

14

DON'T WAIT FOR PERFECTION



*You can be
wide open and
diseased at the
same time.*

No matter how sick you are in body or mind, you can still open. Disease may ravage your body and drugs may cloud your mind, and you can still open. Deep openness can encompass *all* states of body and mind.

Physical and psychological disorders need not obscure your openness, and your openness may not affect your pathologies. If you inherited nearsightedness from your parents, then spiritual openness probably won't change your need to wear glasses. If your mind has adapted to habits of panic instilled by years of childhood abuse, then spiritual openness probably won't eliminate your cringe at the sight of your lover's genitals.

However, you can be a myopic neurotic and still open with the freedom of unbound love. You may squint and become nauseated as your lover disrobes, but the humor of your response can avail. Like a muscular tic or a snotty nose, your emotional responses are natural effects of your history—perhaps uncomfortable, running their course largely beyond your immediate control. Nevertheless, you can offer your love, laughter, and openness even as you sniffle, panic, or shriek.

Right now, unique as you are in body and mind, you can practice opening fully.

Even as you open, laugh, and love, the patterns of your body and mind have their own momentum. Heart disease, cancer, and even alcoholism have continued in the disposition of many deeply open men and women. Every kind of sexual style and twist can be found in the biographies of saints and spiritual teachers. Your openness can be real and profound, and still your bodymind ripples on, patterning itself according to past influence and present habit.

If your mother drank too much alcohol or was in a state of constant emotional stress during her pregnancy, then your nervous system is somewhat shaped by the chemicals that coursed through your embryonic growth, and there isn't much you can do about that now. As a consequence of your mother's actions, your body may be small, your mental acuity may be weak, and your emotional flow may be unstable. These are simply some of the patterns that you may feel and learn to open as, moment by moment.

If your father sexually molested you, then now as an adult you may react to your lover's advances with numbness. Your posture may be hunched and your pelvis locked. The patterning of your bodymind is what it is. You can change it to some degree, but you can always open as it is, even now. Open now, offering your heart's gift, and also do your best to live rightly through the present patterns of your past history.

Have you ever done something you wished you had done differently? If so, you can learn from your mistakes and try to do better next time. If the patterns of your bodymind cause undue suffering, in your life or in the lives of others, you can work to transform these patterns, heal them as much as possible, and grow more fully into a balanced, integrated, and healthy person.

But this growth is not the same as spiritual openness and depth. A balanced, healthy individual may serve to create positive changes in the world and yet be unwilling to open and feel fully. On the other hand, someone may be wide open and feeling all, yet appear to be a raving lunatic, lustful, and drug-addicted. Such a person may, in fact, *be* crazy, lustful, and drug-addicted—and yet be open so deeply their heart feels more than you can know and their love extends to you without bounds.

No matter how fully you open and live as love, your character is only slightly changeable. Your pre-birth influences are ingrained in your nervous system like rings in a tree. Childhood stresses still waltz in the chemistry of your brain and emotions. Even the evolutionary travails of your furry mammalian ancestors contribute to your so-called “spontaneous” desires for sex, food, and comfort.

You are birthed by, grown within, and taken apart by an immense and mysterious web of influence. The efforts you make to be healthy and helpful can be nullified by a falling rock caused by a sudden earth tremor or by a heart failure predisposed by the genetics of your father’s mother’s father. You may truly want to serve your 16-year-old daughter’s friend, and yet you can’t seem to shake the sexual desire you feel, or the guilt.

Integrity is well worth a lifetime of cultivation. Serving others is really the only way to live your heart’s truth. But you are not cured thereby.

Your body may remain bent and your mind may remain twisted. Still, love can extend through your distortions, uniquely twisted yet unbound. Great gifts of openness, love, and awakening can be given—*have* been given—through arthritic fingers and alcohol-drenched brain cells.

Even as lust, greed, and anger continue to arise in your emotional patterns formed by years of mammalian struggle, parental abuse, and self-torture, you can practice opening without bounds. You can practice opening and giving your deepest gifts in every present moment, however awry your body and mind—and the world—remain.

Feel whatever love you can in this moment, however small. Even if you are woozily soused or ravenous with lust, find a kernel of openness deep in your heart. Feel the place in you that wants to give love and be fully received in love, no matter how messed up you are. Locate your desire for love, for openness, for freedom, even if it is tiny. In the midst of your drunken stupor or wild ire, reconnect with this speck of openness.

Breathe in and out of this tiny gist of love, while you open your senses and feel the people and place around you. Even if you can only open a little bit to breathe through your heart and feel the people and world around you, this is a little bit more open than staying closed.

Practice opening a tiny amount while your body and mind reel on, numb, confused, spinning. Breathe love in and out of the feeling-space of your heart. Breathe the force of love deep down into your abdomen, opening the closures in your gut by inhaling full and filling your belly round. Feel the heart of those around you, look into their eyes, open your senses to all the world's display, and offer your full-bellied love through your twists by degrees, in every moment you can remember to practice opening.

As slurred as your speaking may be, offer words of love. Through your shaking hands, offer openness through your service. Feel the hearts of those around you as they open or close in response to your gifts. As dim as your awareness may be fuddled, practice to feel the hearts around you and act to open them. Don't wait for perfection—or even to get straight—to offer your deepest love, full-bellied and open hearted.

Offer your gifts right now with the deepest integrity you can through whatever kinks may remain, always feeling and breathing the hearts of others as you act. Do your best to heal yourself and others, remembering that habits and history may budge very little. Nevertheless, this present moment comes and goes open, just as it is.