

Inside the Cloud of Love

Moving from the Heart into the Kingdom

Overview

There are distinct parts in this booklet. Let me say here how they are related.

1 "The Hidden Design of the Moral Corral" suggests that the hidden purpose of preaching and of religion is to help a person turn to the heart. (This may even be the hidden purpose of life itself.) Page 3

2 "The Value of an Awakened Heart" explains by an analogy how the heart awakens, and then describes some of the positive changes that result from the awakening. Page 6

3 "I Enter the Cloud of Love" takes the next step and moves into Love and offers a suggestion for seeing the people in your life in the context of the kingdom. Page 9

4 "A Final Thought," where I expand a bit on what to do with the kingdom once we've found it. Page 11

Appendix, Page 12 "Ways of Staying in the Heart" describes a number of ways you can use to help you stay in or near your heart once it is awakened. Most of these work only during meditation, except for #7, which suggests simply breathing into the heart, an exercise that works easily most of the day, as well as in meditation.

"Appreciation" isn't dealt with in this little booklet, though it is certainly one of the very best ways to connect the heart with one's experience of the world. I know of no better teacher of this disposition than Abraham-Hicks.

The hidden design of the preacher's moral corral

Imagine a corral with me.

There are fence posts and barbwire and a gate.

This is where we live as our "aspirational space," whether we're religious or secular.

We believe we are here to seek the ideals represented by the different fence posts and to avoid the vices, symbolized ominously by the barbed wire. This is the corral artfully built by the adept preacher, and preachers before him, and they steadfastly point not only to the virtues and vices but also to Jesus and the heart.

Few of us *care* very deeply about this, even when we are earnest and sincere. The ideals seem otherworldly, often unattainable; the vices seem comfortable, sometimes necessary.

Some of our assumptions, we are taught, might be false, such as "the better I perform, the better I am." *No, God loves you just the way you are.* (How can he and why would he? *I don't.*)

Other ideals, such as connecting with others, seem good, but we often wonder why we bother. "It's all about living a little closer to the heart," the preacher says again.

Another ideal, "caring for others," comes naturally to some people, but to others it is often an imposition. "Be a healer and a life-giver to those around you." Yes, just as soon as they shape up!

Even the post representing the love for God strikes us often as an unreasonable expectation, considering the life he has given us. "God loves me? Well, I think the jury might still be out on that one."

Some of the "vices" we are enjoined to move away from are strong emotions such as anger that the world is not the way we want it to be; also fear, shame, and several others. We are also often reminded that "the way of the world" is to live by distraction from what is important in favor of what seems urgent, necessary, or maybe even entertaining.

Anyway, the main idea here is that we try to push ourselves into being better people by moving towards our ideals and away from our current selves. This denies our ideals by pushing them into the future, and it denies ourselves as we are in the present. What's left? Not a lot.

This way of living never gets us out of the corral, and the rewards of living in it are thin and fleeting—the temporary satisfactions of being

better than one's old self and better than "all those other people." To connect on a feeling level with the virtues and vices requires accessing the heart.

The preacher keeps on reminding us of the virtues and vices, from various angles, often with loving humor. And so our life in the corral is renewed, often on a weekly basis. We also hear about love and patience and kindness, but what do we do with them? More posts for the fence.

What happens? The pressure of non-attainment keeps eating at us on some level. You know the feeling: "I'm supposed to be that, but instead I'm (only) this." The pain, the painful dissonance, of imperfection. (If we could think of ourselves as perfect, there would be no problem. But the virtues were carefully selected to be attainable only with the help of the heart; and the vices represent attractions that are meaningless to it.)

Finally, when we are sufficiently "cooked," we say, "Enough already! There's got to be a better way. There has to be a way out of this dreadful place." We turn around and notice a gate. It has a rusty little sign that says, "Jesus hangs here."

Now some people turn around sooner than others, and some need to really become pretty frustrated first. But the important thing is this:

Most of us live mainly in our heads. To the mind, virtues and ideals are just *ideas*. We don't really connect with them on a feeling level. So we don't really care about them, and they don't really move us. The great secret is that this corral system is not *supposed* to work the way we think it does. It is designed only to help us give up on our merely mental ideals, turn around, and see the way out, which is the gate, where Jesus is waiting. It's almost like the corral is designed to *exhaust* our mental aspiration. And so it does, for many. (If you ask why any of this is even necessary, my answer would be that this is perhaps the best way for God to keep calling us to life without *forcing* us to accept it.)

