

Conscious Being

Reading Three: Self-Love

From Chapter 8 of Conscious Being

Love Is What We Are

If you look into the eyes of a newborn baby, you will recognize their profound wholeness. One cannot deny the pristine perfection of new life. We seem to come into this world inherently perfect and whole. We are born as love. However, as we grow up, we learn the ways of the world. We are taught belief systems that are contradictory to our original knowing. In our formative years, we adopt psychological survival mechanisms to deal with the difficulties we encounter. When we suffer from emotional wounds, we close down in order to protect ourselves from further hurt. I have come to recognize and reframe these coping mechanisms as brilliant strategies for survival. The issue for us is that these strategies have become maladaptive. What was once a brilliant strategy is now keeping us imprisoned in a way of being that is no longer serving us. Marianne Williamson says it this way, "Love is what we're born with, fear is what we are taught." In learning about fear—the need for which arises from a belief system that tells us we are separate from each other and the world—we forget our true essence.

I remember the moment I forgot the truth of who I was. I was 7 years old. I remember the physical sensation of shutting down. I was overcome with feeling the need to close off my heart. It no longer felt safe to keep it open. I started believing the stories the adults in my life were unconsciously teaching me: some people are better than others, some are worse; some

are good, and some are bad. I started believing in the idea of separation, the concept of right and wrong. And I also became aware of suffering and violence. I felt overwhelmed and decided the world was not safe and that I needed to protect myself. I also decided that something was wrong with me and I was not enough. At that early age I had begun to feel and experience myself and the world as spiritually bankrupt. Because of that, I started to look outside myself to fill the inner emptiness. Over the years, as I grew into a young adult, I did what most of us do—I tried to plug myself into many different things—including romantic partners, money, clothes, prestige, etc. It was an attempt to reconnect to myself and feel loved. As a young boy, and as a young adult, I didn't realize that it was my closed-off heart that was causing me to feel an inner sense of lack.

The Search for Romantic Love

Many of us believe the fairy tale that somebody will arrive and give us a love that will make us feel whole and complete. As in a movie, we believe in the fantasy that someone will magically appear and fill our emptiness. It is absolutely natural for us to desire a romantic partner. However, when we expect that partner to fill our emptiness, our inner void, then we create a relationship based on dependency and on fear of loss. We create a relationship with an unstable foundation, because it's based on a fundamental lie about who we are. Only when we have remembered ourselves to be love, do we have a dependable, lasting source of love to share with another. The reality is that nobody needs a partner in order to be happy. It's the disconnection from our true essence that creates the misperception that somebody else needs to supply us with love.

As an exercise in one of my workshops, I ask participants to write down what it is they are looking for in a partner. Next, I have them write three things—usually feelings—they think that partner will bring them. Then, I ask them, “Do you think it’s possible that you already possess those feelings and qualities? Do you see that you already are that?” If we delve inside of ourselves, we can find all the qualities we think a relationship will give us. Ultimately, the real reason we want a relationship is so we can express our wholeness, and have people reflect it back to us. When we truly know ourselves to be love, we create relationships in which we mirror back our true essence to each other. If we desire a healthy and sustainable relationship, we will want to be with a partner who also knows that truth about themselves.

In working with people who are looking for a partner, I am often asked, “Why do I keep attracting unavailable people?” A more useful question might be, “Why are you attracted to unavailable people?” Ironically, there is actually a gift in recognizing you are attracted to unavailable people. They reflect to you where you are not fully available to yourself, and where you are not fully available to love another. The deeper question is, “What do you want them to be available for?” If you are seeking another person to do your inner work for you, then the relationship is not sustainable. A couple of questions that might be useful: How can you be more fully available to yourself? How can you be more fully available to the love that is already present, inside of you? When you truly know yourself to be love, there will never be any shortage of love. You will know yourself to be forever one with an infinite supply of love that is unconditional. Then a relationship becomes about sharing love rather than seeking love from another. Isn’t this what we all most want?

The Great Remembering

The journey to consciously knowing your original perfection and wholeness begins with a decision. It begins with a desire and a willingness to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that love is who you are. There is a world of difference between looking for love on the outside, and discovering your inner essence, which is love. Once it is discovered, you can live your life as an authentic example of that love. Your mind might think it's a nice idea to know yourself as love. However, it takes a sincere commitment to overcome the inner resistances you inevitably encounter on this journey. You need to clear out everything that is counter to that. It takes enormous courage and stamina to dismantle the inner obstacles that have prevented you from seeing yourself as love.

This journey involves unearthing yourself from the multiple layers of illusion and confusion that cover your core essence. It necessitates that you dis-identify with everything in you that isn't loving. But first you have to understand and have compassion for it. You will remain stuck in painful patterns until it becomes more painful than changing. Only then will you become willing to try a new approach. Life is like that.

