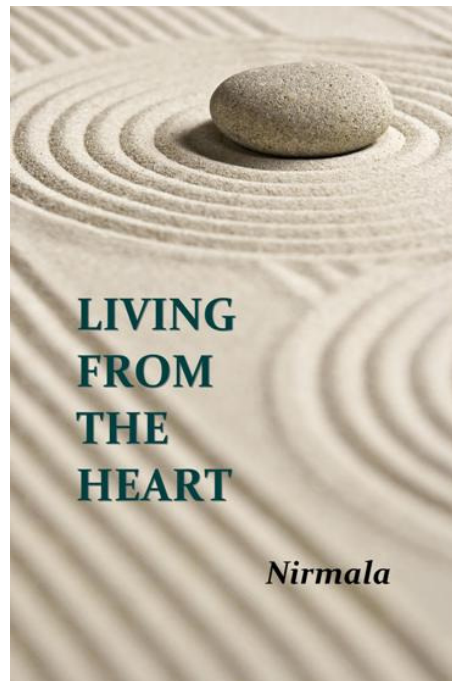


# Living from the Heart

Part Two

**Nirmala**



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Endless Satsang Foundation  
<http://www.endless-satsang.com>  
nirmalanow@aol.com

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# Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

## Part 2

### The Heart's Wisdom

The truth is that which opens the Heart. The capacity to sense the truth is something we all already have. We all have a Heart that is already accurately showing us how true things are.

Anything that puts you in touch with more of the truth opens the Heart. This is a literal and experiential description of truth. When your experience is bringing you more truth, there is a sense of opening, softening, relaxation, expansion, fulfillment, and satisfaction in the Heart. This can be most directly sensed in the center of the chest, but the Heart of all Being is infinite and therefore actually bigger than your entire body. So this opening, softening, and expansion is actually happening everywhere; we just sense it most clearly and directly in the center of the chest.

When you encounter truth, the sense of your self opens, expands, softens, fills in, and lets go. The *me*, the sense of your self, is no longer felt to be so limited or small. It becomes more complete and unbounded. The boundaries soften and dissolve, and any sense of inadequacy, limitation, or deficiency is lessened or eliminated.

As a side effect of being in touch with more of the truth, your mind gets quieter because you simply have less to think about. Even knowing a simple truth like where your car keys are gives you less to think about. And when you touch upon a very large truth, your mind becomes even quieter, like when you see the ocean for the first time: The truth or reality you're viewing is so immense that, at least for a moment, your mind is stopped and becomes very quiet.

In contrast, when your experience is moving into a diminished or smaller experience of the truth and of reality, the Heart contracts. The sense of your self gets tight, hard, contracted, and feels incomplete, bounded, and limited. It can feel like you are small, inadequate, or unworthy. The smallness of the truth is reflected in the smallness of the sense of your self. The result of being less in touch with the truth is that your mind gets busier as it tries to figure out what is true.

Fortunately, your Being is never diminished or contracted, only the *sense* of your self. Just as blocking your view of the whole room by partially covering your eyes makes your sense of the room smaller without actually making the room smaller, an idea or belief that is not very true is reflected in a small sense of your self, without actually limiting or contracting your Being.

This opening and closing of the Heart in response to the degree of truth you are experiencing isn't something you need to practice or perfect. Your Heart has been accurately and perfectly showing you how true your experience has been all along. If you start to notice your Heart's openings and closings, you'll discover that you already have everything you need to determine what is true. The Heart is the true inner teacher, the source of inner guidance we all have as our birthright. You don't need a spiritual teacher or spiritual books to show you what is true, just your own Heart.

*Exercise: Take a moment to sense your Heart. Dropping into the Heart can help you get more in touch with what is happening there. Notice if the Heart feels relatively contracted or relatively open. In either case, your Heart is working perfectly to show you the degree of truth you are experiencing in this moment. Also notice if your Heart is expanding or contracting in this moment. The movement might be subtle or a fairly gross contraction or relaxation. You may be able to notice that the Heart is always shifting in response to every thought, feeling, desire, and experience that arises in your awareness. There is no wrong way for your Heart to respond. It is always showing you the relative truth of this moment.*

## **WHAT IS THE TRUTH?**

Truth is what exists, what is here now. So if what exists is also what is true, then there is only truth. Whatever is present is true—but to varying degrees. Just as there is no actual substance or energy that is darkness, but just varying amounts of the energy of light or photons, there is no falsehood or untruth, only varying degrees of the truth.

We are always experiencing the truth. But because we don't experience everything in any one moment, our experience of truth is always limited. Sometimes we experience a large amount of truth—of what is actually here—and sometimes we experience only a small amount of what is actually happening, of what is true. Our Heart's openness or lack of openness in each moment is what shows us how much of the truth is being experienced in any moment.

What about ideas that are mistaken? An idea or belief that has little or no correspondence to external reality is going to be an extremely small truth, so small it may only exist in one person's mind, like the saying: "He was a legend in his own mind." When you experience an erroneous idea or belief, your Heart will contract appropriately to show you that it is a very small and inconsequential truth.

For example, if you entertain the idea that you will never be happy unless you have ten million dollars, your Heart will contract appropriately to show you that it is just an idea. This contraction may be very quick, so quick that it doesn't cause you any discomfort or trouble. But if you really believe this, then the sense of your self will contract for as long as that idea is held.