The great difference between the mind and the heart is that the mind judges, while the heart does not.

The heart is patient and kind, is content with what it has, and so forth, by its very nature! But until you actually *visit* the heart, you really don't know that from your own experience. If the preacher (or the Spirit within him and you) continues reiterating the virtues and the vices, it may eventually happen that you "try out" being in the heart—maybe just for a change of scenery—and at that moment, there is a strong sense of "that was the right move!"

By his forgiveness of all sin, by teaching the appropriateness of love and forgiveness of one another, Jesus opens for all of us free access to the heart. As soon as we enter—even if only for an instant—the corral has done its work, and we are free to leave and continue to grow in the Spirit.

A final thought—on the Old Testament:

If it were just about being good, rehearsing virtues and discouraging vices would work. Yet it really doesn't, even with only the original ten fence posts. I think that the difference here is that the Old Testament corral had no gate! Perhaps it wasn't yet time for one; perhaps God in his mercy was letting us find the limits ourselves. So there were lots of people just like us trying very hard to be perfect on their own initiative, getting frustrated, maybe acting a little bit superior, and building up a big psychological "shadow." Finally, though, a cry went up to heaven: *Enough already!* And God answered, in person. There was now a gate, a new gate, and the possibility of true freedom.

Places I chose not to go in this essay:

Addiction is in many people the only solution they're aware of to help them deal with the pain of imperfection. These are often people of exceptional integrity, and for them, the pain comes from the *gap* between ideal and actual.

Another place I didn't want to go was Hildegard von Bingen's belief that a sense of sin is a God-given blessing, without which redemption would be unlikely.

A third place, because it was a little bit off-subject, was that apart from the corral and the sudden losses we experience in our daily lives, one of the best drivers of this process is chronic pain. It was 14 years of very painful fibromyalgia before I finally gave up and turned to the heart. I noticed one day that every time I could connect with it, the pain would subside, especially first thing in the morning. After a week or so, I managed to stay with my heart till maybe noon, through various simple practices described in the appendix—which has kept the pain at bay and has completely ended my need to use alcohol for it. The astonishing power of the heart! Anyway, since the 14 years of pain brought me to freedom and my own heart, I need to stop griping and say with humility, "Thank you, Father. Your plan worked. I'm lucky you love slow learners!"

The value of an awakened heart

The process of the heart's awakening can be compared to a scale balance, with the mind on one side and the heart on the other.



Most of us have invested very heavily in the pan of the mind—not so much by problem solving or research as by the constant thinking about upcoming events, past events, worries and anxieties, self-justifications, and so forth. The left-hand pan, meanwhile, is rarely fed—sometimes by nature, sometimes by music or a film.

So the question arises: When will the left-hand pan balance the right-hand one? It's hard to say. But each time you connect with your heart, even if it's by breathing into it, you add a value to the left-hand side that's worth at least 50 thought trains in the right-hand pan of the mind. You keep at it because it feels good, and the day comes when you realize you want a permanent connection with the heart. That's the point at which the two sides come into perfect balance and your whole life changes. Here are some of the ways:

First, the spiritual:

As you spend time with your heart, you realize that spiritual seeking has slowed way down, that somehow you've found your connection with God. This is amazing and unexpected. All of your mental questions about God fade away. You have a sense that you are connected. All of the pleadings and complaining and accusations with and against God—they simply aren't there any longer. Also, you have a new connection with Jesus. You find as you are “in your heart” that you can actually talk to him. Not just in your mind, like before, but as actually present. This alone is a major shift in your outlook on life. Religion is now a lot more real.

Next, in your outlook on life:

The usual stuff that goes on in our heads keeps going, but it's no longer the only center of our reality. The heart is now a center as well. And the more time we spend in the heart, the more we tend to want to spend time there. As you spend time with your heart, there is a subtle shift away from seeking after material or mental things. Somehow they don't matter as much as they used to. You realize with surprise that all your needs are being met.

One of the greatest changes is how you handle addiction thoughts and desires. Before, you would spend time thinking about how to get your next "fix," whether drugs, sex, or alcohol. Now when these thoughts arise, you refer them to the heart, and they still exist, but they lose their potency. Even physical pain can be referred to the heart. The pain doesn't stop completely, but it loses its sting, a lot of which is mental: "God, I hurt! Christ, I hurt! Will this ever stop?" This kind of being in the head begins to fade as you enjoy the new center of the heart.

