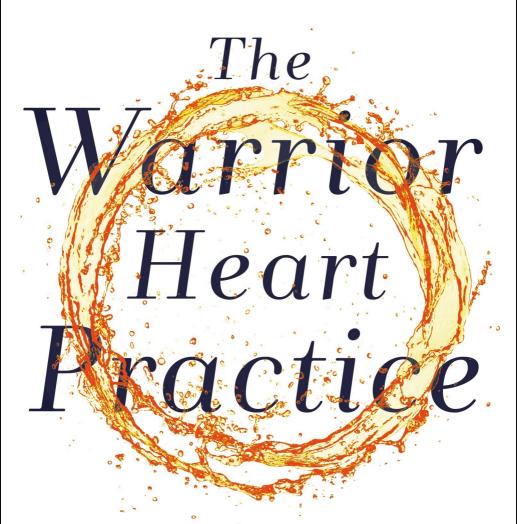
A Simple Process to Transform Confusion into Clarity and Pain into Peace



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The Warrior Heart Practice

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HeatherAsh Amara



Preface

This book emerged from the seeds of need, frustration, and love.

One day, as I was having lunch with one of my best friends, he began sharing his story of pain, self-doubt, and fear, which he repeatedly shared with anyone who was willing to listen. The repetitive voices inside his head were harsh, and he couldn't get away from them. The cycle was deeply entrenched, and I found myself moving toward that edge where I would no longer be able to hold space for him.

As he told me about the experience he couldn't let go of, I reflected his perspective of it back to him in an effort to show him how skewed his version of the story was. I would listen and say, "Fred, that's actually not a true story, because I was there. This is what *actually* happened." And he'd say, "You're right! That is what happened! Okay!" And then he'd get totally solid again. He'd have an aha moment that allowed him to see more clearly, feel better, and leave his story behind, which then enabled him to go about his day.

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A few days later, he would come to me with the exact same story, spoken with the same amount of angst and self-punishment, as if he had never shared it with anyone before.

We've all had stories like this that snag the fabric of our being, where an experience gets caught, but rather than reflect and challenge the story, we keep going back again and again to pick at the loose stitch. Whether the experience happened in child-hood or yesterday, our stories can unravel our self-esteem, drain our energy, and keep us struggling in emotional quicksand.

As I looked at my friend, I could see the pain in his face, his closure, and his self-hatred. Despite repeated attempts to pull him out from under the drowning heaviness of his story, nothing was working. So I offered up a prayer: "Please let me help my friend see and hold the truth."

As I opened my heart to his suffering, I felt an entire process of getting to the truth drop into my being, and right then and there, a practice that I call the *Warrior Heart* was born.

Since that day, I've been teaching, practicing, and sharpening the tools of the Warrior Heart practice. It is a straightforward and well-tested system that will help you untangle your emotions from your stories and your stories from the truth, then connect the truth with your intent. This systematic exploration toward truth is an inquiry practice using Toltec wisdom as the framework and your emotional body as a starting point.

In *The Warrior Heart Practice*, you will learn how to move through a simple process that transforms confusion into clarity and pain into peace.

Feeling, Story, Truth, Intent: These are the four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice, which change the way you operate in the world by helping you to rearrange the pieces of Preface xiii

your personal puzzles into an integrated new whole—mentally, emotionally, and physically.

I wrote this book because I am passionate about helping humans get free from the inside out. I've watched myself and so many of my friends, peers, and students struggle with self-worth, fear of rejection, self-doubt, shame, and blame. For way too many of us, our precious attention and energy are consumed every day just by trying to manage our judgmental mind and our emotional reactions.

We are amazing, creative, powerful creatures, and instead of waking up each day saying, "What beauty and connection will I craft today?" we wake up basically saying, "How can I feel good enough about myself today?" or "How can I avoid my own self-judgment and fears?" The vitality that could be going toward solving world problems, bringing people together in wondrous ways, and celebrating the unbelievably great gift of life is instead drained by drama, conflict, and using the power of our words against ourselves.

The Warrior Heart practice will teach you numerous ways to ascertain the ofttimes subtle or hard-to-see differences between the truth and a story. In plain terms: Through this process, you will learn how to stop the drain and misery of suffering and self-limitation and start creatively living your best life. You'll also learn the importance and skill of how to harness your individual intent and allow the power of Intent, or Life, to move through you.

The first two chapters are the "map" section of the book: a big-picture overview of where we are and where we are going. Remember in the olden days, before GPS and cell phones, when we had these huge things called *paper maps*? If you were lost, the

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first thing you would do was unfold your map and figure out where you were. Then you would look to find where you were going. Just as if we are on a journey together, in *The Warrior Heart Practice* we will start by mapping out where we are as humans and where we are going.

The remaining chapters are the "method," the nuts and bolts of how we travel the road from where we are to where we are going. With deep compassion for the often-bumpy road of human experience, I'll guide you through a specific practice for releasing denial, shame, and resistance while also helping you align with your innate kick-ass authenticity. You'll learn how to follow or deepen your relationship with the wise guidance within; shed fear, anxiety, and self-loathing; and come back in touch with your potent mental, emotional, and physical wisdom.

As you move through the four chambers in *The Warrior Heart Practice*, you will rekindle the power of deep intimacy with self; release self-judgment, guilt, and shame; and claim the path of being an aware, transformative Warrior of the Heart. Chapters range from serious to playful, with a fearless approach toward difficult subjects you may be facing, such as loss, difficult relationships, or addiction.

Your Inner Beacon of Light

No matter how much you have suffered or how much you suffer now, whether you feel slightly dissatisfied or completely lost and confused, there is a light illuminating your way if you only look for it with new eyes. The purpose of this book is to remind you that a beacon of light constantly shines within you like a lighthouse on the coast, guiding you away from the familiar Preface xv

but rocky shores of struggle, stress, and suffering, and showing you the way toward the true harbor of your innate integrity and peace.

The current waters in which we live are turbulent, unpredictable, and filled with fears of not being or doing "enough." If you suffer from a troubling lack of confidence and a bounty of self-judgment despite your successes, if you feel unfulfilled in your relationships or work, or if you have a nagging sense that there is something vital missing within, then you are living within the shallow waters of who you think you are supposed to be rather than from the nourishing depth of who you truly are.

While the pure light of your being is always shining, it can and does get buried beneath years of trying to please other people, an accumulation of hurts, and life's daily demands. Silence underlies all sound, whether it is a whisper or a pounding wave. In the middle of a raging storm, the underlying stillness is overwhelmed, but it is still there, ready to be accessed at any time. Beneath the choppy waves of your mind and the crashing loudness of fearful emotions lie the silent depths of your authentic expression.