*Exercise: For just a moment, hold onto a limiting thought, such as "I will never have enough time," and notice the response in your Heart. Does that thought allow you to relax and be, or does it require a kind of effort or contraction just to hold it? Now consider another thought that you find ridiculous because it is so untrue, such as "I will never be happy unless I become President of the United States." Notice how it might not even be possible to hold onto this thought. It might even make you laugh. Many jokes end with a ridiculously impossible truth (e.g., "And then the dog said to its owner, 'I guess I should have said Dimaggio instead of Ruth') and the smallness of the truth of the punch line causes you to let go of believing in it. Laughter is a wonderful movement into a bigger perspective!*

Thoughts are real—they exist—but they still exist only as ideas. You could put all the thoughts ever thought into a pile, and they still wouldn't trip anybody. They only exist as neural firings in the brain, so to focus on thoughts exclusively is to severely limit or contract your experience of reality and therefore the sense of your self.

In the range of everyday experience, our ideas have varying degrees of correspondence with reality. Those that correspond more closely to reality won't contract or limit the sense of self for as long as mistaken ones. Many ideas are of service to our ability to be at ease in the world. For example, when you need to go someplace, correct ideas about how to get there allow you to simply go there and then move on to other experiences. Ideas such as these can enhance our experience, rather than limit or contract it. An idea about where something is located is, of course, not a big truth, but it's also not usually experienced as a limiting one.

## **THE HEART'S CAPACITY TO SHOW YOU THE TRUTH**

All there is, is truth, and our Heart's capacity to reflect the degree of truth in any experience is the way we recognize how true a particular experience is.

What is this Heart? What is this sense of self that is ever present? It doesn't relate to sensations in the physical heart or chest. It's a more subtle sense, at times even more subtle than the physical

senses, although the opening or contracting can also be experienced as relaxation and contraction in the physical body. The sense of your self, the sense that you exist, is something more intimate than your physical experience.

What does it mean when you say *me*? What are you referring to when you say *me*? This simple fact that we are here, that we exist, is a very mysterious aspect of our experience. When we speak of it poetically to try to capture its essence, we call it the Heart, like when you know something in your Heart or when your Heart is touched.

This sense of your self is a very alive and changing experience. At times, your sense of *me* is open, free-flowing, and expanded. At other times, like when a judgment arises, it feels small, inadequate, and deficient. In these moments, have you actually changed? Has your body suddenly shrunk? Much of the time this sense of *me* is bigger than or smaller than your physical body. How does that work? Have you ever experienced your inner child? How can your *me* be the size of a child when you are an adult?

The sense of *me*, the sense of self, is shifting all the time. It's always either opening and expanding, or contracting and tightening, similar to the ongoing expansion and contraction of our breathing.

***Exercise:*** Consider the idea that it is better to be thinner or more beautiful or younger than you are, and notice what happens to the sense of your self. Does your Heart open, soften, and expand? Does this idea allow you to simply be? Or does it tighten and restrict the flow of your experience?

Then just for contrast, notice what happens to the sense of your self if you consider the idea that you are okay just the way you are. It might be challenging to consider this idea without other thoughts being triggered, such as "But I'm not really good enough!" If this happens, your Heart will show you how true this response is, not how true the original idea of okayness is.

Just as an experiment, see if you can hold the idea that you're okay just the way you are, and then notice what happens in your Heart. Does this idea allow your Heart to open, soften, and expand? Does it allow you to simply be? Or does it tighten and restrict the flow of your experience? For most, the idea of being okay just the way they are allows a greater ease and fullness to the experience of the self.

The idea that it is better to be thinner, more beautiful, or younger than you are is simply a smaller truth than the idea that you are perfect the way you are. Even if you *are* beautiful, thin, or young, the

idea that it is better to be that way can limit the sense of your self. If it's better to be that way, can you just relax and be, or do you need to do something to stay that way?

In contrast, a neutral idea that doesn't state or imply anything about you can be experienced neutrally in your sense of self. For example, if you consider the color of the ceiling in someone else's house, this usually won't open or close your Heart because it's not about you and probably doesn't imply anything about you. The sense of your self doesn't shift in response to neutral ideas like this.

This opening and closing of the Heart is not a prescription—something you need to practice—but simply a description of what your Heart has been doing your entire life. Whatever does happen in the sense of self in any moment is entirely correct and appropriate. It's appropriate for your Heart to close when someone is telling you a small, limiting truth; and it's appropriate for your Heart to open when you experience a deep and profound reality.

## **THE HEART'S QUICKNESS**

Your Heart is incredibly quick. It instantly knows how true something is and instantly opens or closes to that degree. It's so fast that it never really lands anywhere. It is always either opening or closing in response to each moment.

So if a thought triggers another thought, the Heart will then be reflecting the relative truth of the triggered thought, not the original one. And if this triggered thought triggers another one, then your Heart will reflect how true the latest thought is. The openness of your Heart can shift very rapidly, as rapidly as you can think another thought!

I was working with a woman once who had difficulty taking time for herself. I asked her to check in her Heart to see how true it is that it is okay to take time for herself. She closed her eyes for a moment, and when I asked her what had happened, she said she felt an intense contraction. I was surprised, so I asked her to tell me exactly what had happened. She said she thought, "It's okay to take time for myself," and then immediately decided this would be selfish, and her Heart contracted. Her Heart was showing her how true it was that it would be selfish to take time for herself. It was no longer reflecting the truth of the idea that it is okay to take time for herself.

In the quickness of our usual rapid-fire thinking, it can be tricky to determine what your Heart is actually responding to. Therefore, when checking in your Heart to see how true something is, it is helpful to slow down and take each thought or each possibility one at a time.

