

## What's In the Way is the Way by Tami Simon

Tami Simon: You're listening to Insights at the Edge. Today, my guest is Mary O'Malley. Mary is an author, counselor, and acknowledged leader in the field of spiritual awakening. Through her writing and teachings, she empowers people to replace fear, hopelessness, and struggle with ease, well-being, and joy. With Sounds True, Mary has published a new book entitled *What's in the Way Is the Way: A Practical Guide for Waking Up to Life*.

In this episode of Insights at the Edge, Mary and I spoke about the eight "spells" that keep us feeling separate from life. We talked about life as an intelligent process that we can trust and the importance of being curious—and how curiosity is the opposite of fixing. We also talked about the three skills of awakening, and how Mary has "an armchair on the moon" in which she looks at the Earth—and from which she understands the awakening process. Here's my very helpful and illuminating conversation with Mary O'Malley:

Mary, in your new book—there are so many things from your new book I want to talk about. But, I want to begin with this one idea that really struck me because I'd never heard it before presented this way: You write about how there are eight "spells" that keep us feeling separate. I thought, "What do you mean, 'spells?'" Eight spells.

Mary O'Malley: Yes. Well, I love the word "spells" because a spell is something that's laid over the top of us, it's not true, and it can be lifted. This word came just as I was writing.

When we really look into the eyes of a babe, there's the whole universe. There are no thoughts in that child's mind. Slowly and surely, we absorb from the people around us—just like we absorb language. If you live in Japan, you absorb Japanese. Or, if you live in America, you absorb English. We absorb the stories that the people around us are living in, and we begin to create what Eckhart Tolle calls "the mind-made me."

I think that's just brilliant because the mind makes me. Here you are, and then here is a storyteller in your head that has a world all of its own. Most people crawl into that world and think it is them.

But, when you begin to wake up to life—to really be here for life—then you begin to see there's a difference between being here for this great, majestic, mysterious unfolding called life right here in this living moment—and then your story about it. Most people live in their stories.

So, to get to know the storyteller, it's very helpful to see what it's made out of. I've had the good grace to work with people over 30 years. I've seen into the minds of hearts of thousands and thousands of people. These eight core spells are the foundation of this separate, conditioned self that we have all crawled into that keeps us disconnected from life.

TS: I want to go ahead and talk about the first two spells that you call foundational spells. I want to go into this because I think it's just—as I said—so interesting. So, the first one that you write about is, "I am separate from life." Then the second one is, "Life is not safe."

I think especially that idea that life is not safe is something that—many people have that experience. You say life is always for you as a person. But, I think a lot of people don't feel that life's for them.

MO: You're right.

TS: They feel that life's against me. "I went outside and my car got towed. How can you say life's for me?" You know?

MO: Right. So, when we were in the womb, we were at one with life. And then we were born, and now we were a separate being. It takes a while to begin to take hold—this idea takes hold inside of us that, "I am here and you are out there." That's what I mean by, "I am a separate being,"—this me inside of us that's always talking about life.

That is really, truly our suffering—this idea that there is a "me" and then there is an "out there." When we separate out of life in that way—remember, we were raised by giants for a long time. They were giants to us. They were mostly unconscious giants. We needed them. We were in a deep, deep need of connection with them. Even more than we needed food or shelter, we needed connection. And yet, our parents were gone.

So, the people around us—they began to wound us in ways that, even if they loved us, they wounded us. So, life began to be something to guard against. The two core wounds we get [are] invasion and abandonment. Invasion can go as simple as a mother that is telling you what to do, when to do, how to do, and all the way to sexual abuse and violence. Abandonment can go all the way from a parent that is too busy to be with you to a parent that actually leaves.

There was a study done once of children and their breathing patterns. All of them, before they went to preschool, were breathing this natural breath that dogs and cats breathe, where their whole trunk was engaged. Not one of them was breathing their natural breath by the time they went to first grade.

So, as we're taking on this mind-made me and trying to maneuver through this very confusing environment when we are growing up, we learn to hold on, we learn to tighten, we learn how to guard, and then we slip into this idea that our job is to manage life—our job is to manage ourself, to make us good enough or right enough. Of course, we secretly believe we're never quite good enough or right enough. And our job is to manage the environment outside of us.

