

Introduction to The Inner Empathy Non-dual Awakening Practices

Inner Empathy work includes awakening awareness practices that support what I call ‘effortless being,’ also a byproduct of such practices. Effortless being is simply a way of being in the world where there is a connection to the flow of life because we are no longer significantly identified with a sense of self, or our conditioning, to a degree that inspires separation. Some people describe effortless being as a sense of being fully engaged in life, experiencing a certain spaciousness and clarity. Others talk about a calmness washing over them accompanied by a dramatic loss of fear which had pervaded their lives. Still others point to a stabilized openheartedness and a rich emotional connection with all life.

When describing such qualities, the tendency is to project them as future goals to be attained, which can have drawbacks. Rather than making future projections, Inner Empathy work operates under the assumption that effortless being and these qualities are immediately available to each of us through the awareness of what is emerging in our experience now. Effortless being and these qualities are not something we can deliberately produce, but are natural byproducts of attuning to our present experience and creating the conditions for their spontaneous emergence.

The central focus of the Inner Empathy work is an experiential form of inquiry, an open-ended engagement with our inner world. These practices support us to get attuned to what emerges in each moment and, at the same time, offer a functional structure, or inner model, to facilitate clarity and depth. Inner Empathy combines the non-dual awareness practices of the East with experiential psychology of the West to facilitate effortless emergence of wholeness. Inner Empathy is designed to connect deeply with both our conscious and unconscious conditioning and the identities that hold core beliefs that we commonly call ego.

Inner Empathy is a distinct form of inquiry. In this book you will learn how to support yourself and do Inner Empathy inquiry in three ways; 1) you will learn to do a solo Inner Empathy inquiry without support from another person; 2) you will learn to give unconditional, nonjudgmental support to someone else; 3) you will learn how to receive unconditional, non-judgmental support from others, which will support you in deepening your connection with your inner world.

There is much talk in psycho-spiritual circles about eradicating or transcending ego. I want to spend a little time in this introduction to address these attitudes. I’ve seen many learners go on a witch hunt to find and destroy their ego who end up confounding themselves. The ego fights back and gets stronger or recedes deeper into hiding while still influencing our experience in a large way. We simply cannot experience wholeness by fighting internally with ourselves or by splitting off parts of ourselves we don’t happen to like.

Inner Empathy fosters a quality of connection with these egoic aspects of ourselves by holding spacious awareness, compassion, and empathizing with them. Rather than holding the intention to eradicate or transcend our egoic structures, Inner Empathy engages egoic structures with unconditional presence, empathy, and openhearted compassion. I’ve experienced that such empathetic allowances change the relationship we have with these egoic structures. The intensity, resolve, extreme expressions and actions that influence our lives are spontaneously reduced. Disidentification happens naturally. Natural self-corrections appear. When we no longer believe we are our egoic structures, wholeness spontaneously emerges and effortless being materializes.

My First Experience When Effortless Being Emerged

I first experienced the non-dual dimension of existence in my youth. Back in 1979, when I was 21 years old and while studying Jiddu Krishnamurti, a non-dual teacher, I experienced a three-day period of awakening where all of a sudden I realized I was no longer, to such a large extent, identified with my sense of self or conditioning. I recall being really interested in what was there between one thought and the next thought as a contemplation. Other than that, there wasn't anything in particular I did to evoke this experience; it just came spontaneously. I remember feeling connected to all of life and was awestruck with the unity and oneness in all life. I was this unified life. I recall there being an intelligence that flowed through me, something that I experienced as not my own. I spontaneously had understanding and clarity about things I never knew I knew. Things made perfect sense. My awareness was not confined to my body. There was the recognition of awareness being a few feet behind my body and even across the room. My energy was vibrant and perceptions vivid. I remember looking at a puddle of water in a parking lot when it was raining and was transfixed upon it for what seemed like an eternity. I suppose I became the puddle, as they say.

I viewed the world and myself in a different way. There was a calmness, a deep relaxation that pervaded my body as well as a lightness, as though my body was going to float away. I remember having this profound sense of contentment that deemed everything as perfect just the way it was. There was nothing to worry about, nothing to change. There was a spontaneous effortless engagement with life. I was in the flow of life. There emerged a profound sense of love for everything. The love was related to the unity of everything. There was a vague sense that this love upheld everything.

This experience was both a blessing and a curse. The blessing was the sense that I was able to have a taste of experiencing the non-dual dimension of existence. It gave me an experiential frame of reference to begin to understand non-dual wisdom and awakening. Unfortunately, I did not have the internal structures in those days to help me abide in that open awareness. Too much ego and far too many unconscious core constructs pulled me down into an identification with my conditioned life. I experienced a taste of the eternal love, but could not yet discover the cup from which it came.

The awakened experience was a curse because after it ended I wanted to understand the "how's" and "why's" of what happened to me. I hoped to find a way to get back to that experience again. I thought about it as a state that could be gained or lost. I remember being particularly haunted by those profound feelings of unconditioned love for myself and everyone else. I did what many seekers do when they experience such openings or read other's descriptions of opening – I zeroed in on the qualities or attributes of the non-dual opening and strove to cultivate those to experience them again. However, this proved not to be effective because of the paradigm differences, which I will explain below.

I view the awakening experience described above as being on a spectrum of experience. At one end of the spectrum, the body-mind system can be lightly identified with egoic structures or conditioning. There is more open awareness present which engenders a certain quality of experience. At the other end of the spectrum is the body-mind system heavily identified with egoic structures or conditioning. There is less open awareness which inspires that certain quality of experience in any given moment. At any give moment, we can place our experience on this

spectrum. I offer this understanding as a way to introduce and discuss the age old challenges that have been experienced by people who want to learn to awaken.