**Exercise:** Take a moment to think about a situation in your life. Notice if there are any familiar or recurring thoughts about that situation. Pick one of the main ideas, beliefs, opinions, or attitudes you have about that situation or about someone or something related to it. Now just hold that thought gently in your awareness. Repeat it to yourself a few times, and as you do, notice what happens in your Heart. Does it open and soften, or is there a kind of tightness or hardness that starts to form in your awareness? Remember, either way your Heart is working perfectly to show you how true the thought is.

See if you can hold that one simple thought for a moment, almost like a child completely engrossed in whatever he or she is looking at. Holding a thought for a moment gives you a clearer picture of the relative truth of that thought, as indicated by your Heart's response while you are focusing completely on it.

If your mind wanders and you find yourself having second and third thoughts, or even a whole conversation with yourself about the situation, that's fine. Just note that the Heart has moved on along with your thoughts and is now showing you the truth of the thought you are having in this moment.

## THE ROLE OF JUDGMENTS

Not only can an initial thought or experience trigger other thoughts, the opening or closing of your Heart can itself trigger a thought or judgment that results in the further closing of the Heart and a sense of your self as limited or small. If you are a spiritual seeker and have come to believe that it is better for your Heart to be open than closed, then a sudden contraction of the sense of your self can trigger a further judgment related to not wanting to be contracted, which closes the Heart even further. Test it for yourself:

**Exercise:** If you hold the idea that you shouldn't feel contracted, does your Heart open? Does that idea allow you to just be? Or does it tighten or limit the sense of your self? The idea that you shouldn't feel contracted is a limiting idea and usually feels tight or limited because it is simply not very true.

There is a certain kind of logic to this cycle of judgment, even though it results in a restricted sense of self: When the sense of your self contracts, your awareness also contracts and becomes limited, and your *unawareness* expands. When your field of awareness becomes smaller, the rest of reality lies outside your awareness in that moment. The logic of judgment is based on this simple

effect. As a result of a judgment, you become less aware of your experience and temporarily less aware of the initial discomfort that triggered the judgment. Therefore, you get some relief from it. The logic of judgment is based on this temporary relief provided by the reduction in your awareness.

However, the flaw in this logic is that now that contraction of your awareness must be maintained or you will become aware again of the initial discomfort. Maintaining a contraction is, itself, uncomfortable. Try making a tight fist and holding it for several moments. It will quickly begin to feel uncomfortable. Similarly, when you keep your awareness contracted to avoid an uncomfortable sensation, this generates even more discomfort.

So when a cycle of judgment is triggered, the sense of your self and your awareness keep getting smaller as you try to avoid the ever-increasing discomfort caused by this same contraction of your sense of self and your awareness. This often continues until you are exhausted by the effort involved in maintaining vigilance against your discomfort, and you simply let go of any judgment.

The good news is that whenever you are not contracting your sense of self through small truths, such as judgments, the sense of your self naturally relaxes and opens. An open, spacious sense of self is the natural resting state of your Being, just as your muscles naturally lengthen and expand in the absence of any effort to contract them. So when a cycle of judgment wears you out, there is sometimes a profound release of the small sense of self and the contraction of awareness. In light of this, it's not surprising that many realizations and spiritual awakenings occur immediately following an extremely contracted and painful experience.

More good news is that the tendency to judge is not your fault. You were taught to do it by those who raised you, who were taught by those who raised them. They did this because it was the best way they knew to manage their own discomfort. When parents are confronted with the unlimited Being of a two year-old (and we all know how big that can be), they often resort to the best means they know for giving that two year-old a more limited sense of his or her Being: judgment.

We eventually learned to do this for ourselves. We learned to judge ourselves and hold limiting ideas about ourselves to get along with the people around us, especially those who clothed and fed us.

Judgment is just one of the many ways we limit our experience of the truth and thereby limit our experience of our self. Other culprits are our ideas, beliefs, opinions, concepts, doubts, fears, worries, hopes, dreams, desires, and our usual knowledge. Judgment is just one of the more effective ways of limiting the sense of our self because it always implies something limiting about the self.

***Exercise:** Make a list of some of the judgments you have about yourself, life, and other people. Pick ones that you really believe. Now read through your list several times and notice the sense you have of yourself as you do this. Does holding these judgments give you a sense of yourself as someone in particular, someone who has a very definite perspective on life? Do you feel more connected with others and with the world, or do you feel more separate and apart from the world? Even if that separate sense of self feels superior because it has the right judgments, how big or open and relaxed is your sense of self when you have these judgments?*

This implied someone in all of your judgments is always a small someone, someone who is limited and therefore vulnerable to something bad or who needs to feel superior or for something good to happen to feel better or even survive. The ultimate truth is that you are unlimited. Your Being can never be harmed—or benefited—by any experience. Only a smaller (less true) idea of your self can seem to be harmed or benefited.

## **POSITIVE JUDGMENT**

What was said about negative judgments applies to positive judgments as well. When some experience triggers a positive judgment, the sense of our self contracts just as much as when we have a negative judgment. Test this for yourself:

***Exercise:** Think about something you have a very strong positive judgment of, like your favorite movie or something you have done that you are very proud of. Notice what happens to the sense of your self when you have a positive thought about this. If you find yourself thinking something like, “Great! This is wonderful—wait until I tell my friends!” notice what happens to the sense of your self. You may be surprised to find that your Heart isn’t as open as it was before the positive judgment. A big truth allows you to relax and just be however you are and to change in any way that naturally happens. A positive idea about your self implies that you have to continue to be a certain way to be okay.*

Implied even in positive judgments is an idea of yourself as someone who is limited—someone who needs good things to happen to be okay and feel adequate. There’s nothing wrong with something good happening; it’s just that even your positive judgments are small truths that are based on a small idea of your self. Your Heart will contract just as much for a small positive truth as for a small negative truth.