The Warrior Heart Practice shares a pathway to support you in moving beneath your mental and emotional noise so that you can immerse yourself in the inspiration and stillness within you. This book will show you how to move beyond the struggles of everyday life where we often seek outside approval, and how to be less serious and more ecstatic on your healing, work, or spiritual path. It offers tools for finding ease and flow rather than struggle in your relationships and how to be more grounded, present, and playful.

The question is not "Is it really possible to live from my authenticity and heart?" but rather "How do I free myself from

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the mental prison of judgment, comparison, self-criticism, and worry to create a life built on true acceptance, unshakable inner joy, and bountiful trust? How do I find and sustain connection to the profound creative brilliance and capacity that lie within the core of my being?"

The truth is you are a magnificent, nuclear bomb force of love and potential. And if you've had enough of playing small and judging yourself into scattered, itty-bitty pieces of who you really are, this book will awaken the warrior within that you need to claim who you are really meant to be.

This book is a bridge and the cleansing waters flowing beneath it simultaneously. The Warrior Heart's big-picture view will help you accept and integrate all the parts of you so that you are once again connected to your creative, inspired inner wisdom. The specific method of the Warrior Heart practice is like a power washer that will wash away the debris that has accumulated and clouded your authentic knowing.

Within these pages, you will learn how to celebrate both your divine nature and your quirky personality, while balancing practical action with spiritual inspiration.

I'm excited to be on this journey with you.

To get the most out of this book, I recommend that you read each of the chapters, getting an overview of the teachings and the different chambers. Skip over the exercises and questions for later. Then come back and review each chapter, adding in the exercises and questions. You don't have to do every exercise; you may start out by doing one per chapter or picking the exercises or questions that most speak to you.

If you are ready to jump in and want to go deep quickly, make sure you have a journal specifically for the Warrior Heart practice. Read chapter I, answer the questions at the end of the Preface xvii

chapter, and then print out several of the Warrior Heart practice sheets at the end of chapter 2 that you can use for specific issues as they arise. At the end of each chapter, review and answer the questions, and do each of the exercises.

The Warrior Heart practice is a simple sequential process; through the coming chapters, I will take you step-by-step through how to find your truth and view your story in a totally different way. While there is no right way to use the book, I do recommend that you get to know each of the different chambers and do them in order as you learn the practice. Then as you get more adept, you can begin to improvise and use the chambers in a way that best serves where you are.

Before we get into the map and method of the practice, let me introduce myself, and how the Warrior Heart teachings came to be.

Introduction

In 1973, my parents brought my sister and me to India. We went as tourists with the intent of touching the luminous beauty of the Taj Mahal and to be touched by the immense contrasts of poverty, chaos, devotion, and peace that pervade India. I was seven years old.

Earlier that year, I had decided to write a book, but when I sat down to start my bestseller, a sudden insight gave me pause. Sitting there at my wooden desk with my pad of lavender paper and my favorite black felt-tip pen in hand, I realized I was missing one crucial ingredient to be an author:

Experience.

So I put away my paper and pen and went outside to play. I trusted implicitly that what I needed to write for my book would come. Many experiences, which I would eventually write about, began a few months later with a life-altering, four-second event.

The catalyst for this awakening came wrapped in the package of an Indian child who was about my age. I saw her as I was walking down a dusty New Delhi street while I was holding my

dad's hand. I remember the heavy, sticky heat, looking down, and worrying that my white sandals were going to get dirty. When I looked back up, I suddenly locked eyes with this young Indian girl walking toward me.

She was barefoot, draped in a soiled fragment of a dress that wrapped around an all-elbows-and-knees frame. I almost looked away, embarrassed by my clean dress, shiny shoes, and full belly. But as we came closer, our gaze became even more connected. Everything around me stopped. The noise of the traffic dissolved. The fear I hadn't realized I was holding simply evaporated. As I looked deeply into her brown eyes, a warm sun radiated out from her heart. Every cell in my being smiled in utter happiness, and as this occurred, she reflected the same utter happiness and recognition in her smile back to me.

I felt as if I had reunited with my best friend after many long years of separation. This feeling did not dissolve after she had passed; it only grew stronger. I was ecstatic. I felt like I'd been dipped in liquid beauty. Everything around me became a sweet song that I suddenly remembered how to sing.

What I learned in that seconds-long merging, which I've forgotten and re-remembered many times since that day, is that within each of us resides a clear pool of peace and an unbreakable core connection, regardless of our circumstances. The state I felt in those four seconds was the awakening of my authentic Warrior Heart.

Authenticity is the state of being undivided, in integrity, and clear. When we are in wholeness, we are rooted in our truest nature, and we live our lives from a conscious and clear place of faith in ourselves and the wisdom of our Warrior Heart. We learn to navigate our challenges with more and more grace, faith, and presence.

Like my experience with the girl in India, all of us have those precious moments or days of connection and openhearted abiding love for life. We touch this state when we fall in love, hold a baby, or achieve a longtime goal. But when our happiness or self-worth is tied to a moment, person, or place rather than anchored in our being as our authentic Warrior Heart expression, it is frustratingly fleeting and transitory. It takes tools and practice to stabilize this state of inner joy that is independent from our external experience. Here is how I discovered the raw materials and my own inner fire to forge a new, healthy, stable, and fiercely engaged relationship between myself and life.

The Toltec Tradition

From the moment I put my childhood pen down to go out and play and gain more experience, I've been blessed with an abundance of adventures. I've traveled around the world many times over, studied with different spiritual teachers and healers, and eagerly searched for and welcomed connection and meaning.

In the early I990s, I dreamed that I would soon meet a person who would change the course of my life. A few weeks later, a friend excitedly told me about a teacher from the Toltec tradition who was visiting our area. I had no idea what a *Toltec* was, but when I heard don Miguel's name, it struck a familiar chord deep within my body that rang like a bell struck at dawn. I felt a full-body knowing and that same liquid beauty that I had felt as a child. This knowing vibrated through me when I met the Toltec community and especially when I first heard don Miguel speak. I knew I had come home.

