

Carolyn Hobbs - *Free Yourself*
“Your Resourceful Heart : The Power of Fearless Love”

“We are an ancient people who ... have been frightened, coerced, tricked and bribed away from the source of our greatest strength: an accurate knowledge of who we are.”

Alice Walker

The acacia tree outside my bedroom window is in full bloom late, in June. Every April, while the Chinese maple and aspen trees bud and bloom before the snow even melts, the acacia tree remains dormant. This spring a passing neighbor kindly suggested we cut down that poor old dead tree. But I trust the acacia’s timing. More importantly, the acacia trusts its own timing, its inner wisdom, no matter what other trees do.

We, too, can trust our inner wisdom, no matter what others do.

We, too, can accept—and trust—the innate resourcefulness of our wise heart.

Unlike the aspen and acacia trees, though, we were trained from birth to ignore our inner wisdom. Before walking and talking, we learned to *look outside* ourselves—to parents, teachers, pastors, grandparents, aunts, uncles and older siblings—for all our guidance, approval, love and acceptance. Toss greed and corruption into the mix, and even well intentioned elders in a weak moment teach us to abandon our wise heart.

As feisty children, any rebel who dared stand out and follow his or her heart was usually scolded, spanked, shamed, guilt-tripped or disciplined back into submission. With such shaming tactics early on, we could spend the better portion of our lives doubting, fearing, ignoring and mistrusting the wisdom in our resourceful hearts.

Such unconscious discipline—not life—perpetuates suffering and illusion.

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The more we frantically look outside for every ounce of love and acceptance, the more we abandon our truth. The longer we postpone the love and acceptance that is always here, inside our heart, the greater the risk of turning it into a lifelong mistake.

Our whole lives, in every form imaginable, we live terrified to look inside. We distract ourselves, stay busy, ignore feelings, medicate pain, silence longings—all to avoid finding what we feared all along: that underneath our accomplishments and good deeds, we will expose how unlovable we really are. Despite strong religious beliefs, few of us imagine finding anything good, let alone lovable, inside. We hang all hope on the lie that, if we never stop long enough to see ourselves clearly, loved ones too will stay blind to our true colors by focusing on our achievements instead.

From birth to death, we desperately move from parents to best friends to lovers and spouses, even strangers, to fill that gaping, empty hole inside. Secretly, we keep hoping that somebody someday out there will find us worthy of approval and love.

What we forget, time and again, is that the very person we hope will see us, hear us, value us, care for us and love us is secretly hoping for the very same thing—from us. Deep inside, we long to hear what we fear we may never hear: that we are loved and accepted for who we are. As the years roll by, as lovers and spouses come and go, we grow more frantic. Having never received the acceptance we deserve just for being who we are, we have no clue how to offer it to our children. But by accepting the truth—that we all swim in the ocean of unconscious conditioning—we find a deeper truth:

There is no greater wisdom than the wisdom in our own hearts.

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EMBRACING THE POWER OF FEARLESS LOVE

Conscious choice offers freedom from scary, judgmental thoughts. Simple questions engage our curiosity to name which part of us is scared, sad or hopeless. Responsibility releases us from useless victim stories leading only to dead ends. In this chapter, the *Power of Fearless Love* unveils the jewels inherent in every feeling.

Fearless love, not intimidated by any life challenges, holds our hand while we face those feelings we shoved under the rug years ago. It throws out the welcome mat to anxiety, fear, despair, grief and shame so we come to know the voice of each one well. It teaches us to trust our timing, trust our changes, trust our basic goodness.

It even hears our heart-felt longings and responds to them with deep respect.

It stays connected daily with our body, our heart and our young vulnerable self, addressing each need as it arises. It reminds us constantly that we are perfect, just as we are, and to celebrate every joy and delight along the way. It instills in us the courage to look inside our hearts for the loving reassurance we need. It cultivates a kind, loving relationship with us, forgiving our shortcomings, loving our unconscious habits.

Fearless loving sees mistakes, suffering, pain and despair—those things ego avoids like the plague—as opportunities to embrace every aspect of being human. No feeling needs to be avoided. Rather than joining our ancestors, who spent their whole lives lost in ego’s thoughts, reactions and stories, fearless love shortcuts old habits. At our fingertips, we have all the tools needed to bypass reactions and wake up free.

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Whether in our twenties, forties or sixties, we are it. We are the generation to help future generations greet every aspect of being human, the good and bad, with unconditional love. We have a precious opportunity each moment of this life to let our resourceful heart clue us in to how fearless love sounds, looks and feels in our body.

Tapping into this well of friendliness toward ourselves is easier than we think.