Teachers Speak from One Paradigm and Learners Receive from a Different Paradigm

Many of the non-dual sages and masters talk about this non-dual dimension of existence where a certain quality of love springs forth. This love is a byproduct of not being identified with our conditioning, ego or separate sense of self. Nisargadatta Maharaj, a teacher in the Advaita Vedanta tradition talks about this love:

Be true to your own self, love your self absolutely. Do not pretend that you love others as yourself. Unless you have realized them as one with yourself, you cannot love them. Don't pretend to be what you are not, don't refuse to be what you are. Your love of others is the result of self-knowledge, not its cause. Without self-realization, no virtue is genuine. When you know beyond all doubting that the same life flows through all that is and you are that life, you will love all naturally and spontaneously.

There is a lot I could say about this wonderful quote, but I want to focus on a particular point about how we interpret and understand these words. My understanding of the love he is talking about is informed by my experience, which I just shared. I have an experiential reference point for the love he talks about. But what about people who have no direct experience with this unconditioned love or who have not experienced life outside their conditioned identities or what Nisargadatta calls self-knowledge, self realization? How will they interpret this quote? I can only guess that without such meaning anchored in experience, those people will create interpretations from the perspective of their conditioning or ego. Often, when we interpret teachings from our conditioned ego, our ego prompts us to make "loving ourselves" the goal to be attained. We naturally conclude that it is virtuous to love ourselves and may set up a self-improvement program to do so, all the while, being convinced we are following the teacher's words.

We could begin searching for and making effort towards attaining a love of that kind, but sadly such love will never come through that means. But why? Because the love the non-dual sages and masters talk about is a byproduct of not being identified with our conditioned identity or ego. To seek this love from our conditioning or egoic structures (or what I call our self-improvement parts) is to be identified with them and strengthen them. So we miss it, and love gets relegated to the status of a potential to be realized and not the living reality of abiding in a lightly structured experience.

In just a few paragraphs here we have bumped into two age-old dilemmas: 1) Teachers speak from the space of abiding in awakening and learners reduce it down and interpret their words at the level of their ego or conditioned identities; 2) Having been inspired by the teacher's words, practices are initiated from our conditioning or ego. This happens not just with love, but with all the byproducts spoken or written about by those teachers who are enlightened or abide in a non-dual awakening. These teachers speak from one paradigm while the learners receive and practice it from another paradigm, and the two shall never meet.

So what is the way around this? What can learners do to make sure they are not spinning around themselves in their conditioning as they practice? What can teachers do to support

learners in having meaningful learning that is in alignment with what they are teaching? Are there ways to receive information and to do practices that are not out of our conditioning or from our ego? Is there a way to structure the learning so that the teacher doesn't just feed the learner's conditioning or ego?

These are the challenges I have been negotiating for many years. I have been studying how to pass on what I have learned in meaningful ways to those who want to learn. Supporting people and myself to wake up and consistently abide in their awakening is a "learning" or "training" challenge. What I've found is that the best content about awakening and non-dual awareness passed on to people in books, lectures, workshops and teacher-focused satsangs can be a hit or miss proposition. How wisdom from one paradigm is passed on to those abiding in a different paradigm is as least as important as the content itself.

So I've aspired to create leading edge content combining Eastern non-dual wisdom with Western experiential psychology along with a dynamic, experiential way of delivering the content. I've also created a structure that is flexible enough to accommodate the wide range of learners who fall on various points of the spectrum mentioned earlier. For me, the greatest contribution I can make to learners is to create conditions where they come to an experiential understanding. Instead of feeding our heads with awakening concepts we co-create meaning through direct experience.

An experiential anchor is created for learners to understand important concepts and terms. It also keeps the tendency to reduce awakening wisdom down into conditioned knowledge in check. The learner, the group, and the facilitator can be assured of having a similar understanding or a shared reality of meaning for words like "ego" or "conditioning" or phrases like "transcending ego." This has proved to be a rich learning environment, where each member of the group becomes the teacher and learner.

If Transcending or Abandoning Ego Is the Goal, What Is It Exactly That We Are Transcending or Abandoning?

One of the unique things Inner Empathy work offers is assisting people to experientially connect with what is commonly called their ego in ways they have not experienced before. However, I do not use the term "ego" in subsequent chapters, because I believe many of us use and understand the word "ego" in an ambiguous and inconsistent way. Not only that, there are other pitfalls as well. Let me explain further.

In many psycho-spiritual circles, the term ego is used in a way where it is assumed that transcending or abandoning the ego is a good thing or a valuable step on one's path. Nothing wrong with that; however, I have no idea what ego means to these people. Having been immersed in process language for many years I am inclined to talk about specific expressions of ego in a specific time and context. So when people talk about transcending their ego, I often find myself asking, "In what time and context did these people express this ego that they want to transcend?"

Ask twenty people for a definition of ego, and you'll likely get twenty different definitions. Yet, many or most will want to transcend it or annihilate it in some way. Besides having different definitions, I find that people use the term at such a high-level of abstraction that its useful-

ness becomes dubious and imprecise, especially when its meaning is disconnected from specific experience. It becomes something we name that is inside us, and we know for sure it is there, and we know, somehow, that it is not good to have it.

It is generally assumed, and it remains unquestioned, that ego is bad and transcending/abandoning ego is good, and there are some spiritual goodies on the other side when ego is transcended/abandoned. In our goal oriented culture, the vague term is then used as a good/bad yardstick for assessing whether we are moving towards or achieving the ever-elusive goodies that transcending/abandoning ego brings on, or not.