The word Toltec means "artist of the spirit," and the Toltec

path is one of personal freedom—the freedom to choose how we want to create our inner and outer world through our perceptions and intent. Many people in the 1970s and 1980s were first introduced to Toltec philosophy through the writings of Carlos Castaneda as he shared his experiences with Yaqui Indian don Juan Matus. In the late 1990s, don Miguel Ruiz's first book, *The Four Agreements*, opened a new and understandable pathway to access this ancient tradition. While Castaneda's writings were like a lightning bolt that illuminated a radical new way of being, Ruiz's book was a trusty flashlight that shined a clear path to releasing personal suffering and reclaiming our natural state: happiness.

"The real mission you have in life," don Miguel writes, "is to make yourself happy, and in order to be happy you have to look at what you believe, the way you judge yourself, and the way you victimize yourself." Prior to immersing myself in the Toltec teachings, I would have said I was happy. I had work I enjoyed, a partner whom I loved, and a great community surrounding me. On the surface, I was happy. But deep inside, I struggled with feeling flawed, with the constant fear of not being good enough, and with deep-seated self-criticism. When I embraced the Toltec teachings and dove deeply into exploring myself, I discovered an eternal connected wisdom flowing within and around me.

For six years, I participated in an intense apprenticeship with don Miguel and traveled the world with him. While on these journeys, I was doing the work of untangling my old belief system, which was built on judgment and victimization. I was learning to re-create myself from the inside out. I learned to see myself not as someone who was broken and needed to be fixed but as a powerful woman with the capacity to reclaim my energy from old patterns and habits. I traded in trying to be

perfect for playfully embracing all of me. I swapped out taking things personally and caretaking for gratitude in knowing that it is everyone's right to dream the dream they wanted. With this awareness, I gave away needing to be right or fix others and chose to discover my own inner gifts and resources.

At the heart of the Toltec path to presence and authenticity is recognizing that we are all dreamers creating reality through our thoughts and actions. In each moment, we have the choice to wake up, reconnect to our inner light, and stop believing the stories and lies our mind tells us.

As artists of spirit, Toltecs consciously re-create the dream of their life into one of beauty. "If you can see yourself as an artist, and you can see that your life is your own creation, then why not create the most beautiful story possible for yourself?" (don Miguel, *The Four Agreements*) He goes on to say, "Find yourself and express yourself in your own particular way. Express your love openly. Life is nothing but a dream, and if you create your life with love, your dream becomes a masterpiece of art."

While I still felt like a novice at creating my life as a masterpiece of art, I was soon given a much bigger canvas to paint my dreams on.

Becoming My Own Artist

In 1999, don Miguel gave me a huge boost on my path to becoming my own artist, one of those gifts that at the time felt more like a punishment than a treat.

In the inner sanctum of a cool, dark-gray stone temple in Egypt, surrounded by his top teachers, don Miguel announced that he was disbanding our circle. "Go make the teachings your own," he told us. "I am no longer your teacher." I was in a state of shock. I stayed in the temple with my friend Gini long after everyone else had left. I was now a freed bird not yet trusting my ability to fly or knowing what direction I needed to go. In the following fifteen years, I started teaching full-time, opened up Toltec centers in Berkeley and then Austin, and digested everything I had learned from don Miguel to incorporate with my other, now plentiful, life experiences.

While the writings in *The Warrior Heart Practice* are founded in the Eagle Knight lineage of don Miguel Ruiz, I've also gathered and integrated wisdom from every Toltec book in print, along with my own inner unfolding. The resources for this book span from the teachings of Toltec grandfather don Juan via Carlos Castaneda to the writings of many apprentices of don Juan, don Miguel, and other Toltec authors.

Early in my training, don Miguel introduced what he called *the Toltec cosmology* to a group of apprentices. I recall frantically taking notes as I had wave after wave of understanding and clarity about my purpose and next steps. And so it began. The Toltec cosmology is an energetic model of the spiritual and physical experience of humans. To this day, it continues to be the most illuminating synopsis of human development I've ever come across. This model forms the eagle's-eye perspective for *The Warrior Heart Practice*.

Here's a very abbreviated look at the Toltec cosmology's bigpicture view.

From the Toltec perspective, every human contains a unique ray of light that is his or her individual manifestation of spirit in form. This eternal part of us, or what we call our *Big Soul*, remembers its connection to source and all of life. It does not see itself as different or special but as one facet of a multifaceted, divinely radiant jewel. This was the energy I tapped when

I connected with the Indian girl, which is a state of being we have access to all the time if we only turn to face and receive it.

But there is a reason it can be so difficult to remember this peaceful place within, what we call *ego-personality*, or Little Soul. This part of us believes we are separate and will actually fight to stay alone, aloof, and miserable.

In the next chapter, we will explore the importance of reconnecting your Little Soul to your Big Soul and the power of learning to connect with the vastness of your Big Soul as much as you accept and support your quirky, scared, and often stubborn ego-personality.

Remembering the Connection

We don't realize that, somewhere within us all, there does exist a supreme self who is eternally at peace.

—Elizabeth Gilbert

Remember, Forget. Remember, Forget. Remember, forget. I used to be so frustrated with myself. I would have an insight or aha moment and come back to myself and my experience and heart, then soon enough forget who I was and be once again pulled back into who I thought people wanted me to be or who I had been in the past. Aaargh!

This cycle of losing myself and finding myself felt like a kind of slow torture. Plus, it was exhausting. One moment, I would feel centered and happily aligned with my life, and the next moment, something would happen—an old memory, a run-in with a boss or friend, a bounced check or late report—and my self-esteem and happiness would be splattered on the ground like broken eggs dropped from a roof.

I could see that my core beliefs of wanting others to like me, my desire to control people and things, and my seeking of attention and approval from the outside kept derailing my life. But I felt helpless to change it. I didn't understand the mechanics of how I could have glimpses of joyful wholeness and then so thoroughly forget and plunge into struggle, shame, or fear.

Oftentimes, we lose our way and no longer recognize the ever-present bond that lovingly connects the parts of who we are. As I discovered through years of remembering and forgetting and then finally embodying a new way, there is a powerful Warrior Heart inside all of us where our spirit (or Big Soul) and our mental, emotional, and physical being are connected and on our team, rather than feeling like bickering enemies.

In this chapter, we'll look at what has happened that made us forget this inner connection and why it is so important to reconnect our ego-personality to our Big Soul. Afterward, we'll take a look at a new way of viewing your whole self—one that will create space for change to happen more rapidly.

Let's take a look at the difference between living from the radiance of your true nature and living from the exhaustion of drama, self-judgment, and fear. Once you have the big-picture overview of where you are right now, as well as where you are headed, the four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice will be your guide to staying on the path.