Once we dismiss those thoughts consuming our awareness, we uncover an abundance of open space to fill as we wish. We are free to pause and ask, “*What would I love to hear right now?*” Maybe we feel pushed for time and would love to hear, “*I have plenty of time to do what I need.*” Maybe we are reeling from a morning conflict and need soothing words like, “*You are safe and loved just as you are. Stop taking other’s unconscious acts personally.*” Maybe we have holiday jitters and need a reminder: “*Take three deep breaths, see worry as worry and let it go.*”

Maybe when illness strikes, instead of a harsh “I don’t have time to be sick,” we soften and hear our heart say, “I’m so sorry you’re sick. *Together let’s make healthy choices today.*” Maybe when our lover mistakenly rubs salt on our childhood wound, we can remind ourselves, “*I’m wanted and loved, despite other’s unconsciousness.*”

Just by asking, “*What do I secretly wish someone would tell me,*” then saying it to ourselves, we tap into a gold mine of inner strength waiting for us inside our heart. In an instant, we shift channels from feeling lost in feelings to letting our heart love each feeling exactly as it is. This is the essence of fearless love.

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For instance, Linda grew up placating an angry mother and judgmental father. In her home, love was conditional. If she tiptoed around mom and gave dad what he wanted, she felt loved. If not, dad withheld love and mom yelled. This crazy-making formula drove her to drugging. Escaping her pain felt safer, more predictable.

“By time high school hit, I’d get stoned daily to cope with all my anxiety. I was terrified to speak, terrified to have any needs let alone voice them,” she said. “Now with my own teenagers, I exchanged getting stoned for too many glasses of wine at night. But wine makes me feel guilty, weak, indecisive, riddled with self-doubt.”

Linda agreed to close the swinging door to alcohol to allow other doors to open. When I mentioned loving herself, she cringed and shook her head, then later agreed.

“I’m not ready,” she said. “I feel too much shame and guilt to go there.”

To help her drop below judgment, into her resourceful heart, I asked Linda to close her eyes and put both hands over her heart. “Now whisper to yourself, ‘I love myself for feeling guilty and ashamed.’ Repeat it five times to bypass your skeptic.”

As she spoke the words softly to her heart, she burst into tears. “It’s so hard to let in. I don’t believe it. Part of me doesn’t want to believe it. Love means disappearing myself and doing it dad’s way.” After pausing, she shared, “I saw a silver bullet slipping down behind my shoulder into darkness. It felt like shame hiding.”

“Even love the silver bullet for wanting to hide. Love exactly what is.”

As Linda shined fearless love onto the bullet of shameful unworthiness, her tears lessened and breath relaxed. She laid perfectly still breathing self-love into her heart.

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Our heart guides us toward this fountain of fearless love our whole life.

TELLING OURSELVES LOVING WORDS WE LONG TO HEAR

We talk to ourselves all the time. Ego especially is a chatty Kathy. But often, without it registering consciously, we judge and blame ourselves much harsher than we would ever treat others. After hearing how we speak to ourselves, we can finally give ourselves the love and respect we've waited a lifetime to hear from others. By telling ourselves the loving words we long to hear, we feel less desperate when a loved one's words trigger hurt or disappointment in our tender hearts.

For instance, at forty-two Angela had one year of sobriety under her belt. But unlike alcohol, she believed self-hatred was her companion for the rest of her life. In a therapy session, I asked her to say out loud the things she routinely said to herself.

“It ain't pretty or nice,” she giggled. “I don't want to offend you.”

“It's okay,” I replied. “I've heard every four-letter word and use some myself.”

“Whenever I make a mistake or forget to call someone back,” she said, “I whisper ‘asshole’ under my breath. My brother called me this for years. It stuck.”

“And what do you secretly wish someone might say to you?” I asked.

She was quiet for some time. “I don't know if anyone will ever love me, but since girlhood, I longed to hear someone say, ‘ I love you and accept you as you are.’”

As Angela told herself this several times a day, the asshole phrase grew silent.

For Cheryl, twice married and twice divorced, she spent her childhood wishing her mother would get off the phone to play with her or reassure her when she felt

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scared. One day in fourth grade when Cheryl’s class hid under their desks during a bomb threat and mom just laughed, she wrote mom off for good. But now at thirty-nine, she does the same thing to lovers—she abandons them before they abandon her.

“I’m afraid if I let them know me,” she said, “they’ll find out that something really is wrong with me.” When Angela agreed to stop abandoning her inner child and asked her young self, “*What would you love to hear,*” she burst into tears. “That little fourth grade Cheryl still longs to hear the reassuring words mom never said, as if it happened yesterday.” Now, when she notices that young Cheryl is afraid, she repeats, “I see how scared you are, hon. But I’m here with you. I won’t abandon you.”

For sixty years, John had a favorite phrase: “You stupid f__k up!” Whenever he made a mistake or had no idea how to do something, he said this under his breath. Raised by a workaholic mother, he had no clue how to respond to his wife’s feelings (which is why he avoided marriage until his late forties). But it was on an airplane to his father’s deathbed when he really saw how cruel he was to himself.