Fortunately, there's nothing you need to do about a small truth beyond recognizing it's small. Besides, even small truths can be useful. So there is no need to try to rid yourself of them, which isn't even possible. Seeing that they are small immediately puts them in perspective. Then, when they arise, they are seen as no big deal. You might still think them, but no matter how often they arise, you recognize them as relatively unimportant.

You have probably experienced this ability of a bigger truth to displace or put in perspective a smaller truth. For example, if you or someone you love is suddenly diagnosed with a life-threatening disease, what really matters becomes obvious. The truth, or reality, of a possible death makes many other truths appear small and insignificant in comparison.

You don't need to wait for a big truth to hit you over the head to put your experience in perspective. Simply notice how true each thought is. Experiences come in all different sizes. You are always moving in and out of different degrees of truth, and you are naturally able to discriminate how true each one is. You can determine how truly important something is just by noticing the content of your thought and the sense of self it results in. If it opens and relaxes the sense of your self, your Heart, then it is truly important. If it contracts or limits the sense of your self, your Heart, then it's not.

## **ALL TRUTH IS RELATIVE**

Truth is all there is. Yet our experience of truth, of reality, is always partial. Right now your field of vision is partial. You can only see what is in front of you, not what's behind you. Similarly, your Heart is always showing you the degree of truth of the experience you are having in the moment.

Your view or range of experience is always opening and closing, filling in the blanks in your experience or forgetting or ignoring parts of your experience. Whenever you focus on a particular aspect of experience, you necessarily stop noticing other aspects. As a result, any particular perspective is either smaller and more limited, larger and more complete, or roughly the same degree of completeness as another perspective.

The openness of the sense of your self is always relative. Because truth is always relative, any particular truth could be experienced as an opening or a closing of your Heart. Even a small experience of the truth may be larger than the experience you were just having and therefore will be experienced as an opening or relaxation in your Heart. Similarly, even a fairly large truth can feel limiting if you move into it from an even larger, more spacious experience.

For example, if you've lived most of your life paying attention to your thoughts and ideas, then the first time you are put in touch with your emotions will be experienced as an expansion of consciousness. It will feel like you've discovered a new, rich dimension of your Being.

However, if you've had many even larger experiences of much more expanded states of Being, possibly through spiritual practices, then moving into a strong emotion like anger, sadness, or excitement may be experienced as a contraction or diminishment of the sense of your self. The same truth, the same experience of emotion, can be experienced as either an opening up in your Heart or a closing down. It just depends on where you move into the emotion from and also how open or expanded the sense of your self generally is.

The difference can be slight between two experiences with similar degrees of truth or unimaginably huge. The true dimensions of your Being are limitless. You are everything, and when you directly experience this completeness, the sense of self can be equally vast and limitless.

## **YOUR PERFECT WISDOM**

Your Heart is the wisest thing in the universe. The sense of your self is always perfectly and accurately showing you how true things are, how complete your perspective is in every moment. Even when your Heart is contracted because of some deeply conditioned idea you are holding, it is appropriately and accurately wise in its contraction.

No one has more capacity to distinguish how true things are than anyone else. No one is wiser than you, and no one is less wise than you. Since no one else is able to experience your individual perspective, no one else can ever be more of an expert on your experience than you. Just as someone else can't eat and digest your breakfast for you, others can't experience and digest your perspective of the truth in each moment.

If no Heart is any wiser than any other, perhaps that's because there is just one Heart that functions through many bodies and yet is not contained in any of these particular expressions. What you are is this one Heart of Being.

Since we are all equally endowed with the wisdom of the Heart, there is no need to give away our authority to another. There is nothing better than your own Heart at discriminating how true something is for you right now.

In addition, the thoughts that cause contraction are not your fault. Your thoughts and beliefs were passed on to you by others, who learned them from others. If you trace each conditioned thought or reaction back to its source, you'll discover that all limiting beliefs and ideas are shared among us all.

If anyone is to blame for them, it's all of us put together. Another way you could say this is that the whole of Being is the source of everything, even the limited ways we have of experiencing that Being.

With this understanding, the possibility exists to simply trust your Heart, no matter how big or small the truth is that you are experiencing. You can trust your Heart when it opens, and you can trust it when it closes. Your Heart is the wisest and most trustworthy thing there is. In the deepest spiritual traditions, the true teacher, or *satguru*, is seen to be within each of us. Your true teacher is this sensitive and accurate Heart, which expands and contracts as it senses the endless folding and unfolding of life.

## **APPLYING YOUR HEART'S WISDOM**

Because the Heart responds so quickly to what's happening now. . . and now. . . and now, it's helpful to slow down and take your experience one thought or response at a time if you wish to find out how true it is. Just as you can more fully appreciate a meal if you take each bite and savor it, the possibility exists to take time to fully sense a thought that arises.

For example, let's say you remember a disappointing experience and then the thought arises, "My life will never be good enough." Before you rush into thinking of all the ways this is true or, alternatively, defending yourself with reasons why it isn't true, you might take a moment to sense directly how this thought affects the sense of your self. Then, when you know for yourself how true this thought is all by itself, it may be obvious that it is neither completely true nor completely false. If it is sensed directly as a relatively small truth about your life, it may not even be necessary to defend against it with an opposing thought. Sensing how true an initial thought is in this way can reduce the importance of any ensuing thoughts.

