

MAY 2026

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Joy

Unconditional
Joy
DAAJI

A Thing of
Beauty
VICTOR KANNAN

Knowing Oneself
**ALEXANDRA
MAZEK &
THOMAS HIRT**



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“

My heart was in a cage. My life was a long struggle to find happiness, to overcome fear, and to find love I had lost. I did not give up, and that is what my story is about.

—ICHAK K. ADIZES

”



Presenting a wonderful life journey written by Dr. Ichak K. Adizes

Seeing every challenge as an opportunity for growth, Dr. Ichak Adizes moved beyond a childhood marked by imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp and immigration to an unfamiliar country to discover the benefits of opening his heart.

Dr. Adizes's personal story is more than a string of external events that propelled him through adversity after adversity to become the insightful, compassionate person he is today. It is also a map of his journey into a heart which, like the accordion that he played to earn a living and put himself through school, ultimately expanded and opened up to the universal truths that connect us all in our humanity.

The Accordion Player is a compelling account of a remarkable life — an unvarnished view of a man whose decision to recognize the value of change and creative conflict allowed him to love. His story reveals the enduring human ability to turn possibility into reality.



Foreword by Daaji



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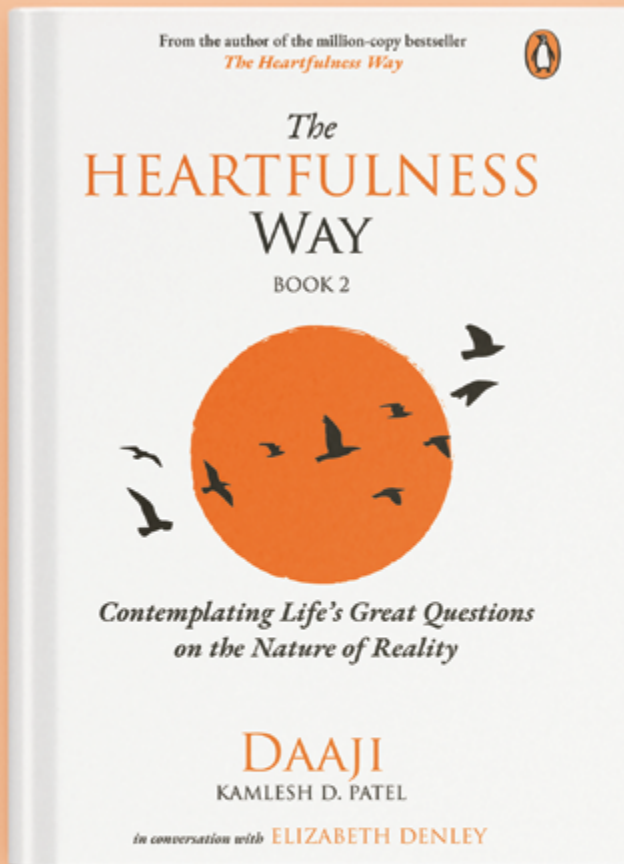


NEW RELEASE

From the author of the million-copy bestseller
The Heartfulness Way

The HEARTFULNESS WAY, BOOK 2

Contemplating Life's Great Questions on the Nature of Reality



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Daaji,
Author,
Global Guide of
Heartfulness



Elizabeth Denley
Author,
Spiritual Trainer in
Heartfulness

In *The Heartfulness Way*, Book 2, Daaji continues with the conversational format that he used so effectively in the previous volume, this time with Elizabeth Denley. Daaji takes us through the journey of expanding consciousness to the ultimate realization of the purpose of human life.

Essentially, *The Heartfulness Way*, Book 2 is a guidebook for any of us wishing to transform from our current state, with all our beliefs, limitations, fears and weaknesses, in order to realize happiness, balance and our full potential in this very lifetime.

Daaji outlines the approach required, which is clear and practical, maps out the journey and provides the practices and tools needed. He sheds light on the obstacles and the solutions to help us overcome them. His approach is simple and experiential and can be practiced by anyone with interest and willingness while working and living a normal family life.

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Joy

Dear readers,

This issue is about joy. Daaji reflects on joy and the spiritual journey. Ichak Adizes places happiness in the present moment rather than in future expectations. Elizabeth Denley asks how we can live with joy in a world that suffers. Victor Kannan considers whether joy can last when outer beauty changes. Inga Marie Ramcke shares ways of helping children learn with joy through stories, puppets, and nature.

As always, we welcome your reflections and submissions at contributions@heartfulnessmagazine.com.

Happy reading,
The Editors



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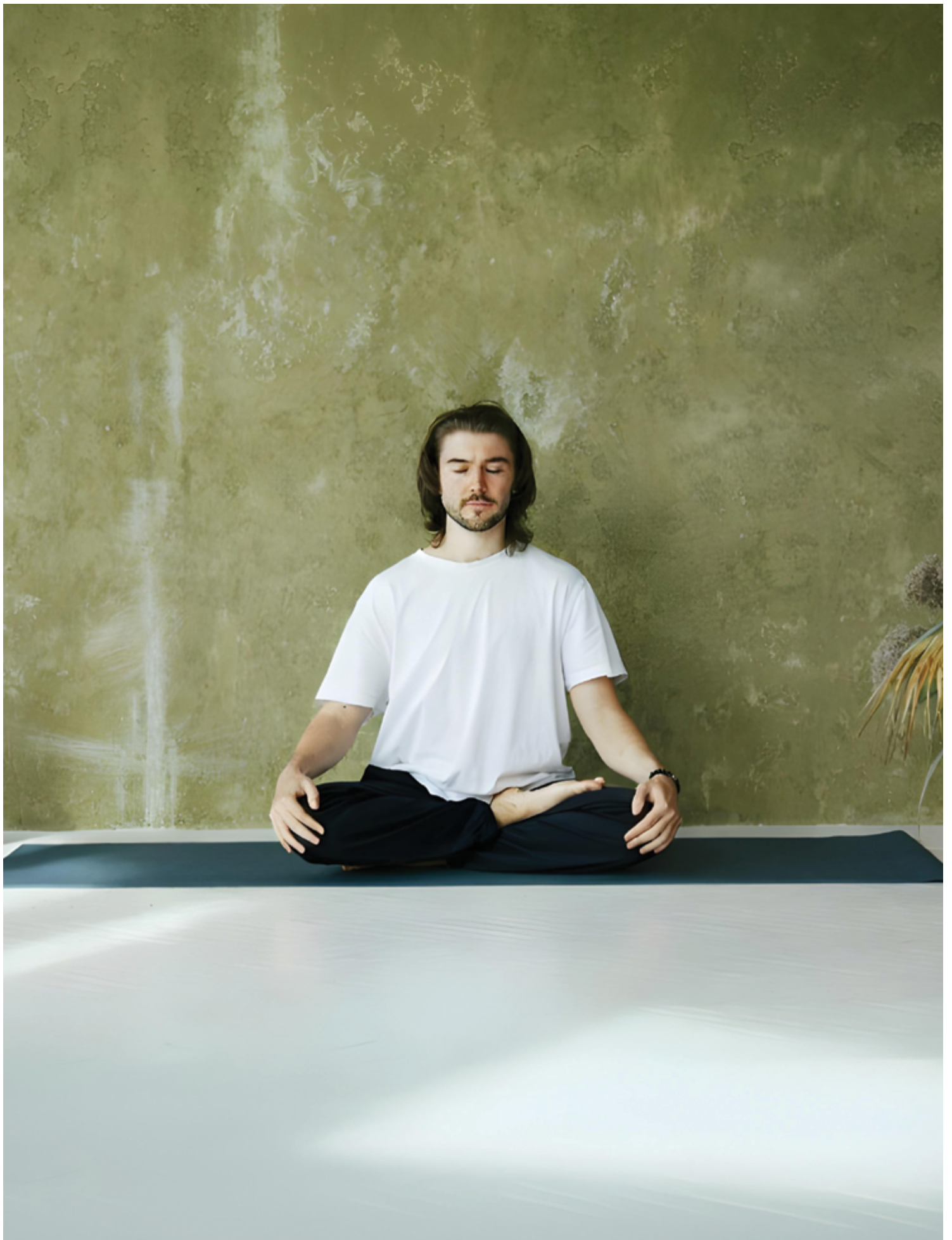
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self-care

“Almost everything will work
if you unplug it for a few minutes,
including you.”

ANNE LAMOTT





Knowing **oneself**

Awareness through Action

ALEXANDRA MAZEK and **THOMAS HIRT** show how our movements reflect and reshape our inner condition, and how fostering the body–mind–spirit connection can transform the way we experience and respond to life.

How do we embody the meditative state in daily life? What does it reveal about the way we move through the world? In this series, we explore how the way we move both reflects our inner condition and shapes it—and how bringing attention to movement can help bring the two into alignment.

Daaji has observed that the way we approach even a simple act—like opening a door—reflects our inner condition. The attitude we bring, and the care with which we act, reveals something of our state within.

Hearing this idea, I was taken back to my early teenage years. I was a nervous person: my movements erratic, my mind restless, my body tense. Sudden bursts of anger and tantrums were common. Yet the idea of being present in my actions deeply attracted me. Intuitively, I sensed that a peaceful mind is reflected in the gentleness of physical movement, just as Daaji described—but I had no real way of approaching it.

I longed to change—to become steadier and more at ease—to be someone who could sit by the riverbank and simply listen to the sound of

the water, as Hermann Hesse’s Siddhartha does. I tried, in different ways, to arrive there. I tried yoga asanas, pranayama, meditation, and chanted mantras. I fell in love with the wrong man and tried to expand my consciousness through drugs. Inevitably, my nervous system suffered. Eventually, my body sent a signal I could not ignore: I lost my voice.

Daaji has observed that the way we approach even a simple act—like opening a door—reflects our inner condition. The attitude we bring, and the care with which we act, reveals something of our state within.

