



## The Dark Side of the Sacred, by Miriam Greenspan

Emotions live in the body. It is not enough simply to talk about them, to be a talking head. We need to focus our attention on emotions where they live. This willingness to be present allows the emotion to begin to shift of its own accord. An alchemy starts to happen â€” a process of transmutation from something hard and leaden to something precious and powerful, like gold.

This is a chaotic, nonlinear process, but I think it requires three basic skills: attending to, befriending, and surrendering to emotions in the body. Paying attention to or attending to our emotions is not the same as endless navel gazing and second-guessing ourselves. It is mindfulness of the body, an ability to listen to the bodyâ€™s emotional language without judgment or suppression.

Befriending follows from focusing our attention and takes it a step further: it involves building our tolerance for distressing emotions. When I was giving birth to my first child, my midwife said something that has stood me in good stead ever since: â€œWhen you feel the contraction coming and you want to back away from it, move toward it instead.â€• The feeling in the body that we want to run away from â€” thatâ€™s precisely what we need to stay with. A simple way to do this is to locate the emotion in the body and breathe through it, without trying to change or end it.

The third skill, surrendering, is the spiritual part of this process. Surrendering to suffering is usually the last thing we want to do, but surrender is what brings the unexpected gifts of wisdom, compassion, and courage. Surrendering is about saying yes when we want to say no â€” the \_yes\_ of acceptance. This is what really allows the alchemy to happen. We donâ€™t â€œlet goâ€• of emotions; we let go of ego, and the emotions then let go themselves. This is â€œemotional flow.â€• When we let the dark emotions flow, something unexpected and unpredictable often occurs. Consciously experienced, the energy of these emotions flows toward healing and harmony. Iâ€™ve found that unimpeded grief transforms itself into heightened gratitude; that consciously experiencing fear expands our ability to feel joy; and that being mindful of despair â€” really entering into the dark night of the soul with the light of awareness â€” renews and deepens our faith.

--Miriam Greenspan

