

## LESSON FOURTEEN

### BECOMING REAL: SPEAKING FROM THE HEART

*I wondered if that was how forgiveness budded; not with the fanfare of epiphany, but with pain gathering its things, packing up, and slipping away unannounced in the middle of the night.*

—Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*

IN THE PREVIOUS lesson I talked about the practice of happiness and the vulnerability of lingering in your joy without chasing after the next best thing. Today’s meditation and workbook exercises continue the theme of focusing on what’s positive in your relationship.

Our society seems to value chasing after happiness, as if this were what Thomas Jefferson was talking about when he said we have the right to pursue happiness. According to Dr. Paul Desean, Yale University psychiatrist and researcher on the subject of happiness, Jefferson’s view of happiness wasn’t the way many people refer to the third “unalienable right” in the Declaration of Independence. He cites Jefferson’s Epicurean philosophy to explain that the founding father was describing happiness as a practice that must be cultivated. The more we chase happiness, the more elusive it is. And from a relationship point of view, the more you try to grasp and achieve your own happiness, the less “real” you become to the other.



#### *Learning at a Glance*

- Why happiness is a practice that must be cultivated, not something to “get more of.”
- How to be more “real” with your partner; value the mundane or uncomfortable elements of your relationship and make yourself easier to cozy up to.
- The difference between speaking from your head and speaking from your heart.

## Bringing Out the Real, Floppy, Easy-to-Snuggle-Up-To You

This course has taught you how to practice being at ease with your vulnerability. You've practiced acceptance of your innermost needs and wishes and learned to value compassion and empathy. You've learned that it's possible to create a mental habit of mindfulness and compassionate inner-reflection that tames your anxiety about feeling worthy, being treated fairly, or being respected. And underneath your self-protective reactions lie your vulnerable fears and insecurities, hopes and dreams—the real you.

*Being real means that rather than fixating on our partner's deficits, we're willing to accept the more mundane or uncomfortable reality right in front of us—and often inside us.*

Margery Williams classic children's book, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, illustrates what it takes to become “real,” better than almost any psychological theory. Her story resonates with the human heart: we all yearn for unconditional love but often shy away from the bendy, flexible, broken-in state that's easiest to cozy up to.

In the story, the toy Skin Horse is the shabbiest but the wisest stuffed animal in the nursery. He's worn from being loved and used. Although the Skin Horse's hair has been hugged off, he's the happiest toy. Another toy, the Rabbit, wants to be as happy and content as him. The Skin Horse tells the Rabbit how being real happens:

“Real isn't how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but REALLY loves you, then you become Real.”

“Does it hurt?” asked the Rabbit.

“Sometimes,” said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. “When you are Real you don't mind being hurt.”

“Does it happen all at once, like being wound up,” he asked, “or bit by bit?”

“It doesn't happen all at once,” said the Skin Horse. “You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the

joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

### **Having the Courage to Be More Real in Your Relationship**

What does it mean to be real in our relationships? It means that rather than fixating on our partner's deficits, we are willing to accept the more mundane or uncomfortable reality right in front of us—and often *inside* us. By practicing acceptance of our own primary emotions and our "exiled" feelings, we create conditions where realness—honesty, sincerity, and kindness—can thrive.

One outward practice of being "real" in your relationship is the idea of speaking from your heart—controlling the outcome as little as possible. Most of the time you speak from your head, so to speak. You say you'll be more considerate of your mother-in-law if your mother-in-law is more respectful of your time. Or you tell your wife how attractive she is because you want to make love. Of course, it's natural to speak from your head—*quid pro quo*—and when you have a healthy relationship, it's relatively harmless to do so. But you're taking this course because you want to cultivate healthier, positive mental habits that will create more positive feelings toward your partner. Today, therefore, challenge yourself to communicate more from the heart.

Here are more examples that illustrate how it's even possible to speak more from the heart when you're in conflict with your partner:

**Speaking from the head you might say,** "I won't accept you talking to me like that—you've crossed the line like you always do and I've had enough."

**But if you speak more from the heart you might say,** "I end up feeling alone and pushed away from you when you're angry, so I criticize you. I don't want to keep walling myself off from you. How can we handle this differently together?"

**Speaking from the head you might say,** "I wish you'd go the gym and make yourself look nicer."

**But if you speak from the heart you might say,** "I'll admit it. I'm critical of how you look sometimes. That's not my intention. But I struggle with how to express my feelings about this and the last thing I want to do is hurt you in the process."