Another practical way of exploring and utilizing your Heart's truth-sensing capacity is to check in your Heart when making a choice. By doing that, you can find out what choice is the truer one. However, when it comes to relative choices (e.g., what to do, what to eat, where to live, who to marry, etc.), the differences may be slight in your Heart. From the ultimate perspective, the practical choices we make in life may not be that important. So it may take a while to learn to accurately sense the differences in how true various choices are. But just as a wine connoisseur can learn to discriminate the subtlest difference in flavors, you can learn to sense even very small differences in how true a choice is relative to another.

When checking in your Heart for the truth about some choice, it's helpful to consider as many choices as possible. The truest one may be somewhere in between the possibilities you've considered, or it may be something completely different. For example, a friend was torn between her desire to go permanently on spiritual retreat and her desire to stay with her husband. Neither option felt completely true in her Heart. When I suggested that maybe she could stay with her husband but still go away for long periods of time on spiritual retreats, her Heart opened, as she sensed this was the truest way to respond to both desires.

***Exercise:** Think of a choice you are considering in your life. It might be best to pick something where you have a decision to make that isn't too important and not too immediate so that you can really explore the process of comparing the truth of your choices. Make a list of possible choices you could make, and be sure to include some that are in between or completely different from the first two options you come up with.*

*Now really take some time with each choice and sense your Heart's response as you hold in mind the idea of making that choice. Again, keep it simple, and just picture having made the choice, and let go of secondary considerations, such as pros and cons and further ramifications. Notice whether considering a particular choice results in a spacious, easeful sense in your Heart or a contracted sense of your own self. There is no right or wrong way for your Heart to respond. Just notice the way it does respond.*

*Include the thought that it doesn't matter what you choose. In many cases, the biggest truth about your choices is that what you choose doesn't really matter. If that is the case, then that thought or perspective will give you the most room to just be, and the largest sense of yourself.*

Finally, when considering the relative truth of various possible choices, it is also helpful to check in your Heart several times over a period of time. Especially when making major life choices, checking numerous times before acting is more likely to result in a more satisfying outcome. For example, if you want to know if it's true to stay in an intimate relationship, you might find a different result right after an argument than right after your lover has surprised you with a gift. It's a bigger perspective to find out what is truest over the long term than just what is true in the present moment.

The Heart is wise and accurate and can show you how true it is to stay or go, how true it is to buy a house, how true it is to take a new job, even how true it is to eat another cookie. But it also can show you much more of the possibilities inherent in this life and much more of the truth of your

Being. In relation to these bigger truths, the practical questions of your life turn out to be relatively small matters. Using your Heart only to know things like what to do or where to live is like using a global positioning satellite system to find your way from your bedroom to your bathroom. It utilizes only a small part of your Heart's capacity.

However, following your Heart day in and day out can put you in touch with the richness of the functioning of this dimension of your Being. Along the way, you may also find your Heart opening in response to the bigger truths and deeper movements of Being that touch every life.

*Exercise: For a moment, sense if there is any Peace here. Don't worry how much or if there's only a little bit of Peace here right now. Just notice if you can sense any Peace at all. Now focus your attention on that Peace that is here beneath the flow of thoughts or feelings. Give yourself permission to really sense the nature of Peace and the deep stillness in that experience. As you touch Peace with your awareness, notice if there really is any boundary to the stillness at the core of this moment. Don't worry about doing this right, but just taste as much of the Peace that is here right now as you can.*

*Now notice the sense of your own Being. Focusing on Peace may have relaxed or opened your sense of self profoundly or just a little. Notice if this has softened or expanded your Heart.*

## **THE MANY SIZES OF TRUTH**

The deepest and largest truths don't fit into words or language. While words can act as pointers, your Heart will open the widest and the sense of your self will feel the most complete and full in response to the direct experience of the vast dimensions of Being that are beyond thoughts and beliefs. As always, your own Heart is the truest guide to these larger dimensions and possibilities, but the reason the sense of your self expands when your view of the truth is more complete is because you *are* the truth. You are everything that exists. When you are experiencing more of the truth, you are experiencing more of your self.

The truth comes in many different sizes. One of the primary ways you create and maintain a small sense of self is through a profound involvement with thought. We've been taught from an early age to think, conceptualize, and name things. Because there is such a huge momentum to thinking, moments without a thought happening are rare. Thinking is such a prevalent part of our moment-to-moment experience that many of us live mostly in our minds.

Adding to this momentum of thought are strongly held assumptions and beliefs about the world and yourself, many of which are unconscious. This deeper current of thought also serves to create

and maintain a small, separate sense of self. As a result of all of our conscious thinking and unconscious assumptions and beliefs, most people live in awareness of a very small part of reality, most of which only exists in their mind.

This momentum of small truths is reflected in a momentum to your small sense of self. This leads to the question of what to do about it. Unfortunately, any idea about what to do about it is just that—an idea, another thought. However, what *is* possible is to simply be aware of the prevalence of thought in your experience. This awareness is not really something you do, as awareness is a fundamental quality of what you are. Just as you don't need to do anything to have shoulders, you don't need to do anything extra right now to be aware—and to be aware of your thinking.