This cuts us off from an alive, nourishing connection with this great creative flow called life.

TS: Now, Mary, I can imagine somebody who's listening who says, "You know, Mary keeps taking me back to the womb, to the eyes of a baby. Isn't this a little regressive in a way? I don't want to go back there. I'm an adult. I now have all this freedom and power. I don't really want to go backwards."

MO: Right. And it's not that we're going backwards, it's that everything that we took on—remember that we're free-flowing aliveness. That's our natural state. All you have to do is look at nature and you see that it's free-flowing aliveness, and that when we were very young, we were connected to that great river of free-flowing aliveness. Then we began to hold on and run away into our heads—into a conversation about life. That's what I call “the storyteller” in this book.

So, it is those templates—those core experiences that we had—that cause us to tighten, to contract, to maneuver through life in a way that tries to manage life enough so that we feel calm inside.

So, we don't need to go back. We need to understand where it's come from. What is this holding in my neck? Why do I keep on getting that tight knot in my stomach? Why do I always just cry and cry at movies, but can't cry when I'm with my mate or my friends?

So, we're not going back. We're just beginning to learn the power of our focused attention. It's one of the most powerful healers that human beings have—that when your attention and your immediate experience come together, that is when the energy that we have learned how to—and then put it underneath our everyday awareness—we have learned how to hold onto life. We have learned how to resist life. And when your attention and your immediate experience come together, that is when this holding begins to let go on its own.

TS: You talk about something in the book *What's in the Way Is the Way*—you talk about learning “the art of the you-turn.” Is that what you're talking about here? Is this the you-turn?

MO: Yes, yes. In a way, yes. Here we are, and mostly our attention is out in life. Believe you me, when I first started meditating years and years and years ago, somebody asked me just to close my eyes and notice my breath, it was too scary for me. It was too intimate.

I had been so used to being out here and [trying] to manage everything, and then feeling like I was such a failure at doing all of that. But, slowly and surely, I began to be able to do this you-turn. I began to be able to do the Y-O-U turn.

And we begin to understand—and this is a real core premise in this book—that life is an intelligent process. We actually trust it a lot. When was the last time you digested your food or made your hair grow or made day come out of night?

This is a highly intelligent process. At one time, you were one cell that was so tiny that you couldn't even be seen with a naked eye. It developed into 70 trillion cells, and they all know how to work without a thought from you.

But, we don't recognize how much we trust life. We definitely think that we got to get to the good stuff in life and get rid of the bad stuff. This is our addiction to struggle.

But, when you begin to realize that—this came all in one fell swoop as I was writing the book—life is set up to bring up what has been bound up so it can open up to be freed up so you can show up for life, you begin to become fascinated during the challenges of your life. Rather than being mad at your mate because they said they would call at six, and they don't call at seven, you begin to become interested in what [this is bringing] up inside of you. And that is how we set free all of this bound-up energy that [in] its natural

state is free-flowing aliveness.

TS: Now, this is a very important idea I want to go into more: life is destined to bring up for you what is bound up. So, let's say I do—I parked my car someplace and I walk out. I didn't see the sign, and my car has been towed. I feel a sense of frustration, agitation, anger, et cetera. I'm mad. I'm upset. And life was destined to bring up how upset I am? I'm upset for a darn good reason. My car got towed.

MO: Right. Absolutely, at that level, it is a darned good reason.

But, what we do is that we are always—at some level—a victim to life. It's happening to us. The mind-made me is always trying to jockey to make sure that everything is OK, and we miss this whole thing that life is an intelligent process and it is putting us in the exact situations that we need to begin to see how this conditioned self operates inside of us. That's when life begins to become an adventure.

Still, I have a very, very close family member whose cancer returned a year ago. It's been a very intense year. I have lived in a lot of spaciousness for a lot of years, and this has stirred up the dregs of the holding that I took on when I was young.