Big Soul and Little Soul

As a human, you are the perfect blend of ethereal and physical: half spirit and half animal. Your spiritual Big Soul always remembers its vastness and creative nature, while your animal self focuses on survival, safety, and (hopefully) the pleasures of the physical body. Your physical form is a brilliant anchor that allows your spirit to explore, experience, and enjoy this earthly

plane. This creative union of you as spirit and matter is precious and unique—and can be seriously fun!

Or it can be a nightmare of painful experiences and broken dreams.

When you were very young, you naturally lived from your Big Soul merged with your physical form and experienced everything in life as a force of which you were an integral part. You engaged fully in the delight of all your senses. Your spiritual Big Soul and your physical being were like two best friends, hand in hand, playfully exploring a vast and exciting new world.

The Toltec view describes the split that often happens between these two allies as we grow. For some of us, this split happens very early on, even when we are babies or before we have language. For others, the split happens later, often when we learn language and begin creating separation from the world around us. This cosmological model—which I have spent many years studying, exploring, and teaching—is like a global satellite map of the human experience. Below is a simplified version of this model, which is designed to help guide you back into your Warrior Heart by illustrating the importance of reuniting your Big Soul and your ego-personality (Little Soul) as longlost friends rather than as the strangers (or even enemies) they have become.

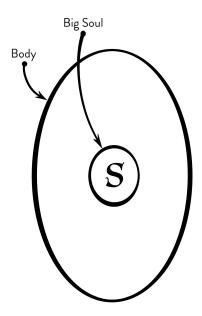
Your relationship to your Little Soul, and whether it is connected or disconnected from your Big Soul, is the crucial factor for whether your life is filled with struggle and separation or with joyful ease and a sense of wholeness. When your Little Soul and your Big Soul are allied, you flourish in the delight of your own integrity, your own wholeness.

Do you remember what it was like to live joyfully, filled with child-awe and dedicated to playful exploration—or have

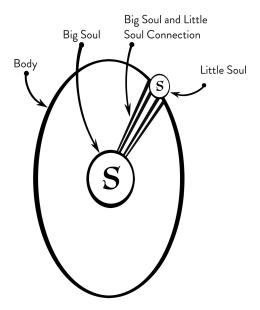
you watched young kids do so? You can have that same love of life, resiliency, and enthusiasm as an adult too. It's just a matter of learning how to reconnect. Let's take a look at how the split occurs between Big Soul and your Little Soul so that the path back to your natural state is clear.

The diagrams in the following pages are simplified snapshots of the Toltec cosmology. As you look at them, feel within you what they represent and how they relate to your own experience of remembering and forgetting.

At the center is your Big Soul, bright like the sun and radiating out rays of "Yes! We are one boundless being of energy and spirit! How shall we explore in this wonderful physical/mental/emotional package?!" The physical/mental/emotional being is represented in this drawing by a circle that surrounds the central point of your Big Soul.



Your Little Soul is represented by a dot on the edge of the circle of your physical/mental/emotional being. When you are a child, the rays of your Big Soul fill this circle, infusing your physical, mental, and emotional being and your egopersonality—or sense of *I*—with joyful curiosity. Again, your Little Soul is important: This is your separate sense of self and your quirky, unique personality.



But when our Little Soul loses its way and grasps onto fearful thoughts (such as *I'm not good enough, I need to be perfect,* or *Bad things are going to happen to me or to the ones I love*), it becomes more and more difficult to hear the loving voice of our Big Soul. For most adults, the circle of our physical/mental/emotional self has become filled with fears and judgments that obscure the light of our inner sun.

The once-seamless connection between our spiritual nature

and our physical form is torn. Instead of making choices from the wisdom of our bountiful Big Soul allied with our egopersonality, we begin to identify more and more with the Little Soul thoughts of who we "should" be rather than the Big Soul— Little Soul union of who we truly are.

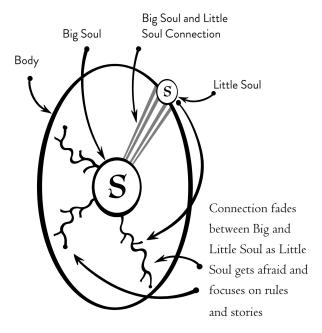
In his book *A New Earth*, Eckhart Tolle describes our ego as an "illusory sense of self" based on unconscious identification with our memories and thoughts. This identification creates what Tolle calls our *pain-body*, an accumulation of old emotional pain. In *The Four Agreements*, don Miguel calls the Little Soul a *parasite*, because for most adults, our ego-personality has split from our Big Soul and now feeds on the energy of fear. Tolle and don Miguel are using different words, but they are describing the same concept: the separation of our Little Soul from our Big Soul.

I see the Little Soul as a small child. When a child is intimately connected to a loving, wise, nurturing caretaker (Big Soul), it is fun to go out and explore the world and then come back and share what it has learned. If a child discovers something scary or confusing during her explorations and then comes back to check in with her older and wiser best friend, Big Soul reminds her of the big picture by showing her that she is part of something vast and wonderful. Once reassured, the child smiles and goes off to play again, realizing that she is engaging in a fabulous dream that she is cocreating. The child thus gains experiences and matures from a base of unconditional love and security. This is, of course, the ideal situation, but many of us do not even know that this is possible.

Now imagine what would happen if that child went out to play and lost her way back to Big Soul, her best friend and wise guide. Can you imagine yourself as a little kid lost in a busy outdoor marketplace? How would you feel? What would you do? Take a moment to imagine that sense of being lost and of believing that you have to figure out how to stay safe in a seemingly unfriendly, unfamiliar world.

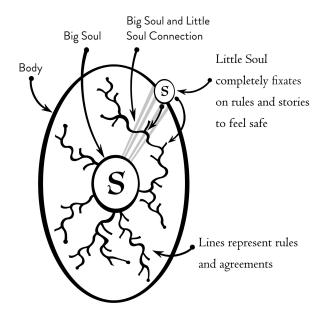
It is in this moment of losing our connection to our Big Soul that the fear-based *I* of our Little Soul is born. *I am separate, I am alone, I don't know where I am, I don't know how to be.* Later in this chapter, we'll explore *why* and *how* our Little Soul loses its connection to Big Soul. For now, let's just explore the result of that break.

As your lost and disconnected Little Soul starts looking for its true source of comfort, Big Soul, it comes across other sources that inadequately mimic how it feels to be in Big Soul's presence. What it finds instead is a bewildering number of rules about how it is supposed to behave and who it is supposed to be to receive that comfort.