“I sat on that plane,” he said, “sad for the relationship I never had with my father and sad for his miserable life. But I couldn’t cry. Men don’t cry. For the first time, in that plane seat, I really heard myself calling myself a f__k up, again. I felt so cracked open, it felt like a knife stabbing my poor heart at a time when I so needed comfort. That’s when I asked my heart, ‘*What would you love to hear someone say to you?*’ Finally, I heard a timid voice whisper, ‘That I’m loved exactly as I am.’”

“I chanted my new mantra to myself all the way to Florida.”

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“By time I arrived, I held my father in my arms before he died,” John said. We had never hugged, never said ‘I love you.’ But somehow by chanting my mantra on the plane, I found the courage to give him the embrace I had wanted my whole life.”

FINDING THE COURAGE TO TRUST OUR HEART’S TRUTH

It takes great courage to trust our heart’s truth over the reprimands of a narrow-minded culture. But courage strengthens one choice, one moment at a time. As we choose to live the truth inside our own heart, we stop worrying about how it looks to others and step fully into who we are in this lifetime. People talk anyway, so in the words of singer Bonnie Raitt, “Let’s give them something to talk about.”

My good friend Julie called crying. Her fiancé just left her the day before. Fearless love was the last thing she wanted to hear about. But it did set her free.

“He left me!” she said. “He said he loved me. After his painful divorce, he finally softened and let me in. He asked me to marry him on Christmas Day after we made an offer on a new house. Finally, at forty, I’d found the man I’d spend my life with. Then while I’m fixing dinner, he packs a bag and walks out without a word.”

“I hear how disappointed and confused you feel,” I said. “But I know you don’t want to stay in pain. So I invite you to drop the story, close your eyes and feel the grief and hurt you feel underneath. Breathe into the sadness.” As Julie did, she sobbed.

As humans, one loss often triggers all our losses; I helped Julie identify her first loss by asking, “*How is feeling such deep loss and grief familiar to you?*”

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“My whole childhood, mother ignored me. She was always too busy with her profession to spend time with her daughter. I was paraded out to show off for company, then shuffled back to eat with the nanny. By twelve, with kids teasing me about my new breasts, I begged her to take me shopping for my first bra. By thirteen, since she never bothered giving me the sex talk, I hit up my best friend for a tampon in the bathroom and filled in the blanks with my imagination. Boys happily taught me about sex.”

“What did you long to hear from your mother?” I asked softly.

A long silence ensued. Finally, she said, “That she loved me. That she wanted to spend time with me. That I was loved, cherished, adored and fun to be with.”

“Good. Now try saying these things to yourself.”

Julie looked at me as if I had really gone off the deep end. “Weird! Nobody loves or cherishes me, so the booby prize is to love myself now?”

“No, no. To your wounded child, you are no booby prize. You are her first choice. She has waited her whole life to hear loving words from you,” I explained, “and hearing them from you means more to her than hearing them from anyone else. So as an experiment, close your eyes, put one hand over your heart and the other over your belly, and whisper to your young child, ‘I love and cherish you, young Julie. I’m always here for you to hear your feelings and I love spending time with you.’”

As she repeated these words inside, a peaceful calm swept over her face.

“Wow! My whole body relaxed. I don’t feel so desperate or unloved anymore. I feel like a person in the desert who got her first sip of water after thirty years.”

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“Each morning,” I said, “say these loving words to yourself. During the day, as often as you think of it, keep telling yourself these words you long to hear.”

Like Julie, we all deserve to treat ourselves with love and respect.

Telling ourselves what we need to hear takes desperation out of the equation.

Once we see ourselves as fountains of fearless love, we feel less devastated when a loved one, lost in their own unconscious wound, says things that trigger rejection. The minute we start to plummet, we can tell our young, tender, vulnerable self what it needs to hear: “I am safe and loved. And no matter how it appears, everything is okay.”

The more we stand tall, trusting who we are, responding to angry words with fearless love, we invite everyone around us to step into their wise, resourceful heart. This gives us more breathing room in all relationships to welcome and embrace the inevitable hurt, fear and disappointment that come and go with human love.

Loving reassurance reconnects us with the unlimited kindness, compassion and joy inside our heart. When we pause a moment to ask, “*What would I love to hear,*” the answer bubbles up from deep inside. Now is the time to uncover that freedom and inner peace inside our hearts. Fearless love delivers it in spades.

CULTIVATING A LOVE AFFAIR WITH OURSELVES

We love falling in love. When love strikes, we spend every possible moment making love. We hang on every word, every look, every sigh and gesture. If separated by work or travel, being apart feels unbearable and we can’t wait to get together.

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Falling in love with our selves can be just as exciting but less time consuming.