Such dualistic interpretation of ego easily facilitates the creation of conditions to suppress whatever we consider “ego” and to embrace what we consider “not ego.” My concern is the “not ego” state we embrace could be just another subtle ego state that is more positive. Under this scheme, transcendence, or “waking up,” would be defined as becoming immersed in a positive ego state of our own making, with the cost being not only self-delusion, but usually a disowning of negative egoic aspects of ourselves as well. This sets up a perpetual inner conflict between different aspects of ourselves: repressing negative feelings to uphold the positive ego state.

In my experience, creating a positive, dreamy ideal about transcending/abandoning ego is a common pitfall when doing deep inner psycho-spiritual work or when on a spiritual path. The phrase “transcending the ego” is often interpreted as the means to gain whatever is idealized as beyond ego (higher self, enlightenment, Self, essence, nirvana, waking up, divine energy, source, etc.). There is nothing wrong with these terms and I respect their meaning in the traditions in which they are used. However, when we idealize these and contrast them with presently emerging egoic expressions, it is hard to allow and embrace our egoic activity. We make ego the bad guy and an inner ego police is waiting to write us a ticket every time any ego activity is discerned.

What is interesting about this treatment of ego as bad is that it is in stark contrast to how ego or our conditioning is treated or regarded when we find ourselves in a lightly structured experience of effortless being. We don’t worry about our conditioning or ego expressions emerging. They emerge and recede and there is nothing we need to do about the ego, nothing to transcend or abandon.

People Usually Think Their Ego is Something Other Than What It Eventually Turns Out to Be

It is amazing to consider all the challenges and confusion with the word “ego,” described above, when we haven’t even directly considered the question of who or what in us is wanting to transcend the ego! Advanced spiritual practitioners are often shocked and saddened to discover that it was their ego that was looking at and trying to transcend ego their whole life. They retroactively perceive their sincere intentions to transcend ego played out as a fortification of ego that amounted to an endless tail-chasing activity. This dynamic has to be factored in to any system of inquiry that wants to support learners to do something differently. In the Inner Empathy awakening practices, we address this dilemma in the way we begin our inquiries. From the beginning we learn to actively discern what aspect of ourselves is conducting the inquiry: another egoic part or unconditioned awareness?

There is an assumption, I've noticed, in psycho-spiritual circles that we not only know what ego is, but that we already are fully conscious of it; that using the label "ego" somehow makes us conscious of it. The assumption continues: since ego is this known entity, all we have to do is simply try hard and transcend it. But suppose our ego or the sense of self that keeps us separated from life's flow is not fully in our awareness? Such efforts to "transcend" will be misplaced and will, at the very least, be incomplete.

Many of us can easily understand ego in terms of our identification with our overt roles in life such as that of vocation, parent, citizen, husband/wife, etc. That is one level of awareness of how our ego or sense of self shows up to us. But what about the egoic structures that are outside our conscious awareness – these deep senses of ourselves that constitute unconscious identities that hold specific beliefs and constructs about who we are?

So often the quest to transcend ego is, in part, predicated on the assumption or presupposition of having full awareness of our ego. However, that is simply not the case. In fact, in terms of influence, pervasiveness and level of identification, the most powerful egoic structures I've connected with in myself and others are deeply hidden and well protected. So any intention to connect with these deeper unconscious egoic structures means navigating the gauntlet of protective parts just to become aware of them. These protective parts of us are other expressions of egoic parts and need attention and connection, and to be integrated into the expanse of open awareness first before connecting to the deeper egoic aspects of ourselves.

Since ego holds such negative connotative baggage and is loaded and imprecise, I've opted to use other terms to do Inner Empathy work. Also, since I have experienced different levels of egoic activity with different functions, I've found the term "ego" to be a catchall term, inadequate to the tasks of supporting us to deeply connect with our conditioning and to accurately represent the interrelationship between egoic parts. This is not meant as criticism of teachers or learners who use the term 'ego,' because it can be an effective term to help us connect with our conditioning. I've just found a significant level of effectiveness when I do not use it and so assert that way of supporting people. Instead of using the term "ego," I explore our inner terrain using the model of psychological parts. Specifically I will use the Internal Family Systems developed by the depth psychologist Richard Schwartz.

Using Parts Psychology To Look Within and Connect With Presently Emerging Egoic Aspects

Using the term "parts" gives us an understanding of our unique expressions of our ego states. A part can be expressed and present itself to each person differently. It might present itself as inner voices, feelings, thoughts, sensations, fantasies, metaphors, dreams, energies, aspects, and/or somatic/kinesthetic messages or responses. When connecting to these parts of ourselves, we experience in their expressions what it is specifically that the egoic condition is saying or doing – in a specific time and context. A couple examples might be: "the part that felt intense anxiety at a social gathering the other night," or "the part of me that feels embarrassed right now for making that comment to a friend." Connecting to the feelings of these parts and what they are wanting grounds our work in concrete, real-time expressions of ego and not some disconnected abstraction.

Rather than holding the intention of transcending/abandoning our ego states, we will deeply connect with, allow and be empathetically present for these ego parts that organically emerge. We'll invite them into our awareness and feel their feelings, allow them their thoughts and judgments, and listen closely to the beliefs or constructs they might hold.

In other words, we can learn to be present to and naturally disidentify with parts as they emerge in the present-time awareness through a quality empathetic connection. This process is different from holding the goal of transcending ego, disowning the ego, or being immersed in future-projected idealistic non-egoic state. We simply learn to “be with” all the various forms and expressions of ego as they emerge. It is a different approach from calling all our conditioning a dream and imploring us to wake up. Let me explain further.