On your journey of self-remembering, you may want to dismantle the beliefs that obscure knowing yourself to be pure love. I call it The Great Remembering. Along the way, you may find all the self-doubt, self-criticism, self-judgment, and anything else that would tell you otherwise. You are excavating the brilliant shining light that you truly are, at your core. This light becomes more and more exposed as you remove what has covered it.

There are many tools and techniques that can help you dismantle the false information you have accumulated about yourself. What matters most is that

you choose something that is effective for you, and use it. You might want to meet with a spiritual coach or counselor, spend time in meditation, or join a supportive spiritual community. These and other things may assist you in the process. You will know it's working when you begin to feel your old, limited sense of self diminishing, and your more expansive, authentic self beginning to freely emerge.

Meditation can be an invaluable tool for you on your journey of self-discovery. It enables you to cut through the more superficial layers of the thinking mind and drop down deeper within. Only by moving beyond thought can you begin to experience the more expansive, unchanging essence of who you truly are. Take some quiet time and sit in the silence. Focus on your essential nature or energy field that is beyond the constructs of your mind. You will start to reach deeper into your essential knowing, and make contact with your original self.

Support for Your Undoing

Although not essential, you might want to work with a counselor, therapist, or spiritual coach. They can help clear your mind of old structures of which you are ready to be let go. Your ego-mind may have some resistance to this process. The ego's role is to preserve the status quo. It resists change. If you decide to work with a professional, trust your intuitive sense about who you choose. In doing psycho-spiritual work, it is important to select someone who feels like a good match. It's important to have a safe place to explore and dismantle the inner workings of your mental and emotional make-up. You may discover that you have been identifying with something other than love. When you release those parts of your identity that no longer serve you,

it can be an emotionally uncomfortable or even a painful process. It can feel as though parts of you are dying—which indeed they are. It's important to have adequate support as you dismantle your old identity. You may also want to join a spiritual community. That group can provide a safe place for you to explore the unknown on your journey. Fellow spiritual travelers can be there for you on a regular and long-term basis. A spiritual community can provide an external context of safety when you encounter internal places that may not always feel safe.

In this process you will be dismantling the parts of you that no longer serve your highest truth. You will be focusing on those inner structures you are ready to release. They include outdated belief systems, unresolved emotional wounds, and old survival mechanisms. You will also concentrate on your true essence—the unchanging source of love that you already are. It is a process of shifting your attention back and forth on these two aspects until, over time, your new identity as pure love stabilizes. In other words, you will need to face your inner blocks, the barriers to your inner source of love, in order to dissolve them. Those barriers have been blocking your view—your inner light, your true essence.

The Ultimate Observer

As we come to remember and to know the highest truth of who we are, we experience ourselves as the ultimate observer of all things. In meditation, we no longer identify with or try to control our mind. Rather we simply bring our awareness to that truest part of ourselves, the energy field of our inner essence. As love, we witness all things in our life through the eyes of compassion and understanding. When we truly know ourselves to be love,

to be peace, we recognize in ourselves the very qualities that we may have assigned to God. Knowing ourselves as those qualities allows us to be that in the world. We no longer need to wait or expect somebody else to demonstrate those qualities in our lives. We become the model of it, demonstrating to others the possibility of living in peace and harmony, here and now. No waiting is required. We become a living example to others that it is safe to live openheartedly, as love, in this world.

At this mystical level of living, there is no longer any desire or need to blame, judge, or to make others wrong. And if we do momentarily forget who we are, we can easily find our way back to being love. We understand and have compassion for the human condition. We see that the vast majority of people are still trapped in a limited, separate identity. They have forgotten their true nature. They are a potential danger to themselves and to others. Coming from a place of separation and fear, they believe they live in a dangerous world. When their safety feels threatened, they are convinced there is no alternative but to attack others in order to preserve their well-being. This way of being currently plagues humanity. The phrase --“Forgive them, for they know not what they have done”—comes to mind. How could they know, when they have assumed a false identity? I actually add to this by saying —“Forgive them, for they know not who they are”

Living Beyond Our Stories

From the highest viewpoint, forgiving others is natural because we can readily admit that whatever “wrong” another might have committed, we have committed the same or a similar wrong ourselves—even if only in our imagination. We know their so-called wrong was the result of ignorance,

born out of fear, as a result of their forgotten identity. The ultimate forgiveness is to have compassion toward those who originally taught us false ideas from an old paradigm of separation. We understand they were taught the same things by those who came before them. They had also forgotten their true identity, which is love. At the mystical level of awareness, we recognize that there is actually nothing to forgive, ever. We see that all there is to do is simply return to the truth, and move beyond the belief or appearance of a separate self.