It's been so powerful. I call it "becoming a tightness detective." It's been so powerful to be alert to when the body starts tightening or the mind starts tightening or the emotions start tightening—and then get curious about that. When you can bring your attention to this conditioned self that keeps us separate from life, that is when it begins to lift just like the morning fog lifts with the light of the sun.

So, I'd love to say, Tami, you don't have to like it. But, you can trust it. I've walked through this with thousands of people over the years, and it's just amazing what happens to them when they are in a situation that they feel life is happening to them—that then they switch it and they realize that life is showing them something about this conditioned self so that they can see it and see through it more, [and] so that they can come back and be available to life.

TS: OK. I'm going to give you a specific example, Mary, because I became familiar in reading *What's in the Way Is the Way* [of] this idea of becoming a tightness detective. I thought, "This is great. I love this. I love this. This makes a lot of sense to me."

So, here today, I'm driving in my car and I have a new, adorable, but mischievous puppy who can't stand her car seat. She's not used to it. So, we're in the car and she's yelping the entire time. I'm watching myself. You wouldn't have to be a very good detective to be able to see that I was getting tighter and tighter as she continued to be inconsolable.

So, here I am. I'm tight. I'm tight. I can't stand hearing her cry, but I don't know what to do. It's not safe to let her out of this dog carrier that she can't stand. OK! I'm curious about how I'm feeling. It's pretty clear to me that I'm annoyed and I'm upset.

Where's the insight here? I'm a tightness detective. What's next?

MO: So, there's a couple of levels of it. You're noticing. That's important. Most people just get caught in the situation and they yell at the dog, or they pull over to the side of the road and cry. But, you're noticing.

That may not be the time to actually take that noticing inside and to begin to really bring

your attention to exactly what is holding on inside of you. It would be something about helplessness. We all knew such great helplessness when we were young at times. That caused us—I mean, it was just so painful.

I've been working with a woman who had difficulty with her spine. When she was 18 months old, they put her in a cast from her neck down to—I think—her knees. She was in the hospital for weeks. She would cry. Her parents would come and she would cry more when they left. So, then her parents did not come and visit her. The nurses decided they couldn't come and visit her.

So, let's fast-forward [to] years later. She is somebody that has a compulsion that just has overtaken her life. It brings up so much self-hate and so much despair and hopelessness. It brings up the exact energy that was bound up in that experience when she was young. She is learning now to be with herself when these feelings come rather than running away.

Now, with your situation in the car, it's not time. You're driving. You're probably going to an appointment. It's not time. But, just that acknowledgment—and then the asking life for clarity. Maybe when you're in bed that night—maybe a little bit of that vestige of that holding. And then you begin to become curious.

We're not becoming curious to figure anything out. That's the real important piece here. That's the mind trying to figure something out. We're becoming curious. We're bringing our attention and our immediate experience together to begin to allow energy that is bound up to move. That's where the healing is.

TS: Now, I took a note from your chapter on the healing power of curiosity—how “curiosity is the opposite of fixing.” I thought that was so important.

MO: Yes. Yes. Yes. And the more you get curious, the more fascinating it becomes and the more you know.

I mean, here I was—somebody that fell ever deeper into darkness. I had the kind of childhood you wouldn't wish on anybody. By the time I was in my early twenties, I was trying to drink it away and eat it away. I gained 97 pounds in a year once. I was trying to drug it away. When that didn't work, I went into a mental hospital for the better part of the year. And when that didn't work, I tried to kill myself three times.

TS: Oh my.

MO: And then a man called Joel Kramer came into my life. He was one of the people that first brought yoga here to the United States. He would come up from California, and my mother—I mean, this is life. It's such an amazing adventure.

My mother was going to go for a weekend with him, and she said, “I can't go. Would you like to go.” I'm 27. “Ah, well. Yes. Maybe. OK.” I walk into that room, Tami, and he starts talking. My life changed from a B-grade, black-and-white, grainy horror movie to a Dolby surround-sound, Technicolor, Panavision movie. When I walked out of that room, I could not tell you what he said—but I knew that it was truth.