By spending ten, twenty or thirty minutes a day watching our breath in meditation, we move underneath thoughts and reactions to know our tender, vulnerable parts:

our body, that speaks to us through tension, pain, illness and feelings;

our feelings, which demand our attention and guide our life choices;

our young self, who needs reassurance when childhood wounds are triggered;

our tender heart that speaks to us through heart-felt longings and dreams.

Stealing however many minutes we can from a busy schedule to meditate helps address the first signs of a cold or flu before it costs us days in bed. Watching our breath makes crystal clear how angry we still are over last night’s rude remark by a loved one. Slowing down creates space for any sadness, hurt, fear or rejection to rise to the surface, allowing us to consciously respond with a loving heart. Rather than medicate symptoms, watching our breath helps us hear symptoms asking for our attention.

Rather than letting thoughts drag us around by the nose, meditation helps us discern which thoughts deserve our undivided attention—and which deserve the trash. As we focus more on our breath, we drop deep into the deep inner silence where our heart-felt longings can be felt and heard. Taking a few moments to understand ourselves at this intimate level begins wherever we are, at any age of our lives.

For Don, it started at seventy by asking himself every day, “*What am I feeling now,*” and saying, “yes” to every feeling he found. When Don retired from ranching

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this year, he felt lost and useless. He'd spent his life telling himself, “Get over it.

Nobody wants to hear your sniveling.” In therapy, he revamped his approach.

“My wife of twenty-six years wants to leave. My oldest daughter refuses to speak to me,” he said. “I need to do something different. Raised in Texas, I was told that I'm better off shoveling horseshit than wallowing in bullshit feelings. But I see now, by taking time to name my feelings, that the young kiddo inside felt abandoned when nobody paid attention to him. Five times a day now, I pause in the middle of chores to ask, ‘What am I feeling now?’ But I ignored myself so many years that it still takes a few minutes to identify my anxiety, loneliness or joy. I told my wife I couldn't hear her feelings until I can hear my own. For now she unpacked her bag.”

By loving our feelings, we teach others how to value and respect them.

Cultivating fearless love brings a breath of fresh air. It is like organic chicken soup on cold winter nights or a berry smoothie on hot summer days. It is a three-syllable word for making friends with our selves, best friends, like we've never known.

Fearless love is like a dream grandmother undaunted by life's ups and downs. Nothing ruffles her calm tranquility, scares her or erases her sense of humor. She is always here knitting in her rocking chair, ready to reassure us, stroke our hair, wrap her huge arms around our fear and remind us what is real—and what is not.

Fearless love is inviting our loving grandmother for a sleepover and hoping she'll stay forever. It is listening to our feelings and longings like we never listened before. It is voicing our truth, forgiving our mistakes, respecting our longings, believing

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in our dreams. It is caring for our selves the way we only cared for children and pets before. It is giving ourselves the kind understanding we long for from others.

Fearless love is the pure vein of gold tucked inside our heart.

It is pausing to tell ourselves *right now* what we wanted to hear for years. It is declaring our selves good enough now and forever. It is taking a few minutes to really listen to our feelings, our pain, our wisdom and our heart-felt longings. It is replacing self-judgment with unconditional love. It is truly seeing ourselves, valuing what we see, and finally giving ourselves the understanding we thought only others could give us.

It is trusting our inherent goodness one moment, one choice at a time.

It is responding to our feelings and needs with respect from this day forward.

It is being the unlimited joy, kindness, compassion and peace that we are inside.

Now is the time to wake up by loving ourselves unconditionally, no regrets, no apologies. Why wait for outer circumstances to change one iota when we have the capacity to be happy, free and peaceful now, despite other's unconscious habits.

Daily self-love changes my life, and the lives of many clients, forever.

I awoke out of sorts this morning. Besides six clients changing appointment times this week, none of my three tenants paid their rent. The first of July came and went with no rent checks in the mailbox and no explanations. I was too upset to write, so I took myself on a two-hour hike in nature. After too many minutes of chewing on the story in my head, I remembered to ask, “*What would I love to hear now?*”

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I laughed out loud. Instantly I realized that nobody caused my angst. It was *my* story about how unfair it all was that kept my mind reeling. I was stealing my own joy and inner peace away by arguing with what is. Immediately I stopped.

Since I prize freedom more than anything, I could not perpetuate any story another minute, no matter how enthralling or right it sounded. Instead, I reminded myself one more time about who I am: “I am conscious awareness in this human body. I am the space around thoughts, stories and feelings. I choose joy and freedom now.”

I repeated these truths over and over until I felt calm and peaceful inside.

Nothing changed yet on the outside. The rents remained late. Anger and lack of control kept nipping at my heels. But by accepting my feelings and deep breathing, my resourceful heart saved my life one more time. I softened into what is.”