It is also possible that we have held a grudge against someone for something that never actually happened, at least not in the way we believed. I realized this in my 20s, when I was examining painful incidents of my past in order to resolve what still seemed unhealed. I remember calling my two sisters to have them corroborate the details of certain childhood happenings. To my surprise, they both recounted different versions of the same events, which seemed equally true for each of them. It occurred to me that the three of us had three different, yet equally real, experiences of the same occurrences, the same childhood. We all had different childhoods, and therefore we have created different "stories" about ourselves and the world at large.

With clear vision, we see that it no longer serves us to cling to any story of wrongdoing, either by oneself or by another. What would be the benefit of continuing to perpetuate stories that are not in alignment with the truth that we are all essentially love? The fact that most of us are still living in a state of forgetfulness of that fundamental truth doesn't change that reality. As we shift our perspective about who and what we truly are, that in turn shifts the nature of the world we inhabit and our experience of others. The world becomes a more loving place because we have become more loving,

openhearted human beings. And all we did was come into alignment with what was already true. This is what it means to live beyond our stories—about ourselves, others, and the world.

The Shortcut

The Truth—that we are all essentially pure love—is actually quite simple. Our minds often want a more complicated reality. Many of the great spiritual leaders and teachers are in agreement that, as human beings, we have merely forgotten our true identity. We have been misled into a world of illusion by the teachings and beliefs of others who have also forgotten who they are.

What obscures the realization of who and what we truly are? Any thought, belief, or experience that does not affirm that we are love. We need to question anything or anyone who would tell us otherwise. In the end, the only practice needed is one that points us back to this truth. And it can be as simple as finding the willingness to be fully present with whatever is happening, at any given moment. As the observer, we allow life to be exactly as it is. We can safely let go of resisting or trying to change or fix things, including ourselves. From this place of inner spaciousness and inner stillness, useful action naturally emerges. When we no longer feel a need or desire to control anything or anybody, the useful action becomes obvious. It is organically made known to us, from within. Proper action is always in alignment with the highest good for the whole. It naturally facilitates the shifting of consciousness in the direction of awakening. This enables us to operate from the mystical level of awareness. This is the only way that true and lasting change can emerge on this planet.

As our vision clears, it becomes obvious that any understanding other than knowing oneself to be love just does not make sense. Anything else is insane, because it leads to insane behavior. It creates division and conflict and eventually leads to war, to all kinds of abuse of people, animals, and the earth itself. It leads to untold suffering. This has reached such an extreme that our very survival is currently under threat. Is this not insanity? The only way to create a functional, harmonious, loving humanity and world is simply to remember ourselves to be love. It is our true nature, and we need to let our actions be in alignment with that knowing.

Our mind might want to believe that there is one particular way to achieve this. However, many different paths and practices can take us in a useful direction. They can provide us with tools to deconstruct our outdated beliefs and habits. In the end, though, it might be as simple as choosing to be a loving human being. We simply let go of whatever stands in the way of that. Remember, that's what we already are.

Being love in this world may occasionally leave us feeling vulnerable. It requires laying down all of our defenses. There is a certain gentleness, a harmlessness that emanates from those who have truly awakened to their authentic nature. For when we deeply know ourselves to be love, this is the ultimate safety. Nothing and nobody can harm pure love. It is both harmless and unharmable. Unconditional love is unbreakable. Knowing ourselves to be love means that we are in touch with an inner, reliable feeling of safety. We know we can trust our inner knowing at any given moment, whatever the situation. Being love means that we are keenly tuned into our inner guidance or direction. When we trust it enough we are also willing to act from it.

A Deeper Look at Self-Love

Many, if not all of us, grew up with a somewhat damaged sense of self. Childhood hurts, traumas, or abuse severely distorts our self-image and it can interfere with our ability to relate to others in healthy ways. If this is the case for you, it is important to do the emotional healing work to resolve whatever is still affecting you from the past. On your journey of healing, you need to develop unconditional acceptance and compassion for your wounded inner child. You need to be aware if you are acting out and/or demanding your needs be met by others who may not be capable of, or willing to, meet them. Loving the wounded parts of yourself is a vital step in creating a healthy ego in order to have functional relationships.

However, as we move into the mystical level of consciousness, and we fully know ourselves to be love, we recognize there is actually no separate self to love. The very idea of loving oneself suggests duality, where in fact, there is only oneness. Self-love implies that we are separate from the source of love, rather than an expression of it. From the highest level of truth, the greatest act of "self-love" is to truly know who and what we are. Love is the truth of who we are. When we truly know this, everything changes. Can it be that simple? I say yes!