So, he came up a couple more times. The third time he came up, I took a tape deck in there and recorded the whole weekend—and then went home and transcribed the whole weekend. I had this book—this book of every single word that he said over that weekend.

When my house and store burnt to the ground, I lost everything—[but] it was the book that I grieved.

So, he came up one last time and I said to him, “I want to tell you what I have gotten from listening to you. And I want you tell me if I am on the right track.” And he said yes. I said, “There’s two parts of it.”

The first was [that] in the seeing is the movement. Oh my God—his eyes just twinkled. He said yes. What he meant, Tami, is that there’s nothing that needs to be fixed, changed, rearranged. There is nothing wrong with us.

I mean, I went to doctors and psychologists and psychiatrists and group therapists and hypnotherapists—and everybody tried to fix me. When he came into my life, I began to see—and he confirmed for me—that it is when we can bring our attention and be with something that it begins to move. We don’t need to fix it. As long as we try to fix it—and my God, we use meditation to fix it. What I’m inviting people into is using meditation to hone your attention so that you can then bring it here for the living process.

So, then [he] said, “OK, the whole sentence should be, ‘In the seeing is the movement until the observer and the observed become one.’” I said, “What do you mean by that?” He said, “Go find out.” [Laughs.]

TS: Now, I want to ask you just one question about this word, “seeing.” “In the seeing.” Tell me what you mean by “seeing,” because it doesn’t seem like you’re talking about something visual per se. You’re talking about something deeper than that.

MO: Yes. It’s about attention.

So, let’s say that you’re in the car and the dog is yipping, and all that. You’re acknowledging what’s going on. But, then let’s say that you take him to the vet, and the vet takes him back for his checkup. You’re in the waiting room.

And all of a sudden, “Oh, that’s right! I can see that there’s a kind of a knot in my stomach.” It’s really very helpful to begin this with the body. But, then we learn how to bring it to the stories in our head and to our emotions.

But, you bring your attention—let’s say it’s just this clench. It could be an ache in your neck. It could be a stabbing in your back. It could be a lump in your throat, an elephant on your chest. And you just close your eyes, because you’re just waiting there, and you bring your attention into your actual, living experience.

Now, you’ve seen it because you’re recognizing there’s a knot in your stomach. But, you haven’t really been with it. Your attention has not been there for the living experience of it. That’s what Joel taught me. [It] was that when your attention and your immediate experience come together, that’s seeing—being with the actual, living experience of whatever is going on inside of you.

And the more you do that with your body, the more that then you can do that with the stories in your head and you can be with even feelings in watching this close family member just fighting, fighting for their life—and going through the most intense chemo you could imagine. Major, major surgeries and all that.

When I would be sitting in the hospital with him and it’d be quiet, and his breath was

labored, and he had just come out of surgery and was moaning—and I'm sitting there, and I'm grounding in this moment. Then up comes a wave of despair—just ancient, deep despair.

And instead of identifying with it and starting to ride the wave of despair or the wave of fear—I had a lot of fear [that] arose in this last year—I bring my attention to it. And now, that despair is not alone. Now, that despair has a witness to it. It's just like what happens if you had a bad day and you go to your friend, and your friend does with you what you do with you when there is discomfort arising inside of you—whether it's upset mind or strong emotions or some holding in your body, and that friend just says, "Oh my God, not again," and judges you. Or, [they try] to fix you or ignore you. That doesn't feel good.

But, when that friend—let's say this is a fairly aware friend—just gives you the light of their attention—they're just there; they're not even saying anything—you may talk for 15 minutes and you feel better. Why? Because energy moved through the light of attention.

That's what I mean about seeing.

TS: Now, Mary, you talk about eight spells—where we started our conversation—and believe it or not, we only started by talking about the first two. But, they're what you call the "foundational spells." Then you move into this section about "operational spells." These are, "I must control life," a spell that I think—yes; "I must do it right;" and, "I'm not doing it right enough."

So, talk to me a little bit about how we fall under these operational spells—but more importantly, how we can break those spells.