Every attempt to speak resulted in a strangled, trembling sound that made others stare. My fear and nervousness were suddenly exposed—most painfully in moments when I wanted to appear confident. I could no longer hide what was happening within me. Perhaps this created the humility to admit that I had to start again—that I did not know, and that I wanted to learn.

Doctors were unable to help me with my voice. I then encountered the Alexander Technique, and one year later, Heartfulness meditation. Through the Alexander Technique, I learned how my habitual reactions were expressed in my body—and how they could be interrupted through the conscious inhibition of unnecessary tension. It would become a critical tool in learning how to pause these patterns.

First Step: Take Care of Your Spine

In the Yoga Sutras, Patanjali lists illness (*vyadhi*) as the first of nine obstacles, or *vikshepas*, on the spiritual path. Drawing on this, Daaji points to the role of the body—particularly the alignment of the spine and head—in supporting our ability to turn inward. When the body is misaligned, it becomes harder to remain steady and receptive; when it is balanced, that support is present.

“When the spine is straight, we conserve energy in another way. With the body and head upright, gravitation doesn’t lead to more energy being dissipated than needed.”



What begins as natural ease and uprightness gradually gives way to habitual patterns, reshaping how we sit, move, and carry ourselves—often without our awareness.

From Habit to Conscious Awareness

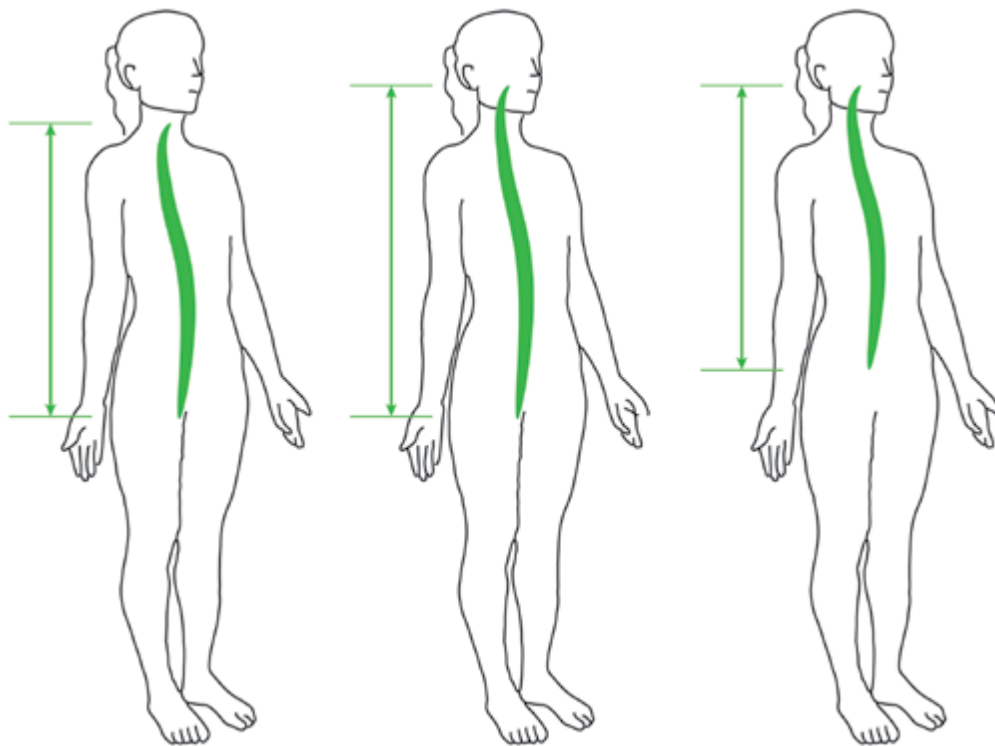
Every morning, as you get out of bed, you stand up against the pull of gravity without thinking. How did you learn to do that? Posture is shaped by habits formed from early childhood. A baby spends much of its waking time learning to move—gradually developing coordination, balance, and an internal sense of how the body is organized in space. To reach for a door handle, I rely on a subconscious sense of my arm’s length, the range of my joints, and the nerve connections that translate the wish to open the door into movement. At the same time, my body must orient itself in space—balancing against gravity on two feet. Thank goodness for movement habits, which allow all of this to happen without extra thinking. Over time, these patterns become

automatic—and much of what we do happens without our awareness.

Usually it is pain, tension, dizziness, or other disturbances (the voice, in my case) that act as inbuilt indicators that something is not as it should be—that some of our programming needs re-evaluation. This is the point at which we must become consciously interested in what we do when we sit, stand, and move, and in the internal concepts that shape our movements.

The Spine and Trunk

Let’s explore what a “straight spine” means and how the balance of the head influences it. The spine supports the body and allows us to orient ourselves in space—but where do you imagine it actually is? Where does it begin and end?



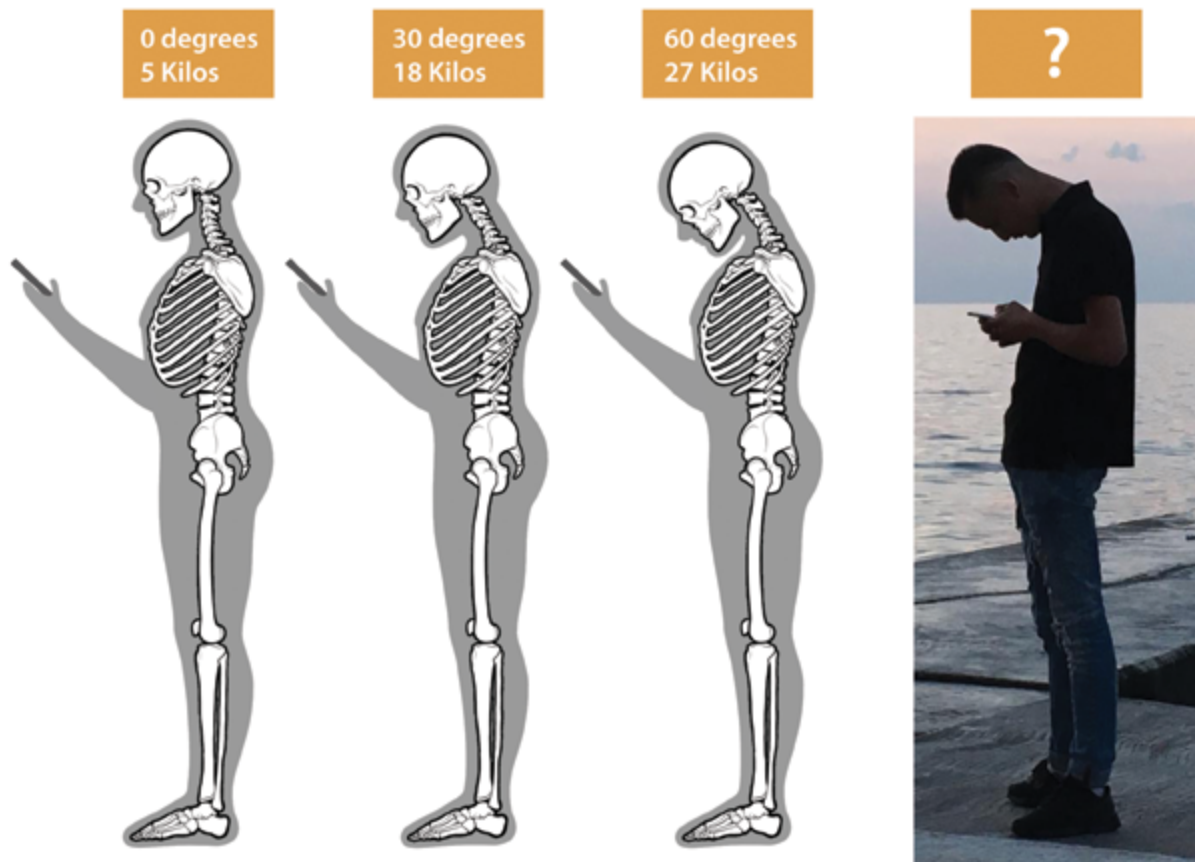
Where is the top and the bottom end of your spine?

SELF-CARE

The two points which define the spine's top and bottom are the atlas and the tailbone. Let's call everything in between the top and lowest part of the spine the torso, which includes the neck and the pelvis (connected via the sacroiliac joints). The legs attach to the torso at the hip joints, and the head rests atop the spine at the atlanto-occipital joint.

The way the head relates to the spine is especially important. For example, when looking down at your phone, you can either push your neck forward or allow the head to tilt at its natural joint with the spine. These are two different ways of performing the same action, with very different effects—not only on the body, but on how we experience the action itself.

How Forward Head and Neck Posture Increases Neck Load



A chronically forward-bent head-neck posture places strain on the neck. Muscles in the back tighten, while the front structures are compressed. Over time, this can affect mobility, circulation, and nerve function.



Portrait of Erasmus of Rotterdam, Hans Holbein the Younger, Kunstmuseum Basel, 1523. The head inclines at the top of the spine while the neck and back remain upright, reflecting a coordinated use of the whole.

Becoming Curious about What We Do

How do we react to seeing these images? Do we want to correct others—or ourselves? Do we remember being told we have “bad posture”?

Labels like “good” or “bad” rarely bring about change. If your goal is to check your messages and you crane your neck while looking at the phone, the brain registers that as successful—you achieved the task, no matter if unhealthy habits were involved.

Instead of thinking in terms of right and wrong, we can become curious about what we do. The clearer we are about our actions, the more choice we have in how we carry them out.

For example, imagine yourself sitting at the table, about to eat. Which part of you moves forward? You might bend from the waist, hinge at the hip joints, move the eyes and head, or crane the neck. Each produces a different result.

