

From  
*Radical Happiness: A Guide to Awakening*

Gina Lake

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## CHAPTER 5

### Waking Up in the Now

#### WHAT IS REAL

We have been talking mostly about what is not real—what the ego produces and pretends is real, such as thoughts, feelings, and desires. What is not real wouldn't be a problem if it didn't take us away from what *is* Real—from this moment, which is where true happiness can be found. What is Real is what *is*—what is right here, right now, not what is *not* here right now, such as what should be, could be, or was. What is Real is what is true about this very moment. What is Real is this moment, which is constantly changing into the next moment and the next. What *is* keeps changing.

What complicates this is the fact that part of what is Real in most moments is thoughts. The *experience* of a thought is real—it's happening now. However, what happens in the egoic state of consciousness is that a false reality is created by giving our attention primarily to thoughts. When attention is given mostly to thoughts, the rest of reality is overlooked, as if it didn't also exist.

Part of the rest of reality of any moment is the input from our senses: colors, patterns, light, shadow, beauty, warmth, cold, sensations, sounds, tastes, and smells. Moreover, the reality of any moment also includes the essence of who we are: joy, peace, contentment, acceptance, gratitude, and love. Who we are is alive in the moment, and the qualities we exist as can be experienced in any moment. Who we are is joy, peace, contentment, acceptance, and love. When we experience who we are, we feel all these things, and that makes for true happiness. When we experience who we are, we also feel a sense of presence and aliveness because that is how the energy of the Self is experienced.

To leave out so much of reality from our awareness by focusing on the egoic mind's stories or on what is not here in this moment, such as the past and the future, leads to a very limited experience of reality, which feels hollow because it lacks the fullness that is possible. When I say that thoughts and desires are not real, I mean that they are not the whole truth and therefore lack truth. If you had some ice cream and

all you could taste was the creaminess and not the flavor, it wouldn't seem like real ice cream because the full experience of ice cream would be lacking.

The same is true when we are identified with our thoughts: The experience of thought is not the complete, full experience of the moment. We miss a lot of reality when we are lost in our thoughts. Just as we can't enjoy ice cream that only has creaminess, we can't find real happiness in a moment consumed by thoughts. True happiness can only be found in the fullness of the moment. Any happiness that may come from paying attention to the egoic mind's limited reality is also limited.

## TURNING AWAY FROM THE NOW

In the egoic state of consciousness, we continually turn our attention away from the fullness of the moment to the products of the egoic mind: thoughts, desires, and feelings. The ego is entranced by its thoughts and desires and the feelings that arise from them, and it has little interest in anything else. And yet, who we really are is not the ego but something more all-inclusive that includes the ego and its servant, the mind, and allows the ego to do what it does. Because the Self is so allowing, when we are identified with the egoic mind, reality outside the egoic mind doesn't seem to exist. Reality becomes what the ego thinks it is, and so we find ourselves living in a reality that includes only a small slice of what is Real.

Just as we become engrossed in movie images and forget our surroundings, when we are identified with the ego, we become entranced by the movement of the egoic mind: its thoughts, feelings, and desires. This becomes our world, our reality. We don't notice the space, the nothingness, the emptiness between the thoughts, which is more real than anything the mind is able to experience.

Thoughts, desires, and feelings are part of the now, and by themselves, don't take us out of the moment. However, in the egoic state of consciousness, we rarely allow thoughts, desires, and feelings to just come and go. Instead, we identify with particular thoughts, desires, and feelings and feed them with more of the same; and this does take us away from experiencing the moment fully.