MO: Yes, yes. I think it's so important. I've led groups for years and done retreats in beautiful places. It's so important—well, it's helpful—to hang out with other people that are beginning to come back to life, to open to life again, and be present for this amazing, intelligent, creative flow called life. It really, really helps to have a group of people where they are real about what is going on inside of them.

In fact, a number of years after I met Joel, I had the very wonderful grace to meet Stephen Levine and spent many times with him when he would come up to Seattle, and then got a chance to be with him for 10 days at Breitenbush once. He said once, "You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to create a hat. When you put it on your head, it instantaneously broadcasts over a loudspeaker all of your thoughts."

All of the people in the room groaned. And he said, "But, no, you would know so much more freedom because you would see we're all doing the same thing."

So, this spell that "I must control life," which really is the spell, "I must do life," and then, "I must do it right." Then, "I am not doing it right enough." If most people could stop for a moment and just really listen to what's going on in their head, they could see that that is the real foundation of the movement of what is going on in their head. It all comes to this very secret feeling that we all carry that, "I'm not enough."

So, when we get to that place, "Oh my God, I'm not doing it right enough," then we pick back up again and we say, "No, no. I got to control life. I got to be on top of it. If I am on top of it—if I do my meditations right and if I think positive thoughts and I give enough money, and so on and so forth—then everything will be OK." But, we don't look. We don't take time to begin to understand that we're being run by these three operational spells,

which then lead us to what I call “the three hidden spells”—the hidden spells that we all have.

TS: And those are—I have them here in front of me—“I’m wrong, I’m unlovable, and I’m all alone.” So, I’m sure a listener at this point is like, “Yes, I know that. I know that part of me that feels like I’m not enough—that I’m wrong, unlovable, and even alone.”

So, my question to you, Mary, is: here we’re shining a light on these thoughts that are going on in our head, underneath the loudspeaker—we’ve worked with Stephen Levine’s hat. And yes, underneath, “I wish I was doing a better job with this interview. I wish that . . .” whatever. Whatever’s going on inside people. Everybody has their own broadcasting voice of what they wish was better. What is your set of instructions when we become aware of this?

MO: Well, in the book, there are ten remembering sessions. They’re at the end of each of the ten chapters.

Let’s say this first: unconsciousness is all—or, this storyteller. That’s a better word to use. This storyteller that goes on in our head all day long—if you had a little door in your forehead and you opened it up—and of the 65,000 thoughts we have a day—you would see these spells operating, and you would see they’re all based on fear and glued together with judgment. It’s always fixing. It’s trying to do things right. It’s trying to get rid of what it doesn’t like and get towards what it does like. It’s this endless game of struggle.

Now, the path to freedom has three core skills that we can learn that we talk about in the remembering sessions. The first is curiosity. For most of us right now, our attention is like a muscle and it’s very flaccid. It just follows thought wherever it goes. If the storyteller says, “I’m sad,” we think we’re sad. If it says, “We’re mad,” we think we’re mad.

So, we want to begin to strengthen the muscle of our curiosity. That’s why it’s so good to set aside some time every day—to me, consistency is far more important than quantity. We start having our times of silence, and we go, “I’m going to do 20 minutes twice a day!” and we do it for three weeks, and then it fades. But, if we begin with just five minutes to notice a focus and to then know that the attention is going to wander off into thought—of course it is. It’s only been there most of our lives! But, when you notice you’re gone, you don’t judge it—and then you bring your attention back.

For the ten years between when I was introduced to Joel and then met Stephen, I was a part-time meditator because I couldn’t do it right. [I] just felt the spell, “I was doing it wrong and thus I am wrong,” and everybody else was doing it right.

Then, when I met Stephen, he began to show me how to look with great compassion. That’s when I began sitting every day and have for many, many years.

But, every time you bring your attention back—and Stephen said to me, “Mary, if you sit for an hour and you bring your attention back to your focus one time in an hour, that is time well spent.” So, I began to really see that this wasn’t a contest. I wasn’t trying to get someplace. I was just discovering how to bring my attention out of the storyteller and bring it back to life.