Fearless love is not about never getting caught up. It is about noticing when we are triggered, whether this takes two minutes or two years, and using even this opportunity to see ego’s patterns. By asking, “*Which feeling is ego judging here?*” we free ourselves to say, “*I accept myself for feeling sad and for judging my sadness.*”

As we grow skilled at fearless love, we have more breathing room for the human foibles that inevitably come—from our selves and others. When we tune in to hear our feelings several times a day, we feel less desperate when a loved one lapses into hurtful remarks. As we pause each day to see, hear, accept and value ourselves, we feel only gratitude—not resentment—when a loved one stops to really see and love us.

Fearless loving flows by recognizing joy stealers disguised as wisdom.

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RECOGNIZING WHAT DOUBT & JUDGMENT SOUND LIKE

It’s important to recognize the voice of doubt as doubt. It badgers us in “what if” questions designed to confuse us: “But *what if* you invest all that money in your new business and can’t pay the mortgage?” or “*What if* you leave your dead marriage and spend the rest of your life alone, loveless?” (Such a drama queen.) Doubt arrives before we begin any creative endeavor and leaves us curled up and paralyzed in a fetal position, unable to think, speak or move forward.

Judgment, on the other hand, arrives after we complete something we care about. It clears its dry throat like some stuffy college professor while berating us, once again, for not working, parenting, finishing the college semester, making love, finishing that triathlon or retiring good enough. Whatever we are doing, somehow judgment deems it *not good enough, not right, not perfect*. It leaves our self-worth a puddle on the floor while feeling chronically dissatisfied with life and all our hard work.

Fearless love elbows doubt and judgment just past earshot with, “Oh, what silly lies have those ninnies filled your head with now? Let’s have a hearty laugh, take a few deep breaths and step back into this moment, where joy and love always live.” With our new best friend, we greet doubt’s arrival at the eleventh hour before launching a new project, with, “Hello doubt. Have a seat in that far corner. I’m busy consciously co-creating something with the Universe and enjoying the process immensely.”

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When judgment arrives on the heels of our latest endeavor, we offer soothing reassurance: “I’m a playful, creative human loving everything I make including mistakes. Now back to the task of being the fearless, powerful being that I am.”

Joy stealers dissolve once we separate primary from secondary feelings.

LOCATING CORE FEELINGS IN OUR BODY

Too often anxiety, despair and anger flood our whole body like a tsunami. Overwhelming feelings displace all semblance of inner peace. Before we know what hit us, they sweep us off our feet with some engaging story of who is to blame.

The solution lies outside of logic’s terrain, inside the heart and body. Whenever we drop below ego’s compelling story and locate a feeling in our body, unmanageable feelings suddenly feel manageable again.

First, we must distinguish between secondary feelings and core feelings. The four core feelings—fear, hurt, sadness and shame—lead to inner peace when we focus directly on them. But secondary feelings—such as jealousy, envy, anger, frustration, irritation, rejection, disappointment, abandonment, mistrust, guilt, resentment, pride and many more—jump immediately on the heels of core feelings before we feel anything.

With core feelings flashing by as fast as a space comet or asteroid, they rarely register on our radar. Ego takes advantage of this human glitch by flooding our minds with secondary feelings. Since ego vehemently protects us from feeling any feelings directly, as if it were a life or death matter, ego weaves tall tales of who did what to us

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when and how it should never have happened, all to distract us from feeling. This all happens so fast that the hurt, sadness, fear or shame feeling remains unconscious.

Nine-tenths of the time, we collude with ego's tricks. We identify with our secondary feelings, spilling grandiose stories out to friends about which lover betrayed us, which parent or child failed to do what they should and how life is unfair. But as exhilarating as telling such stories can be, these watered-down versions of core feelings lead only to endless confusion and suffering. Like thoughts, judgments and doubts, we must peek underneath secondary feelings to find the freedom inside core feelings.

By pausing to ask ourselves, “*Which core feeling is fueling my jealousy, anger, despair or anxiety now,*” and by listening patiently for our heart to answer, we identify the fear, sadness, hurt or shame we missed the instant it occurred. By taking fifteen minutes to *locate one of these four core feelings in our body*, we uncover our heart's immense capacity to heal wounds our body unconsciously carried for years.

Long after our mind forgot, our body still feels dad's slap across our face at nine, or the shame from someone molesting us, or the fear of more emotional abuse.

At times, when we tune inside, we feel tightness or pressure in our throat, chest, diaphragm or belly. Other times we notice tension or pain in our neck, shoulders, hips, or back. Sometimes, if we spent years disconnected from our feelings, we may feel numb in an area of the body where a core feeling was stuck for a long time. But numbness is a real feeling to respect. By being fully present with the numbness, focusing directly on it, numbness soon yields to the core feeling underneath.

