

D A R E  
T O  
F E E L

*The  
Transformational  
Path of the Heart*

**ALEXANDRA ROXO**

 **sounds true**  
BOULDER, COLORADO

# *Contents*

Introduction - Feeling: A Reclamation – 1

## Part 1: Heartbreak

1. Learning Not to Feel – 19
2. When It Feels Safer to Be Alone – 31
3. When Emotion Has Nowhere to Go – 39
  4. When Fear Gets Stuck – 47
  5. Joy Warms a Timid Heart – 53
  6. Grace Heals a Heart – 61
7. Courage and Curiosity Bring Us Back into the Heart – 71

## Part 2: Opening the Heart Again After Diving Into Its Shadows

8. Courage to Face Our Core Wounds – 81
9. Yearning and Learning to Feel Safe – 89
10. Trying to Avoid Our Core Wounds but Falling  
Straight into Their Healing – 101
  11. Grace Comes in Many Forms – 109
  12. Daring but Not Feeling – 117
13. Risking Our Messy Feelings to Be Seen – 127
  14. Daring to Be Honest – 137
15. The Heart's Hungers That Blind – 147

## Contents

- 16. Creating New Relationships with Feeling Your Heart – 159
- 17. Feeling Again After Shutting It All Down to Survive – 167

### Part 3: Awakening to the Openhearted Way

- 18. The Innocent Heart – 179
  - 19. Fearless Feeling and Self-Trust – 183
- 20. Turning toward Love, Especially When It Hurts – 193
- 21. From a Broken Heart to One That Is Healing – 205
  - 22. Daring to Let Yourself Feel Loved – 211
  - 23. Meeting Heart Shadows with Love – 219
- 24. Opening the Heart to Receive Big Love – 225
- 25. The Heart That Dares to Ask for Help – 231
  - 26. Compassion: Risking for Love – 241
- 27. Dreaming of a Planet Where We Dare to Feel – 249

Acknowledgments – 253

About the Author – 255

## INTRODUCTION

### *Feeling: A Reclamation*

**M**ost of us weren't taught how to feel. In fact, I would argue that most of us were taught *not* to feel. For example, as a child, you were likely told you couldn't pee at school until it was time for break. You are six years old, and you drank your juice at lunch like you were supposed to, but now you aren't allowed to pee. You are trying to focus on  $1 + 1 = 2$ , but your bladder is starting to burn. So, what do you do? You learn how to stop feeling. You learn how to stop listening to the sensations, signs, and signals of your body, and in learning how to ignore these, you quickly learn to override your most basic needs.

As a bonus side effect, parents and society praise you for being "good." You learn that it pays not to make a fuss. When you feel hurt that you were left out on the playground and you go cry to a teacher, you are reprimanded for complaining, or you are told to cheer up and to "not let it get to you." And so, you learn to smile through your pain. You learn to grin and bear it. Instead of playing and dreaming, you focus on getting good grades. You are proud of yourself for this warrioriness; it is survival. It's not safe to feel everything you are feeling.

Even if you have the courage to ask them, most of the time the adults around you are too busy to hold you in the pain of being picked on at lunch, too busy to stop and share in your delight at spotting a giant orange butterfly dancing through the air. They, too, are concerned with survival, putting food on the table and keeping you from running into traffic. They are worried about money. They are stuck in their own shit.

When you stub your toe and are wailing on the floor in the grocery store, honoring your pain with tears and shrieks, they are embarrassed; crying like that in the grocery store is not okay. You are hushed, placated, or ignored. There is little space for your inconvenient, real-time feelings in their world. So, you take the lollipop that says, “Shhh,” or you shove your thumb in your mouth and zone out watching dancing, animated fish on the TV.

And some of you experience frightening things that you don't know how to face. You freeze parts of your true self in the face of trauma, and for good reason. Terror makes you hide inside yourself. Your tiny body doesn't know how to handle or process the painful or heartbreaking or invasive experiences of abuse or neglect or abandonment, or of looking or feeling different than the others. You may be a sensitive soul, but your psyche is strong. It helps you tuck the felt memory of these experiences away into the tissue of your cells, hiding things from yourself that are too hard to digest.

By the time you're in middle school, you can hold back tears, poop, laughter, and insane menstrual cramps, and no one is the wiser. You are amazing at suppressing feelings and sensations and emotions. You rarely even need to cry, and you're proud of it! Sometimes, though, the emotions catch up with you like a tidal wave, and you feel so overwhelmed you don't know what to do. You sob in a heap on the floor and get up and try to face life again. When life gets intense and the feelings threaten to overtake you, you calm yourself by bingeing on sweets or staring numbly at the TV. Or you begin to count calories. Tallying up every Cheerio you place into your mouth becomes the perfect distraction from everything that is going on inside you. As puberty hits and the hormones rage, controlling something like food feels safe. There are likely no rites of passage to hold you. No circle of crone mamas to say, “It is safe to feel, it is safe to cry.” So, you play it cool and do whatever you can to fit in.