Another really big change is in your pace of life. When we are in our heads, we go fast, we talk fast, we walk fast. But shift your attention to the heart, and you relax, let go, and begin to enjoy your surroundings and what you're doing. If you are out walking your dog, you may find yourself in your head, shift attention to the heart, and you'll automatically slow down. Your shoulders will drop. Sometimes you have a big sigh as you relax.

Peace. This is related to the slower pace, but the change is hard to explain. Before my heart woke up, peace was only a great word, never an actual experience. Connected with your heart, you begin to be relaxed, you begin to feel calm. You feel more peaceful than you ever thought possible. The heart goes with peace as the mind goes with restlessness. The mind is restless by nature until the heart is awake. Then it begins to be calm and more useful. And as your stress level goes down, your energy level goes up. Life gets better.

Your overall outlook on life changes in the direction of more peace and more joy and more love; more openness, less fear, less worry. You feel you are finally in the right place, leaning against a great oak tree, looking out over a beautiful green valley. Life is no longer a struggle. You are at ease. Life happens on its own. You know you are free.

Relationships:

You realize that all of the virtues you ever knew about—kindness, patience, longsuffering, forgiveness, compassion—all of them, are now in you because they are all native to the heart. All you need to do is call on them, but you also find them expressing naturally in your day-to-day life. You have increased compassion for people generally, and you begin to look for ways to help out. Compare this to the former life, filled with mental complaining and self-seeking.

Even sex becomes a different experience: heart to heart and not so exclusively body to body. And slower. And better.

Perhaps the single most important change that occurs shows up when you have a “heart-to-heart” conversation. Here, you simply imagine the other person’s heart along with your own as you converse. All of a sudden, you will notice a shift takes place. Out of this shift will come an expression: The conversation may go deeper, the other person will start to cheer up, or you may simply exchange a knowing glance. Now this doesn’t depend in the least on whether the other person has an awakened heart, which shows you something about the Spirit being already present in both of you.



I enter a cloud of love

I was in a dry spell, meditation-wise. The merkaba stuff (see exercise 6 in the appendix) was there, but didn't engage me much. Same with the heart stuff. (I've learned that these dry spells usually mean "the tide is out; a new tide is coming in." And so it was.)

Even though I've been preoccupied with the heart for some time (and will no doubt continue to be), I got a firm "course correction" from Spirit a few days ago:

The answer to every question or problem is the same: Love ye one another. This does not mean to give attention to the heart over everything else. It means to love one another. And what is love? Love is simple, love is kind. Love is undistracted and without malice. What is love? Love is Jeshua. Love is connectedness. Love is a mother's love for everyone on earth. Love is who we are.

A significant correction! I remembered the saying in meditation and decided to just give myself over to it. (That means I flop around in my mind like a fish on land.) I finally decided to go into my heart, because that's where I guessed it would be easiest to access Love. Soon, a loving hand reached out to me. I was being taken on a "guided" meditation.

We went up in non-physical space until I could see both spirit and matter below me. I turned around and saw a gray cloud of translucent forms, like our human bodies but far less dense. As I entered the cloud, I became like them and found myself very happy to move among them. Some I recognized, but most I did not. After a few moments, I felt "I am Love" and all of a sudden, this cloud became the light and central truth of creation, with everything else fading for a few moments. We are Love. The Father is here with us. There is nothing but Love.

I came back out after a few moments, changed. Realizing that I can access this any time I'm quiet enough, I knew there was now a new dimension in my life. I don't see the cloud as far off. Simply touching in with my heart, I can find it within, enter it, and be who we are.

Later . . .

Lord?

Yes, Stu.

Do you want to comment on the cloud?

Yes, I do. The cloud is the kingdom. To be in the kingdom and to be in the cloud are one and the same. "Love ye one another" is most likely to take place there (here). But you must become convinced of this through your own trial and application of the image.

You asked for a softened, melted heart [like Maya Angelou's]. You have it in the cloud, yes?

I do!

A final thought:

When you are thinking of the cloud of love from the outside, it is of course defined and limited. But when you are inside of it, it is unbounded. Everything inside is love, and since in the view from the inside, there is nothing outside of it, there can be no place where love is not. This is the true perspective from inside the cloud, which I now understand is also the kingdom that Jesus spoke about during his life on earth.