The more that you strengthen that muscle of attention, the easier that it becomes that when something comes—when you have a huge reaction or even a small reaction in

life—you don't like the stoplight—your attention is there, your attention is able to see what the mind is doing, and that cloud passes right through you. That's the first skill set of awakening.

So, when we learn how to actually have our attention and our immediate experience together—not an idea about it, but the living experience of it—most people don't have a clue about what that means. That's partly why I wrote the book—[because] we can begin to see the phenomenal power of having our attention and our immediate experience together. Something pretty amazing begins to happen: our heart begins to open.

All those years I was with Stephen and all those years I sat with Jack Kornfield—and I did I think thousands of lovingkindness meditations and forgiveness meditations—I didn't feel a lot of a shift. I think that I was planting seeds. I think they were very important. But, I began to see that when you begin to learn how to be present for your experience and you begin to see this storyteller in your head, you begin to see how young it is, how hard it's been trying your whole life. And that's when you begin to discover the phenomenal power of the second skill, which I call "compassion."

But, sometimes I call it "spaciousness." It's the ability to say, "I see you," and to actually be with that despair or that anger or that fear or that ache in your back or that mind that just wants to explode—that you are that capacity to see what is going on inside of you. As you begin to discover how to open around it—how to give it space—these parts so respond to our hearts. They're just like you and I. When we're heard and listened to and honored, we begin to let go—and so do these very ancient parts that we learned how to hold onto when we were very young. It is just so delightful.

I was somebody that really, really lived extreme self-hate. I've carved up my body with razor blades. This was my early twenties and I broke my own arm once—

TS: Oh, wow.

MO: —because I was drunk and hit the end of a bed. I was trying to hit the bed and had a duvet cover over the four-poster bed, and I just kept on hitting it.

How do you heal that kind of deep, deep self-revulsion? It's beyond self-hatred. It's self-revulsion. It's by learning how to see it, to be with it, and slowly have your heart open to it.

Does the judger still come at times? Yes. But, I say, "Oh, hi! You having a bad day?" [Laughs.] It just gets heard and it passes right through me. So, this to me is where really true, lasting healing happens.

They've done these studies now. I was interviewed for a book like four or five years ago called mBraining—the "m" is for the word "multiple." They took 600 of the leading-edge research papers on our three brains—the abdominal brain, the heart brain, and our head brain—and all the studies have shown that the heart brain is our main brain.

Yet, for most of us, it had to be shut down. It's too sensitive. When we're young, it had to be shut down. So, we become an object in our minds rather than the subject of our hearts.

So, there is a huge thread through the book that is [about] how to really begin to be with yourself through kindness and care and compassion. That's how I came out of being a highly compulsive person to one who is very normal around food.

So, then the third skill—and it's so helpful—I call it “living in questions.” What I want to say about it is that when the hero goes out and he's trying to get to the Holy Grail or the magic wand, he's just meeting all of these heartaches and hardships—like we all do in our lives. He comes across the White Witch of the North. She gives him a talisman, and she says, “Just wear it around your neck, and whenever you need help, just rub this talisman.”

Well, we have this most amazing talisman that is always with us and we're only beginning to discover: the power of living in questions without looking for an answer. It's so important to get that when you really start waking back up into life, your mind thinks you are the one that is awakening. It takes a while to see that enough that that begins to relax. Then you begin to realize there is an intelligence with you always. When you ask a question, the answer will be lived through you. It really helps you to see that you are not alone in this process.

So, when you put those three really basic skills together, you begin to be able to see and see through the clouds of conditioning and come back to our real home—this living moment that is this constantly unfolding adventure [laughs] of the great mystery of life.

TS: Mary, you have such a simple, grounded, practical, helpful way of talking about—really—some of the greatest mysteries of life. I don't exactly know how old you are—and it's not important—but you're an older woman, you're a counselor and a spiritual teacher. But, some part of me feels that you're sort of one of these hidden, wise mystics that's now coming out—but in a way just so ordinary too. I mean, counseling, teaching, working one-on-one and in small groups. And yet, here you've written a book that is just so right on the mark, in my opinion.