But the truth is that not feeling hurts you. Controlling your feelings by numbing or silencing them creates a pattern inside of you that may go on your whole life. Denying your emotions and your felt sense

of life is denying your reality. It creates a spiritual and psychological split from your true self. It may seem safer to deny the moving opera of your soul incarnate, but it is not. Denying and controlling your felt experience shuts down the voice of your soul, eroding the link between you and your life, you and your body, you and this world, you and the divinity that yearns to speak to you.

Fast-forward twenty years, and your innocent survival tactics have become dark and gnarly. Even if you want to feel the pain and joy in your body, you can't. The habit is too deep. Now you're in therapy learning to feel again, and it's brutal. Perhaps you feel a lot, but it comes in tidal waves of emotion that you can't control. Maybe you're engaged in a push-pull with feeling—numb the tough ones, try to enhance the good ones—and now you're a mess. You know it is time to thaw the layers of ice that have frozen the feelings in your body. To break down the walls you've built around your heart. To stop smiling through your pain. To stop eating your feelings. Or drinking or working or shopping them away. You want to start being honest with yourself and the people around you. The idea of this terrifies you, but somewhere deep inside, you know it is the only way to liberate the truth of who you are, to know yourself, to live honestly and openly.

And slowly, over time, you learn to feel in real time again. You remember how to feel the pain in your body. The grief in your heart. Your capacity for childlike wonder and delight. Feelings no longer come in waves that threaten to drown you, but they exist as an ongoing symphony that you are learning to live within. Taking time to feel “slows you down” from maximum productivity, but somehow you know you must do it. You are ready to cultivate compassion for your family, your friends, the trees and animals dying in the Amazon. You find yourself crying over the injustices in the world. And you cultivate compassion for yourself. For the things you have endured, the things you didn't know how to feel, the things that got stuck in your body and turned you tough or hard or scared. You hold the little one inside of you with so much love. You understand that feeling is the language of the Divine, the way the Mystery speaks to you and through you.

At first you are truly overwhelmed. It is insane to feel this much. But over time, it gets easier. You learn to be with the waves of emotions and sensations. You learn not to identify with them and instead let them wash over you like a giant, cleansing wave. You hear messages in all of it. You feel truth pulsing through you. You regain a connection to the eternal essence that you are. All this feeling *feels like being alive*. It feels like connection to yourself and life. You are more shining and open now. Your eyes glisten with tears as you stop to watch a sunset, absorb what is happening in the news, and spend evenings laughing with your loved ones. There are times when you feel you can't hack it; it's too hard. So, you rest, and then you come back to your heart. And slowly, it opens again, little by little, and even though it is terrifying, it feels amazing. You are open to life again. You are home in your body again. You did it. You dared to feel. You opened your spiritual heart. You plugged deeply into Source and learned to trust that connection again.



This quite accurately describes my own journey of reclaiming my full-feeling self, of trusting my feeling self as a language of connection to Spirit, of finding balance beyond the pendulum swing of too much feeling and not feeling at all, and walking the transformational path of the open heart. For most of my life, I either let the feelings coming from my wide-open heart drown me, or I pushed them down and muscled my way out of them. I didn't always want to hear what they had to say. This continued until one day I realized that this dysfunctional relationship with feeling was costing me my joy and presence, preventing me from receiving love, cutting me off from my spiritual journey and my body, and generally wreaking havoc on my life. I knew that unless I stopped to feel, and in turn heal, and began to listen, I would never experience the life I longed for. I would never feel the joy I yearned for. I would live in my head, cut off from the deep embodiment of my soul.

Life could fly by while I remained checked out, numbed out, frozen, and stuck in my thoughts. This reckoning with my body and soul was necessary and urgent. I also knew on some level that feeling was a way I was in contact with the Divine, and that when it was blocked, I became disconnected from my eternal nature and my spiritual path. I was stuck in the rational world, the thinking world, a world without the numinous magic of what exists beyond words in the felt senses, intuition, and instincts, and in living deeply embodied.

