

# OPEN HEART

In our culture we are well trained in how to use our minds. Here we pause to see how we can become overly reliant on the mind, while we forget the powerful intuition and wisdom that resides in our hearts and in our body, which is the gateway to the heart. Here we will explore more than surface feeling and emotion. We will discover that the heart can be, and in fact is intended to be, an open channel through which love and compassion can flow. Tilden Edwards, founder of the Shalem Institute, describes the spiritual faculty of heart as "a quality of intuitive awareness...a sense of inclusive, compassionate, undefended, direct in-touch-ness". This "undefended knowing" (aka vulnerability) allows us to drop beneath the surface of our thoughts, below even the waves of emotion, to touch a deeper Source: real, uninterpreted (by ego) experience, the waters of healing in every context of life.

"We cannot live in a world that is not our own, in a world that is interpreted for us by others. An interpreted world is not a home. Part of the terror is to take back our own listening, to use our own voice, to see our own light." Hildegard of Bingen

The challenge at this place on the path is to gently and compassionately allow the mind and heart and body to work as one. This will open up whole new horizons on the Journey.

"The concentration of attention in the heart - this is the starting point of prayer."  
St. Theophane the Recluse, nineteenth-century Russian mystic.

The work that brings us joy isn't necessary to survive, but it's necessary if we're to fully come alive. The path we cut helps us survive, but the heart with which we walk that path enables us to thrive. This kind of work—when the heart and mind and body conspire to completely enter the world—is the effort that opens us to grace.  
Mark Nepo A.B.S.

When we can mindfully attend to, tolerate, and surrender to the energy of the dark emotions as it flows, we open the heart's doorway to the magic of emotional alchemy. These are the three basic skills: Attending, Befriending, and Surrendering (ABS). The ABS process won't transform a flabby midriff and give you that sleek washboard look, but it may well see you through many a dark night. Without mastering these three skills, you won't get the information carried by grief, despair, and fear, and you won't be able to transform their energies to gratitude, faith, and joy. This doesn't mean you're a bad person. With luck, you'll survive and be happy anyway, and not become an alcoholic or drug addict, or spend twelve hours a day in Internet chat rooms. Maybe you don't need the ABS process, because you're content with the way you feel. If so, you don't need to develop these skills. But if you're having trouble with sorrow, despair, fear, or any other difficult emotional state, then these three basic skills will never fail you.  
(Healing Through the Dark Emotions, p. 75)



## OPEN HEART IN CONTEXT

Interior:

Interpersonal:

Systemic:

Environmental:



## Exploring Open Heart

Questions: At what crossroad am I at this stage in my life? Where is my heart breaking?

Posture: How can I describe a stance of openness and receptivity?

Conversation: Where is a safe place for the expression of my heart's longings?

Language: Tara Brach describes this movement as "The Sure Heart's Release". What spaciousness or openness does my heart long for?

Belief: When do I notice feelings of cynicism making my heart small?

Challenge: What is it like when I numb out and/or when my heart gets constricted?  
(I.A.W.I.F.)

Practice: Knowing that the body is the gateway to the heart what practices can I do to keep my heart open and pliable? Practice - Body Prayer; Poetry; Labyrinth