The beatific forms that make up the cloud are not spirits of the departed or the saints. These spirits are the original children of God, unchanged from before the beginning of time and space. Each one is purest love. And these beings are the ones making up the kingdom, though the spirits of the departed are no doubt here in their original beingness.

Forgiveness clears the way to the heart, and the heart is the portal to the kingdom. Within the kingdom, forgiveness is no longer needed because all the figures there are eternally loving. What is only love does not need forgiving.

So, what do we do with this vision? Christ encouraged us to connect with the kingdom within, here where we are. So what I do is this: Consciously breathing into my heart during the day keeps me close to the cloud, to the kingdom. Especially when I am with another person, I call on the cloud to surround us both. I then use this perspective as an overlay or as the *context* for whatever interchange there is between us. To see an elderly friend as divinely loving even when his physical self is being demanding, this is itself *divine!* Instead of getting irritated, I remain calm, patient, compassionate. Life becomes an easy flow. It becomes a happy experience. Most important of all, living in the kingdom makes it possible to fulfill the “new commandment,” that we love one another. In the world, this is difficult (or irrelevant) most of the time. In the kingdom, it is already true, all of the time.

Now all my walk is sacred as I feel the swirling forms of light and love around me, and I am so nurtured, so protected, so at one with those whom I adore. I no longer walk alone!

Appendix: Ways of staying in the heart

The single most important thing I have learned in my life is *forgiveness*. I learned it from *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM), which basically teaches that since God creates only what is eternal, what he creates must be unchanging. So no matter what we perceive another person to be doing or to have done, in the eyes of the Creator, that person is still the same: innocent, pure. (And this is the truth I experience in the cloud of love.)

I applied this idea to all of the people I had grievances towards, and after some time, I was able and willing to see them as eternally innocent. (*The Course* is a year-long program of thought changing, and it takes that long before you “get” it, whether from the Course or another spiritual teaching.) Nevertheless, it is forgiveness of self, others, and God that allowed me to switch my allegiance from the mind (which judges) to the heart, which does not. I do not claim that the heart is the only way. It isn’t. There is a parallel path of the mind, as can be seen in the original teachings of the Buddha. Later, there would come Tibetan Buddhism, which with its emphasis on compassion integrates mind and heart. My focus in this booklet is the heart and Christian love, but I believe in the value of the way of the mind. It is a sister path.

Back to the story. The switch to the heart was mostly enabled by *Love without End: Jesus Speaks*, a book by Glenda Green. I highly recommend it, though as I said, the removal of the *obstacles* to heart awareness came—at least for me—from ACIM’s teaching of forgiveness. Each grievance is like a boulder in front of the doorway to your heart, and forgiveness removes them.

I take no personal credit for anything in this booklet, other than the intention to keep on growing, and even that is more God’s than mine. I am pretty sure that the awakening of my heart was the result of someone’s help—whether on this side or the other. Also, this awakening was preceded by a few years with a spiritual trip I took with Jesus. He took me by the hand to the center of all that is and showed me the Father, with whom I spent a fair amount of time over the next several months. I mention this because I now really believe that Jesus is the way to the Father and that until we experience the Father as all allowing, all loving, until we are convinced that he is not punitive and not judging, we are not likely to want to enter our hearts, suspecting (rightly) that he dwells there.

Over time, I've encountered little exercises that help me stay near or in my heart, though there is only one of them I use consistently, and that is the seventh: breathing consciously into my heart. At the present time, I usually spend time in the cloud, though I am aware of the heart from time to time. And the heart exercises are my fallback discipline, whenever I lose touch with the cloud. Anyway, here are the little exercises:

A friend of mine named Victor said he was aware that we are all approaching some kind of Edge in 2012, and his thought inspired me . . .

Shortly afterwards, I encountered this idea from an Al Miner/ Lama Sing reading: "And we look to the Father and we see that we are separate, and yet one."

1. The edge between wholeness and uniqueness

I asked about holding separateness and oneness together. What I heard was,

Yes, well, there are three things here. One is uniqueness, one is the All, and one is the balancing of the two, for both are real, both are of the Father. You have heard it said that once a pair is in balance, you can focus in on the balance itself, as the edge between the two, and let the other two go gently and sweetly out of focus. This balance is the edge you seek and the edge that seeks you. Its nature is Love itself.