Practical Explorations

To explore these relationships in your own experience, you can begin with the videos accessible via the following QR codes. They introduce key points of orientation in the body—such as the atlanto-occipital joint and the hip joints—and show how small differences in movement can change the overall coordination.



In the first video, Thomas demonstrates how the head balances and moves at its joint with the spine.



In the second, Alexandra explores sitting and bending, showing how the relationship between the pelvis and spine affects balance and ease.

From there, you can begin to notice these same patterns in your daily activities. When you sit, where is your weight—on your sit-bones, or behind, or in front of them? When you bend forward, what initiates the movement—the hip joints or the waist? When you look at your phone, does the movement come from the eyes and head, or from the neck?

You may find it helpful to use a mirror or ask someone to take a photo—not to correct yourself, but to see more clearly what you are already doing.

Solution to the spine quiz: the middle image shows the full length of the spine—often different from how we imagine it.



inspiration

“Wherever you are, be all there.”

JIM ELLIOT

Joy Without Conditions



DAAJI traces the path to unconditional joy through contentment—and suggests it may be closer than we imagine.

There is a question that lies beneath every human endeavor, beneath the striving, acquiring, and yearning. It isn't asked directly very often, but it affects almost everything we do. Why is it so hard to keep joy going when we have so much? Why does it come without warning, stay for a short time, and then leave without warning, as if it belongs to another country and we are only visitors there?

The Taittiriya Upanishad says that *ananda* [bliss] is at the very core of human existence, deeper than the body, breath, mind, and even intellect: we are joyful by nature. In one reading, the whole spiritual journey is removing everything that obscures that original brightness. And the amazing thing is that this gentle letting go brings happiness in and of itself. We don't have to wait until we complete our journey to feel free.



Joy, in its truest sense, cannot be forced or manufactured. It is like a flame that moves through us, not something we can artificially create. No practiced smile or rehearsed effort can replicate its authenticity. True joy flows freely, carrying a natural grace that defies imitation. This is why it cannot be summoned by mere intention, and why it cannot be sustained by willpower alone. Enduring, unshakeable joy arises from a balanced and harmonious mind. As the mind settles into harmony, the intensity of passions, cravings, and emotional swings begins to fade. Gradually, even the distinctions between sorrow and pleasure lose their grip, giving way to a steady state of peace and calm in all situations.

Hazrat Inayat Khan, writing with the precision of one who had looked deeply into the heart of human experience, observed that true happiness is not gained but discovered—that what keeps it from our lives is the closing of the heart. When the heart is not living,

he suggested, happiness cannot live there either. This is a profound reversal of the assumption most people carry through life, that joy depends on what we receive, what we achieve, what is done for us. But the evidence of genuine seekers across all traditions points in another direction: joy is already present where the heart remains open. The work is not addition but subtraction, not construction but clearing.

Babuji confirmed this from a different angle when he wrote that the various pleasures of the world do not provide lasting satisfaction but change into miseries. Yet beneath this diagnosis lies an insight of striking tenderness: the very fact that we are unsatisfied by worldly pleasures is proof that we once enjoyed something unparalleled, and the taste of it still haunts us. Our restlessness, rightly understood, is not a defect; it is a memory. The soul knows what it came from, and it will not be permanently consoled by anything less.

Modern neuroscience, arriving at this conclusion through a different corridor, confirms that sustained well-being is not a function of external circumstances. Research on the hedonic set point, beginning with Brickman and Campbell's work on the hedonic treadmill and developed further by Sonja Lyubomirsky and others, shows that after major life events, whether gains or losses, people tend to return to a relatively stable baseline of well-being. External circumstances account for only a fraction of lasting happiness. The dominant factor is internal: the habitual orientation of the mind. A mind that has learned to rest in its own depth, to stop grasping and resisting, finds that the baseline itself rises. This is not a coincidence. It is the same truth the Yoga Sutras articulated centuries earlier: *santosha* [contentment] brings supreme joy.



Enduring, unshakeable joy arises from a balanced and harmonious mind. As the mind settles into harmony, the intensity of passions, cravings, and emotional swings begins to fade. Gradually, even the distinctions between sorrow and pleasure lose their grip, giving way to a steady state of peace and calm in all situations.

Yoga Sutra II.42 says that *santosha* is the basis for real joy. This is the ease of a tree whose roots go deep enough that no storm disturbs its canopy, and the ability to find fullness in the present instead of in a future that keeps getting further away. An open heart that never rests will eventually become anxious. When it doesn't feel full, even small gifts can be hard to give. That is why compassion needs to be balanced with contentment. We should live like children who give freely without thinking about it, just for the joy of giving.

When *santosha* grows, it spreads like seeds planted in the heart that one day grow into a huge forest. From this inner wealth comes a quiet joy that spreads to the world around it. This teaches us that when we don't have any needs, other people feel comfortable around us. There is no stress, no noise, just acceptance. The HeartMath Institute's research on heart coherence has shown that when people feel real gratitude and happiness, it changes the heart's electromagnetic field in a way that can be felt by people nearby. The radiance of a saintly presence, described in ancient traditions, may well have a biophysical signature we are only beginning to detect. When we are content, it spreads and changes the quality of the space we live in.



For hundreds of years, people have puzzled over a line from the Isha Upanishad: “*Tena tyaktena bhunjitha*” [enjoy by giving up]. It seems strange: how can someone enjoy something that they have given up? The misunderstanding comes from how people think about renunciation. *Tyaga* means letting go of the feeling of ownership over things, which is very different from giving them up. A subtle detachment comes over us when we stop holding on to things we like or defining ourselves by them. It brings a deeper and more lasting peace.

Consider someone who holds a flower tightly in their hand, versus someone who holds it lightly in their palm. The first is afraid of losing it. The second loves it. The open palm is the real *tyaga*. The enjoyment is more intense because the clinging has gone away. Studies on what psychologists call savoring, or the ability to fully enjoy positive experiences without clinging to them, support this idea: not being attached to outcomes actually makes positive emotional states last longer and feel better. When you hold joy lightly, it grows. The Upanishads and the scientists arrive at the same door from opposite sides.



When *santosha* grows, it spreads like seeds planted in the heart that one day grow into a huge forest. From this inner wealth comes a quiet joy that spreads to the world around it.

In a November 2003 message from *Whispers from the Brighter World*, Babuji spoke of the link between joy and spiritual practice in a way that few other teachings do.¹ He said, “Let joy flower inside you, and offer it like a bouquet to Divinity.” Joy is the delicate connection between the spiritual heart and the physical heart. It brings peace and happiness to the person. Joy is a strong force that should be grown. A heart that wants to love cannot ignore it. It is a key part of the *sadhana* [practice]. It doesn't help to show a sad face or love someone when you're sad.

This lesson goes against what most people think. We often think of joy as the reward for spiritual



INSPIRATION



growth, like the fruit that comes after years of hard work. Babuji puts it first as a condition and as a way to do things. Joy is one of the things that gets us there. When you do things with joy and a sincere heart, you make progress in practice. A mind that is really engaged is a lighter mind, and a lighter mind goes further. We should do everything with a smile on our faces. Even if you feel limited or weighed down, you can reach great heights through regular, heartfelt, and joyful practice. Babuji communicated again in March 2006: “Let this hymn of joy rise in you—that which you cultivate with delight, making you forget the trials and tribulations of the world. Meeting this inner call also entails evoking subtle forces capable of strengthening the being, in its most elaborate structures.”



Babuji once said that the only person who is truly happy is the one who is happy under all circumstances. He told each abhyasi to work on the very spiritual skill of cheerful acceptance, which is both a sign of growth and a means of growth. In defeat, you feel helpless: “I can’t change this, so I give in with heaviness.” Cheerful acceptance, on the other hand, means that you are open to whatever comes your way and welcome it as it is.

When that kind of happiness is really present, everything starts to change. Fear often grows when you fight it, but it can be understood and worked through when you accept it. What we resist remains standing in our way. What we welcome becomes our guide.

This is the deeper meaning of *saranagati* [surrender]. It makes you feel like a Beloved is holding you and taking care of you. Someone who has this kind of trust goes through life with a sense of lightness and gratitude. In a whisper message, Babuji expressed that surrender means being completely available and accepting. It is the cost of everything coming together and making sense in a useful way. Research on the brain’s resting state corroborates this at the physiological level: a mind in an accepting, non-reactive state produces diminished activation in areas linked to rumination and anxiety. The body calms down, the heart rate variability increases, and the organism reaches what is effectively its best operating state. The scientists and the mystics both talk about the same homecoming, but in different ways.



When you share happiness, it grows. Joy brings more joy. Joy brings grace. The devotional traditions describe the highest

Babuji once said that the only person who is truly happy is the one who is happy under all circumstances. He told each abhyasi to work on the very spiritual skill of cheerful acceptance, which is both a sign of growth and a means of growth.

form of devotion as one in which the devotee feels the happiness of others as their own—*para sukha sukhi*—and is sad when others are sad—*para dukkha dukkhi*. It is natural to want to celebrate with someone when they are happy. But jealousy often comes up instead. That jealousy makes the mind uneasy, breaking inner peace and creating vibrations that do not settle. The critic believes they are better than everyone else, and the idea that “no one is better than me” takes hold. How can there ever be peace in a heart like that?



The best way to show thanks for everything we have is to share our own happiness and feel the happiness of others.

Why are we so good at showing our sadness, pain, and anger but so bad at showing our happiness and love? In times of trouble, almost everyone talks to God. We ask and beg. But what happens to our memory of the Beloved when we are happy and full? You can also give joy to others. We can share that feeling with God, just like we share our sadness with a cry from within. Mirror neurons, which fire both when we act and when we observe others acting, indicate that when we truly celebrate someone else's happiness, we are participating, and the heart that celebrates adds to its own reserves.

