

Chapter Nine

You Are More Than That

The human mind is plagued with feelings of deficit. This drive for the next best thing, *N* (the current moment) + *1* (the next best thing) — whether it's a job or a car or a lover — can be expressed as the ambition that fuels artistic expression and professional accomplishment, but it also brings with it greed, envy, and boundless suffering to the unaware mind. No achievement, no acquisition, will ever fill the emptiness our minds have created at our core.

In our pre-aware quest for fulfillment, we set out on life's journey. We learn what we are supposed to want from our family, our religion, our schools, our friends, and the media that saturate our lives. All of this tells us in great detail about our "needs" and the dos and don'ts of pursuing them. A quest for happiness begins, but the "happily ever after" never arrives.

What I've learned is that happiness doesn't lie in how much we own, who we love, or what we achieve. Rather, happiness lies in robust mental health. It means reaching within ourselves to understand what we feel and finding a way to express it. Happiness lies at the end of a process in which we learn to see, feel, speak, accept, and let go of life's experiences.

We begin adulthood with a story that we've crafted around the events and emotions — joys, sorrows, misunderstandings, losses — of childhood and adolescence. In many ways, we believe that this story contains us, that it is “who we are.”

We Are Always More

To reach genuine maturity, we need to understand that we are more than that. Our experiences are like the sand a child uses to build a castle or the words a writer uses to compose a book. Consciously or unconsciously, we always set up our own situations: we are the player, composer, singer, artist, instrumentalist, and performer. Our story doesn't need to hold us back. Like a sand castle, we can knock it over and rebuild it to suit ourselves.

The spiritual Being at our core rides the wave of our human experiences without judgment. It tells us that we are, always have been, and always will be an individual worthy of respect and love. While we may not be happy in every moment or every area of life, seeing ourselves from the perspective of this Being will allow us to become emotionally alive. The goal of life becomes *living* itself. Consider this: The spiritual Being within is like a patron in a theater, watching the film that is life. Wouldn't we want to give this spirit the richest vision of human experience?

From this perspective, the basic feeling of inadequacy that can prevent us from making emotional connections and feeling secure slowly fades. We come to see ourselves as complete and whole human Beings, allowing us to feel safe within ourselves and within our relationships. In turn, this lets us consider

what feels insecure in our reality, to discuss it with significant others, and to reconnect those parts that split off in our past.