For example, the thought "I can't find a job" arises in the mind. This may be true in the moment, although not generally true. But the ego tends to interpret thoughts globally, as if this means "I will never find a job." The ego mixes fear in with the truth

and creates a problem out of something that is just true in the moment. “I will never find job” becomes a problem for the mind to chew on, and it’s always looking for something to chew on. This so-called problem generates more thoughts that attempt to solve the problem: “I’ll look in the paper. Maybe I need to move. Maybe I should go back to school. Maybe my old place of employment has an opening. Maybe I should change careers.” Any one of these thoughts may or may not coincide with what the Self chooses to do next. The Self will allow the ego to pursue any of these avenues in an attempt to solve the problem. Meanwhile, the Self will move as it always has to unfold the life, and what that will be won’t be known until it happens.

In a sense, there are two things going on in any moment: what the ego is propelling us to do and what the Self is propelling us to do. Life goes smoothly when these are the same. But when they don’t coincide, the result is confusion, discomfort, fear, anger, and sadness—suffering.

The ego tells stories about feelings too, not just about thoughts. For example, anger arises about something someone said. Instead of just allowing the anger to be there without doing anything about it, including thinking about it, the ego is likely to generate more thoughts: “He shouldn’t have said that about me. He’s a jerk. What does he know? I never liked him. That’s so unfair.” These thoughts, in turn, generate more feelings: “I can’t stand that guy. That really hurts after all I’ve done for him.” Then, these feelings might lead to actions: “I’ll show him. I’m going to give him a piece of my mind.”

Following our thoughts and feelings keeps us very busy and leads to a lot of suffering. It creates the drama we call “my life.” However, life doesn’t have to go in the direction of our thoughts and feelings. That isn’t the life intended by the Self. It intends a different story, a simpler and potentially happier and more fulfilling one. However, the Self allows us to create these dramas and learn from them until we tire of them and begin to question the cause of our suffering.

Of course, desires work in the same way, and they are compelling figments of the egoic mind. For example, let’s suppose you have a desire for a relationship. This could spur a number of actions that might keep you very busy: joining a dating service, calling up old friends, looking in the personal ads, going to bars, and fantasizing. However, if it’s not time for you to have a relationship, according to the Self’s plan, these actions aren’t likely to bring one, although they are bound to bring some

learning and possibly some suffering. The Self allows you to create this drama because this experience is part of the Self's exploration through you.

When our actions are not aligned with the Self's timing and plan, we spend time doing things that don't work out well and that often result in suffering. On the other hand, if something, such as a romantic relationship, is part of the Self's plan, the Self will bring it about in its own way, and the ego couldn't stop it if it wanted to. Life happens naturally and easefully when we are living the life the Self intends for us.

The mind is really just a mechanism—a tool for thinking and perceiving for the physical body—and, as such, it serves the body well. However, reality is much more than what the mind and senses are able to perceive and sense. And yet, we take ourselves as the mind and the ego, and our world as what our senses tell us about it.

Nevertheless, our senses do bring hints of something else. Many are able to feel the energy of the Self. As we evolve, we develop the ability to sense more of reality. We become more sensitive psychically and more capable of sensing outside our usual senses. For those whose senses extend to the more subtle aspects of life, the Self is very real indeed, more real than thoughts and things.

However, to the ego, beliefs, opinions, judgments, hopes, fantasies, fears, the past, the future, and almost any *thing* is more interesting than no-thing. The ego is likely to be more interested in, for instance, the style of a piece of furniture than how life is unfolding in this moment. It doesn't recognize that something is happening in all of this no-thing-ness that has little to do with it—which is why it isn't interested. The ego is only interested in things that pertain to its story and its survival. It won't even be interested in something like furniture if furniture doesn't have some relationship to its identity, story, desires, or survival. The ego is not interested in everything, only in what will enhance it in some way.

As a result, the ego turns its attention towards what it feels may help it survive or be happier. It's a good thing it is interested in happiness because that desire for happiness is what ultimately causes the ego to be open to looking in directions it wouldn't ordinarily look, such as spiritual practices.

