

## AWAKENING COMPASSION FOR OUR IMPERFECT HUMAN SELF

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*Hasidic story: Once when Rabbi Mordecai was in the great town of Minsk expounding the Torah to a number of men hostile to his way, they laughed at him. "What you say does not explain the verse in the least," they cried. He replied, "Do you really think that I was trying to explain the verse in the book? That doesn't need an explanation. I want to explain the verse that is within me."*

When I read this, my heart opens and I feel great compassion for this very human dilemma. We want to be ourselves, as we are, expressing and sharing our hearts and minds freely and fully in the world. And what we most fear is if I am exactly who I am in any given moment – I am also opening myself up to the possibility of being hurt, disappointed, judged, criticized, and being seen as not loveable or not good enough.

So rather than being ourselves as we are, imperfect, wise, confused, uncertain and wholly human – we go into various defensive postures and strategies. These include pretending to be something *other* than an imperfect human being. We pretend to be smarter than we are, to like things we actually don't like, to agree with others when we disagree or we shrink and hide and isolate afraid there is no place for us to be ourselves with other human beings.

It is painful to realize we often choose (albeit unconsciously or semi-consciously) a life of submitting to the idea that who we are is not good enough, could never be good enough and the only choice we have is to hide away our tender hearts and our foolish minds and fake our way through life.

The first step of healing is to turn back into the ground of being a human being, who was made exactly as he/she is, *imperfect*. This is not about our personal histories or failures only. This is about coming into contact and right relationship with the holy truth that to be a human being is to be an imperfect being. This is

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not something to be ashamed of or something to be overcome or obliterated. This is something that calls for me to have an impeccably honest and heart opening relationship – the fundamental truth of imperfection.

There is no individual human being who isn't imperfect which includes being confused, uncertain and foolish. There are also times we are perfect, wise, insightful and even brilliant. Pitting imperfection in opposition to perfection, however, only adds to our personal suffering and the suffering of the world.

*Quote from Soetsu Yanagi, The Unknown Craftsman: A Japanese Insight into Beauty, "True beauty in Tea cannot lie either in the perfect or the imperfect, but must lie in a realm where such distinctions have ceased to exist, where the imperfect is identified with the perfect. This is the beauty that I refer to... "as 'irregular – irregular not in the sense of being opposed to the regular, but simply that when one does not consciously aim at either there is always a little something left unaccounted for. ... They come out of a world that existed before this dualism began-or rather, not 'before or after' but in a world where the dualism is irrelevant....They live in a world of thusness, not of must or must not. Their way of making things is so natural that any man-made rule becomes meaningless. They have neither attachment to the perfect piece nor to the imperfect....They are quite free from the conflict between the beautiful and the ugly. They just make what they make without pretension".*

It takes courage and often healing and awakening to open our hearts to the vulnerability of being a human being, expressing who we are naturally and freely, not being concerned with the appearance or what others perceive as beautiful or the ugly, but simply being who we are and expressing who we are naturally in our words, actions, creations and relationships.

When we judge and criticize ourselves prior to any act of creation, whether of speaking or writing or saying hello, we run the risk of trying to create a whole life by destroying or eliminating what we don't like. We run the risk of treating others' opinions and even our own opinions about what is beautiful or ugly as absolute facts or final conclusions and not as what they are simply ideas in process.

If they are simply ideas, an aspect of the process of being human – then we can also change our mind and our hearts. When they are facts, we run the risk of freezing life and locking ourselves into prisons of conception while hiding the key to our freedom.

If we destroy too much, we run the risk of taking our humanity out of the Unity of All That Is, of denying the value of being a human being. It is so often unfathomable to us that the Great Unity made us exactly as we are – imperfect and fully human. We don't get that there actually is value in being imperfect.

So we fight against this, rail against this and deny the value of imperfection. We hold ourselves up as objects that can be scorned and rejected. Imperfection is built into being a continual process of being and becoming and this is a fundamental truth of what it means to be human.

We don't need to become someone else or wait until others are open to us to appreciate or be in relationship with the wholeness of ourselves and our lives. When we embrace our imperfections and recognize the value of every aspect including the mishaps and flaws and dissonances—then the very places that once diminished our joy become places of insight, gratitude and strength.

When we invite in more and more of who we are, including our disappointments, struggles, sorrows – we paradoxically invite in more beauty into the world. By actually destroying as little as possible, we give ourselves and life a chance to shift and change and bring forth more wholeness and freedom.

This is holy work in which we heal our separate-only self while simultaneously awakening to our already present impeccable imperfect individual self – the one who is consonant with compassion and beauty. Sometimes we need to really wrestle with our histories and memories and ways we were hurt and made less than human.

And there are times when our work is to simply notice, honor, give place to our imperfections and the imperfections of the world as having the right to exist, exactly, as they are, in the state that they are in. In so doing, we also open our

hearts and minds to discovering something new about the value of imperfection in relationship or for revelation and awakening to happen.

In other words, in so doing, we open ourselves to seeing our imperfections as a call for relationship and resist the temptation to rush too quickly to judgement and demands that things be different without recognizing the value of what already is.

To be impeccable is usually defined as perfect, flawless, beyond criticism and so perfect in character incapable of sinning. Imperfection is usually defined as less than perfect, faults, defects.

*So how do these two opposites come together into a new unity of wholeness and beauty?*

This is much of our work as human beings, to learn to perceive with all of our hearts and minds and beings the relationship of perfection and imperfection and in so doing, to also go beyond the opposites to perceive the Unity of thusness where we can become increasingly free from “the conflict between the beautiful and the ugly”.

In becoming free from this conflict, we awaken into increasing levels of compassion for ourselves and all existence. Compassion arises in this relationship of perfection and imperfection and in the unity of the two which reveal themselves as a single being.

(Please work with the following meditation.)

## AWAKENING THE HEART MEDITATION

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Begin by paying attention to your breath, slowly breathing in and out.

Now, gently bring your attention to your heart.

As you do so, allow yourself to truly take in and receive the beauty of your human physical heart, which is rhythmically pumping blood, filling your cells and organs with your life's blood.  
(Pause)

Now, allow yourself to receive and take in the beauty of your personal, tender, vulnerable human heart, the heart that feels and longs and loves and suffers. Truly receive/take in this personal heart who longs to be authentic and to be whole and in relationship with all of life.  
(Pause)

Now, allow yourself to, even just a bit, receive the Heart that is not personal only. This is the Heart that is already connected to all, that includes everything and nothing is left out, including our imperfect humanity.

This is the Heart that invites in everything, that encourages and allows and transforms everything and is continually inquiring *into Life*.

Now think of something imperfect that you don't like about yourself or don't like about others or perhaps don't like about the imperfections of life, which you think should be different.  
(Pause)

This is something that stands in the way or acts as a barrier to you opening to your longing and capacity to be in life fully. (Pause)

## AWAKENING THE HEART MEDITATION

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Take some time to imagine it vividly...remember the details of what you don't like or think should be different. Let your feelings become very alive in you.... (Pause..take a bit longer here to remember all of the details)

Now, tune in to your body and notice what has changed since you began remembering this barrier.

Notice your breathing, your pulse or any tightness or tension... Pick one of these changes and focus your attention upon this one location. Now, allow it to be vivid.

Now drop all of the details you are remembering, except this feeling in your body, and simply allow it to be there as pure sensation.

Notice what happens....