MO: Yes. Yes. And the gift I was given was to be given so much heartache that I couldn't get rid of it. I couldn't even kill myself! I was a failure at suicide. And then life began to say, “Pay attention.”

The exciting thing is that mostly people have woken up out of this dream of separation—this conditioned self—back into life—they've had to remove themselves from life. A monastery, a cave, whatever. And thank God for those people, because they have been our way-showers.

But now, more and more of us are waking up right smack dab in the middle of rush-hour traffic and raising kids and illnesses and financial difficulties. That's why I love this title. I like to joke. I say, “You don't even need to read the book. Just live the title.” What's in the Way Is the Way—that the great challenges of your life are embedded with gifts. We don't need to get out of life. We need to get into it and gather the gifts that are always embedded in every great challenge of our lives.

TS: Now, Mary, before I met you, I hosted a series called Waking Up: What Does It Really Mean? I interviewed 30-some-odd people about spiritual awakening and what spiritual awakening means to them. So, I want to now envelop you, if you will, into that question and that inquiry—because one of the things I discovered was that people use this term—“waking up,” “spiritual awakening”—but they mean different things by it. So, I want to be really clear what you mean by “spiritual awakening.”

MO: Yes. Do you have your mind, your body, and your heart all in the same place at the same time—to be here for life? To actually experience not an idea about it, but the living mystery of it.

And I have an armchair on the moon. Well, I have a lot of armchairs on the moon. I invite people constantly to come up. It is so amazing to have that kind of broader kind of perspective. You look over at this blue-green jewel of our planet and your heart just opens to it. You see over to Mars and it's brown and is beautiful in its own right. You look at the moon and it's kind of brown and dusty.

Then you look at the Earth and here are the blues of the ocean and the whites and the grays of the clouds. And here, all the different variations of colors of flowers. My God, there's aardvarks and zebras and giraffes and there's baby spinner dolphins and there's tiny mountain wildflowers and there's majestic icebergs. Oh my God! I think it was Robin Williams [who] said, "Boy, we did not move into the fixer-upper. We got the prime real estate."

If you look at this Earth, you will see all with its exquisite creativity—but you'll see that there's seven billion people wandering around on this planet that have clouds around their heads. Alan Watts, the wonderful Zen philosopher, once said, "No matter how many times you say the word 'water,' it will never be wet." People have clouds because they have forgotten how to really connect with life—to be open, to actually experience life, to become a part of this great flow of life.

When I sit up there, I see that there's more and more people that—with their own attention—are clearing their clouds. And then they are then present for other people. Then those people turn and they are present for other people. I see this movement all around the Earth—that humanity is waking up out of the dream of separation [and] out of the dream of fear.

Where this will take us, I don't know. But, I see that movement everywhere in my life. We begin to understand that we can make a difference. We really, truly can. By healing the war inside of us, we can become a part of the healing of our world.

So, that's what resonates with me when I hear "waking up."

TS: Now, you mention this very interesting idea—which no one else of the 30-some-odd people mentioned—about [all three centers of] the belly, the heart, and the mind being in the same place. So, what I'm imagining is, my head says one thing and my heart says another. So, what do I do in those situations? I'm not all in the same place. In fact, there's a lot of different things going on inside me.

MO: Yes! And, we have really made a god of this conditioned self. In one moment, it says, "I want an ice cream cone," and you go get an ice cream cone. You're eating the ice cream cone and it says, "You shouldn't have done that." That's what we use to guide our life.

But, underneath all of that holding that has taken over our belly brain, all of that contraction and judgment that has taken over our heart brain, and all of that busyness and trying that has taken over this head brain—which I'm not putting down at all. It's an exquisite tool. It only took 13.8 billion years to figure out how to make it. But, it's a wonderful tool for maneuvering through reality—it's not reality.

But, underneath all of that is our essence. Our essence—it's almost like you begin to dance with life. Or, maybe a better way to say it is you begin to follow the currents of life and you begin to feel your way through life. You begin to trust this deep knowing inside of

you.

Now, are we always there when we're first starting to awaken? No. And it can be very confusing at times. You have all these conflicting parts. But, that's where we come back to this first skill: be curious. What's here? And we couple it to the last skill.