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ALLOWING OUR BODY TO RELEASE CORE FEELINGS

Once we locate some hurt, fear, sadness or shame in our body, we release that feeling by turning off the phone and computer and taking fifteen to thirty minutes to lie down alone in a quiet room. We close our eyes and take several deep breaths until thoughts and to do lists yield to awareness of our body. To align our mind and heart, we set an intention such as “*I am willing to explore my fear of growing old*” or “*I am willing to heal my core molest shame that hold lovers at a distance.*”

Now we focus directly on the place where our fear, hurt, sadness and shame lives in our body, take a big belly breath and send the exhale directly into that feeling.

Freedom and release comes by focusing attention directly on our throat, chest, belly or upper back—wherever the core feeling calls to us—and breathing down into the center of that pressure, pain or sensation. Ego will try to regain our focus by obsessing about what happened that should never have happened. And we may be tempted to jump into ego’s story rather than stay in this new unknown territory. But if we grow impatient with nothing coming right away, we simply take more deep breaths. By trusting our wise heart to guide us through the wilderness into a full-body healing, we relax into not knowing for these few moments.

Most often core feelings appear in the torso, somewhere between the neck and pelvis. But if our attention is drawn to our third eye, between and slightly above our eyes, healing requires us to stay fully present and trust where our attention is drawn. Telling our selves, “usually I feel tightness in the center of my chest so I’ll focus there”

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or “I fear abandonment, which usually appears in my diaphragm’s power center” makes logical sense to ego. But it sabotages healing by overriding the body’s present signal.

This may sound too simple and weird to be true. Our inner skeptic sneers at such silliness, distracting us before we embarrass ourselves. It mocks the whole idea of our body possibly healing old traumas from decades ago. But the best way to silence the skeptic is to hear some real life examples, then personally give it a whirl.

For example, one year of chemotherapy for thyroid cancer convinced Sue she needed therapy to avoid a relapse. By forty, her nice girl approach left her exhausted, handling too many responsibilities while stuffing all negative feelings.

“I’m so pissed at my husband for ignoring the kids,” she said, “I could shake him. Instead so much resentment is stuck in my throat, I have a chronic cough.”

After talking, I asked Sue to lie down, take several deep breaths and bring her full attention to her tight throat. “Continue to breath in your belly. With each breath, send the exhale into the center of the tightness and listen for any feelings or memories.”

“It feels like someone is strangling me,” she said. “I remember being thirteen, developing breasts and hips, and my father called me a slut for wearing makeup.”

“Right now tell your dad whatever feeling you couldn’t say then.”

“How dare you shame me? You never bothered to see or understand me.”

After expressing the feelings in her throat, tears erupted, allowing Sue to finally feel and release the hurt that lived as a pressure over her heart all these years.

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“I loved my dad,” she said, “but I never felt important to him. He was always working or attending my brother’s soccer and baseball events.”

That evening Sue sat down with her husband and shared her resentments. He listened quietly, then agreed to share half the responsibilities for their children. Sue grew adept at voicing her feelings. But for weeks she spent five minutes alone in her car making guttural sounds to keep the energy flowing through her throat.

Dan suffered from indigestion and chronic stomach pain for thirty years. Fed up with temporary relief from doctors and pills, he tried body-centered therapy to get to the bottom of this. “When I tune into the belly pain during meditation,” Dad said, “I see images of my older sister terrorizing me while my parents looked the other way. But I don’t know what to do with these memories. I’m willing to heal this completely.”

“Our body stores trauma and pain,” I explained. “Let’s ask your body.”

I asked Dan to lie down on a futon and deep breathe in his belly to relax. “Now bring your attention to your belly. Imagine breathing directly into the belly pain.”

After quietly breathing for several minutes, his legs began trembling.

“It’s okay,” I reassured him. “Trust your body. Allow your legs, feet and whole body to tremble until it reaches a natural completion. Our body shakes to release fear.”

Dan kept breathing into his belly, using his breath as an anchor. Soon his hands, arms and torso joined his legs, shaking vigorously. This continued for a minute or two. Afterwards Dan sighed long and loud, implying a huge weight had been lifted.

“Who knew I needed to shake and tremble like that for decades?” he laughed.

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When we locate core feelings in our body and breathe directly into them, the shaking and trembling releases fear, returning us to inner peacefulness.

GIFTING OURSELVES WITH UNDERSTANDING

To love ourselves fearlessly, we have one final hurdle to overcome. We need to stop clinging so tightly to that favorite role we slip into so easily, that long-suffering misunderstood one. This role only feeds our dead-end victim stories.

The second we feel hurt, disappointed, discouraged or hopeless, we call upon our lengthy “Nobody understands me” story. Within seconds, this unravels into all the times we felt misunderstood by ex-lovers, parents, friends and bosses spanning our entire life. But hidden in the background, fearless love offers a choice: to stay lost one more time in our elaborate “I’m so Misunderstood” for days, years, or decades— or drop the story like a hot potato and give ourselves the understanding we long for.