Sharing happiness does not divide it; it multiplies happiness. The Bhagavad Gita describes the one who delights in the welfare of all beings—*sarvabhuta hite ratah*—as attaining dissolution in God.



And here we return to the flame. At the opening of this reflection, joy was described as a flame that moves through us, not something manufactured but something that passes. Silently, the question was planted: if joy is our natural state, why does it feel so elusive? The answer has been unfolding across

When you share
happiness, it grows.
Joy brings more joy.
Joy brings grace.

every movement of this inquiry. Joy does not feel like home because we have furnished the interior of our lives with so much that obscures it, with demands, comparisons, resistances, and the quiet but constant insistence that things must be other than they are. The flame was never extinguished. We simply stopped sitting near it.

Our spiritual journey is a gift, the very first gift we receive from the Divine, tied to our very existence, and to life itself. To be alive is an opportunity to grow. What is the best way to honor this immense gift? If we live it fully and joyfully, simply appreciating the fact that we are here, we are already on the right track.

When *santosha* deepens into *saranagati*, when contentment opens into surrender, joy ceases to be a passing mood and instead becomes our ground. It no longer arrives and departs but underlies even grief, difficulty, and the ordinary Tuesday afternoon with its unremarkable demands. The seeds sown in the heart have by then grown into something that provides shelter. And from

that shelter, joy flows outward without effort, touching others, inviting them toward their own original luminosity, doing so not by instruction or persuasion but simply by being what it is.

If we offer love without conditions, our joy too can become unconditional. When the heart rejoices in wonder and gratitude, this state of joy itself becomes a bridge to Divinity. Let joy flower inside you, as Babuji said, and offer it like a bouquet. Not because you have been asked to, nor even because it is prescribed, but because when the heart is genuinely full, offering becomes as natural as breathing. And when joy is offered upward with love, it completes its circuit and returns, deeper than before, steadier than before, less like a visitor and more like home.



¹ *Whispers from the Brighter World*, messages received through intercommunication from elevated souls.

AI-generated images

The Secret of Life: Keep Moving

ELIZABETH DENLEY explores how joy supports our mental well-being in a troubled world, reshaping our response to pain and suffering.

It seems to me that joy is the pure awareness and celebration of our human existence and purpose. Joy brings with it an abundant heart that is light, moderate, balanced, and present in the moment. It is not loud, excitable, and attention-seeking; rather, it is a subtle current suffusing everything from within, flowing into everyday life from the depth of the heart. It is an expression of life force.

My own personal experience of joy became more profound once I embarked on a conscious inner journey almost forty years ago. It was like rivulets joining to become a river, streaming toward a vast ocean with a natural, mighty flow.

The first book I read after embarking on that journey was *Truth Eternal*, written by Lalaji, a spiritual master born in nineteenth-century India. His words sang in my heart, creating new possibilities, despite the suffering and heartache of this world.

Lalaji exalted the soul and described it as “the instrument of joy. Nay! It is joy itself, and cannot exist without bliss and happiness.” He continued, “Happiness is not anywhere outside. It is in

our fixing the attention, in the steadiness of disposition, and in the concentration of our mind. Those who know this secret need not search for happiness outside.” Lalaji saw spiritual happiness as “nothing but steadiness, settling, and peace.”

Did he mean that being joyful results in a life without challenge and pain? Not at all. They are necessary aspects of being in this world. Joy does not mean we always experience pleasure and are always happy; it is the undercurrent of soul in everything we do.

Many mystics, philosophers, and writers around the world have understood this. Here are just a few quotes—there are many more:

“We need joy as we need air. We need love as we need water. We need each other as we need the earth we share.”

—*Maya Angelou*

“Joy does not come from what you do, it flows into what you do and thus into this world from deep within you.”

—*Eckhart Tolle*



“True joy results when we become aware of our connectedness to everything.”

—*Paul Pearsall*

“When we are centered in joy, we attain our wisdom.”

—*Marianne Williamson*

“We cannot cure the world of sorrows, but we can choose to live in joy.”

—*Joseph Campbell*

“Find out where joy resides, and give it a voice far beyond singing. For to miss the joy is to miss all.”

—*Robert Louis Stevenson*

“Finding joy is probably tantamount to finding yourself and being comfortable in your own skin.”

—*Morgan Freeman*

“Joy is the infallible sign of God’s presence.”

—*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

“When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.”

—*Rumi*

“When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves.”

—*Gautama Buddha*

INSPIRATION

“Do few things but do them well, simple joys are holy.”

—*Francis of Assisi*

“The beating heart of the universe is holy joy.”

—*Martin Buber*

“The fullness of joy is to behold God in everything.”

—*Julian of Norwich*

“From joy I came,
For joy I live,
and in Thy sacred joy
I shall melt again.”

—*Paramahansa Yogananda*


Osho told us that joy is a state of transcendence, where we are neither happy nor unhappy, but utterly peaceful, quiet, and in absolute equilibrium; that joy arises within and is the spontaneous flow of our own energy.

He also said that “life is very simple; it is a joyful dance. And the whole earth can be full of joy and dance... life is not a jail, it is not a punishment. It is a reward, and it is given only to those who have earned it, who deserve it. Now it is your right to enjoy; it will be a sin if you don't enjoy... leave it a little happier, a little more beautiful, a little more fragrant.”

Swami Vivekananda reminded us that in every moment we are actually experiencing the joy of the soul. He said that wherever there is any joy, even the joy of a thief in stealing, it is that absolute bliss manifesting; it is just that it has become misunderstood and covered up. And the inner journey is the way to uncover it.

In the Heartfulness tradition, Babuji once told Chariji a great open secret, which he shared with us: “The secret of life is to keep moving.” In joy, we do not stay stuck. Like water, we flow,





and we find ways around obstacles. When joy is uppermost in our lives, we are not crippled by the fear of suffering and struggle. And it happens very naturally when the soul is nurtured.

This feels like a fulfilling way to live—to be joyful, bring joy to others, and ease their suffering in whatever ways we can. There will always be ups and downs in life, and overwhelming challenges that test our being. But we have the means to accept them all by living in a state of joy, of *upasana*, as Lalaji calls it. This is the beautiful possibility we have been given—to radiate joy and love to everyone and everything in this precious world. Lalaji often used to pray for the soul of the world, and that itself evokes such joy!

One evening, almost twenty years ago, in Chennai, India, a small group of us went to Elliot's Beach with Chariji. Back then, it was a pristine beach with clear, unpolluted water and soft, yellow sand. The water was warm, and the waves were small, so we rolled our pants up to our knees and jumped waves together as the sun went down. After that, we played catch on the sand with a tennis ball. It was a glorious evening, filled with simple conversation and many silences. As we left the beach, Chariji said, "We need to play more often."

Such joyful memories are wonderful, and yet, the Heartfulness tradition also encourages us to go beyond joy. As Daaji explains, "The next stage is bliss, immersion in the joy of the soul. What more could there possibly be after this? But bliss still involves the experience of "I." So, the journey continues until there is no longer an "I." Bliss too disappears. In 'no-thing-ness' the heart becomes infinitely empty and receptive."

A Thing of Beauty: On Joy That Endures

VICTOR KANNAN on beauty, joy, spiritual growth, and the search for what endures.

What is a thing of beauty? We experience beauty as something that gives joy. But beauty commonly fades. If that is so, can the joy it brings endure forever? And if our joy can endure, must there be a kind of beauty that does not fade? And would enduring joy remain unchanged, or deepen as our understanding deepens?

We often take beauty to mean form, color, or expression. But these change, diminish, and disappear. That kind of beauty cannot sustain joy.

I have heard it said that simple is beautiful, small is beautiful. There is something true in this—but not in the way we usually take it. Beauty is not decoration. It is not something added. There is something innate about beauty—original, natural, uncontrived, authentic. It is without pretension. It is true to itself, and for that reason, it is grounded in reality. What we recognize as beautiful has a certain quality: it does not depend on conditions to sustain it. It does not exhaust itself. It is this kind of beauty that gives rise to a joy that does not fade.

In spirituality, we seek reality. All our seeking—whether in love, relationship, work, or meaning—is for that reality. Even if we seem to seek in the

wrong places, we are only seeking that. We do not knowingly seek in the wrong places; we do so unconsciously. As we grow in our seeking, we become pattern-bound, and those patterns are supported by unawareness.

As our seeking evolves, we begin to experience joy—an inner condition that is subtler, steadier, and more satisfying. As awareness deepens, this inner condition begins to guide our seeking, becoming a key indicator that we are moving in the right direction, and guiding our spiritual practice.

Daaji talks about AEIOU—acquiring a spiritual condition, expanding it, imbibing it, becoming one with it, and uniting with it completely. It is a matter of receiving a condition and deepening it until we *become that condition*. In time, another condition arrives and settles upon it, and the process continues.

Through such practice, we are transformed. Yet this transformation is not the creation of something new; we discover that what we have become is what we originally were. The condition we experience now is what we had when we were first created—innocent, pure, radiant. A thing of beauty.



Joy in Wisdom

As Daaji explains in his book, *The Power of Paradox*, the innocence of a child is not sustainable as we grow into adulthood. We must develop wisdom. Wisdom in the adult is the equivalent of innocence in the child. Both arise from purity. Purity and wisdom are inseparable.

We say that we are growing older and wiser. But aging does not guarantee wisdom. Wisdom brings the right perspective in life, and that perspective sustains the inner condition of joy. A joyful heart shows even in an aging face—settled through time, integrated with the evolution of life itself.

What does this inner condition of joy consist of? We have many terms to describe it—happiness, pleasure, fun, feeling good. These are often used interchangeably, but they do not refer to the same thing. They describe how we feel at a given moment.

Joy is often spoken of in this way. We say that when shared, it multiplies.

"Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow" is a well-known Swedish proverb that emphasizes the importance of community, companionship, and empathy in life's highs and lows. It means sharing positive news magnifies happiness, while sharing pain or grief with others lightens the emotional burden.

Joy in Service

I read a Chinese saying when I was a very young boy: "If you want to lift yourself up, lift someone else up." This stayed with me. When you help someone in need, their heart fills with gratitude, and that feeling reflects back to you. You feel happy.

Wisdom in the adult is the equivalent of innocence in the child. Both arise from purity. Purity and wisdom are inseparable.


Joy in service is the fulfillment that comes from giving time, energy, and love to others without expecting anything in return. It shifts our attention away from ourselves and gives meaning even to small acts. In this sense, service becomes a condition for the emergence and continuity of joy.

"We cannot give what we do not have" is a truism. Not all of us have money, time, or energy to give. But love is not limited in this way. We can always give love, because it does not require anything else as a precondition. As Mother Teresa reminds us, it is not the scale of what we do, but the love with which we do it that matters.

As I was leaving for the US in 1983, my Master Chariji advised me to serve unobtrusively. To serve in this way is to be attentive without drawing notice—anticipating what is needed, responding quietly, and creating ease for others without interrupting or placing oneself at the center. When love is present, it expresses itself naturally in this way—without effort, without display.

Joy in Greeting

When joy exudes from the heart in a natural manner, one cannot help but greet others joyfully. Joyful greetings go beyond simple pleasantries—they express warmth, care, and genuine interest.



Joyful greetings go beyond simple pleasantries—they express warmth, care, and genuine interest.

We see this most easily in the way we greet children, especially when they are young—“Good morning, sunshine.” When this becomes natural in us, it extends to others as well.

When someone greets us with that same warmth—“It is wonderful to see you”—we respond in kind. Such greetings acknowledge the other person and create a natural connection.

Losing and Finding Joy in the Jungle of Life

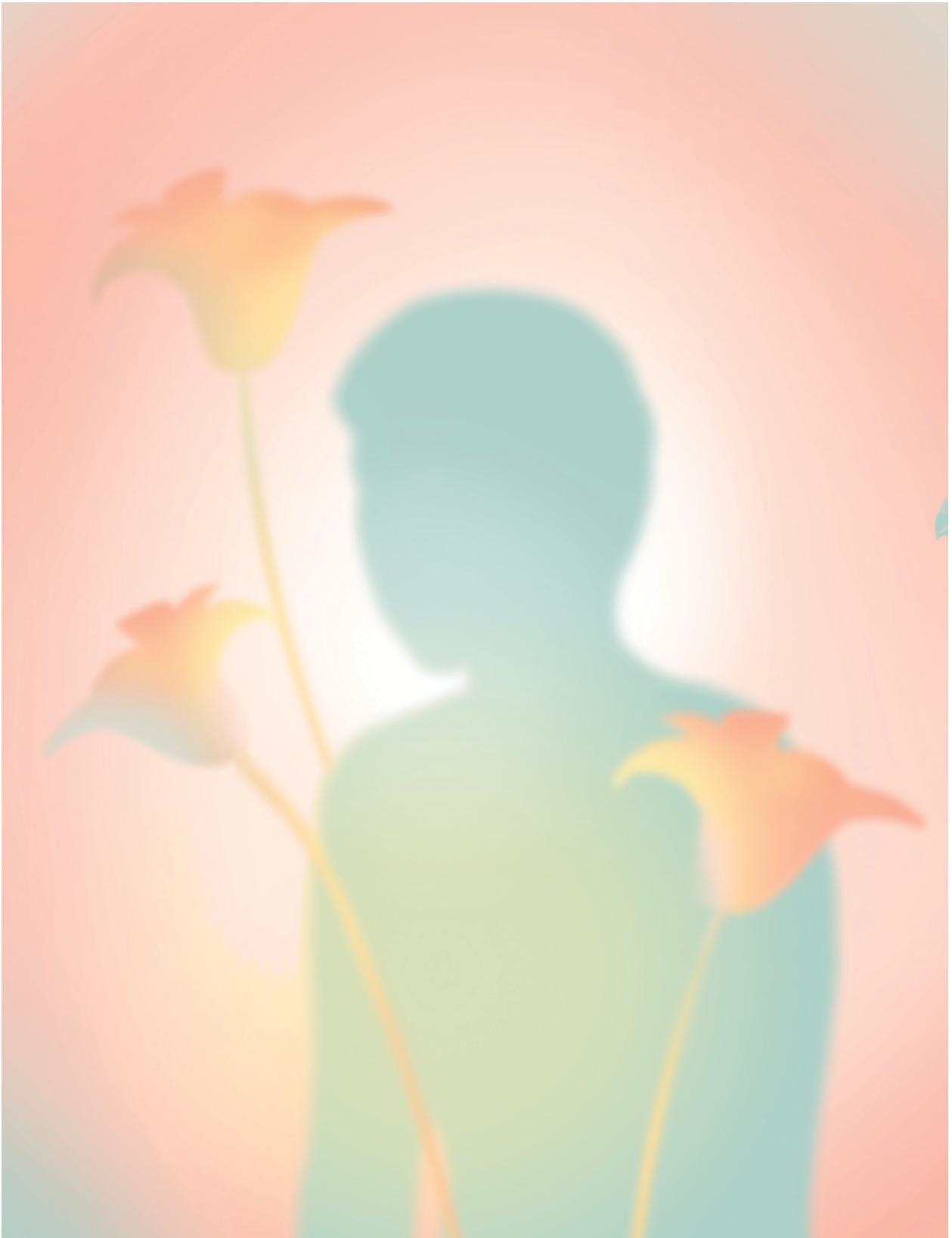
We know life is no bed of roses—even if they do come with thorns. Most of the time, it is because we take joy to be conditional. When joy depends on circumstances, it becomes unstable—rising and falling as those circumstances change. Recognizing and fostering unconditional love, happiness, and joy alone make them real.

Babuji often placed the word “real” before qualities like love, happiness, and joy to

emphasize that, when tied to material conditions, they are ephemeral. Pleasure is ephemeral. If pleasure becomes the basis of happiness, happiness becomes ephemeral. And if such happiness becomes the basis of joy, that joy cannot endure.

The Katha Upanishad distinguishes between *preyas* and *shreyas*—the pleasant and the truly good. Pleasure appeals to the senses and gives immediate satisfaction. But when the conditions that gave rise to pleasure pass, sorrow follows. To avoid that sorrow, we seek the same pleasure again, and in doing so, become bound to the very action that produces them. Pleasure-seeking is therefore not wise. And where there is no wisdom, can there be room for joy?

Whereas, if we recognize that inner joy is unconditional and can only be attained through the spiritual orientation of our being and our seeking, we attain freedom. *Preyas* brings about ignorance and bondage. *Shreyas* begets joy and freedom.



If material well-being becomes the basis on which we depend for love, happiness, joy, and even the fulfillment of our goals, then all of these remain uncertain and cannot endure. For even in the pursuit of material goals, if we seek something lasting in them, we are in fact reaching beyond the material to the *real*. Otherwise, the beauty and joy with which we were greeted at birth are lost in the jungle of life.

The good news is that only in this jungle of existence can we find beauty, joy, and lasting reality. No amount of reading about it can convince us. It requires a change in orientation—a turning toward the divine, keeping it in view—and, above all, a direct, felt experience of that forceless force that carries life within it.

Without existence, we cannot experience reality, nor can we experience bliss. Existence is given. We are in it. We are part of it. The real question is: how do we exist in such a way that this becomes a living reality?

Joy in Spiritual Search and Finding

The great saints and sages who came before us walked the earth like us. They toiled to find answers to the eternal question of why we are here and the purpose of creation. As we move through this search, cultivating joy becomes a companion.

As we live our lives cultivating joy in all our expressions, we begin to attract grace. Even in the normal course of life, when we feel joy in our hearts, we act with patience. We greet people with warmth and concern. We open doors for others. We yield while driving. We are understanding when someone cuts us off. We do not react unnecessarily. We remain centered, connected, and in the flow of life.

Babuji expressed this simply: “Joy attracts grace.” I take this to mean not only in the spiritual sense,

As we live our lives cultivating joy in all our expressions, we begin to attract grace. Even in the normal course of life, when we feel joy in our hearts, we act with patience.

but in all dimensions of life. How can we separate spiritual life from daily life? How can we separate night from day? How can we separate ourselves from others? We are connected in many ways—not by a single fiber, but by many.

Joy is one such fiber, along with love, humility, and authenticity. When life becomes well-connected in this way, it becomes a thing of beauty. So it is joyful. This is a certainty, not merely a hope. Get involved in life in such a way that you uncover the real beauty within. Then joy is no longer something we seek, but something that expresses itself naturally in all that we do.

¹ Chariji refers to Shri Parthasarathi Rajagopalachari (1927–2014), the third guide of the Heartfulness tradition.

² Babuji refers to Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur (1899–1983), the second guide of the Heartfulness tradition.

Illustrations by LAKSHMI GADDAM

Workplace

“Doing what you like is freedom.
Liking what you do is happiness.”

FRANK TYGER





Where is Happiness?

ICHAK ADIZES revisits the question of happiness and mental well-being, asking whether we have been looking in the right place.

Many of us have asked ourselves: “What is happiness?” When asked in this way, it can be very difficult to find an answer. Where should one start? Trying to define the term can get you lost in endless interpretations.

I suggest rephrasing the question to: “Where is happiness?” Because if you figure out where it is, you just might find it.

So where is it? Where is happiness?

Happiness is not found in nostalgia for the past or expectations for the future. The past is gone and unchangeable; the future has not arrived. Happiness is only in the present, experienced by letting go of the past and detaching from the future.

But how?

Letting go of the past is relatively easy compared to detaching from the future. While we know the past is dead, the future still holds potential. This lingering possibility makes it far more difficult for us to let go of what has yet to happen.