## KNOWING IN THE NOW

*Exercise: Discovering What Is Here*

*Do this whenever you want to get in touch with what is true:*

*Just sit still a moment and experience what is here, now. What do you experience? a thought? a sensation? an image? a feeling? a desire? tension? relaxation? contraction? expansion? awareness? presence? silence? acceptance? beauty? love? joy? All of this and more can be happening in the now. It turns out that the now is packed! If we don't follow our thoughts, feelings, or desires, but just stay present to them arising and falling away, we will be able to experience everything else that is happening in the now.*

All of this experience packed into the now is life living itself. Life is perfectly capable of carrying on—and it does—without so much thinking going on. Of course, some thinking is necessary to function and some is just fun, but most is extraneous and causes suffering. When we live in the now, life is simpler. The egoic mind complicates life by creating problems that don't exist and then trying to figure out how to solve them. It offers everything it has learned from experience or read or heard from others that might be relevant. It is like a computer with lots of information, most of which isn't applicable to *this* moment.

When we are very present to each moment, what is needed is apparent. All this information offered by the egoic mind isn't necessary because the present moment already contains what we need to know—for now. This knowing keeps changing because the now keeps changing, so how could the egoic mind possibly keep up with this? The egoic mind's knowing is stagnant and hit or miss at best, although sometimes the ego's knowing does coincide with this moment-to-moment knowing. When that happens, the egoic mind is reinforced.

We don't seem to trust that life is fine without the egoic mind's intervention. We really believe that the egoic mind has something valuable to contribute, because it convinces us that it does. But it doesn't. Outside of using the mind for functional purposes or for some fun, such as crossword puzzles and other mental games, the mind can be set aside. This is what occurs once the Self begins to live more fully through us: The mind is taken up when needed and set aside when not. This new

relationship to the mind doesn't happen overnight, however. We usually need repeated experiences of life happening just fine without listening to the egoic mind before we begin to trust this way of being.

More often than not, the egoic mind has failed us. But instead of giving up on it, we tend to keep going to it for answers. But they aren't there! The egoic mind has never had the answers we are really looking for. It only has answers to the most basic, practical questions. We are so sure that we can come up with the answer to anything if we think about it long enough, but the egoic mind isn't equipped to tell us how to live life. The only good answers for that come from the knowing that arises in the moment.

Think of all the times you have struggled to figure out what to do about something. This can go on for days, even weeks or months, before you finally realize what to do. Where did that realization come from? Did it come from all the thinking you did? Usually it appears out of nowhere, when we aren't even thinking about the issue. The experience of knowing in the now is instantaneous, sudden, sometimes surprising, and unaccompanied by thought. Inspiration, creativity, inventiveness, understanding, insight, and new ideas pop into awareness out of nowhere. That is the Self at work.

This experience is very different from thinking. Thinking is an experience of being absorbed in an imaginary reality: We picture what will happen if we do this or that. We might have an inner dialogue or conversation with ourselves about it. Perhaps we make a mental list of possibilities. All these activities are taking place in our mind.

Knowing in the now, on the other hand, happens when we are *not* thinking. That is the difference. The other kind of knowing is more like trying to know by thinking about something. These two kinds of knowing feel very different energetically and experientially. Once we are aware of the difference, they are not difficult to distinguish.

## ACTING IN THE NOW

Knowing is not the only thing that comes out of the now; so do many of our actions. Some actions come from the now, and some are a response to the ego's thoughts and feelings. Both types of actions are going on simultaneously in most people's



experience.

The ego is very focused on doing: “What should I do? What will I do? How will I do it? When will I do it? What will happen when I do that?” The ego takes on the task of planning the doing, motivating the doing, and evaluating the doing. It also wonders about the doing, imagines and fantasizes about the doing, worries about the doing, changes its mind about the doing, talks about the doing, and gets confused about the doing. The only thing the ego doesn’t actually do is the doing, because the ego doesn’t exist. It doesn’t have a body to perform the doing. It tries to motivate the body, but the body is not the ego. The ego uses the mind, but the mind is not the ego.