Without your Big Soul's big-picture guidance, your Little Soul starts soaking up new concepts and beliefs that are not highest truth but only appear to be truth. Little Soul is then introduced to the concept of punishment and reward and begins to fear the pain of love being withheld. As a result, Little Soul concludes that it is not enough and believes that the only safety is in fitting in, or that the only safety is to rebel and not fit in. In either case, your Little Soul grasps for an identity to give it a sense of stability in a very confusing world.

Your Little Soul spends years carefully constructing who it believes it is supposed to be to be loved and accepted. Each time it believes a thought about how it is supposed to be, such as I should be happy all the time, or If I'm happy, people will be jealous of me, or If I were good enough, I'd make lots of money, or My friends won't approve of me if I let them know I love baseball, your Little Soul erects



tiny walls that further separate it from its connection to its own Big Soul truth.

Remember, Big Soul hasn't gone anywhere. Rather, your Little Soul *believes* it is lost and alone and can't find its way back to its source. There are always glimmers of Big Soul peeking through, showing the way home. But your Little Soul is so distracted by thinking about how to be that these glimpses of simply being are quickly covered over by stories.

The Little Soul's Fear

Here is a specific look at how our Little Soul loses its way, taken from my book *A Little Book on Big Freedom*:

I am three years old, playing with my rambunctious eightyear-old sister. We're laughing and gleefully running around the house, arms waving, feet barely touching the ground.

Suddenly, I hear a loud noise behind me, and I turn to see that my sister has accidentally knocked over a vase, which has shattered all over the floor. We freeze and look at each other, wondering what to do next. My sister shakes her head and says, "We'd better clean this up before Mom comes back inside." But when we go into the kitchen to get the broom, we decide to have a snack first. Before long, the two of us are laughing and playing again, forgetting all about the vase.

Meanwhile, our mom has been outside working in the garden. She is hot, tired, and still upset over an argument she had with Dad earlier in the day. She's thinking about everything she needs to get done, and trying to fortify herself to push through her current state of physical and emotional overwhelm.

Mom's not-good day is about to get worse.

As she walks into the house, she hears my sister and me laughing and running around. Then she sees her grandmother's vase—the only thing her grandmother had ever given her—shattered on the floor.

Even though she has rarely yelled or gotten upset with us, today she just loses it. She starts yelling, "Who broke my vase?! Who broke my vase?!"

My sister and I come running into the front room, both scared as she shouts at us about the vase, demanding to know who broke it.

In a panic, my sister points at me and says, "She did it!"

I look at her, and then at my mother, stuttering, "I... I didn't—"

"You! Go to your room now!" Mom yells.

Now close your eyes for a moment and imagine that you are a child and that you have just been punished for something you didn't do. How does this feel in your body? What thoughts are beginning to cycle through your mind?

You may have a strong emotional reaction, a tingling that fills you from head to toe. Physically, you may feel a churning in your stomach, a tightness in your throat, or a tearing feeling in your chest. You may be angry and feel betrayed. You may feel scared or confused.

The emotion itself is not the problem, but what we do next creates the fodder for most of our ongoing suffering as adults.

We tell ourselves a story.

As a little kid, consider some of the things you may tell yourself to help make sense of what just happened:

Mom loves my sister more than she loves me.

People will lie or betray me to serve their own interest.

If I lie, I won't get punished.

It's not safe to play or feel joy; I'll get in trouble.

I can't trust Mom.

I have to be extra careful and earn the feeling of love and safety.

I'm bad, clumsy, and stupid.

Material objects are more important than people.

Life's not fair.

Any one of these thoughts could be nothing—like a dandelion puff blowing in the wind and not taking root. Or the puff could land on fertile soil and start growing roots and shooting out leaves. Before you know it, a whole field of weeds has sprouted. These tiny thoughts have immense power—not their own power but the power we give to them. We are incredible creators, but what we often create is based on the seeds of false thoughts that, when planted, take root and blossom into agreements that we make with ourselves and with others.

While the situation with the vase is a relatively minor trauma, the point is to see how a brief incident can plant seeds of doubt, confusion, and misunderstanding, which can then grow into larger agreements that affect our entire lives until we investigate and uproot them. The child in this scenario may not even remember the incident when she grows up, but you can see the impact it could have on her thinking—especially if things like this occur on a regular basis. On an unconscious level, she

will literally create a reality that will grow from this handful of childhood agreements. These beliefs will become a shaky floor for all her future actions.

Take a moment to reflect on your own experiences:

Where have you erected jail-like walls based on past stories?

What are the stories you tell yourself that make you feel helpless or victimized instead of powerful and confident?

In what ways do they limit how you perceive your life story, your talents, and your possibilities for the future?

For many of us, there are more than a few of these in a variety of areas. Sometimes we have told ourselves these stories for so long that we no longer recognize them as stories. We mistake them for "the way things are." Unearthing these beliefs can take time and energy, but we must reveal and expunge them if we are going to be free.

The good news is that you do not need to know the origin of these beliefs to correct and replace them; all you need to do is (I) be honest with yourself about the current state of your internal house; and (2) be willing to do the work to remodel it from the ground up.

We are incredible creators, but what we often create is based on a foundation of false thoughts from which we then build an entire, limiting structure of agreements. As don Miguel writes in *The Four Agreements Companion Book*, "Imagine every agreement is like a brick. Humans create an entire structure out of bricks, and we glue it together with our faith. We believe without doubt in all the knowledge within the structure. Our faith gets

trapped inside that structure because we put our faith in each agreement. It's not important if it is or isn't true; we believe it, and for us it is true."

Let's continue to explore how a thought forms the basis of a story that hardens into a structure that walls us off from the wisdom of our Big Soul. Imagine yourself as the little kid who got punished for breaking the vase. Let's pretend that you have the thought, *I got punished because Mom loves my sister more than she loves me.* While it might feel awful to think this thought, do you notice that there is also a sense of relief at having a reason for being punished, even if it is not true?

Now imagine that your mom comes into your room and apologizes for yelling at you. She says all the "right" things: "I'm so sorry, honey. I had a rotten day and I loved that vase, so I got upset. Your sister just told me she knocked the vase over by accident and that it wasn't your fault. I love you, and I'm sorry I yelled at you and sent you to your room. Come, let's go have dinner."

But what little doubt has already been planted in your mind? As you sit down to dinner, imagine Mom passes the mashed potatoes to your sibling first. If you are still holding the thought *Mom loves my sister more*, what would you say to yourself?