The secret to freeing ourselves from the false hopes of future happiness—and the suffering that follows unrealized hopes—is to let go of expectations. It’s okay to project or plan, but once you turn projections into expectations,

unhappiness can result. Expectations may not be realistic, dreams may be disconnected from reality, and uncertainty is always present. When our expected outcomes do not happen, we might feel failure and disappointment.

In the present, there are no expectations. There’s nothing but reality, and if the reality is accepted, happiness lies in enjoying that reality, in enjoying the “what is.” For example, consider a sudden rain shower: you are being rained on and getting wet. Do you accept that it’s raining and find what you can enjoy about it? (As someone once said, “I like people who smile when it is raining.”) Or do you curse the sky for bringing the rain when you were not prepared? To illustrate this further, in *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn shows how Ivan, even in a gulag, is happy that he still has a single slice of bread to eat.

Happiness is accepting whatever life brings in the moment. Instead of expecting, rejecting, negating, or hoping, it means simply accepting reality and enjoying every minute, without descending into misery. This state is possible regardless of wealth or success. The more ambitious you are, the higher the probability of unhappiness.

I have a friend. He is happy. Never seen him complain. He finds a

Happiness is only in the present, experienced by letting go of the past and detaching from the future.

way to appreciate each moment, no matter what it is. When we go walking, he sees the trees, the flowers, and the animals, and he enjoys them all exactly in the moment.

I feel the importance of this message for myself as I’m getting older. Periodically, I get depressed that my dreams will not be fulfilled. I brood over the fact that the end is approaching and that my expectations for my life will not be realized. What I want to achieve would take another generation to be realized, yet I have only one life to give.

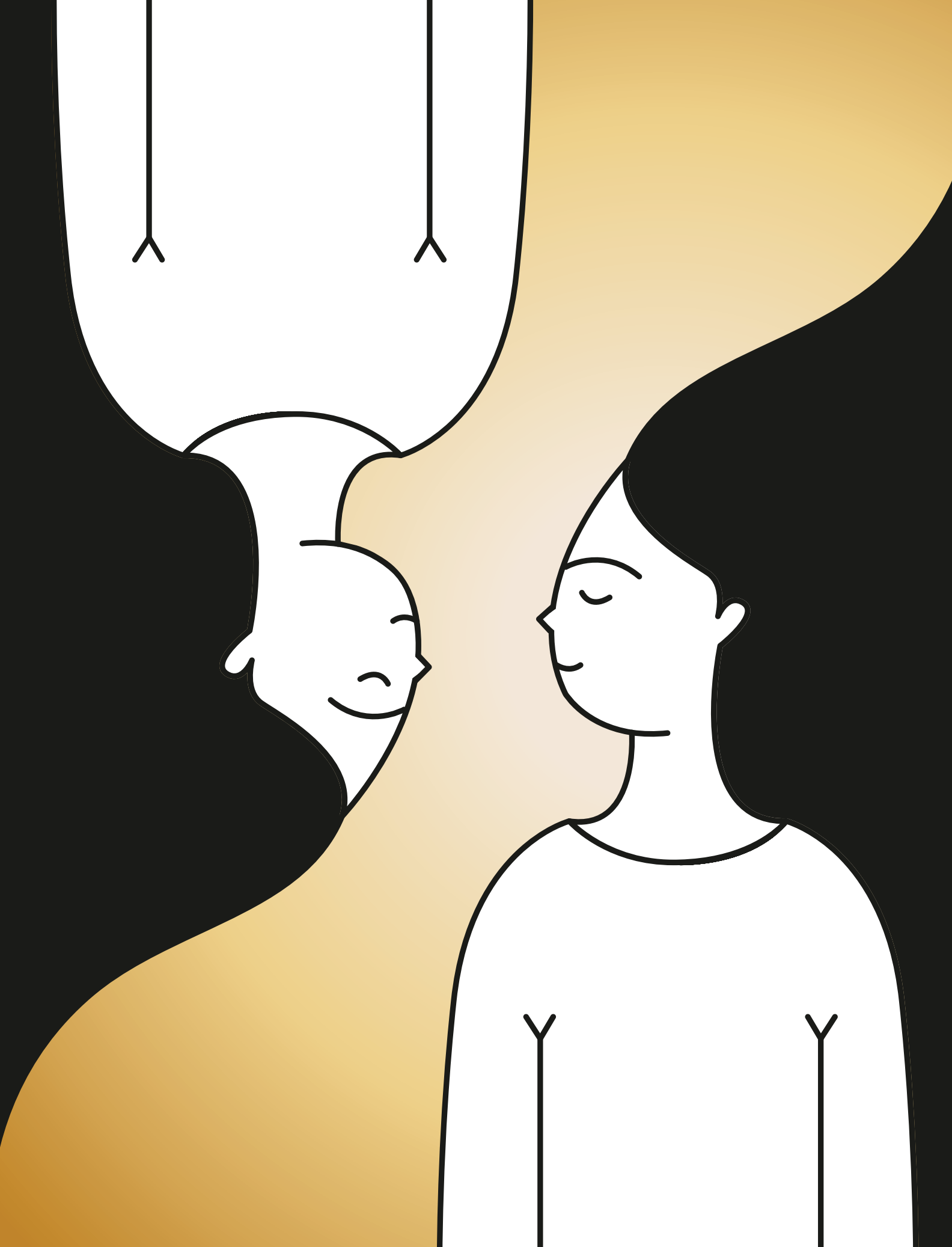
When asked what he wanted his epitaph to read, Shimon Peres, the Israeli statesman, replied: “Died prematurely.”

Accepting our vulnerabilities, our weaknesses, our deficiencies, and our perishability—and then enjoying whatever life presents to us—is where happiness dwells.

relationships

“Love one another but make not a bond of love:
let it rather be a moving sea between the shores
of your souls.”

KHALIL GIBRAN



The Red Fire Truck:

The Day I Realized I Was the One Snatching

AAYUSHI KANSARA shares how one small parenting crisis became an invitation to conscious living—using Heartful Communication, pause, and self-awareness to transform reactive habits into connected family moments.

Parenting is often described as a journey of guiding children—but for me, it quickly became a journey of self-discovery. I found myself repeating old patterns I didn't know I had—habits picked up long ago. Facing that was humbling and, honestly, a little terrifying.

The realization started with a red plastic fire truck. One day, my four-year-old son grabbed it straight out of his older sister's hands. She let out a high-pitched wail that instantly sent my stress levels soaring. My fix-it instinct kicked in. I wanted to make it right—but mostly, I just wanted the noise to stop. I marched over, took the truck back, and firmly

said, “That’s not right! We don’t snatch! Give it back now!”

As I held the truck and looked at my son, I realized I had just repeated the very behavior I wanted him to stop—I had also snatched it. I was asking him to be patient and share while failing to model that behavior myself. In that moment, it was clear my reaction was part of the problem.

Around that time, I was learning Heartful Communication—a practice of connecting with the heart to communicate with empathy and clarity. But standing there with the fire truck in my hand, I wasn't using it. And yet, something in me noticed. And

in the middle of my reaction, I *paused*.

Pausing was not a pre-planned strategy; rather, it was a spontaneous ceasing of reactivity—a moment of space in which something new could emerge—and in that moment, something did. Instead of continuing to approach the situation with blame, a desire to understand arose. From there, the principles I had learned in Heartful Communication came together in a clear sequence—one that has since become a practice for me:



1. Narrate the Play-by-Play

When things go sideways, my instinct is to judge:

Stop being mean. Don't snatch. Why can't you just share?

Instead, I now simply describe what I see. Instead of "Give that back," I say: "I see you took the truck from your sister. It looks like you really wanted a turn with it."

This small shift has changed everything. My son, who would normally shut down when corrected, has now started listening. Because I'm not labeling him but only describing the situation, he doesn't feel attacked. In Heartful Communication, this principle is called "observation." For me, it simply means slowing down enough to see clearly before acting.

2. Hit the Pause Button

After describing what happened, we both pause. I say, "Let's put the toys down for a second. Let's all take a breath together."

And we actually do it—together. This "pause" is the Heartful Communication principle of "centering." It helps us all move from a level-ten reaction to something more manageable. You can't understand what's happening



RELATIONSHIPS

when everyone is flooded with emotion. The pause gives us a different pair of glasses—a calmer lens.

This step has transformed me the most. It interrupts old patterns before they can take over.

3. Check the Feeling

Once all parties are calmer, I start asking questions. At first, I wasn't sure whether a four-year-old could reflect on feelings. But I asked anyway: "How do you think your sister felt when that happened?" "How did your tummy feel when you grabbed the truck?"

To my surprise, he'd noticed. He'd seen that his sister was sad and realized that grabbing the toy didn't feel good, even if he wanted it.



That moment was powerful. It reminded me that children are capable of emotional awareness, provided we give them space instead of lectures.

Heartful Communication calls this step the recognition of "feelings and needs." Over time, we began using a feelings-and-needs list at home. The whole family's vocabulary is growing. The children have started expressing their big feelings more openly because they've learned that they won't be judged for them.

4. Find a Third Way

Instead of fixing it for them, I ask: "How can we make this work so everyone is okay?"

Sometimes I even put the toy aside and say, "Let's figure this out first. How can we all enjoy the fire truck?"

Their solutions—taking turns, trades, setting timers—are often



more creative than mine. And because the idea comes from them, they want to follow through. This removes the “right versus wrong” dynamic and lets them take ownership of their actions and solutions. This stage is very close to the Heartful Communication tool of “making a request,” based on one’s identified feelings and needs.

Small Shifts, Real Change

Conflicts aren’t completely gone now, but they are less chaotic. No one feels unfairly treated, and the sense of favoritism I once worried about has slowly begun to fade. More than anything, there’s more openness within the family. Big feelings still come up, but instead of shutting down or blaming, we stay with each other through the harder moments.