The ego is simply thoughts arising out of nowhere, with no one attached to them. There is no person thinking those thoughts, only a body-mind having those thoughts and the semblance of a person. The person, however, is really only thoughts about a person. There is no actual person that is the ego. The ego is a sham. It’s imaginary. It’s no more substantial than a thought.

When we are identified with the ego, we are very busy planning and thinking about doing, and we are very busy doing what the ego suggests we do. All this doing causes our life to happen and to be experienced in a certain way. It shapes and creates a sense of self, and it constructs a life. The life the ego creates is based on its desires, its tendencies, and other conditioning, or programming. The person that you think you are and the life that this person creates come out of conditioned, or programmed, thoughts. But that’s not the whole story, thankfully.

Because the ego doesn’t actually exist, there must be something else here that does—and there is, of course. What actually exists is the real you—the Self—and it is the consciousness that apparently (although not exclusively) inhabits your particular body-mind. This consciousness motivates and guides you, and it uses the body to speak and act. It operates alongside of the ego. It allows the ego to move you, while it also moves and guides you in its own way. While the ego primarily uses thoughts (the egoic mind) to move us, this consciousness uses intuition, inspiration, inner drives, and urges to move us.

When we are responding to the Self, it doesn’t feel like the doing of the ego. It’s fluid, natural, spontaneous, and without resistance or thought. We just act or speak spontaneously, and it feels right and natural to do so. This action in the midst of a

lack of effort and resistance is what spiritual teachers refer to as the experience of there being “no doer.”

When our doing is full of striving, trying, worrying, stress, and confusion, those actions are coming from the ego; when our doing is spontaneous and natural, those actions are coming from our true nature, the Self, and the experience feels like we aren’t doing anything. It feels like going with the flow. It feels like something else is carrying us along (and it is), and we are just flowing with that without resistance. Rather than the egoic mind pushing us, we are being carried along, without any desire for things to be otherwise, without questioning the experience, without confusion—without thought. The experience feels right, so there is no need to *do* anything but go along with it.

The ego uses desire and fear to motivate us, which is stressful: “Will I get my desires met, or will what I’m afraid of happen?” However, with the Self, there is a deeper Will at work, one that is also shaping all of life. When we are aligned with this Will, we are aligned with all of life and in the flow. We are carried along. Our only job is to pay attention to where the flow is going, to notice it and adjust our course accordingly. We feel the rightness of our course with our Heart, and the mind is only used in practical ways—to read, calculate, learn, analyze, and so on. Doing arises naturally out of the flow as needed, and because these actions are part of the flow, these actions don’t feel anything like the doing of the ego. The experience is one of there being “no doer,” yet doing is happening.

Everyone experiences this flow of action on a daily basis, at least briefly. We all move back and forth between effortful, ego-driven doing and effortless, Self-driven activity. And everyone is evolving toward living more in the flow. The more aware you are of the difference between these two types of doing, the easier it will be to move into the flow and stay there.

After awakening, most of our actions flow spontaneously from the present moment, although we may still find ourselves acting on our thoughts, desires, and feelings some of the time. This is not a problem for the Self. It works with and adapts its plan to whatever we create on the egoic level. Besides, some of the thoughts, desires, and feelings we respond to come from the Self. These are some of the ways it motivates us to unfold its plan.

The Self has a number of motives for spurring us to action besides the intention

to unfold its plan. For one, it enjoys playing in the material world. That is, after all, one reason for taking on a physical body. For the Self, life isn't only about learning and growth, but also about pleasure, fun, adventure, and discovery. Activities that provide these experiences nourish and expand the Self and us. The Self motivates us toward them by creating a desire for them when appropriate. After awakening, we enjoy life not only because we can handle challenges without suffering, but also because we allow ourselves to play.

