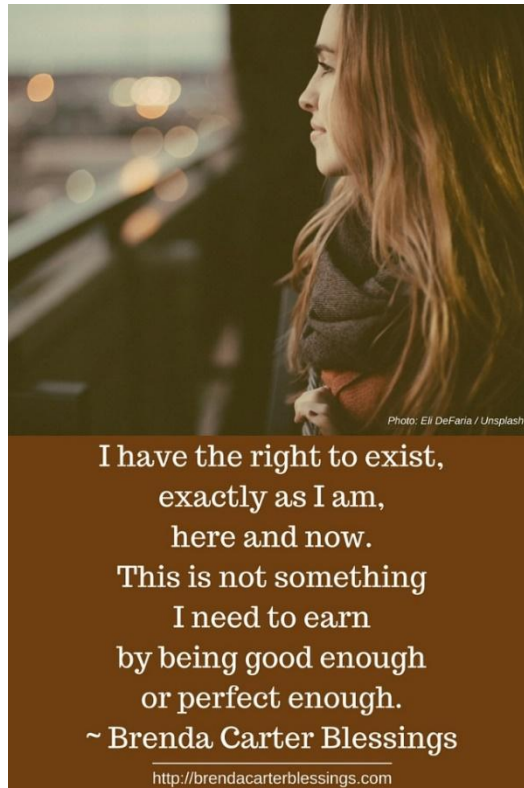


**EMBRACING LIFE AS IT IS
ENCOURAGING LIFE—AFFIRMING CHANGE**

Article 2: I Have The Right To Exist Exactly As I AM



From a nondual perspective, to embrace life as it is, while encouraging authentic change, begins with an open-hearted attitude in which we are willing to give everything a chance.

The only place we can really practice being open hearted is in the present moment. This moment, no matter how confusing or uncertain actually has the certainty of already existing. It simply is. When I am open to what is here now, including my reactions and resistances to what is here now – having an open heart allows, encourages and invites

me to be more present, more trusting of the built-in intelligence of this moment and also takes me beyond where I think I can go.

This is a daily practice of being willing to give yourself the benefit of the doubt so to speak, to have an open attitude, an attitude that says I am doing the best I can do in this moment, I have the right to exist exactly as I am, and I don't have to be more than I am right now. I don't have to beat myself up for not being better, or wiser or more perfect. It means accepting my true limitations, not with judgement and rejection, but with kindness.

As our hearts open, we find there is a willingness to discover and explore our resistances, our confusions and our certainties, to give everything a place and to be open to the intelligence that is built into the way things are, while also knowing that change is also intelligent and is included in life.

Having an open heart involves being willing to engage with and open to how much of life we cannot bear – to see how we erect barriers and walls around our heart – because we cannot be with Life As It Is, with all of its confusion and suffering.

We need to see how we limit life.

This is not the work of the young heart that still exists inside of each of us, the heart that sees the world with a type of clarity and certainty and resists its vulnerability, while being very impulsive and reactive to life's changing movements. This is the work of the maturing open heart that is willing to enter into the dark places within and find nourishment and healing in them.

The ongoing practice of having an open heart is a choice of courage and compassion. It is also a healing choice, for it opens us up to depths of beauty and wisdom and possibilities that we could not open up to any other way. Unless our hearts are open to all of who we are, we cannot encourage change in ways that are truly honoring of all the complex

beauty and challenges of being a human being in this time and place in the earth.

To be an awakening human being– which is synonymous with an open hearted human being– does not mean we reach some pinnacle of perfection or purity.

Having an open heart means we are open to the life we are living, as we are living it.

As we continue to practice opening our heart, we realize that each moment is filled with the Presence of All That Is. This Open Hearted Infinite Presence – that is not personal and that we do not fully understand – is always ready to carry us and support us no matter what the situation. It is there offering support and compassion. It nourishes us through despair and confusion. It teaches and shapes us.

This Open Hearted Presence is firmly rooted in the concrete experiences and moments of our lives. It is not abstract. This means, the choice of opening our heart is not abstract either. We have to do real work to open our thinking, along with our hearts and bodies in a new way.

Ultimately, healing and awakening to Open Heartedness involves ***unlearning and unwinding the patterns that block our natural open heartness from shining forth***. We don't need instructions on how to become a better person. We need help to get out of our own way so that we can open to what is here and now.

As Jason Shulman says in his book, ***Instruction Manual for Receiving God***, “The Heart holds All to itself, making no distinction. At the same time, it is perfectly discriminating, because it is not at all entranced. It is not entranced because the origin of the Heart is not personal but transcendent. The Heart is not a product of history, but of Emptiness. Emptiness means ‘without exception’.”

This is a type of Open Heartedness that is so vast that it is unfathomable to the personal human ego. Everything is allowed to exist, without exception.

This does not mean, however, that we as human beings need to be this “infinite. “ We are finite, personal beings, which means we have our likes and dislikes, our resistances and our preferences for what we want to happen in our lives and in the world.