Anytime we don’t get our way, or get what we don’t want, it is such a tiny step to “Nobody gets me, nobody understands me” that we barely notice it. Soon friends and family gather round, supporting our victim stance by commiserating with us. But falling into this popular but deadly misunderstood story comes with a high price. It costs us our happiness, joy, freedom and inner peace. At times, it may cost us our relationship.

An elderly friend confided, “After decades, Carolyn, I finally stopped playing the long-suffering housewife. I stopped hanging my happiness on what he says or doesn’t say. Every morning I reclaim my happiness asking, ‘What sounds good to me

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today?” ” Sooner or later, we have to wake up out of the stupor our stories cause us. We finally drop the “Poor Misunderstood Me” movie and make a fresh choice.

After all, standing in the truth of conscious awareness that we are, we remember that we humans did not come to be understood—or misunderstood. We did not come to grovel for approval or sell our souls for our next meal.

We came to live in integrity, aligned with the pure joy inside our hearts.

We came to carve a place in this world for who we are at the deepest level.

Understanding comes later, after we jump in and test the waters. Only by trusting our hearts, and letting our hearts lead us to each new moment of creation, can we deliver the gifts that our resourceful heart brings to this world. But when love fails to fit neatly into mainstream culture, when the deepest truth in our heart steps outside of the social and religious norm, following our heart leads us into a wilderness.

For instance, Stephanie lived with a silent war inside that was killing her. She could not sleep. She lived with ulcers and panic attacks. She struggled to focus at work. When she finally came to therapy, she described suicide as an easier choice:

“I’ve been married to John for twenty-five years. Our son Jason just turned twenty. For years, our family attended the Lutheran Church down the street where John and I sing in the choir. But now at fifty-two, it’s too painful to keep living a lie. I’ve known I was gay since thirteen. But I thought if I prayed enough and lived right, God would correct me. Instead, it’s destroyed my health, my sleep and now my marriage.

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“I’ve been a robot for years, going through the motions of life. I had sex with my husband, not because I desired him, but to be a good wife. When I asked my pastor for help five years ago, he strongly encouraged me to cast out this evil desire and ask Christ for strength, which I tried for years. But I can’t keep living a lie. I’d rather kill myself than go on like this.” She held her head in her hands and sobbed.

I felt deep empathy for Stephanie’s dilemma. “What are you most afraid of?” I inquired. “What might happen if you tell your husband, son and church the truth?”

“That I’ll be called pagan and thrown out of church. That God will strike me dead for sinning and I’ll go straight to hell. That my church will black list me. That my husband will refuse to stay friends and my son will never speak to me again.”

“I really hear how scared you feel,” I said. “And since those are all fear thoughts, I want to share a secret about fear: fear doesn’t know what will happen anymore than we do—it just sounds like it does inside our heads. Try an experiment. Try labeling each one ‘fear’ and letting them go. Now say your real truth in your heart.”

Stephanie closed her eyes. “Between us,” she said, “I’m very attracted to a female friend. We’ve spent time together, as friends. If I could do what I want, I’d leave my husband tomorrow and explore this new relationship. My son is open-minded. He might even accept me over time. If God loves all his creatures, maybe he loves me.”

“In the safety of this office,” I said, “I invite you to experiment with saying your deepest truth out loud. Stand up, look in the mirror at yourself and claim who you are.”

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As Stephanie stood up, her knees were shaking. With tears rolling down her cheeks, she found the courage to stand up to the fear voices in her head. “I’m listening to *my heart*. I follow the truth in *my heart*. I trust my heart as the highest authority.”

When she finally sat down again, she felt uncomfortable in her body at first. “This feels so new, so foreign, so selfish. What if I’m wrong, what if God...”

“Before you let fear take you for a ride,” I said, “place both hands over your heart. Now whisper five times inside, ‘I understand you, Stephanie.’ Drop your story of feeling misunderstood and be the source of understanding you long to hear.”

“I understand you, Stephanie. I understand you need to follow your heart and stop living someone else’s life. I understand you need to finally trust your heart.”

“Wow!” she giggled. “I feel such peace that I want to pinch myself and make sure I’m not dreaming. I feel more alive than I’ve felt in years. Like all those fears that felt like brick walls are really paper thin.”

That evening, when she told her husband, he exploded. “How could you break up the family like this?” he repeated over and over. In his rage, their son, overheard. “But I thought we were happy together, Mom.” Stephanie kept deep breathing and listened quietly to their reactions without abandoning the truth in her heart.

In the weeks to come, she found a house two blocks away, moved out and began dating the woman she had fallen in love with two years earlier. “I’ve never felt this way about anybody!” she said. “I loved my husband, but I feel *in love* for the first time in my life. And free. I can finally be honest and open about who I really am to another human

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being. I'm not all alone anymore. My pastor still gives me the cold shoulder, but several church members have called for lunch and to wish me all the happiness.