Your oh-so-helpful brain would do what we call selective-evidence gathering. You might think, Aha! I knew it! Mom passed the mashed potatoes to her first. She does love her more. And later, if Mom passes you the ice cream first, what might you do with that evidence? Often when you have a seed thought, you will begin to gather evidence to make sense of the thought. If there is an experience that does not support the story, you actually ignore it, or you weave it into your new story. In this way, you are

ingenious! So you might think, Yeah, Mom passed me the ice cream first, but it is just because she is feeling guilty that she loves my sister more than she loves me.

Do you see how you can take one thought and build a whole elaborate structure, a fortress created by ideas and conditions and agreements about what is true and what is not?

Mom likes my sister better, but I don't care anyway. I don't need anyone. Mom likes my sister better because I am bad. Mom likes my sister better because younger sisters are more important. Maybe if I am perfect, if I try really bard, then I'll be loved like my sister is. Or maybe if I am invisible, if no one sees me and I am really quiet and nice, I won't get in trouble. The foundational bricks of this new internal structure—I am bad, I don't need anyone, and Younger sisters are more important—will produce more and more agreements that become bricks as long as she is not conscious of them. She will create a walled-in reality that will conform to this handful of unconscious childhood agreements, all so that she can feel safe.

How have you created your current reality based on old stories or agreements you made with yourself, about what you were told as a child? And why are these false stories so alluring that you could forget the warmth of your Big Soul? Let's take a look.

As children, each of us took on beliefs or agreements that moved us further away from our Big Soul. Many of these agreements, which are designed to give us a sense of safety when we feel lost and confused, were passed on energetically from our parents and other caretakers. Some we mimicked from what we saw around us, and others we made up all on our own, like believing *Mom loves my sister more* in the scenario illustrated above. However, the stories we created as a child were highly influenced not only by the agreements of the people around us but

also by what the Toltecs call the dream of the planet—humanity's collective perspective. As don Miguel and his son don Jose describe in *The Fifth Agreement:* "The shared dream of humanity, the dream of the planet, was there before you were born, and this is how you learned to create your own art, the story of you."

You can easily see the invisible but pervasive influence of the dream of the planet by turning on the nightly news, reading the headlines of major newspapers, watching soap operas, or looking at advertisements. When was the last time you saw a major evening news story that highlighted all the good things happening in the world? Or how about a soap opera where the characters didn't end up knee deep in painful emotional drama? Or saw an advertisement about how perfect you are and would you care to buy this new shampoo? Most media report fear and scarcity; advertising is geared to how perfect you would be if you used their product, not how perfect you are now....

The information on how to think and how to act and how to be is not created by the media—it is merely a reflection of the agreements we've made. The content of our media shows us that most of us are experiencing reality through the eyes of conflict, fear, scarcity, and a sense of not being good enough. These limiting qualities are what hook our attention because they feel familiar to us, and in that familiarity, we find a (false) sense of safety.

Since almost everyone—from our parents to our teachers to our friends—is immersed in this way of perceiving the world, it seems natural for us to believe that we are not lovable or that we have to be a certain way to be accepted. But this is not our natural state, and that's why it feels so uncomfortable to us! That's why we are always looking for comfort and for something to complete us. That's why we are seeking the path home.

Finding Our Way Back Home

Your Big Soul is like the sun, constantly radiating its loving glow. No matter how lost you feel, how much you are suffering, or how deeply ingrained your stories or agreements are, at any moment, your Little Soul can thouse to pierce through the illusion of separateness to return home to the ancient and wise guidance of your Big Soul. This takes a willingness (and a constantly honed skill) to release the stories of the past and turn toward the truth of this present moment. It is in the present that we can cut through the illusion of our old, fear-based agreements and reconnect our Little Soul with the calm, peaceful, and steady love of our Big Soul.

The love and comfort your Little Soul seeks will not be filled by the temporary pleasures of life. No matter how good the wine, how abundant the chocolate, or how many likes and comments you have on Facebook, when your Little Soul is disconnected from your Big Soul, all relief is transitory. But even in your darkest times, your Big Soul holds up a lantern, waiting patiently for your wandering Little Soul to come home. The path back to Big Soul is there but is simply obscured by the walls you have built.

Keep stepping out of your Little Soul's perspective and hold the big-picture view. You are not your Little Soul. You are not the fear-based structures that lie between your Little Soul and Big Soul. And you are not just your Big Soul. You are Little Soul and Big Soul, both yearning to be reunited.

When you learn to witness the totality of your physical/ mental/emotional being through the eyes of Big Soul rather than through the eyes of Little Soul, everything changes. With this one perceptual shift, you can go from feeling stuck to being full of ease, from a place of judgment to one of compassion, from a state of annoyance to one of acceptance. But learning to stabilize Big Soul perspective can take a lifetime. This is why we need tools like the Warrior Heart practice to help us break down the walls, at first brick by brick, and then wall by wall, ultimately allowing our Little Soul to be freed from its self-imposed jail so that it can see new possibilities and perspectives.

Your Big Soul doesn't impatiently demand that your Little Soul be different. Your Big Soul isn't addicted to caretaking or fixing the Little Soul. It knows that the Little Soul will eventually figure its way through the fog and break down the false walls. Remember, Big Soul is like an ancient grandma who patiently and sweetly invites you to remember that you are so much more than your beliefs and fears.

Your Big Soul eternally whispers to your Little Soul, "You are enough exactly the way you are. You are all of creation. You are loved. You are perfect the way you are." Your Big Soul is always holding out a hand and saying, "Let's explore and create in this wonderful world of taste, touch, sight, sound, and feeling!"

While your Big Soul constantly sends your Little Soul, your little lost ego-personality, love notes and trails of bread crumbs leading the way home, it can be hard to see the path. The quiet, steady voice of your Big Soul can easily be drowned out by the noise of your stories. The moments of grace, the peaceful pauses, and the exhilarating insights are often quickly swamped with unsupportive thoughts and emotional reactions.

This is why you can have awareness of a pattern or habit you want to transform, but find it nearly impossible to change your behavior. If you have ever wanted to stop thinking about an ex, or refrain from being upset by your boss's curtness, or have faith but instead find yourself anxious and worried about your future, you know how fixated and freaked out your Little Soul can be.

Having a desire of what you want in your life is only a start. It is not enough to simply understand that you should not judge yourself or to understand intellectually that you are safe even when someone is angry at you. The question is, how do you fully embody your choice and presence in each moment rather than just thinking about it or wishing for it?

