

# A MIND AT HOME WITH ITSELF

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*How Asking Four Questions Can Free Your Mind,  
Open Your Heart, and Turn Your World Around*

**BYRON KATIE**

**WITH STEPHEN MITCHELL**

INCLUDING A NEW VERSION OF THE DIAMOND SUTRA  
BY STEPHEN MITCHELL



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## THE GIFT OF CRITICISM

The Buddha said, "Subhuti, if each of the grains of sand in the Ganges River were its own Ganges River, wouldn't the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers be uncountable?"

Subhuti said, "Yes, Sir. If the number of Ganges Rivers were themselves uncountable, how much more so their grains of sand!"

"Now tell me this: If a good man or woman filled worlds as many as the grains of sand in all those Ganges Rivers with treasure and gave it all away to support charitable causes, wouldn't the merit gained by this person be great?"

"It would be immeasurably great, Sir."

The Buddha said, "I assure you, Subhuti: if an open-minded person, upon hearing this sutra, could truly realize what it is teaching and then embody it and live it, this person's merit would be far greater."

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When you realize that there's no such thing as a self or an other, you also realize the value of criticism. Since everyone is yourself, criticism

is always coming from inside you; it's you talking to you. Criticism is the greatest gift you can receive, if self-realization is what you're interested in. It shows you what you haven't been able to see yet. What could anyone say to me that I wouldn't be able to acknowledge? If someone were to say, "You're unkind," I would become still, I would go inside, and in about three seconds I'd be able to find it—if not in the present situation, then at some time in the apparent past. If someone were to say, "You're a liar," I'd think, "Duh," because I can easily join them there. Or I might say, "Where do you think I lied? I really want to know." This is about self-realization, not about being right or wrong. Whatever someone might call me, I can go inside and find it. My job is to stay connected. The only thing that could cause me pain would be my defense or denial. "Oh, no, you can't be talking about me—I'm not *that*!" Well, yes I am. I am that too. I am everything you can think of. Keep coming at me. Show me what I haven't realized yet.

When the mind begins inquiry as a practice, it learns as a student of itself that everything is *for* it. Everything adds to it, enlightens it, nourishes it, reveals it. Nothing is or ever was against it. This is a mind that has grown beyond opposites. It's no longer split. It keeps opening, because it's living out of a fearless, undefended state, and it's eager for knowledge. It realizes that it's everything, so it learns to exclude nothing, to welcome it all. There's nothing gentler than open-mindedness. Because I don't oppose, it's not possible that someone will oppose me; people can't oppose anything but their own thinking. When there's no opposition, the chaotic mind hears itself. It notices that the only opposition is its own.

There's nothing anyone could say about me that wouldn't be true in some sense. Though I appear as this body—the perfect height, the perfect weight, the perfect age—some people may have a different idea. A few years ago, a producer proposed a television series called the *Byron Katie Show*, on which I would be doing The Work with a different person every week. I was delighted. I knew this would mean I'd

have to spend a lot of time in a studio in L.A., but I thought it would be a wonderful way of getting self-inquiry out into the world. So he shot a few video samples and took them to the chairman of the network. A week later, he came back to me with a disappointed look on his face. His boss said I was too old and too fat for TV. I was delighted. I thought, "He could be right. The man's a pro. What a blessing!"

Even if someone called me a murderer, I could see how that would be true. I can remember a time in my life when I was so confused that I would have wished for someone to drop dead. I have killed mice and wiped out hundreds of ants when they invaded my house. I could go on and on. If they locked me up for killing someone I didn't kill, I could go to jail, even to death, knowing that I finally got caught; it was the wrong body but the right crime. Not that I wouldn't hire the best defense attorney I could afford. But if I were convicted, I would be at peace with that. As I sat in prison for a crime I didn't commit, I would get to see where I was still arguing with reality, if anywhere. If there was something other than gratitude in my mind, I would have the opportunity to question the thoughts that were causing me discomfort. The worst thing that can happen always turns out to be the best thing that can happen.

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*What's the connection between happiness and realizing that there is no self and no other? Why is this a joyous experience?*

It's a joy to see that everything that isn't, isn't. It's a joy to see that everything is unreal, without exception. This leaves you with a mind awake to its true nature, a mind at home with itself, at home *in* itself. Amazing grace!

*Would you say more about happiness?*

I use the word to mean a natural state of peace and clarity. It's a state that is free of sadness, anger, fear, and any other stressful emotion. It's

what remains when we meet our minds with understanding. That's what The Work gives us.

The only place we can be happy is right here, right now—not tomorrow, not in ten minutes. Happiness can't be *achieved*. We can't get it from money or sex or fame or approval or anything on the outside. We can only find happiness within us: unchanging, immovable, ever present, ever waiting. If we pursue it, it runs away. If we stop pursuing it and question our minds instead, the source of all stress disappears. Happiness is who we already are, once our minds are clear. When the mind is perfectly clear, what is is what we want. We're happy with whatever life brings us. That's enough, and more than enough.

Here's the bottom line: suffering is optional. If you prefer to suffer, go on believing your stressful thoughts. But if you'd rather be happy, question them.

*How can we not take criticism personally, especially when it comes from the people closest to us?*

Just consider the suffering you create when you believe their thoughts about you, and yours about them in return. It's huge, and it goes on and on. As for the how, it's simple. Question the thoughts you had while your mother or father or husband or wife or apparent enemy was criticizing you. Hurt feelings or discomfort of any kind cannot be caused by another person. No one outside you can hurt you. That's not possible. Only when you believe a story about them can you be hurt. So you're the one who's hurting yourself. This is very good news, because it means that you don't have to get someone else to stop hurting you or to change in any way. You're the one who can stop hurting you. You're the only one.

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