Pitfalls of Using the Dream Analogy

Many books and teachers are attempting to help people become aware of their conditioning/ego by comparing it to our dreams at night – a very powerful analogy. There is value in seeing our egoic conditioning as constructed illusory material. There is value in seeing our daily life as conditioned constructions lacking inherent existence, or as empty, like a dream. However, my concern is that people will relegate their egoic parts to dream material without experiencing firsthand the specific expressions of them as being empty. Thus, the effectiveness of the analogy might be reduced or incomplete or worse, just another subtle form of conditioning. To dismiss ego states as a waking dream, delusion, or Maya without fully experiencing them in specific contexts, I fear, will turn the inquiry over to conceptualization or a subtle form of intellectual disassociation. This is not to say that all our conditioning has to be experienced in order for the analogy to be meaningful. What I'm pointing to is the difference between holding this analogy as a broad concept and experiencing it as a living reality. For me, the living reality means we notice ourselves being identified with a particular daily life waking dream and then wake up to it by seeing it as a dream.

Let's look at the dream-at-night to elucidate this point further. It is only because we easily identify with the emotions/beliefs of a dream and experience these intense emotions/beliefs when sleeping at night that makes our reminder “Oh, it's only a dream” meaningful. This, in turn, stimulates us to have a sense of freedom from the feelings and beliefs of the dream. For example, let's say I had a dream in which I (or the dream character) was in a social setting and experiencing intense anxiety with sweaty palms and with rapid heartbeat and breathing. I wake up from this dream and conclude it is only a dream. The “it's only a dream” is an after-the-fact awareness of disidentifying with the dream character in the dream. After awakening, the anxiety stops because the dream is seen as not real or as empty. We think the dream at night is not real because we assume that our waking life is real. At that point, if we generalize this awareness and conclude that all activity at night is “only a dream,” does that prevent us from being identified with dreams the next night? I don't think so. That is simply adding a conceptual overlay that warns us never again to become identified with our night dreams.

The same is true for looking at waking life as a dream. Reading the dream analogy in enlightenment books and then concluding that life is all a dream without specifically experiencing the identification and disidentification of specific waking dream material can be just another waking dream in itself. Such broad stroking of waking dreams is simply a conceptual overlay that turns the living reality of waking up into a positive concept. We then can become identi-

fied with this positive ideal of the non-dream state or awakened state. We're still dreaming; it's just a more pleasant dream called "not dreaming." We have to experience what I call a lightly structured waking reality to know how much of our waking life is a dream (heavily structured experience).

Some people train themselves to have lucid night dreams where there is the co-emergence of the dream content and awareness. Because the body-mind systems don't totally identify with the content of the dream, and since awareness knows it is only a dream, our experience of the dream is of a different quality. We are not identified with the dream so a certain freedom can emerge. There might be clarity that emerges as the dream progresses, and this awareness can influence the content of the dream. Moreover, dreaming and having the awareness that we are dreaming means we can influence the dream content in various ways. With Inner Empathy inquiry work, what we are doing is comparable to cultivating lucid dreaming. We are lucidly engaging our waking dream content (egoic parts) in daily life. We focus on practicing having awareness and on the waking dream simultaneously. We can learn to see even the most intense waking dream as dream material that will come and pass.

A Flexible Model to Meet the Dynamic Flow of Life

Chapter 1 outlines a parts map that serves as a flexible container for the flux and flow of our experience, and honors the dynamism of our stream of consciousness at the conditioned level. Parts psychology, and the different categories of parts it utilizes, also serves as an inner scaffolding to descend to our core, if that is what spontaneously wants to happen. There is no force or contrivance used in this model of inquiry.

In addition, this parts model accounts for and honors the interrelationship of different aspects of ourselves that spontaneously emerge in our experience. Thus, it allows us to be with and facilitate the spontaneous teasing apart of our habitual internal responses between different aspects of ourselves that unwittingly occur and then it holds them in awareness. We can see firsthand how our stream of conditioning presents itself. The way this stream of conditioning presents itself is unique to each person. We start to become aware of our conditioning in daily life. We see how there are many parts that emerge in conjunction with each other. We begin to see the interrelationship of the appearance of constellations of thoughts, feelings, and sensations that move in a stream or flow and stimulate each other.

As we explore and experience these conscious and unconscious parts, we see that they are aspects of ourselves that are looking out for our best interest, but are doing so in a way that is at times harsh, extreme and comes with costs. We see that we don't need to vilify our ego expressions (or parts) to gain relief from their extreme dispositions or strategies. Nor do we need to remain identified with them believing that it is totally who we are. In less extreme expressions, or integrated expressions, our egoic parts allow us to navigate and enrich our lives in so many ways. Through empathetically connecting with them, hearing their feelings and needs, hearing their judgments and stories, we learn to enact a natural form of uncontrived integration.

So experiential parts psychology is used extensively in the Inner Empathy awakening practice to support us in keeping our inquiry out of the hands of certain egoic structures (self-improvement, personal growth, spiritual growth parts), to aid in creating an inner scaffolding

for us to gently and safely step down into the depths of that is what is emerging, and to support teasing apart and empathetically connecting with all these egoic structures.

Pitfalls of Incorporating Western Psychology Into Non-Dual Awakening Practices

Many non-dual awakening teachers emphasize and teach people to awaken from the dream of their conditioned existence. Some question the value of Western psychology in the awakening process and dismiss Western psychology as simply creating more tolerable or pleasant conditioning. I have heard sentiments that go something like this: “If you work on your personality, at the end of your life, you will have a better personality, but you will not be awake.” They charge that psychology promotes identification with conceptuality and ego and they question whether this supports a person in waking up to unconditioned reality. At worst, they see psychological endeavors as futile for waking up. At best, they see psychology as creating the conditions to put someone in position for awakening to occur.

I agree with the notions that working within the identification of egoic structures to change other egoic structures does not inspire the emergence of awakened awareness unless the person does it long enough, connects with the futility of it and wakes up. Within Inner Empathy practices we place emphasis upon unconditioned awareness to lead the inquiry rather than having egoic parts lead the process.