However, the biggest shift I’ve noticed has been in me. Breaking old habits hasn’t been easy, and there are still days when I’m tired and feel the urge to take control in the old way. I’ve realized I cannot help my children navigate their big emotions when my own internal state is just as fractured as theirs. My meditation practice has become my anchor, training me to “be the pause” I want to see in them.

Fundamentally, I’ve learned that parenting isn’t about control—



it’s about self-awareness and connection. The ways I respond in small everyday moments set the tone for the whole family. Each time I choose curiosity over urgency, I find our connection becoming stronger.

When tension rises, I now ask myself: Am I truly listening to my feelings, or simply trying to escape discomfort? As life often teaches us, the smallest moments can bring the biggest changes when we are willing to pause and listen.

Learn more about Heartful Communication:
<https://heartfulness.org/heartful-communication/>

AI-generated images

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heartfulness
purity weaves destiny

UR
L I F E



experience

enrichment

“Heal the Earth, heal yourself.”

UNKNOWN



The Eco-Guardians

Nobody Sees

B. RATHINASABAPATHY shows how owls embody conscious living at Kanha Shanti Vanam, serving as silent nocturnal guardians whose precise hunting, cultural symbolism, and ecological balance invite a deeper reverence for coexistence with the natural world.



We may walk the forest by day, but its safety is secured by those who rule the night—the silent hunters whose presence keeps Kanha in harmony.

Silent Keepers of the Forest and Grain

In the quiet hours, when the world retreats into sleep, another realm awakens. At Kanha Shanti Vanam, the presence of owls is both subtle and sacred. They do not announce themselves; they remain largely unseen, yet unmistakable. Barn owls, spotted owlets, and forest-dwelling scops owls have made Kanha their sanctuary, helping maintain the balance between cultivation and wilderness.

The Night Belongs to the Listener

At Kanha Shanti Vanam, the night is not a place of absence; it is a realm of heightened awareness. While the human world withdraws, the forest inhales. Beneath the moonlight, the barn owl sails low over the fields, wings moving without sound. The spotted owlet perches on ancient ficus branches, alert and curious, watching the slightest flicker of movement on the ground. In the deeper wooded patches, the

mottled wood owl—a master of camouflage—becomes almost indistinguishable from the bark it rests upon, embodying stillness itself.

To encounter an owl is to enter a world where vision extends beyond sight—guided by precision and instinct. Unlike daytime hunters who chase, owls simply wait. They do not waste energy; they do not engage in pursuit unless accuracy is guaranteed. This ecological discipline makes them among nature's most efficient hunters—and one of humanity's quietest allies.

Silence itself can be a form of protection. The owl does not need to announce its presence to serve.

Ecological Guardians: A Silent Service to Humanity

Long before the term “pest management” entered human language, owls had already mastered it. A single barn owl family can consume more than 1,500 rats in a year, protecting grain fields and food stores without human intervention. At Kanha, where large swathes of agricultural lands surround the forest, owls play a decisive role in keeping rodent populations

Unlike daytime hunters who chase, owls simply wait. They do not waste energy; they do not engage in pursuit unless accuracy is guaranteed. This ecological discipline makes them among nature's most efficient hunters—and one of humanity's quietest allies.

naturally under control, reducing the need for harmful chemical poisons.

Modern pesticide use disrupts ecological balance, killing snakes, frogs, lizards, and even birds of prey, while owls offer a completely natural, regenerative solution.



Barn owl

Photo: ADITYA VARMA

They are living proof that nature's intelligence precedes human invention. Their impact is not merely biological. It is economic, ecological, and profoundly ethical.

Yet despite this silent service, owls are often misunderstood. Villages across India still associate them with ill omen, while in truth, they are protectors of food, homes, and harvest.

Myths, Mysticism, and the Cultural Memory of Owls

Across civilizations, the owl has carried meaning beyond its physical form. In Greek tradition, the owl is the symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom and strategy. In Japanese culture, it is considered a harbinger of good fortune. In many Native American traditions, it is seen as the keeper of ancestral memory, a bridge between seen and unseen worlds.

India, however, carries both reverence and fear toward this night guardian. In Tantra and Shakta tradition, the barn owl is the vahana [vehicle] of the goddess Lakshmi, representing the one who sees value in darkness—prosperity born from deep insight. Yet folk superstition has sadly recast this sacred symbol into one of perceived misfortune, a profound misunderstanding born from separation between fear and wisdom.



Mottled wood owl

Photo: J. SARAVANAN



Spotted owlet

Photo: J. SARAVANAN

The Jain tradition honors the dawn listener, the one who awakens before the world and knows what others cannot perceive. The owl, in that sense, becomes not a creature of night, but a herald of inner awakening.

A Call to Reverence and Coexistence

To protect owls is to protect the intelligence of the night. At Kanha Shanti Vanam, where ecology and spirituality meet, their presence is essential. They remind us that not every form of service is visible. If we learn from the owl, we begin to understand that true guardianship is silent, subtle, and unwavering. It does not seek recognition, but only balance.

As the world races toward noise, the owl remains a symbol of deep listening—the wisdom to act without aggression, to protect without proclamation. May we offer them safe skies, unpolluted nights, and the dignity of being recognized not as omens, but as partners in the restoration of Earth.

When darkness settles over Kanha, a different world awakens—one shaped by precision and instinct, carried upon silent wings.

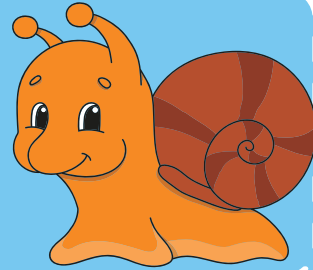


creativity

“Out of clutter, find simplicity.
From discord, find harmony.”

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Story, Play, and Wonder



INGA MARIE RAMCKE shares her joyful approach to educating children through storytelling, puppetry, and hands-on exploration of the natural world. In this conversation with **VANESSA PATEL**, she reflects on how her work nurtures curiosity, imagination, and connection—an early foundation for conscious living.

Q: Inga, how did you find your way into this work of educating children about the natural world?

Inga: That’s a funny story, because I have a very weird background. I tried working on many things, and nothing seemed to fit. I’m more of this artsy, free-spirited person, and not a business-minded person, even though I had to work in that area for a while. And at that time, I was unemployed, and a university asked me to take over a program they were running for children. They were looking for someone who could run classes educating children in a park, outdoors. So, I took this up, and after that, I designed one of my own. I thought about my own childhood and playing with my toys—they were really living

beings to me, which helped me make my programs more appealing to children. The task that I was given was to explain to children the difference between frogs and toads in the park. And I thought maybe there was a stuffed toy I could use, so the children could touch something and engage their senses. I mean, nature already is something you can smell, you can taste. But when you want to tell the story and just give them pictures, it’s nice, but not enough—it’s not emotionally engaging. I found hand puppets to use in my program, and the children loved them—they have such vivid imaginations, and they are so curious and receptive. I’ve really found my place with that work, because I had so much fun working with them. So, I did that for years.

Q: So the characters become the teachers, in a way.

Inga: Yes, you know, rather than just giving them instructions, it’s like the character is saying, “Be quiet because my animal friends could be scared off if you are too loud.”

Q: You’re also the author of a number of children’s nonfiction books. Tell us about those.

Inga: Sure. I wrote a book just on spiders, all different types. One of my books, called *Reiseführer für Tiere* (a travel guide for animals), is about twenty-five different species of animals and their migratory patterns, written in the style of a travel guide—it offers tips on accommodation, food, and, of course, travel warnings.





The first animal in that book is an Indian dragonfly called Shakti, following her migration path over the sea towards Madagascar. Animals don't have borders, right? And that's what's so amazing. The message of spirituality is that we are all one. The natural world doesn't only include humans, but every sentient being. I put so much love into this book.

My work is very collaborative, and I was talking to scientists all over the world. From Chinese scientists, I received pictures of baby panda bears, which are not usually available. The person doing research on salmon in Canada

gave me his research pictures. A German researcher gave me pictures of penguins looking at humans—because it's from the animals' perspective, and the animals need to be represented! In my book, there is a Magellan Penguin, who's looking at the scientists, like, "Oh my gosh, this guy again! They really need to get off my island!"

One of my books, *Die Astronautin von nebenan* (the astronaut next door), is about a half-Indian, half-German main character called Maya, and she's supposed to go on a vacation with her dad, but she falls sick and instead discovers that her neighbor is an astronaut, and so the adventure begins.

I wrote the book while I was preparing to become a meditation trainer. And while I knew nothing about the subject, I love doing research. There is even a puppet included with the book—he's a "mermaid pig" called Tönning. He's the grumpy one who says things like, "I will not go into



space if there is no masala chai or a bed to sleep on.” But what was really interesting was the book’s spiritual aspect. I was reading what Babuji wrote in his book, *Towards Infinity*, about how the world came into being, and my research led me to all the astrophysics stuff, and how astrophysicists came to a similar conclusion, but several decades later. It’s very new to the scientific world that everything came out of nowhere, and the very first chapter of my book starts with this idea that there was nothingness, and now there is everything, and it’s getting bigger and bigger, wider and wider.

I think the astronaut and migratory path books are the most spiritual books that I have written. With the migration one, I was feeling so connected to the animals, and I was really praying that these animals in the book would make me travel and see the world and spread this idea of unity to others—how the animals are traveling in a world without borders, and that we all have the same needs. It’s just the humans who make it weird.

Q: Another way of learning you promote is through experiments that you’ve designed with collaborators.