***Exercise:** What is thinking like right now? You can notice not only the content of your thoughts, but also the rhythm and speed of your thoughts, the ebb and flow of thought. Where do thoughts come from and where do they go? What happens if there is a pause between thoughts?*

*How is the sense of your self affected by this flow of thought? Do you need to think in order to be? Does thinking give your sense of self a familiar smallness and sense of boundaries? Is it uncomfortable to not know something in this moment, to not have a thought?*

*The invitation is to just notice thought and its effect on the sense of your self. Any idea of changing your experience is just another thought that will have a similar effect on the sense of your self. Why not simply find out what thought is like? Experience for yourself how true each thought is. There's nothing wrong with small truths—they're just small. What if all of your thinking is not that big a deal? What if your thinking is just not a very large container for the truth? Thinking can only contain a small amount of the truth.*

*There is no need to get rid of thought. Once you experience that thought is not a very large container for the truth, this gives way to another question: What else is here besides thought? What else is true? As you sense the prevalence of thought and possibly even the deeper current of unconscious beliefs and assumptions, you may also begin to sense what surrounds and contains thought.*

*Drop into your Heart and notice the space all around your thoughts. What effect does dropping into your Heart have on your sense of self?*

## **THE DEEPER CURRENTS OF THOUGHT**

Many beliefs and assumptions shape and limit our experience of truth and the sense of our self even when we aren't consciously thinking them. They are ideas and concepts that are so deeply believed that they aren't even questioned, such as "Life is short" or "There's never enough time." Furthermore, these beliefs and assumptions generate other thoughts, which add to the momentum of thinking and keep your Heart, the sense of your self, small and contracted.

Two deeper currents of thought strongly shape the experience of your self. The first is the belief in a direction to your life. Usually this direction is toward more, different, or better experiences. But sometimes it's framed in opposite terms as not less, the same, or not worse. In either case, there is a deeply held belief that life should move or change in a particular way.

Of course, things do change, which keeps the hope alive that they will change in the way you want them to. This deeply held assumption that things could or should be better implies a small *you*. The directionality of this assumption is based on a reference point: Things should be better—for *you*. If things should be better for *you*, then *you* must be lacking something. This assumption and the thinking it generates help maintain a small, contracted sense of your self because that is the implied reference point of the assumption—a small *you*.

The second, even deeper and less conscious current of thought that serves to maintain a contracted sense of self is the assumption that physical experience is the most real. This is such a widely held assumption that any other orientation could get you labeled crazy. Even very sensitive and spiritually-oriented people who have had very real and profound experiences of other dimensions are often pulled by this assumption back toward the physical into a more limited experience of truth and their own Being.

There are many dimensions to reality besides the purely physical, and as a human being, your experience includes all of these dimensions. There are the dimensions of thought, emotion, and intuition. And beyond those, are dimensions of pure presence and spacious Being. Many of these dimensions are more real than even physical reality. Experiences of this transcendent reality give you a transcendent sense of your self that is much fuller and more complete than the purely physical sense of your self.

## **THE THOUGHT THAT YOU ARE THE BODY**

The idea that your life could or should be better and the idea that physical reality is the most real animate an even more basic assumption: that you are the body. Your sense of your self, and therefore the experience of your Being, is most often shaped and limited by your identification with

the body, which results in the ongoing question, How is it going for the body? Is it better, more pleasurable, or at least not painful right now for the body? This orientation toward the body isn't bad, but it is a limited way of experiencing reality and your self. It's like watching only one channel on your television: It's something, but it's limited.

This limitation can affect every experience you have. By focusing on how it's going for your body, you can miss some of the richest and most profound possibilities in life. The biggest truths may not even be particularly comfortable for your body. Profound states of love and bliss can be exhausting from a purely physical perspective. The deepest realizations of the nature of your Being can be so vast and expansive as to feel like a death for your identity as the body.

Asking what you can do about this limitation will only reinforce it. Another possibility is to explore the sense of limitation that identification with the body gives to your awareness and your Heart.

***Exercise:** What is it like to believe you are the body right now? Does this allow your Heart to open and relax? Or does it result in a small sense of your self? There is nothing wrong with small truths; they just aren't very complete. You don't have to get rid of or change small truths. Just recognizing they are small is enough.*

*With the recognition of the incompleteness of identifying with the body, a larger curiosity often arises: What else is true about you? Are you more than the body? What other channels are there on this television called your life? What else is going on here?*

## **THE SENSE OF ME**

Beneath the assumption that you are the body is an even deeper one. The idea that you are the body is predicated on the assumption that *you* exist, that you are a *me*—a separate, individual self. The most intimate sense of your self is often this sense of *me*, which is a limited and incomplete sensing of your self. It doesn't include the far reaches of your greater Being. This sense of a separate *me* is not bad or wrong; it's just limited and incomplete.

In the midst of a very profound and large experience of truth, the sense of your self can become so large and inclusive that it no longer has much of a sense of being *your* Being. When you awaken to the oneness of all things, the sense of a *me* can thin out quite dramatically. If *you* are the couch you are sitting on, the clouds in the sky, and everything else, then it simply doesn't make sense to

call it all *me*. If it is so much more than what you usually take yourself to be, then the term *me* is just too small.

In a profound experience of truth, the sense of *me* softens and expands to such a degree that there is only a slight sense of *me* as a separate self remaining, perhaps just as the observer of the vastness of truth. Beyond these profound experiences of the truth, is the truth itself. When you are in touch with the ultimate truth and the most complete sense of Being, there is nothing separate remaining to sense itself—there is no experience and no experiencer, no Heart, and no sense of self. There is only Being.

The experience of bigger truths and even the biggest truth doesn't obliterate your capacity to experience a small truth and therefore a separate self. But with many experiences of shifting in and out of a small sense of self, this separate self feels more like a suit of clothes you can take on and off than like something permanent. As you move in and out of many dimensions of Being and even beyond experience itself, the boundaries between all of these dimensions become very permeable and inconsequential. It turns out that these boundaries are just thoughts anyway. They don't actually separate anything.