Another concern I have is when people tend to get lost in endless conceptuality of psychological models, because when the student’s focus is turned towards endless psychological introspection and their eye is taken off the ball of waking up from what they are inspecting. Their intention to wake up gets caught in a web of causal conceptuality. They also charge that Eastern psychology introspection promotes conceptual proliferation, and awakening is about reducing conceptual proliferation.

Again, these are salient points and need to be addressed in any awakening path or system of inquiry. Inner Empathy work answers these concerns by specifically using conceptual tools and psychological models to support lessening conceptual proliferation and for learners to gain clarity rather than getting lost. We use psychological models as a frame of reference for understanding experience with specificity, not as ends in themselves or as representing “how things are.” For example, we use a psychological model to determine the precise moment when we are identified with an egoic part. Even though much of Western psychology is thought to lead to self-referencing or self-reinforcing conceptual loops, I’m afraid some teachers throw the baby out with the bath water and miss important opportunities to support learners, especially in our Western culture where psychological literacy is the norm.

Another criticism some see regarding Western psychology, with its extensive cataloguing of experience, is that it can prescribe what people are experiencing. Learners will experience what they are prescribed to experience. An example of this is seen with college students who are taking abnormal psychology classes and suffer from what is called Psych 101 syndrome. They either see themselves totally in the pathological descriptions or they start to take on some of the symptoms. With Inner Empathy work, even though we catalogue some common egoic parts that emerge in people, it is done not to prescribe experience but to use as a starting point to inquire into the person’s individual and unique expression of their egoic parts.

Yet another criticism of Western psychology is that it is derived from and holds a pathological focus. Not only that, but sometimes it is delivered in 50 minute “talk about” sessions that often lack any first-hand experiential insight or understanding on the part of the learner. I hear and respect the concerns of these non-dual/awakening teachers and agree with most of their sentiments when broad stroking Western psychology.

However, I’ve found that some psychological models have certain qualities that support the non-dual awakening practices without the drawbacks mentioned. In fact, I believe the incorporation of these models facilitates depth and efficiency in our deep inquires. The primary psychological models I listed in the Preface, which are incorporated in the Inner Empathy work, emphasize the experiential and hold a non-pathological regard. This is a deviation from many psychological models.

1) Emphasis on Experiential: The psychological models used in the Inner Empathy awakening practices heavily favor experiential understandings and insights that occur while connecting to emotional aspects of ourselves as they emerge. This is different from “talking about” or “stories about” or “having an intellectual understanding about” or “an analytical assessment of,” all of which, though useful, can actually be ways to disconnect from the deeper feelings, thoughts or sensations of our emerging experience. For example, instead of talking about your loneliness or telling an analytical story about why you are lonely, you allow the loneliness to emerge and really be with the feeling, body sensations, and thoughts that occur while connecting to this lonely experience. This type of connection gives us important emotional insights into our experience. We feel the loneliness. We feel the parts of us that don’t want to feel the loneliness and want to push the loneliness away. We feel the parts of us that want to distract us from feeling the loneliness. This is a much different experience from our formulating intellectual stories about loneliness. This emphasis on the experiential, I believe, makes the difference between our spinning around and getting lost in the intellect and our connecting to what is presently alive in us and allowing our innate wisdom to self-correct.

2) The Principle of Holding a Non-Pathologizing Regard: Much of Western psychology operates under the assumption that something is wrong with us that needs to be fixed. Often psychological models arrange their conceptual tenets around pathologizing diagnostic labels. Using these labels, there is a tendency to interpret and describe our experience and who we are with these pathological terms, which constantly and consistently reinforce and feed what I call the good/bad self system. Generally two types of static labels are used in psychological growth work: negative labels designating that something is wrong with us or something is missing and positive labels designating how we should be in order to be deemed whatever is idealized as psychologically healthy. Put simply, the labels point to a healthy or an unhealthy ego.

The psychological models used in Inner Empathy practices don’t start from the place of ‘something is wrong with us,’ rather there exists a sincere intention to neutrally connect with whatever is emerging in our experience. These practices support an effortless self-correction through connection and being present to whatever is emerging.

I believe Inner Empathy practices have effectively synthesized Western psychology to support awakening practices while, at the same time, they address the potential pitfalls. The psycho-

logical models I use support the awareness, openness and allowance of whatever emerges in our experience without snagging the learner with labels and non accepting self-judgments.

Pitfalls of Non-Dual Awakening Paths

On the psychological side of the fence, you have psychologists who point out that their clients who are engaged in awakening practices are often embracing a transcendent state that is disassociated from everyday life. They charge that the Eastern spiritual teachers are teaching students (or the students are incorrectly interpreting, or both), to repress their thoughts and feelings while promoting identification with some ideal of non-attachment that puts them above daily life. Rather than being fully engaged in life, these students emotionally disengage from daily life and mistakenly take their aloofness and alienation to be an awakened state. They practice a disembodied form of transcendence and believe their emotional flatness and contrived nonreactive numbness is a sign of their non attachment to the “dream” or “illusory” world.

Another criticism is that whatever is experienced on the meditation cushion is not transferred to meeting daily life challenges. A blissful experience on the cushion, or a feeling of spaciousness from slowing down our thoughts, does not necessarily mean a one is less reactive or that their identification with their conditioning in their chaotic home or work life lessens. This is one reason why I designed Inner Empathy practices to be carried out in the context of our daily life. Our daily life becomes a meditation cushion. This is in no way meant to disparage the value of structured meditation, but to point out a potential failure of students to apply what is gleaned during meditation to their daily life.