Inga: For this, we are a team of three people. The others are a marine microbiologist, Julia Schnetzer, and a chemist-physicist and laser physicist, André Lampe. I met them when I was doing research and working with puppets to inform people about sustainable development topics in a fun, subtle way, without the schoolbooks. I was going through a very low time in my life when they approached me; they knew my work and wanted that element in their new project. They were both very supportive and understanding, did all the legwork to get funding, and just asked me for my ideas. They also supplied the experiments. But I'm the one traveling, so I'm very

much part of the project and carry the experiments wherever I go.

Q: Between the books, the puppets, and the experiments, you've built quite a toolkit for engaging children. And on top of all that, you've designed puzzles and games, almost like a treasure hunt, to help discover the world around us.

Inga: Yes, you have to make it playful, fun, and light. And it's a very subtle way of learning. Through humorous stories and a hands-on approach, you experience something, and then you won't lose it. You don't have to learn it by

heart; you learn it through stories and this personal engagement.

Q: Speaking of personal engagement, people connection is a huge part of your work. You also do city tours.

Inga: Yes, I love my city, Hamburg. I'm very emotionally connected to my city, and I love doing city tours. I even wrote a book about it, and there's a puppet rat called Carly telling the story. I started off doing private tours, but then I started working with children. I did lectures in Hamburg schools—in the fourth grade, they study the history of their city, which students tend to find theoretical

and boring. So I thought this could be done in a more fun way—they experience the city and get to know it in an easy, charming, funny way. And of course, I always have a puppet with me. The teachers then approached me to do city tours with the children, which was so much fun!

Q: I've read that you work in multiple languages other than German. Is that correct?

Inga: My books have been translated into Russian and Danish, but that doesn't mean that I work in these languages. I don't

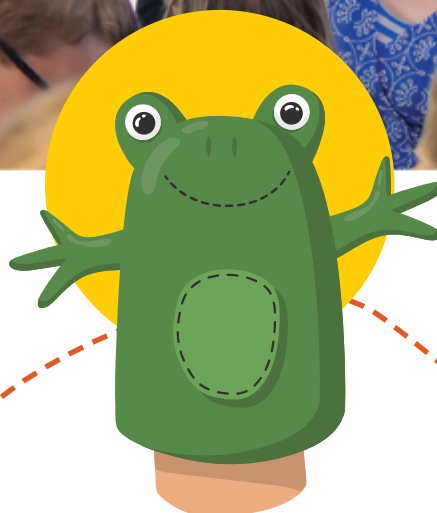
speak Russian or Danish, but I do work in German, English, and French. I've been to the Kerala Literature Festival and talked about my astronaut book. I was even able to meet Sunita Williams, gift her the book, and ask if she would maybe hand it over to a US publisher. One of my main goals is to get published in some Indian languages.

Q: Yes, I really hope you do! It's such a wonderful way to rouse children's curiosity and shape how they relate to the world around them.

Inga: That's what I love to do. And there's some spirituality in the books, too. *Die Astronautin von nebenan* will be translated into Chinese, so that's my next language, but I would love to be published in Hindi or English.

Q: Inga, it's been a huge pleasure talking to you about your work! You know, there's an idea of adding Arts to STEM—science, technology, engineering, and math—to make it STEAM. That's really what you do!

Inga: Yes, you could say that. That's funny; thank you!





Walking on the Grass with Walt Whitman

CLARK POWELL

walk with you and on
You, Walt Whitman, just as you
Promised I would, I walk

On the blades
Of your century's
Leaves of grass

And there I find you
Where you promised I would,
And so I stop with you

To listen again
As you sing
The body electric,

And I sing along, for I too am
As much Body as I am
Soul, whirring between

The worlds of being a human being,
Where all I am and all you are
Are just electrons moving

The way they move
In their shells of orbits
In the wide space around what

Nuclei we cannot know,
The centers turning to return
their prana back to prakriti,

back to the grams of matter times
the speed of light squared —
This is what I here release

Back to you,
My father,
My poet of the grass

And yet I seem to see you smile
From under the grass,
still unfinished, still uncontained,

And I seem to hear you saying:
No, my friend, not electrons only,
But touch and breath,

And an arm flung wide
Across another's shoulder,
And the salt of the body,

And the long tide
Of men and women
Entering and leaving

Each other's lives, impermanent
As waves returning to their shores
Without regret.

Clark, you say that the soul
Is not elsewhere, that
It is leaning here

In the wrist's turn,
In the back's bend,
In the unashamed gaze.

And I, much older now,
I feel the current slowing
In your century, but deeper now —

Not the flash
Of youth alone,
But the steady field

In which all things
Arrive to dissolve
Without sorrow and without loss.

So I stand here with you
Here on still-living leaves of grass,
And I do not pass on —

Not yet —
For the body still hums
And the grass still speaks,

And somewhere between
Your century and mine
The same charge is moving

Unowned,
Unbroken,
Unknown — and it is all

Enough, and it is
All there is — it is all
Enough...

Om shanti,
Shanti,
Shanti.



children

“I really love being human.
But some days I really wish
I could be fairy.”

GRETA, AGE 4

Brigid

Goddess of the Gaels

RUBY CARMEN tells the story of Brigid, the Celtic goddess of fire and healing, a tale of compassion and strength that carries ancient wisdom for modern life.



Way back in time, in Ireland, there was a Goddess, Brigid—her name means “exalted one.” She is the Celtic Goddess of Fire, healing and poetry, and even of pure love. Do you remember the story of Dagda with his magical harp?¹ Brigid is the daughter of Dagda of the Tuatha de Danann.²

There are only a few left to remember her—perhaps you are one of them. Some remember her in dreams, some see her in the gleaming rivers, and some see her in sparks of light, especially in springtime.

It is said that Brigid was born of fire, at sunrise. Indeed, when she was born, there was a flame coming out from her head, reaching up to the heavens. The storytellers, or Seanchaithe, say that her hair was like those flames, red and golden, shining like the first light at dawn. And her gray-green eyes were as deep and soulful as the holy wells, where people of modern times go to remember her and pray for healing of both the body and the heart.³

Not long after her birth, a Druid gifted Brigid a cloak, not just an ordinary cloak.⁴ It was a



beautiful blue cloak dyed from wildflowers and was, in fact, magical. But wait now, I will tell you more about this cloak later.

Brigid quietly grew into a strong, kind, and powerful woman. She treated every single living thing—plants, flowers, trees, animals, people—with much care and respect, with tender compassion. Her healing abilities developed until she was well renowned all over the island of Ireland. Do you remember the healing power of Dagda’s harp that eased the suffering of the warriors after battle? Well, let me tell you—Brigid’s honey-sweet voice had the effect of healing. Whenever she spoke to any creature, be it a bird, a deer, a child, or a warrior, they felt it in their being, soothing away any pain and hurt.



For all this, Brigid did not see herself as divine, or as a goddess. She was just gloriously and unapologetically herself. Those who had the eyes to see her could see the Divinity shining out of her heart and, importantly, in the very breath of her actions.

Over the years, Brigid had witnessed much suffering in the land, caused by the many battles and conflicts, and decided that she wanted to create a sanctuary—a place of refuge for the weak, the widows and the orphans. She sent a message to the King requesting to meet with him. This king had won many battles and in doing so, gained more land. He, however, was unable to see her Goddess qualities.



Full of respect, and taking permission to speak, Brigid asked, “Respected King, ruler of these lands, may you see it in your heart to give me a piece of land under your charge?” She paused with poise. “So that I may build a sanctuary, a place of peace. We have many women and children affected by the warring here.” She waited patiently for his answer, for it was unclear if the King would be willing to consider, never mind accept her request.

The King smiled cleverly. “Well, I have fought hard against my enemies to win these lands.” Brigid nodded knowingly. “Yes, it is true that

you have, dear King.” On seeing how serious and determined she was, he confidently continued in a booming voice, “I will grant you only the land that your cloak covers!”

“Is it so, dear King?” It was Brigid’s turn to smile gently, for her beautiful blue cloak grew and grew, covering over an acre of the land! Meanwhile, the King’s jaw dropped in disbelief. “How is this possible?” he spluttered, his regal composure gone, replaced by reluctant awe.

On realizing Brigid’s divine power and loving compassion, the King was true to his word, granting her all the land that her magical cloak had covered. And on that land, she built a sanctuary of healing, for the wounded, the widows and the children. It became a beacon of light and a place of peace.

The legacy of Brigid lives on in Ireland today.⁵

¹ See “Tuatha de Danann,” *Heartfulness Magazine*, February 2026.

² The Tuatha de Danann (“People of the Goddess Danu”) are a supernatural, divine people in Irish mythology.

³ There are over 3,000 holy wells in Ireland, thought to be far more than in any other country in the world. For more information, see [Holy Wells of Ireland](#), published by the Heritage Council.

⁴ Druids were a class of individuals in ancient Celtic cultures known for their great wisdom and knowledge of traditions.

⁵ The Goddess Brigid’s legacy lives on in modern Ireland in the form of Saint Brigid, recognized as a national saint of Ireland. A public holiday was granted in her honor, taking place on February 1 as the first day of spring. For more information, see [Ireland.ie’s page on St. Brigid’s Day](#).

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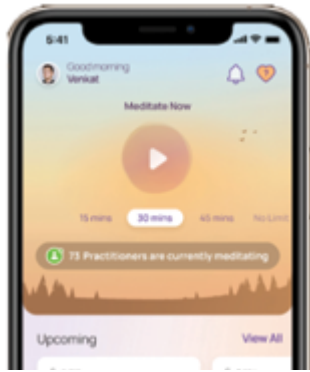
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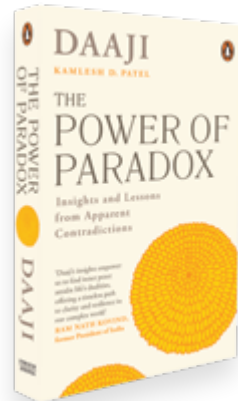
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