The question isn't how to get rid of a small sense of self, but what is the sense of your self like? Is it fixed or is it constantly shifting—opening and closing, expanding and contracting, tightening and loosening, and sometimes even disappearing altogether? The sense of a separate self can therefore be loosely held even though it continues to contract appropriately when a small truth is triggered.

What is your sense of self like right now? What is true right now? Your Heart is the only guide you need for exploring even the biggest truths.

## **THERE IS ONLY LOVE**

Anything you or anyone else has ever done has been the movement of love. What shapes the movement of love is the sense of *me*. What we are always doing is taking care of the self, whether it is a small sense of self or a more expanded one. Whenever that sense of self is contracted and small, we take care of that *me*. And when it's expanded, we take care of that larger sense of self. All we have ever done is tried to take care of the self in the best way we know how, which is always a loving act.

But, of course, when our actions only take care of a contracted *me*, they don't take care of or take into account other things. For example, we might take care of our taste buds by eating tasty foods, while ignoring our body's need for nutrition. Or if we are so identified with a feeling that all we can do is take care of it, we may not be taking care of our whole Being. Taking care of only the taste buds or only the emotions is still a loving act, but because it is such a narrow way of loving ourselves, it can be neglectful or even harmful to other aspects of our Being or to others.

If we see love in everything we may be afraid that we will allow rape, murder, and other horribly narrow ways of taking care of a small separate sense of *me* to continue. Yet in discovering that there is only love, the surprising thing is that our actions naturally become more loving. If we see murder as an evil that needs to be abolished without also seeing its basic loving nature, that is when it makes sense to murder. If murder is really bad, then it makes sense to kill someone who has murdered someone else. Or it even makes sense to kill someone before they kill us. It makes sense to bomb a country before it attacks us. But when we see the loving nature even of murder, we can respond to it in a way that doesn't perpetuate it, even as we work to prevent it.

It is possible to recognize the love that is already inside of us and already acting through all of us. It is in recognizing that love that the possibility exists for even greater recognition of love. Contrarily, when we reject any aspect of love—which includes anything that's happening—the more contracted our experience will be and the less completely loving our actions will be. So in condemning, we actually become more like what we condemn. Seeing the beauty, perfection, and love within something is what allows it to transform, to move into a more complete way of loving.

When the sense of our self expands, our actions aren't really any more loving; they're just more loving toward a more complete view of the self. When our loving actions take care of a larger sense of ourselves, we appear more saint-like because they are taking into account everybody, since we recognize that we *are* everybody. These actions are still self-gratifying, but they are gratifying to a much broader sense of self.

When the awareness of self becomes even more complete, you come to see that there is ultimately nothing that needs to be changed or fixed. Everything is already fine. The world already is full of love. Your actions and everyone else's are already loving. Whatever Being is doing is Being taking care of itself. That is all it ever does or ever has done.

This leads to an appreciation of everything you do and everything that happens, an appreciation of the way Being moves every time it moves. Love is pouring out everywhere. There's no evidence of the lack of love. What a surprise to discover this in a world that seems so full of problems and things that need to be changed.

## TRUE FREEDOM

In this culture where more is felt to be better, there is often an implication that bigger truths are better. If your Heart can open and expand, then it may seem best to find a way to open the darn thing all the way and keep it that way.

However, if you check in your Heart right now as you hold the idea that it's better to open your Heart and keep it that way, you may be surprised to find that this idea actually feels tight or limiting. It's simply not the biggest truth or the most freeing possibility. An even bigger, freer possibility is to allow the sense of your self to be whatever size it is. If your Heart is always accurately and appropriately opening or contracting to show you how true each moment's perspective is, then the best result of experiencing a small truth is for your Heart to contract and show you how small that truth is. It can be as liberating to find out that a small truth is small as to find out that a vast dimension of Being is profoundly real. In both cases, the nature of truth has been more fully illuminated.

Once you realize you can trust your Heart just the way it is right now, whether it is open or closed, you can just rest within the folding and unfolding of all perspectives. You don't do anything to get rid of the small perspectives, which just arise out of the conditioned parts of your Being, and you don't do anything to bring on the bigger perspectives, which just arise out of the unconditioned parts of your Being. You just rest in the moment as it is.

There is never a need to have a bigger or smaller experience, as Being is still Being even in the small experiences. Its nature is the same, and part of its nature is this capacity to discriminate how true—how complete—a particular perspective is. The small experiences of Being are still an expression of Being's ultimate nature, just as a single drop of water is still wet.

Spiritual seekers often think of liberation as staying in an expanded experience of truth. While expanded experiences are freeing (especially when you've been contracted for a long time), the ability to move in and out of many different perspectives is an even greater freedom. Walls are only a problem when you don't know where the door is and therefore can't get in or out.

True freedom is when you can move in and out of identification with a small sense of your self. You don't have to take my word for it. Find out what happens in your Heart if you just let the opening and closing of your sense of self be just the way it is right now. Does this allow your Heart to open? Does it allow you to just be for a moment?

## WHO ARE YOU?

What is this Being that you are always sensing to some degree? Perhaps the most surprising discovery is that the sense of your self is not showing you anything about your true nature. A limited sense of your self is never about who you really are! It's not indicative of who you are but, rather, shows you how true your conditioning is. Recognizing this can turn your world inside out. The sense of your self is being shaped and limited by the unfolding of conditioned beliefs and ideas; it's not a reflection of your true nature.