This is the path of the Warrior Heart, which will help connect the stormy waters of your fear-based thoughts and emotions to reconnect your Big Soul and your Little Soul. Instead of fighting your Little Soul or trying to force the waters of your mind and emotions to be calm, let's build a bridge. Just as it took time to build the old structures of fear and separation, it will take action and focus to lay a new pathway between your Big Soul and ego-personality.

Your Warrior Heart awakens the moment you start loving the journey of reconnecting your Little Soul to your Big Soul's loving guidance and grace. It is about accepting all of you, big and little, whether your experience is blissful expansion or painful contraction. Being a Warrior of the Heart brings you back into alignment with the beauty of all of you, including your Little Soul ego-personality. It is this acceptance that clears the smoke and bridges the gap between your Big Soul and your Little Soul. And once this happens, everything changes as you realign with your true, wise inner self.

There are two main actions that reconnect your Big Soul and your Little Soul. The first is to do more of what you love. (Isn't that a great assignment?) Doing more of what you love can actually be more difficult to do than it seems. Here's why.

When you do something you love (like hiking or dancing or daydreaming or running or knitting or whatever floats your boat!), you get completely and happily lost in the activity. Your mind quiets, and in that space, your Little Soul and Big Soul are united again, able to work together creatively toward solutions or simply enjoy being. You don't have any need to explain, defend, judge, or worry. All is right in the world, because your Little Soul is in the present moment, holding hands with your Big Soul.

Losing yourself through doing things you love is very different from using an activity to numb or distract yourself (like compulsive drinking or shopping). The same action can reconnect your Little Soul with your Big Soul or create even more separation, depending on the intention you are bringing to it. While substances that alter your consciousness can be useful for getting past the mind and merging with your Big Soul, they are best used as a flashlight that points you in the direction you want to go so that you can then find your way there on your own, rather than use it as a crutch that will ultimately cause more harm.

So your first task is to do more of what you love so you touch the happy-wise place within you.

Your second task is cleaning out everything that is between Little Soul and your Big Soul. This means facing and dissolving all the agreements, fears, false beliefs, past trauma, hurts, and stuck places.

Now, cleaning is not usually considered a very glamorous or enticing spiritual or healing endeavor. We would much rather have things disappear or change on their own or have someone to come in and clean things up for us. Or sometimes we hope that if we just go to enough workshops or see the right healer or meditate just the right way, we can somehow skip straight to blissful enlightenment (or at least be free of our mind's insanity).

In the Toltec teachings, there are three main levels of mastery: awareness, transformation, and intent. In the first level, you learn to become aware of your thoughts, emotions, and body, without judgment or victimization. As your awareness grows, you see and take action on what agreements and habits you want to transform. Instead of being stuck repeating the same patterns and responding with the same emotional reactions, you begin to consciously transform how you behave and think. As you change your thinking and behaviors, you align more and more with your Big Soul's wisdom instead of your Little Soul's fear. And eventually, you step into living from intent, which means living in inspiration, faith, and connection to your Big Soul.

My philosophy is this: May we become immersed in doing things we love, or use everything in our lives to help us clean up what blocks us from loving the moment we are in. There are plenty of challenges in our lives, and avoiding or ignoring the challenges is not the pathway to freedom. Your freedom comes from learning to courageously face your challenges as opportunities to clean out false beliefs and old, heavy emotions.

And for this, you need a Warrior Heart.

Practice

Before we move to exploring the four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice, take a few moments to write in a journal to help you uncover the Little Soul stories you tell yourself. Use these questions to guide you. Write without thinking, and see what you learn about both your foundational agreements and the walls that your Little Soul has created to feel safe.

What sort of experiences do you find happening in your life over and over again?

What beliefs or agreements did you learn from your parents?

How do you feel about yourself?

How do you feel about the world?

What things do you judge about yourself the most?

How do you judge others?

What beliefs or agreements are limiting you?

Introducing the Chambers

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth.

—Виррна

HE NUMBER ONE QUESTION I am asked is "How do I clean out all the agreements, stories, and experiences that don't serve me?" And the answer is the foundational practice that is laid out in this book.

The Warrior Heart practice is one of the most efficient, practical, and doable methods of inner cleaning you'll find. As you incorporate the Warrior Heart practice into your life, you'll find that you no longer wonder why you are upset, or get stuck in painful thoughts and emotions. You'll learn how to stop taking things personally, be able to release the weight of your past traumas and experiences, and quickly clear out old beliefs and reactions that no longer serve you so you can get to the truth.

Now let me introduce you to the four chambers that comprise the power-washing brilliance of the Warrior Heart practice and will help you step into your own warrior self.

The Four Chambers

Feeling Story Truth Intent

These are the four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice. Learning how to work with the chambers will change the way you operate in the world by helping you release limiting and painful beliefs and to rearrange the pieces of your personal puzzles into an integrated new whole—mentally, emotionally, and physically.

The idea of personal transformation is just an idea until you fully commit to taking action. But it is also important to know bow to take action.

The Warrior Heart practice centers around four distinct chambers, which are like the four vital chambers of the heart. It takes both the courage of a warrior and the vulnerability of an open heart to step into each of these "rooms" and witness all of yourself, including and primarily your emotions, thoughts, truth, and wisdom.

Just like the heart, no one chamber is more important than the others; they all work together. There's a continual flow that happens in our heart as we work through the chambers. In the following chapters, we will go through each chamber sequentially, but please consider this model as circular rather than linear.

The four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice are:

THE FEELING CHAMBER

You enter the Warrior Heart practice by learning to gently sit with emotional triggers, fears, or pain that arises within you, separate from the story you believe is causing the emotion. In the Feeling Chamber, you learn how to be present with discomfort and become curious about what is actually happening in your physical and emotional body rather than just thinking about the upset, trying to repress emotions, or cycling stories endlessly. In the Feeling Chamber, the goal is not to fix, understand, or explain emotions but to simply be with them consciously.



The Questions You Bring to the Feeling Chamber Are:

- What am I feeling?
- How does it affect my physical body?
- Where do I feel closed and where do I feel open?
- How can I support myself to stay open to my discomfort?

The keys to unlocking the Feeling Chamber are breath and presence.

THE STORY CHAMBER

Once you have spent some time breathing, witnessing, and feeling your emotions and how they affect your physical body, you will move to the Story Chamber. Here you give yourself full permission to let your judgments, fears, worst-case scenarios, doubts, and insecurities speak without censorship. You invite those parts of you that feel victimized by your inner critic, other people, and the world to share their story. You follow the threads of old story lines deeper into where hurtful words, hatred, and longing are hiding. You learn to stay curious, witnessing each story as it unfolds from past and present as well as those story themes that try to fix or explain or threaten to haunt your future.