What we can do is open our personal heart and enter into the stream of Open Heartedness – which is always present and available to us – in the current unfolding moment. It begins each time with being open hearted to our imperfect, confused, incomplete and precious self and resisting the impulse to judge and reject ourselves and others. Rejection always means something is being left out, excluded, exiled and orphaned.

In each and every moment we have the opportunity to make the choice to enter into the stream of having an Open Heart – without exclusion – nothing being left out. We have the opportunity to choose to be open to the one in us who has not known any another way, who has only been fed by rejection and to find kindness and compassion for our confused self.

Galway Kinnell said this beautifully in his poem, ***St Francis and the Sow***

*The bud stands for all things,
even for those things that don't flower,
for everything flowers, from within, of self blessing;
though sometimes it is necessary to reteach a thing its loveliness,
to put a hand on the brow of the flower
and retell it in words and in touch
it is lovely
until it flowers again from within of self-blessing;
as St. Francis put his hand on the creased forehead of the sow,
and told her in words and in touch
blessings of the earth on the sow, and the sow
began remembering all down her thick length,
from the earthen snout all the way
through the fodder and slops to the
spiritual curl of the tail,
from the hard spininess spiked out from the spine
down through the great broken heart
to the blue milken dreaminess
spurting and shuddering
from the fourteen teats into the
fourteen mouths sucking
and blowing beneath them;
the long perfect loveliness of sow.
The Flower of Self-Blessing*

All beings are designed to flower from within of self-blessing, to know the precious beauty of all of who we are, to trust our lives as they are unfolding here and now within the earth. And, often we need reminding through words and touch, through kindness and practice, of the truth of this so we can open our broken hearts and begin to flower again. In our flowering, we open our hearts to all other beings as well.

May the words in this article encourage you to flower within, to express yourself within this world and to open to new possibilities of transformation and relationship. I offer the words below to you as meditation and affirmation, to support you in this journey.

THE STREAM OF OPEN HEARTED PRESENCE – I HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXIST

Right here and now, in this moment, I choose to enter the stream of Open Hearted Presence, which is present here and now within the earth and within the life I am now living. I am making the choice to enter the stream and as I am ready, I am also willing for the stream to carry me, to teach me and help me to heal, and perhaps even to take me beyond where I think I can go.

I begin with having an open heart to myself. This is the only true place to enter into the stream. I have the right to exist exactly as I am here and now. This is not something I need to earn by being good enough or perfect enough. Even if I don't believe this fully, here and now in this moment, I am willing to giving myself a chance by taking on an open hearted attitude to all of who I am, imperfect, wise, loving, confused and afraid.

In this moment, even if just a little bit, I am willing to open my heart and not repeat my old patterns of judging myself. I am willing to acknowledge that all aspects of who I am have a right to exist. They have a rightful place simply because they already do exist.

I have a right to my own voice and vision. This does not mean I have to be filled with clarity and purpose in every moment. It also does not mean that everyone has to agree with me. My voice has the right to exist. Even if I don't believe this fully, I am willing to give myself a chance by opening my heart and receiving my voice here and now.

(Pause here a moment and take yourself in fully. It is important to be honest with who you are and where you are right now. Perhaps this is enough for today. If so, just allow yourself to rest here in this Open Hearted Infinite Stream. In this next stage, we move to other beings and other aspects of life. If you feel you are ready to open your heart, even just a little bit, to other aspects of life that you find challenging, begin to swim again.)

Here, in the Open Hearted Stream, I open my heart to all other beings. I recognize that all beings have the right to their own voice and vision, to exist as they are right now— including all of those who are different from me, disagree with me and who want something different from me or who have different needs. I don't need to agree with them or understand them in order for them to have this right. They naturally have this right to exist, simply because they do exist. Even if I don't believe this fully here and now, I am willing to give them a chance by opening my heart here and now.

I don't need to do this perfectly. In fact, here and now, I choose to open my heart just a little bit more to acknowledge and receive my resistances and defenses to having an open heart, including my fears around safety and vulnerability. These tender and terrified places within me also have a right to exist, simply because they do. In this moment, I choose to give them space. This does not mean they take up all of the room in my heart or that I need to act them out. However, I do acknowledge that they have the right to exist, to be here now.

Here and now, I acknowledge that all life has the right to exist, exactly as it is right now – incomplete and filled with uncertainty and the unknown. I don't have to understand things as they are in order for them to have a right to exist. It does not mean that things won't change. Everything is continually in the midst of changing.

(Pause)

Now, no matter, where you are in this stream, whether you stayed floating early on or kept swimming – see if you can allow yourself to notice that the Infinite Open Hearted Presence that is always present in every moment – is actually carrying you. Then, make the final statement of affirmation that follows here.

I, as a particular and specific being, choose to be awake and present in this place, and to open my heart and allow the Infinite Heart to carry me. Here, everything flowers, everything is itself and everything is connected in relationship.