As you feel the edge, you will also feel a mild pressure on your spiritual heart. That is how you know that Love and the edge are related, are one.

So the first practice is to hold awareness in your heart of oneness and individuality, and the invisible edge between them. When you can focus on the edge itself, you will feel an opening of the heart and a lightness of being.

2. An open heart

Another practice comes from a friend named Lennie, whose closeness to Love has always impressed me: "I work on keeping the heart open, letting all pass through without holding on to anything. That is worth the time. I am becoming aware of the blocks and that is a good start."

3. Heart-to-heart communing

Perhaps you have experienced your connectedness with other hearts. It's one of the most beautiful experiences we can have:

My heart to your heart, your heart to mine,
Awareness of both hearts at the same time.

Seeing the light in one heart is one thing;
Seeing the light in your own is another.
Feeling a light in both hearts together and
at the same time is bliss with a brother!

4. Letting the heart sing

Singing the song of the heart, you simply allow your heart to sing through you. You know that when your heart is touched by someone else's singing, you are hearing a *heart* singing. The song of the heart is powerful and seems to fill all the space around you. You can do this through your voice, a musical instrument, or poetry, or any art form, especially in heart-felt improvisation.

5. Letting God shine through you to others

I was saying my morning prayers, something like the following:
"In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I Am.
Bless me, Father, remember me always, and allow me to help with
your work, whatever that is and wherever and with whomever.
Let your face shine in me for others, and give them peace."

In a morning trip to the grocery store, I inadvertently brought considerable cheer to a cashier who normally seems pretty sad, simply by asking about her Valentine's Day. She became animated and told me how much she enjoyed the surprise Valentine's dinner from her husband. Her face was beaming.

6. The star tetrahedron in the heart

For this exercise, I need to explain the star tetrahedron, in case you haven't encountered it before. A tetrahedron, unlike the pyramid, has only three faces and one base. If you take two of these, base to base, and then rotate one of them until its points are halfway along the sides of the other tetrahedron, you have the beginnings of a "star" tetrahedron. You can then push one of the bases into the other, and it will still look like a star. This figure has also been related to a Biblical "vehicle" called the MerKaBa, and the contemporary author, Drunvalo Melchizedek, has configured the MerKaBa as a form you can imagine around yourself, as in this diagram:



Without any experience yet in this outside-the-body use of the form, I found great usefulness of it inside the heart. Sometimes I would feel the lower tetrahedron connecting with the earth and the upper one connecting with heaven, like two beams of light coming together in my heart. Later on, the inner MerKaBa somehow “induced” the outer one shown in the diagram, and then they were both present. When they were both held in mind at the same time, something very special happened.

7. Just resting the attention in the heart

I sometimes just put the attention in my heart, without any thought of an exercise. This is like the heart’s Sabbath—a period of rest and devotion. Sometimes the heart will want to do something, sometimes not. It doesn’t seem to matter, and it brings me a great sense of peace, like floating in water. You can facilitate this by breathing slowly and evenly into the heart. This way of conscious breathing will serve to keep you close to the heart all through the day.

8. The Jesus Prayer of the Heart

I would be remiss if I didn’t mention the Prayer of the Heart, which has been used since at least the early “desert fathers,” monks who practiced breathing into their hearts as they offered the prayer, “Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” After a while of practicing this prayer within the heart, the praying would take on a life of its own and continue without conscious intention on the part of the monk. Several early monks, and many since, have testified to the great spiritual efficacy of this prayer. I remember first encountering it many years ago, but I was unable to relate to it because of its language of sin and implied need for redemption, both of which I believed to be already taken care of

by the life of Jesus. At the time, even “mercy” meant little more than the forestalling of punishment for being a sinner. Nevertheless, I believe that this prayer is effective even if modified to remove the reference to sin. For example, “Jesus Christ, only love.” Try it out and see. You will soon find variations that work for you.

9. Lately, I’ve been practicing being in the Cloud. I enter it in meditation simply by allowing my physical body to be set aside. I enter the Cloud as my spiritual body. The usual result is that I can remain at least partly conscious of the Cloud during the day, and being in it also keeps me aware of the heart. If I lose touch completely, I will go back to the first seven heart exercises and cycle through them a few moments for each one. When I feel my spiritual heart again, I return to awareness of the life we have in the Cloud. As one of my favorite poets described it: *everything which is natural which is infinite which is yes*.