Being real is an act of courage, but it will have a huge impact on your partner. I remember

when I was writing my book *Love Under Repair*, and there I was, a professional marriage therapist, writing a book to help couples, and my own marriage was falling apart. It seemed like the perfect excuse to skip all the hard work of the writing I was dreading. “Who am I to write about this?” I asked myself many times. But the decision to lean into the uncomfortable feelings—both in the hard work I needed to do on my marriage and in sharing my struggles in the book—turned out to be a key reason that it connects with so many people.

Today’s meditation uses a visual idea to help you notice how “real” you’re being in your relationship: Imagine you’ve got a knob that lets you turn up or down the amount of vulnerability you’re feeling. Turn it up and you become more unguarded, more real. Turn it down and you become more defensive, critical and avoiding.

Use today’s meditation as a rehearsal for noticing how you have a choice—you can choose to be more or less vulnerable—in your communication with your partner. You can communicate “from the heart” or you can communicate “from the head.” You need both kinds of communication. But if you fail to account fully for what’s at stake when you struggle with your partner, then you’re like a radio with no knobs; you lack a way for your partner to connect with you and you can easily get out of tune.

 **You may now proceed to listen to the Lesson Fourteen meditation.**

**After completing this meditation, turn to the next page to complete the Lesson Fourteen journal and reflection questions.**  

 *Lesson Fourteen—Journal Questions*

1. Write down the activity you were doing right before beginning the meditation.

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2. What feelings or thoughts were you aware of prior to the meditation? (For example, you might have felt distracted, stressed, confused, tired, or been struggling with a problem at work or with your kids, or rehashing an argument with your partner.) Just jot down enough information to record, generally, what mental state you were transitioning from to start the meditation.

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3. How stressed or relaxed did you feel before you started the meditation?  
(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)

4. How stressed or relaxed did you feel after the meditation?  
(Overwhelmed with stress) 1—2—3—4—5—6—7—8—9—10 (Totally relaxed)



## Lesson Fourteen—Reflection Questions

### *Speaking from the Heart vs. Speaking from the Head*

When you're in conflict with a partner, your communication becomes ineffective because it's laden with defensiveness, criticism, blame, or avoidance. During the meditation today, you were asked to imagine "speaking the truth about your vulnerability without trying to control the outcome" to your partner—speaking from the heart. Name a subject (or subjects) that you find it difficult to imagine being able to speak from your heart about to your partner?

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1. How do you normally react when this subject comes up? What are the things you say which might be driven by your protective secondary emotions (speaking from the head)?

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2. What thoughts, feelings, or physical reactions did you have when you heard the prompt in the meditation that asked you to speak from your heart, without your protective guard up?

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3. Write out what your version of speaking from the heart would sound like. Try to include some of the following key ingredients:
- **Name** your protective response and admit how you're aware that you can hurt your partner by guarding your heart, however you do that (be specific).
  - **Express** your wish for or hope that you'll be able to react differently because of what's at stake for you (for example, "I wish I could quit fumbling for words and going silent when you want to be comforted, because you mean the world to me").
  - **Commit** to being willing to tolerate the discomfort that comes from being a novice at implementing the wish or hope you expressed (above). Be self-affirming and patient with yourself when your best intentions get a lukewarm, indifferent, or critical reaction from your partner in the beginning. The bottom line is that you must persist at being vulnerable until your partner "gets it," and accepts it as the real deal. Remember that your "realest" emotions—your primary emotions—are rawer; when you're acting from your heart, you aren't likely to look or sound the most polished, mature, or practical. But trust me, if you believe in yourself, it'll work!

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**TIP:** If you feel stuck because you can't imagine that your partner would appreciate your effort or would criticize your attempt at being more vulnerable, you're focusing too much on something you can't control (your partner's reaction to you) and you need to deepen your focus on what you can control (accepting, feeling, and riding out your anxiety/fear/discomfort). Practice the you-turn to mentally rehearse how you'll keep a COLA attitude (curiosity, open, loving, accepting) toward your discomfort. It will feel much easier to tolerate your partner's ambivalence or skepticism about your intentions if you've quieted your own inner critic voice and anxiety.



## LESSON FOURTEEN ITEM CHECKLIST:

- Watched Lesson Fourteen video introduction
- Read Lesson Fourteen workbook chapter
- Completed Lesson Fourteen audio meditation
- Completed Lesson Fourteen journal and reflection questions

Note: Remember, you have 21 days to complete the 15 lessons.