important. That Oneness that we are speaking of, is it here right now, without referring to thoughts or feelings?

Well. I know what I'm supposed to say.

Yes. We all know what we are supposed to say! The thought that you know the right answer—what is that appearing in? You can't really know that, like you know the right answer, and yet it is here. You can't feel it completely, and yet it is here. Once it has been recognized that there is this huge Mystery within which everything is happening, then there is no problem with feeling only a part of it. You are no longer seeing this couch as separate from the Mystery but feeling the Mystery in its couch appearance or in this animated form as another human being or as a feeling or as a thought or judgment.

How does this Oneness show up in so many different forms? Not one of them is separate from it, no matter how different it is— and there are some pretty wild things in this ever-unfolding Mystery. They can even end up living next door! The Mystery seems to delight in differences. It extends itself outward into countless forms and doesn't even make two snowflakes alike. That is how into differences it is. Yet, when you look with your heart at any aspect of the Mystery rather than with your thoughts and feelings, you will discover the Oneness underlying all the differences. There is something more simple and direct than thoughts and feelings that knows the Oneness—without knowing it.

Let the Heart Be Your Guide

If you stop and notice, it is obvious that the mind is not such a reliable guide for what to do and how to run your life. If you have followed your thoughts at all, you will have discovered that they are a very poor compass. They spin you around and take you on all sorts of wild goose chases.

Feelings are a little deeper place to check and a little truer than thoughts, but if you are honest, you'll recognize that feelings are not very reliable guides either. There is nothing wrong with them; they just aren't a good compass because feelings point in all directions.

Even deeper than thoughts and feelings are desires. This is moving in the right direction. When you are honest about your desires, you are being more complete. But if you reflect on your experience, you will probably find that following your desires has not led to great results either. So, I invite you to look even deeper for a guide. Look even deeper than your thoughts, feelings, and desires.

What is being pointed at is that which cannot be known through the mind. In looking deeper than your thoughts, feelings, and desires, you leave behind any sense of knowing in the usual sense. The mind doesn't register what lies deeper, and yet it is possible to recognize a place of deeper knowing that can be called the Heart. This is a very vulnerable place, which is probably why we speak of it as Heart. It feels vulnerable because there is a sense of not knowing in advance what is coming; things happen spontaneously in surprising ways.

This not-knowing and sense of things not being fixed or static, is an indicator that you are in the Heart. Being in the Heart has a quality of being fresh and new in every moment. The invitation is to keep diving into this place that is more honest and true and where you know less and less. As you surrender to not-knowing, you allow more space for this wise and knowing guide called the Heart to speak to you. It can show you more clearly than your thoughts, feelings, and desires what is really happening and what is true about your situation.

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This free bonus is an excerpt only of the book, *Nothing Personal*.
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