

## Discover the Healing Power in your Heart

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When I was about six years old, I received an essential teaching from an old woman sitting in the sun. I was walking by her house one day, feeling lonely and unloved, kicking anything I could find. Laughing, she said to me, “Little girl, don’t you go letting life harden your heart.”

Right there, I received this pith instruction: we can close our hearts to life to try to protect ourselves against difficult circumstances. Or we can let difficulties soften us and make us kinder and more open to what scares us. We always have this choice.

If we see the fears and suffering we’re all experiencing now as a chance to grow in bravery and wisdom, in patience and kindness, then our personal distress can connect us with the discomfort and unhappiness of others. What we usually consider a problem becomes the source of empathy, a way to connect with the natural warmth of our hearts.

Natural warmth is our shared capacity to love, to have empathy, to have a sense of humor. It is our capacity to feel gratitude and appreciation and tenderness. It’s the whole gamut of what are often called the heart qualities, qualities that are a natural part of being human.

Our natural warmth has the power to heal all relationships—our relationship with ourselves as well as our relationships with other people and with all that we encounter every day in our lives. *Discovering our inner warmth can be the value of our personal suffering, the silver lining of the very dark clouds we’re experiencing.*

In these times, it is easy for us to see firsthand that we are all in the same boat and that the only thing that makes any sense is to care for one another. This difficult time is our chance to come out of our self-protecting bubble and realize that we are never alone. This is our chance to finally understand that wherever we go, everyone we meet is essentially just like us.

When we feel fear, when we feel discomfort of any kind, it can connect us at the heart with all the other people who are feeling fear and discomfort. When things fall apart and we can’t get the pieces back together, when we lose something dear to us, when the whole thing is just not working and we don’t know what to do, this is the time when the natural warmth of tenderness, the warmth of empathy and kindness, are just waiting to be uncovered, just waiting to be embraced.

Our own suffering, if we turn toward it, can open us to a loving relationship with the world. When you touch your sorrow or fear, your anger or jealousy, you are touching everybody’s jealousy, everybody’s fear and sorrow. You wake up in the middle of the night with an anxiety attack and when you can fully experience the taste and smell of it, you are sharing the anxiety and fear of all humanity. People’s stories are different, their situations are different, but the experience is the same. Instead of your distress becoming all about you, it can become your link with everyone all over the world who is in the same predicament.