This can be a tremendous relief. All of your experiences of limitation, incompleteness, contraction, insufficiency, or unworthiness have nothing to do with you! Instead, they are accurate reflections of the limitations, incompleteness, smallness, insufficiency, and unworthiness of your ideas, judgments, beliefs, concepts, fears, doubts, worries, hopes, dreams, and desires. They have nothing to do with the nature of you.

The most intimate experience of your self—your Heart—is ultimately never a *complete* experience of your true self. It is always a *relative* experience of the functioning of that true self as it determines the *relative* degree of truth in the particular content of your experience.

This brings us back to the question: Who or what is the Being that you are always sensing to a greater or lesser degree? This question points to what is completely beyond words—and even beyond experience. Even the most expanded *experience* of Being is still not free of this shaping or limitation. In this case the question itself points to a bigger truth than any answer, even an experiential one.

What happens in your Heart when you simply hold the question, Who am I or what am I? Even if your Heart is open, you can still wonder who or what is experiencing the openness. The ultimate truth will never be captured in an experience because it's simply too big to fit in even the most expanded experience. This provides a clue to the question, Who are you? The reason an expanded sense of your self never quite contains the *whole* truth of your Being is that you *are* everything that exists.

Perhaps you can rest now from the dream of experiencing the ultimate truth. The truth is not dependent in any way on your experience of it. It is and always has been functioning just fine through what you call your experience of a self, without ever being contained in that experience. The sense of your self, whether it is expanded or contracted, is a functioning expression of a much larger Being that can never be fully captured in experience.

Perhaps the *experience* of truth doesn't need to be captured. Truth is something we can also unfold gradually bit by bit like a meal or novel that we slowly savor rather than rush through. We are and always have been realizing the truth even when we experience only a small part of it. The richness of Being is also revealed in the small truths that make up our lives.

Being is never harmed by the limited perspectives we experience. Being is not dependent on any particular way of sensing your self, nor even on the absence of a sense of self. Being is already resting within the endless opening and closing of your Heart, so you might as well enjoy the ride.

*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*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After a lifetime of spiritual seeking, Nirmala met his teacher, Neelam, a devotee of H.W.L. Poonja (Papaji). She convinced Nirmala that seeking wasn't necessary. And after experiencing a profound spiritual awakening in India in 1998, he began offering satsang with Neelam's blessing. This tradition of spiritual wisdom has been most profoundly disseminated by Ramana Maharshi, a revered Indian saint, who was Papaji's teacher. Nirmala's perspective was also greatly expanded by his friend and teacher, Adyashanti.

Nirmala is also the author of *Nothing Personal: Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self* and *Gifts with No Giver*, a book of nondual poetry, and many other writings that are available as free downloads on his website: <http://www.endless-satsang.com>. In addition to giving satsang throughout the U.S. and Canada, Nirmala is available for Nondual Spiritual Mentoring sessions in person or over the phone. To arrange a session, contact him at [nirmalanow@aol.com](mailto:nirmalanow@aol.com). Nirmala lives in Sedona, Arizona with his wife, Gina Lake. More information about her and her books is available at <http://www.radicalhappiness.com>.

## OTHER FREE E-BOOKS BY NIRMALA

The following PDF e-books are available for free at <http://www.endless-satsang.com/ebooks.htm>:

### *Beyond No Self*

Nirmala's newest e-book explores the fullness of Being found in the absence of a separate self. It ends with a simple fairy tale that offers a sense of how one Being can appear as so many. Here is an excerpt:

“How can that be—empty space that is full of everything that matters? The mind cannot grasp it fully, as presence exists beyond concepts and even beyond its own forms; and yet, that is what you are. You can experience it with more subtle senses than the physical senses and the mind. Ultimately, you “sense” it by being it. You just are this full empty presence.

It is this second movement of realization of essence, presence, and fullness of Being that counteracts the belief that since I (as ego) do not exist, therefore nothing exists and all is illusion. It gives a heartfelt sense of meaning and purpose back to this relative life of the body and mind, not as a means of gratification to your idea of yourself, but as a pure expression of the wonder and beauty of this deeper reality. Instead of living a life in service to the ego's wants and needs, you can find yourself fulfilling the deepest purposes of a human life: to serve and express freedom, joy, beauty, peace and love. By itself the realization of no-self can end up dry and lifeless, but when the heart opens wide to the bigger truth of the true Self, life is anything but dry and lifeless.”

*Free Ebooks continued:*

### ***Gifts With No Giver***

A collection of non-dual poetry by Nirmala. Here is a sample poem:

*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*

### **Part One of *Nothing Personal, Seeing Beyond the Illusion of a Separate Self***

(The entire book is available as a paperback for \$15.25 or an ebook for \$6.95 at <http://endless-satsang.com/nothingpersonal.htm>)

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.

“*Nothing Personal* is an excellent book, very clear and warm-hearted. I love it and recommend it highly. Nirmala is a genuine and authentic teacher, who points with great clarity to the simplicity and wonder of nondual presence. He invites you to ‘say yes to the mystery of every moment.’ Good stuff!” –Joan Tollifson, Advaita teacher and author of *Awake in the Heartland*.

### ***That is That***

*That Is That* is an intriguing and enlightening look at life’s biggest question: Who am I? This book is a collection of the free essays and articles found on Advaita spiritual teacher, Nirmala’s website and blog at [www.endless-satsang.com](http://www.endless-satsang.com). It is intended to be an easy way to sample all of his teachings. There is no particular order and you are invited to wander through the essays as you please.