“Once my husband and son got past their initial shock, we're all happier. My ex found a woman who wants to have sex with him. And my son brags about his lesbian mom. Last night, he brought his new steady girlfriend home from college to spend the night. He shrugs and says, ‘I'm just happy to see you and Dad happy.’

“When I finally opened my mouth, I feared God would never forgive me. But I feel God's love around me, holding me everyday.”

COMING HOME TO THE BURIED TREASURES INSIDE

Fearless love unlocks the buried treasure tucked inside our hearts. It is our life jacket in scary times, our magic wand in creative times. It is not some default position or booby prize in between lovers or spouses to stave off loneliness. In and out of relationship, weighted down by worry, fear or conflict, it sets us free by recalling the deepest truth: “I am loving reassurance noticing worry, fear and despair.”

Fearless love takes courage. It is the wave of the future. With time, this cutting-edge practice changes how we see our selves and the world. When we love our hurt, fear, sadness and shame, we stop identifying with these core feelings. When we offer loving reassurance to our wounded child each time she or he reacts in fear, we stop hiding under the bed with our scared young self. When we find ourselves lost in thought or reactions, fearless love reminds us who we are deep inside: “I am unlimited joy,

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loving-kindness, compassion and inner peace dressed up in this body.” Once we recall who we are, fear and despair shrivel into annoying flies to be brushed away.

Fearless love restores our self-worth to its rightful position as our birthright. It is something nobody can take away, control us with or reward us with for good behavior. It gifts us with the approval and recognition we thought we could only receive from others, freeing us to cultivate healthy love relationships, our self-worth intact.

No matter what happens *out there*, and no matter which feelings are triggered *in here*, we can turn to our resourceful heart every day for the loving reassurance, respect, acknowledgement and understanding we need to receive in this moment.

HEART TOOLS FOR SELF-SOURCING:

1. **BEGIN A LIFELONG LOVE AFFAIR WITH YOURSELF NOW.** First, spend time noticing how you speak to yourself when you feel upset, anxious, angry or guilty. Just notice without judging yourself for cruel put downs or past habits. Then begin your new habit. Each day, find a quiet place, close your eyes and ask inside, “*If I could hear anything, what do I secretly long to hear? What do I secretly wish someone would say to me?*” Deep breathe and patiently listen for your heart to respond. It may be “My life is good enough” or “I’ll be okay,” “I understand me” or “I am safe, wanted and loved,” “I have plenty of time” or “I’m never alone. My wise heart hears every word.” Whatever phrase pops into your awareness, softly whisper these words to yourself all day long.

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2. **BRING THE POWER OF FEARLESS LOVE INTO YOUR DAILY LIFE.**

Pause each hour to ask quietly, “*What am I feeling now?*” Whether you feel worried, happy, lonely, hopeless or scared, whisper inside, “*I love myself for feeling ____.*” Notice how fearless love *feels* when you lavish it on every feeling. Whenever you wake up out of ego’s stories in your head, celebrate by loving yourself: “I am happy and healthy and free. Now I remember the totally loving, totally accepting being that I really am.” Spend a few moments basking in this. If you feel caught in fear or hurt, remind yourself of the deeper truth: “I am conscious loving awareness waking out of the dream of thought.”

3. **IDENTIFY CORE FEELINGS UNDER SECONDARY FEELINGS.** Whether

driving, working, exercising, reading or washing dishes, start by asking, “*Which secondary feeling is fueling my story now?*” Listen patiently without judgment, allowing guilt, jealousy, anger, resentment, disappointment, frustration, rejection, mistrust or other secondary feelings to fill your awareness. Then drop below and ask, “*Which core feeling—hurt, shame, fear or sadness—lives underneath, triggering this secondary feeling?*” Acknowledge it.

4. **LOCATING & RELEASING CORE FEELINGS IN THE BODY.** Set aside 20

to 30 minutes. Turn off your phone, find a quiet room and lie down comfortably. Close your eyes. Whisper an intention to yourself such as “I’m willing to explore and/or heal this core feeling to completion.” Take several deep breaths in your belly to relax and focus awareness in your torso. Then ask softly,

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“Where does this hurt, fear, sadness or shame live inside?” Patiently breathe and listen. When you feel a tightness, pressure, pain or numbness calling your attention, drop any thoughts and focus directly on this area. Take a deep belly breath and imagine sending your exhale down into the center of the sensation. Repeat this several times while you trust your body. Surrender to whatever crying, shaking, trembling or sounds want to occur. Allow this release until you come to a natural completion of feelings and your body returns to a calm, peaceful state. Rest a few moments in this spacious peacefulness, repeating inside, *“I am happy, peaceful and free, resting in my natural state.”*