Another area of concern for psychologists has to do with students who create a positive construction of what it means to be awake and then live from within that construction, (a dream about not living in a dream), which might include exalted feelings, equanimity, and the general attitude of “I got it.” There is nothing wrong with these feelings; they can be quite pleasurable. However, if they sit on top of repressed negative experiences or an aversion to negative feelings, it turns out to be a house of cards which can come tumbling down at any time. This dynamic is commonly expressed when people become disillusioned with a teacher or spiritual group and the glow of and positive feelings of their “spiritual transcendence” are overtaken by repressed painful feelings and judgments.

The basis for such “transcendence” can be a reaction to or compensation for the shadow parts of ourselves. John Welwood, a Buddhist psychologist coined the term “spiritual bypassing” to describe what happens when people bypass doing psychological work and use their quest for the absolute or transcendent as a way to hide from their psychological wounds and/or ego dysfunction. He says, “Using spirituality to make up for failures of individuation – psychologically separating from parents, cultivating self-respect, or trusting one’s own intelligence as a source of guidance – also leads to many of the so-called “perils of the path:” spiritual materialism (using spirituality to shore up one’s shaky ego), grandiosity and self-inflation, “us vs. them” mentality, groupthink, blind faith in charismatic teachers, and loss of discrimination.”

One of the advantages I’ve experienced with using depth psychological models in conjunction with awakening practices is that they address a broader range of how obstacles/conditioning present themselves. Many non-dual approaches focus only on thoughts as appearing as

obstructions or objects of awareness. Nothing wrong with that, being aware of thoughts is the tried and true method. But what about conditioning that appears as feelings or somastatic/kinesthetic sensations? There's a possibility that these might be missed if we are only being aware and focusing on our thinking. Sometimes our thinking is inferred or unconscious. Inner Empathy practices allow each person to define and connect with the specific way in which obstructions or limitations emerge. As mentioned earlier, in addition to thoughts, our egoic parts could appear as feelings, body sensations, energetic blockages, bodily holding patterns, etc. Therefore, our practice of being present to our obstructions is uncovered by the different ways they emerge with each person.

When We Allow Our Daily Life Triggers, They Become Our Teachers

When we are heavily identified with egoic parts in their extreme forms, we are not aware that we are identified with them. We simply view the world through the lens of these parts, and believe whatever beliefs or constructs they might hold are true reality. Our perceptions and experiences are limited by the narrow confines of whatever we are identified with in any given moment. One of the best ways to see this identification in action is to notice when we experience intense triggering feelings in daily life.

I've found that the level of identification with our parts is proportional to the intensity of feelings and reactions of our triggers. When such heavy identification exists, it means our awareness is not present in that moment but is always available as potential. There is not the co-emergence of awareness and the content of awareness; there is only the content flowing in our experience and our attention is focused upon and consumed by the identification with the flow of content. In Inner Empathy awakening practices, we invite these intense triggers and regard them as opportunities to learn to be with our experience and to connect with deep egoic parts of ourselves. We trust that these triggers are parts of ourselves that are crying out for attention and compassionate presence. We invite them in instead of pushing them away.

For example, when one of our unconscious core beliefs is stimulated, a part of us might believe we are unlovable and we experience intense hurt feelings. We strongly identify with the hurt feelings of this part and the thinking and beliefs that accompany these feelings. Again, being "identified with" means we believe we are the hurt feelings at that moment, and that the judgment that we are unlovable is unquestionably true. It is as though we are under a spell of this part, yet we are not aware that we are under a spell. Our experience will be saturated with hurt feelings, and we might try to find relief in some way.

The relief might come in the form of another part that responds to the hurt part. We may spend time trying to figure out why we are experiencing what we are experiencing so we can fix it: we can call this the analytical or fix-it part. We may resist our experience, which can take many forms: some common parts are denial, addiction, or shutting down feelings part. We might feel the urge to practice positive thinking to counter the belief that we're unlovable; we would call this our positive thinking part. We may direct blaming angry energy at the person who stimulated the hurt: this blaming energy could be called an angry or blaming part. This strong identification with the hurt unlovable part and its expression might last a minute, a few hours, many days or even a lifetime.

We might mistake these parts that emerge in response to the hurt feelings as unconditioned open awareness. Even though it seems as if these responses are helping us, when closely inspected, we see these parts have the effect of shutting down the feelings of the unlovable part and giving it the message that it is not presently wanted in our experience. An unlovable part is thus received in an unlovable way and can then recede or banish itself into the subconscious, but it will still have an impact on the person's life in a substantial way.

When we connect with and view an unlovable part from the lens of a fix-it or positive thinking part, any action we take will further reinforce the belief that we are unlovable, and thus, create an intractable loop; our well-intentioned efforts to connect with the unlovable part suddenly turns into a Chinese finger trap in which the harder the parts struggle to improve the unlovable part, the more entrenched the belief of unlovable becomes.

So what can we do? What action can we take that will not further promote identification with our conditioning or parts as they emerge? One thing we can do is pop out of the spell of the fix-it part by stepping back into the awareness of it. By holding a soft-hearted allowing awareness toward the fix-it part, and at the same time, holding awareness for the unlovable part it is trying to fix, this acts like a potent pair of scissors cutting through the Chinese finger trap. Allowing awareness to emerge is one action we can take that will not contribute to the polarizing tension between parts. Opening to awareness as ever-present potential while triggered, and naturally disidentifying from parts – these are primary intentions of the Inner Empathy awakening practices. We will learn to experientially become aware of such identification as it is happening in the moment and actively create the conditions for awareness to emerge.

Direct Paths and Gradual Progressive Paths

I consider the Inner Empathy awakening practices to be in the “direct path” camp instead of in the “progressive path” camp. This may sound contradictory because I use practices and people often erroneously associate direct paths with no practice at all.