You don't have to see something. You just have to notice, and then you can ask life, "Show me what you're showing me here."

You're in the car and the dog is yapping, and you're just finding yourself feeling tight. There's no way you can go exploring. But, you say, "OK, life. I notice that you are showing me something here." And you're signaling life. At the right time and in the right way, life will show you. And you begin to trust life again. You begin to trust this place that is underneath all of this busyness and holding that we have lived our whole lives.

TS: Now, I want to circle back just for a moment for a very powerful statement you made. You were talking about the eight spells, which is where we started our conversation. And you said that, "They're created out of fear and held together by judgment." So, I thought this was an important thing to pull out and talk about. What do you mean, they're created out of fear?

MO: Well, go back to [how] we really were little, tiny people in a land of unconscious giants. They pretty well say that this conditioned self—all of its foundations are pretty well formed by the time we're six years old. You can remodel them a bit over the years, but the core foundations of it—these core beliefs. That's another word you could use for "spells." These core beliefs are—we kind of absorb them inside of us in those first six years of our life.

Most of us had unconscious parents. They may have loved us. But, life was a wounding process. Here we are, this little tiny person—now we're a separate person, because here I am and life is there—out there. And I've got to do something to make a connection here, or I'm going to die. Then the mind starts off on its merry chase.

So, the foundations of this conditioned mind happen within the framework of fear. If you watch it very carefully and watch it with kindness, you'll see that most of the time it's scared. It's not big fears. It's the fear that the stop light won't be long enough to put your makeup on. Or, the stoplight will be too long and you may be two minutes late to work.

There is this kind of grinding [growls] that goes on inside of us all day long. If you watch it carefully, you'll see that its foundations [are] all about fear.

But, you'll see that it tries to manage all of that through judgment. It's constantly judging and looking about how we're doing. Are we doing good enough? Are we right enough? So on and so forth.

And then we judge other people. Then we judge that we judge other people, not understanding that our judgment of people is just like the safety release valve for all of this judgment that we took on when we were young.

That's the heartache. Oh, that's the heartache! A really, truly whole person has every single part of them woven into their heart. We're all nutty as fruitcakes—even that!

It's so wonderful to discover that everybody else thinks that way too. But, we don't have

to be at the beck and call of this storyteller in our heads. That's what life has had me offer to the world.

TS: Mary, you've written such a beautiful, helpful, practical, grounded book. In my view, it's like gritty spirituality for everyone. It's right there. It's called *What's in the Way Is the Way: A Practical Guide to Waking Up to Life*. I wonder if, to end our conversation—you teach so many different meditation practices that people can do as part of these “rememberings” that you offer. I wonder if you could leave us just with one breathing practice here that we could do as a way to conclude our conversation.

MO: Yes. So, we learn how to hold our breath—and tighten our body and run away to our minds. So, we become human doings rather than human beings. And our breath can be the most exquisite biofeedback mechanism. Also, it can calm what is agitated, it can open what has been closed, and it can ground what has flown off into the ethers.

So, one of the most powerful breath practices—and it's so simple, and I just love this—is that, as you breathe out, you say the sound, “Aaah.” This is the sound—the vibration—of the heart chakra. It is no accident that it is in most of the words that we use to point to God. “God.” “Allah.” “Jehovah.” “Yahweh.”

And when you breath out and say the word, “Aaah,” you begin to lengthen your out-breath—to begin to be able to bring more open breathing, which, oh my God—it's so exhilarating.

It is not in [inhales], I'm going to take in this deep in-breath—which really causes more stress and you're only using the top part of your lungs. This long, slow, “Aaah,” begins to relax what has been holding. It calms. It reminds us everything is OK right now.

And if we're in a place where we can't say it out loud, we say it silently inside of ourselves. “Aaah.”

TS: Aaah. That's a beautiful note to end on.

Mary O'Malley, the author of the new book, *What's in the Way Is the Way: A Practical Guide to Waking Up to Life*. Thank you, Mary. Thank you so much for your life of wisdom. Thank you.

MO: It's my joy.

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