The Questions You Bring to the Story Chamber Are:

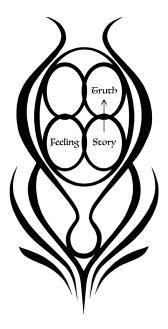
- What am I telling myself?
- What words have I woven together?
- What old agreements and rules are embedded in my story?
- How can I support myself in listening to a deeper layer of this story?

The keys to opening the Story Chamber are willingness and permission.

THE TRUTH CHAMBER

While the Story Chamber gives you information on the multifaceted and noisy layers of your internal dialogue, the Truth Chamber opens up space for stillness. You cross a threshold between Story and Truth, where you must leave behind being right, being wrong, being understood, or any other desire. You move toward the simplicity of what is real in this moment. Most people enter the Truth Chamber dragging their story with them like a familiar blanket they can't let go of, and they believe that creating a better, more spiritual, or more pleasing story is the truth. In the Truth Chamber, you explore the difference between ultimate truth and subjective truth.

I always like to start with the basics in the Truth Chamber: I am breathing. Truth. I am here. Truth. Using these two truths allows you to begin to build a foundation for carefully exploring and separating out the threads of your story from truth.



The Questions You Bring to the Truth Chamber Are:

- What is an ultimate truth right now?
- What is true about this situation?
- What do I wish were true versus what is actually a fact?
- How can I support myself in being with the truth?

The keys to opening the door of the Truth Chamber are creating a sense of spaciousness inside and the ability to listen to what is true.

THE INTENT CHAMBER

The Truth Chamber opens up space so that you can step into the Intent Chamber and get clear about what you really want in each situation. Your intent is your focus and I00 percent commitment. Without intent, you are at the mercy of outside forces, even when you are clear about the truth. Having clarity about your truth is like patching the holes in your sails after they have been torn in the storm of a story; your intent is your steady hand on the ropes, allowing you to catch the wind and consciously navigate where you want to go.

Your intent is critical because it guides your coming actions. The choices you make going forward may be different if your intent is "compassion" versus "speaking my truth no matter what."



The Questions You Bring to the Intent Chamber Are:

- What do I actually want in this situation?
- Where do I want to put my focus?

- What is my bigger focus in life right now, and how does this situation fit in?
- What word best describes where I want to put my attention?

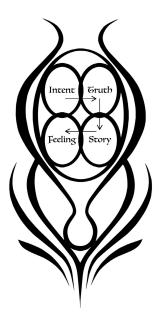
The keys to opening the Intent Chamber are in taking total responsibility for your life and your choices and claiming your personal accountability and direction.

Circling Back

The Warrior Heart practice does not end here. The real potency of the Warrior Heart practice is what happens next: You go back through the chambers. Once you are clear on your Intent, you step back into the Truth Chamber. I like to imagine that you revisit the Truth with new eyes, holding your Intent in one hand and your Truth in the other as you step back into the Story Chamber, where the view is now very different.

The process of moving from Story to Truth to Intent and back again will help you to integrate a more expansive view of those places where you were once struggling. In your second visit to the Story Chamber, you will review and rewrite your story to align with the truth rather than your fears and old beliefs. You will be freed from what you think should be happening and be released from weighty expectations and subconscious obligations. This will allow you to be creative and playful in your relationship with your story. Even if the story itself remains a difficult one, your relationship to the story changes from victimization or judgment to power and curiosity.

The final step in the Warrior Heart practice is to return to the beginning, the Feeling Chamber.



The Warrior Heart practice is like a sponge that is always available for you to clean up your internal and external messes, which then allows you to return to clarity, peace, and authentic communication.

As you use the Warrior Heart practice to consciously reconnect your Little Soul and your Big Soul as allies, you will return to your natural state: whole and joyful. Always remember that you are Big Soul, vitally connected and complete, and you are also that fearful child who needs to be reconnected and reminded of the truth. With this awareness of what is truth and what is not, you can clean up the Little Soul's mistaken perceptions and false stories. And the more you clean away the debris, the more your Big Soul can shine through your Little Soul and out into the world.

You can use the Warrior Heart practice to understand more about an emotion or reaction you are having, how to determine the best course of action, clean old agreements, get more information on something you are blocked about, move past fears or procrastination, and be able to do this as a daily practice. It is a versatile tool, and as you use it, you will come up with more ways that it can help you find clarity, peace, and direction.

Over the next four chapters, we will dive into learning about the individual chambers and how to navigate them. Then I'll introduce you to an advanced daily practice called *stalking* that will help you integrate the Warrior Heart practice even more effectively.

Throughout each of the descriptions of the chambers, I will share my own experiences and bring in specific, real-life stories to help you in your process. We will talk about how people have used the Warrior Heart practice to untangle specific challenges, similar to your own. We will explore the Warrior Heart practice using tangible topics, such as caring for elderly parents, divorce, troubled children, aging, health issues, work challenges, finances, and more.

Throughout the coming chapters, we will also explore Toltec concepts of the first, second, and third attention, the concepts of the *nagual* and the *tonal*, the *petty tyrant*, *not doings*, and more (see glossary for definitions). These ancient teachings are brought forward with a gentle, feminine touch that will allow you to incorporate them with ease rather than through forceful, "cut off from your emotions and change your life now" emphasis that can sometimes haunt other Toltec and inquiry-based practices.

As we step into the chambers, take a moment to close your eyes and pick one issue or struggle that you keep getting snagged by.

Reflect on the issue that you keep coming back to over and

over in your mind, even if you know it is not true. The issue might be around relationships, finances, your spiritual path, your health.... What's one area that keeps snagging you? Write it down as concisely as possible and do your best not to judge yourself or try to fix it. Then as you learn more about each of the chambers, I'll teach you how to use the Warrior Heart practice to clean your old story.

You can download a free Warrior Heart practice sheet at www.heatherashamara.com/whp-sheet. This will give you a format to write out the information you gather from the practice. As you go through the chapters in *The Warrior Heart Practice*, I support you in keeping a few Warrior Heart practice sheets available so that if something arises, you can write it down while it's fresh in your mind, and capture your process. You can also create a Warrior Heart practice binder, where you keep all of your practice sheets so you can look back and see your progress. Look for many more helpful suggestions in the Exercises section after each chapter.

And now, on to becoming more intimate with the four chambers of the Warrior Heart practice.

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To all the warriors of the heart who walked before us, shining the light of their courage and love for the rest of us to follow

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