The way I break down the distinction between gradual and direct types in Inner Empathy work is as follows. A gradual or progressive path will tailor practices in an attempt to make the contents of awareness (including our sense of self) better or improved over time. There is a going from point A to point B while working within the contents of awareness. The example I just outlined above with a fix-it egoic part, or a positive thinking egoic part, is an example of working within the contents of awareness. With a gradual path, these parts are subtle inner structures that drive our practices towards whatever is idealized at the end of the path. There is value in such practice in the sense that they create the conditions for open awareness to emerge.

However, in Inner Empathy work we want to start from a different level; practices start at the results level or at the end of the path. That means we want to know what it is like to experience life in a lightly structured awareness, to be open awareness, to be identified with nothing (or everything), as opposed to being identified with limited egoic parts. We want to practice being open awareness as much as possible. We want to experience life from this dimension. But since open awareness is not really a something, it makes for an interesting practice.

Buddhist teachers use the open sky as a metaphor for open awareness and the clouds as the contents of awareness. When we are open awareness, we can allow egoic parts to emerge (the

clouds). We practice and experience how it is when egoic parts are not present in a relatively high degree (clear sky), and we practice and experience how it is when egoic parts are present (cloudy sky).

As I say all this, I want to be clear that we are not really getting anywhere and open awareness, or lightly structured experience is not really a destination or a thing, for that matter; it emerges spontaneously and effortlessly when we cease to be identified as being the clouds. The clouds are an expression of the sky, but a limited one.

Another way to approach understanding this is to say that being identified as only the clouds is a certain quality of experience in the sense that we don't connect with or know about the open sky around the clouds. On the other hand, when we are the open sky, the clouds are included and therefore we are the open sky and the clouds simultaneously. Our experience of the of the clouds from this standpoint of the open sky is different from our experience of clouds without the open sky.

The practice portion of Inner Empathy revolves around noticing how awareness and attention can be bound by way of identification with whatever is presently active or being constructed in our experience by egoic parts. We practice being aware and allowing objects (parts, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, ideologies, various identities) to appear without accepting or rejecting, or grasping or averting them. We simply connect unconditionally and hold empathetic presence and compassion for them. For these reasons, I consider Inner Empathy to be a direct path to realization and awakening.

Introduction to Inner Empathy Inquiry Sessions

In Inner Empathy work, one of the ways we learn is through self-inquiry in a particular time period we call a session. We will learn to do self-inquiry sessions on our own and to have sessions with others supporting us, and we will learn to support others in their self-inquiry sessions. These sessions are a way to support being in awareness of whatever emerges. What follows is a detailed explanation of what we can expect in an Inner Empathy session.

Inner Empathy Sessions Are a Different Kind Of Contribution

An Inner Empathy session is not a therapy session. Inner Empathy is an inquiry method where you learn to hold empathetic and compassionate presence for whatever emerges in your experience. In an Inner Empathy session, there is no need to diagnose, analyze or label you according to some theoretical ideal of what is and is not psychologically healthy. You will feel a sense of comfort and ease from the listener's nonjudgmental care and acceptance of whatever emerges.

Inner Empathy is non-pathologizing because it is not based upon the premise that something is wrong with you that needs to be fixed. Inner Empathy is based upon the premise that empathetic awareness is available to you now to hold presence and connect with all aspects of yourself on a feeling and need-based level. Holding such empathetic presence for the various conscious and unconscious aspects of your inner world can inspire natural self-corrections. Your well-being will be self-defined and based upon your choices and your own unique values.

Working in the Present with the Innate Wisdom of Your Body-mind System

Working in the present means we engage and empathetically hold presence for whatever is organically emerging in your experience during the session. You may have a particular issue you want to explore or maybe even engage some unsavory aspect of yourself that troubles you. You will learn to trust the message of your body-mind system – that the particular aspect of you that emerges in the present is what wants attention. You will also learn to support others and operate from the premise that the other people's body-mind systems know what is best for them and give them a type of support that honors their innate wisdom.

Working in the present discourages you from being preoccupied and totally identified with past memories or future projections in an intellectually and emotionally detached way. These past/future intellectual excursions can be endless, disconnecting and can represent a subtle way of protecting ourselves from experiencing present feelings. Present-time work includes connecting to how you believe you are these past memories and future projections as they are happening. The Inner Empathy practices help you get separation from these memories/projections and support you in staying present to whatever is occurring in the moment. A trust in a calm centeredness emerges which serves as a foundation upon which to do your inquiries.

Support That Cultivates Your Own Self-Presence and Guidance

When someone is supporting you while doing an Inner Empathy session, the guiding principle this person will operate under is to support you in connecting with your own awareness to hold presence for whatever challenging aspects of yourself emerge. This kind of support builds your own inner resources to continue to connect deeply with yourself. This follows the principle of teaching you to fish instead of feeding you a fish for the day. Also, cultivating your self-presence gives you a hedge against getting lost in your inquiry. It is very easy to become identified with a core part's feelings and beliefs and believe these represent your identity. Cultivating the capacity of your empathetic awareness to stay present and hold these deeper aspects of yourself becomes essential. The more capacity you develop to hold empathetic awareness, the deeper you can go into your inner world to hold presence for your core feelings/needs and associated beliefs. Learning this skill can open the way for ongoing self-support throughout your life. Your life becomes a session, so to speak, and abiding in lightly structured, stabilized open awareness is a reality.

Working Experientially With Unconscious Sense of Self or Core Parts Allows Something Useful to Happen

Inner Empathy work was specifically designed to efficiently navigate your inner world for the purpose of connecting with core unconscious identities that hold feelings/needs/beliefs that are deeply embedded in your being. The presupposition in this work is that these unconscious core identities are largely responsible for the egoic sense of self that influences the quality of the life we lead. We are identified with such senses of self and don't know it. In my experience, chronic troubles with relationships, career, parenting, all find their inspiration in one's unwittingly being identified with unconscious core identities that hold particular feelings/needs and associated beliefs.