When we are identified with the ego, play is often about escaping pain. It is often an attempt to feel good, or at least to stop feeling bad. After awakening, play—recreation—is more about contacting the joy of being alive. This is the joy the Self takes in creation. Yes, the Self enjoys difficult situations for what can be learned from them, but it also savors the joys and pleasures of being in a body. It enjoys beauty, sensuality, eating, movement, singing, dancing, creating—and even thinking. The Self derives great pleasure from these activities, and it instills a drive for them in us when appropriate.

The Self also motivates us to take action on behalf of others. It frequently helps itself, in the form of others, when the need arises by inspiring us to help. This drive doesn't come from the idea that we *should* help; rather, it arises spontaneously from the now. We do something just because we can and because there's a need, without any thought of reward or of what's in it for *me*. This type of action is unencumbered by thoughts, feelings, and attachment. Our actions feel easy, natural, right, and joyful. This joy and ease is a sign that our actions are aligned with the Self.

There's no shortage of drives and action coming out of the now. The Self has lots to do in the world, which becomes very apparent when we stop filling up our lives with ego-driven activity. Activities that come out of the egoic state of consciousness are not nearly as fulfilling as those that come from the Self. The egoic state of consciousness has its place in life, but life doesn't start to become truly fulfilling and happy until we begin to live in the now, where the Self's drives and joy for life can be experienced.

## DOORWAYS INTO THE NOW

By now, you might be wondering how to get to the now from the egoic state of consciousness. It's a very short trip: Just stop. Stop and notice what is here, right now, in this moment. Noticing is the primary doorway into the now. The others are variations on noticing that involve the body and senses: noticing beauty, noticing sounds and the absence of sound, noticing the breath, and noticing the body's sensations and energy. The body and senses play a key role in bringing us into the now because full engagement with our senses precludes thinking. We can't think and be fully involved in our senses at the same time.

## NOTICING

If you notice, you will see that happiness is already here. Still, no matter how good life may be, the ego says no to it: "It would be better if..." "I will be happy when..." As long as we don't follow these thoughts, we will be happy. But usually we give our attention to the ego's rejection of what *is* instead of to what *is*. We give this "no" the power to steer our actions: We jump from one idea to the next, trying to make life and ourselves better.

We will never arrive at happiness by listening to the "no." Happiness just is. It is inherent in the moment—in the now—in the form of joy, acceptance, and love. It can't *not* be. We only have to notice what already *is*. That's the only reality there is, so why waste your attention on what is not?

We think that someday there will be no more "no"—no more ego arguing against reality—and then we will finally be happy. But that day will never come. If you wait for the "no" to disappear, you will be waiting a very long time.

We don't have to get rid of the "no" to be happy; we just have to see it for what it is—the programmed discontent of the ego—and ignore it. The ego will never be happy, but we can be happy if we don't give our attention to what the egoic mind says we need to be happy. The ego doesn't know about happiness. What can it know about happiness? Its job is to manufacture unhappiness, and it's very skillful at convincing us otherwise.

Once we see this, the egoic mind has no power to draw us away from the now.

The only power it has is the power we give it by believing what it tells us. Now that you see this, there's no excuse for giving your attention to your thoughts. Pay attention to *this* moment. Notice. That's all it takes. The price of admission into the now is attention.

This is an easy price to pay because we are always paying attention to something. Attention is one thing that is constant; it's always happening. Attention is like the eyes of the Self. Where you are placing your attention is where the Self is focusing part of the Awareness that it is. The Self could be described as an awaring presence. It is sometimes simply called Awareness or Presence.

Your attention, which is part of Awareness, is directed either by the Self or by the ego. In any moment, the Self may be directing our attention or the ego may be. The Self allows attention to be hijacked by the ego because that experience is part of the Self experiencing this world. Even when attention is being focused by the ego, the Self remains aware of that. Awareness is never lost, but the ego is not aware of Awareness. After awakening, our attention may be briefly captured by the ego, but awareness of the Truth remains.