Inner Empathy Inquiry work acknowledges that the way you access your core feelings/needs and associated beliefs is a critical factor in whether such connection is useful. Do you emotionally and experientially connect with these deeper aspects, or does your intellectual part take over the inquiry and hold these feelings/needs and beliefs in an intellectual way? A lot of personal growth falls prey to the intellectual parts of us that keep us disconnected from deeper core needs/feelings/beliefs. This is why people who think they have connected with their core beliefs do not see effortless self corrections in their lives.

Inner Empathy work was designed to support people in directly accessing these core feelings/needs and associated beliefs experientially and emotionally when they emerge. The overriding assumption and intention contained in Inner Empathy work is that such deep empathetic connections with core feelings/needs and beliefs will create a quality of connection where you can trust that something useful will occur. What is useful will be self-defined as you connect with the unique expressions of your particular core feelings/needs.

Cultivating Reliance Upon Your Own Inner Wisdom Both When being Supported and When Giving Support

I've noticed, and have a concern about, our tendency to defer to authorities when engaging in personal growth work. Such deference can be an obstacle to doing meaningful personal work. Typically, we are conditioned to look outside ourselves to authorities to tell us what to do to relieve our suffering, to fix our problems, or to improve us in some way. Even authorities talk about the dangers of looking to authorities! There is nothing wrong with looking to authorities for inspiration, learning, and self-support, if we do so in a way where our innate wisdom is invited to operate with discrimination. There is a certain quality of interdependence that emerges. When reliance on authorities is done in a way where we abnegate our responsibility for utilizing our own inner wisdom, we set up dependency, subjugation, and compliance to ideals based on others' experiences.

In my own experience, when I relied upon authorities in a manner in which I gave up my responsibility, my innate wisdom, empathetic awareness and self-leadership atrophied and became conspicuously quiet. Much personal growth work is done in a context in which we accept whatever the authority is saying without testing it experientially or checking with our inner wisdom resources to see if it is true for us. One of the ways to provide leadership for yourself is to receive information skeptically, and use your own inner resources and wisdom to test it and try it out. This type of skepticism is different from the type that is a defensive posture to keep anything new from entering into your system. The skepticism of innate wisdom relies upon the part of you that looks out for your best and highest interests, and is unique to your system. Please take enough time to examine any concept or exercise presented in the text by testing it with your own experiences on deeper levels. Remember, too, that the conceptual models we work with in this course are conceptual tools with the specific purpose of helping to foster a certain quality of connection with aspects of ourselves, not to entrench or bind us to be identified with the models or their components.

Also, keep in mind that projecting idealistic and perfectionistic notions upon the facilitators or a body of work can be disruptive to the learning process. Often these positive projections are simply a participant's 'golden shadow' as Jung called it, qualities or attributes the participants

have difficulty in owning for themselves. Either that, or they could be deep symbolic longings for parental love or approval. It is useful to track whether this is occurring. Much insight can be gleaned by paying attention to these dynamics.

Balance Self-Leadership to Support Others

One way for facilitators to provide leadership for themselves is to remain aware of the seductive temptation held out by people who look to them for the answers and not to accept the power offered by participants. It is easy to be lured into associating our self-worth and self-acceptance with being seen as capable of answering all questions, or giving out keen insights, or solving someone's problem. This breakdown in self-leadership often happens subtly. For example, when I feel impatient or intensely upset upon hearing about a participant's pain/problem, this indicates to me that perhaps, unconsciously, I am uncomfortable with their pain and want to help them get over it so I can feel comfortable. Perhaps I have a similar unresolved painful issue in my life that I unconsciously want to work out through the participant – less wear and tear on me.

Also, it can be very intoxicating to accept the positive perfectionist projections from participants, which, unwittingly, can lead to our cultivating and encouraging them. Facilitators can cultivate perfectionist notions by believing that they need to be perfect in their roles, to live up to the standards being projected on them. This, too, can be very subtle. An “I've got it together” persona can easily be formed and flaunted, which indulges these positive projections. Tracking these tendencies or possibilities helps with the overall authenticity in the relationship between the facilitator and the participant. When both participant and facilitator can provide a relatively high degree of self-leadership, a context is created for a self-correction connection, and we can trust something useful will occur.

Requirements For Doing Inner Empathy Practices

What type of people flourish doing Inner Empathy work? People who seem to thrive doing Inner Empathy work have been on a spiritual path and/or have already done a lot of personal growth work. People thrive who have studied non-duality and are having trouble stabilizing their awareness because they become identified with psychological triggers that need attention. People thrive who are coming to the end of their search and wanting to experience the fruition of all their personal growth work. People who want to abide in the present more fully, who long to experience a stabilized wholeness in their life also benefit. The book helps these people untangle the subtle ways they confound themselves with their own brilliance, knowledge, and personal growth practices.

Generally, my approach is secular, neither promoting any specific spiritual tradition or personal growth orientations nor denying any. Even though a larger non-dualistic context informs this work, the belief in or adherence to my understanding of non-duality or any spiritual context is not required. My hope is that you would honor and bring your own spiritual beliefs and understandings into this process for yourself.

I would like to end this introduction by saying how truly touched and honored I am to have your trust and to be able to collaborate with you on your journey inside. My passion in life is to contribute to your life in ways that are deep and meaningful to you according to your

wisdom, which knows what is best for you now. I enjoy creating conditions for people's innate wisdom, self-compassion and empathetic awareness to emerge, which inspires their own self-correction mechanisms and supports stabilized effortless being.

**For more information about retreats,
training courses, and private session work go to:
www.InnerEmpathy.com**