What we put our attention on is what we identify with. Attention directs identification. When we put our attention on thoughts, we become identified with them. And when we notice what else is here, now, in addition to thoughts, identification shifts from the ego to the Self. Here is an exercise that will help you be in the now, where it is possible to experience the Self:

*Exercise: Noticing*

*Try applying this to every moment!*

*Turn your attention to this moment and notice what's happening right now. Is the ego saying no to that? That could be one of the things that is happening in this moment. What else is happening right now? what sensory experiences? what thoughts? what judgments? what feelings? what insights? what desires? what urges? What is coming out of this moment right now? Something is always arising from the moment, and something is always being taken in by you. What is happening right now? Notice how the egoic mind tries to co-opt the moment, and then bring your awareness back to your sensory experience and everything else that is coming out of the now.*

## BEAUTY

Beauty is the visual doorway into the now, where we find the Self. We can enter the now through the sense of sight, and the easiest way of doing this is by becoming absorbed in something beautiful. It is possible, however, to enter the now by looking—really looking—at anything. Everything is part of the Self, and becoming fully engaged with anything brings us to the Self. Beauty may be the easiest visual doorway because we are generally more willing to become fully engaged with something beautiful than with something that isn't. We say yes to beauty, and that yes takes us into the now. However, anything we see that we don't reject can bring us into the now.

Looking at something beautiful opens the Heart. By this I mean that beauty can cause an expansion of our energy field that is felt as an opening in the area of the chest. This energetic reaction is a sign that we are in the now and aligned with the Self. This Heart is like the heart of the Self. It is where the Self connects with the human and how it communicates with the human part of itself. More will be said about this in the following chapters.

Beauty connects us instantly with joy. Think of some of your happiest moments. The beauty of nature was probably part of many of these happiest moments. Spending time in a beautiful, natural setting is one of the easiest ways to get in touch with the Real, with the Self. Natural beauty brings us into the moment because it captures our attention so completely. The egoic mind has difficulty competing with it. Setting the egoic mind aside is much easier in a natural setting because a merging of energy fields happens that stops the mind. The life force in nature is so strong that it pulls us into it and right into the Self.

Many artists are drawn to creating beauty because of its power to bring us into the now. A painting of nature can have the same effect as nature itself. However, art doesn't have to represent nature to evoke the Self; any expression of beauty can. Color, in particular, often has a powerful effect on us. The right combination or balance of colors can strike a chord within us that brings us Home.

Very detailed artwork has a special ability to bring us into the now because the mind says yes to the detail. It loves getting lost in detailed designs and patterns, which

act like meditational focus points. When the mind attends to color, detail, or pattern, it becomes still, and we drop into the now, our natural state.

*Exercise: Getting Back to the Now by Seeing*

*This is especially easy to do in nature.*

*Choose something beautiful to look at. Give it your full attention. If evaluations, labels, or other thoughts come up about what you're looking at or about anything else, bring your attention back to just seeing. Receive the visual impression and experience its impact on your being. How does the experience of seeing without thinking feel energetically? This peace is who you are!*

*Alternately, move your gaze from object to object, without letting it rest on any one object. This is an especially good practice for when you are walking in nature. Keep your eyes moving around the environment. If thoughts arise about what you are seeing or about anything else, notice them, and then go back to seeing and to experiencing the impact seeing has on you energetically.*

## ABOUT the AUTHOR

**Gina Lake** is the author of numerous books about awakening to one's true nature, including *From Stress to Stillness*, *Trusting Life*, *Embracing the Now*, *Radical Happiness*, *Living in the Now*, *Choosing Love*, *Return to Essence*, *Getting Free*, *Anatomy of Desire*, *Ten Teachings for One World*, *A Heroic Life*, and *The Jesus Trilogy*. She is also a gifted intuitive with a master's degree in counseling psychology and over twenty years' experience supporting people in their spiritual growth. Her website offers information about her books and courses, free ebooks, book excerpts, a monthly newsletter, a blog, and audio and video recordings:

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