Animals move through life with keen senses and instincts. Healthy animals can smell a storm coming, sense danger, and shake off trauma. They instinctively roll around in playful delight. They are a part of nature, not separate from it. This connection to our own instincts is something we humans have lost. Though this book isn't a reclamation of the instinctual self per se; it is an invitation for us modern-day humans to begin to deeply feel each other and our lives again through the depth of an open heart, the "brain" of our feeling self, and in turn let that be an invitation to reclaim a sense of embodied spirituality and live from what I call the "transformational path of the heart."

This is a book about the spiritual journey of the heart's feeling and not feeling, opening and closing, numbing and withdrawing, diving deeply into the heart's shadows, healing, and finally learning to stay open. In this book I will invite you to feel the good, the bad, and the ugly, using my own heart-wrenching and heart-expanding stories of walking the transformational path of the heart to help you access the wells of feeling inside of you. These stories are about my own soul's journey, but they are yours, too. They are a part of our shared human experience and what we all feel. They will call forward memories in you that you can now recognize as your own heart's initiations, the lessons that called you into deep feeling, deep opening, deep healing, and change. They are access points to every soul's journey of human experience. They belong to everyone who has experienced loss, shame, loneliness, joy, love, and more. The feelings we experience as human beings, and the situations that give rise to them, are universal. They are what human biology and mythology are made of. Without seeing our lives in the context of the spiritual path,



the soul's journey of deep learning, and the heart's journey of deep opening, life experiences can seem mundane. But they are keys to how we know love and how we honor the great Mystery that created us. It is when we dare to feel, and, in doing so, dare to open the heart, that we are available to truly feel the immensity and magic of life. In each deep dive into openhearted feeling, we say yes to being made, molded, crafted, and opened by Goddess/God/the Divine . . . by the experiences that we came to this planet for, as souls seeking awakening.

These are true stories about my own walk on the transformational path of the heart, feeling my way through core wounds, discomfort, heart opening, dark nights, and all states between. Some of the stories may be activating as I occasionally talk about things like addiction, alcohol and drug use, suicidal ideation, sexual trauma, and mental health struggles. If something is activating to you, take your time, take a breath—there is no need to rush yourself. Within our shared humanity I hope we can all sense the healing potential and feel less alone in our own struggles. Also, some of the names have been changed to protect people from my past and be respectful of where people are today. But the names of my dear friends have stayed the same.

In this book, “feelings” encompasses emotions, sensations, instincts, and intuitive hits, all of which are experienced in the body. Feeling is the language of the heart and extends to the body and soul. Feeling is a way Spirit reaches into us, speaks to us, and lives through us. Much of the canon of self-help, personal development, and modern spirituality can feel intellectual, data-driven, or how-to driven, offering instructions and advice flattened into digestible memes. There are stats on how meditation can help you become calmer and more productive. There is data showing exactly how the nervous system becomes dysregulated and how to regulate it again. There are step-by-step formulas to drive these teachings home. It is becoming increasingly common to psychologize all emotional experience and analyze emotions and feelings. This is a helpful part of all our journey of awareness and healing collectively, but it can also lead to over-processing, getting stuck in the head, and losing contact with the spiritual gifts of our felt experiences. I myself

am a forever student of psychospiritual theory; I love learning with my mind, and yet I am cautious to remember that on the spiritual path there are places beyond intellectual understanding, places where the deep mystery exists in myth, story, feeling, poems, and in the well of the spiritual heart.

The aforementioned “transformational path of the heart” is the choice to experience life through the spiritual heart, to study how it opens and closes, how it recovers from hurt, how it learns to trust again, and how it dares to feel as a way of connecting to all of reality. This path is ineffable, mystical, artistic, nonlinear, and beyond reason. I worship at the temple of that which is felt in the body, the visceral, the sensual, the sensorial, and the primal as key aspects of my connection to the Divine. In my practice as a teacher, facilitator, and spiritual guide, I support people to connect with their soul, their deepest yearnings, and the divinity within through embodiment. Allowing emotions to be pathways to deep openings and pulling concepts and ideas through these bodies, feeling how the body inhabits the soul self and how the senses are an extension of the soul and our divinity. This is an opposite spiritual path to how many of us were conditioned, where we seek to calm ourselves and our senses and stay in the realm of prayer or meditation, seeing holiness as existing outside of ourselves and not as something to be found when we descend into the chaos and magic of all that is going on in the body and the soul that inhabits our tissues and emotions.

In a spiritual space that can feel oversaturated with left-brain analysis, this book is an invitation for you to get to know yourself from the perspective of the right brain, the heart, and the body; from a place of experience, feeling, and deep knowing, where meaning is *divined* rather than explained. As such, this book is an invitation into a felt experience in your body, using storytelling and poems and rituals to share spiritual truths. This is an ancient way of teaching, sharing, and transmitting wisdom that I believe is ripe for reclamation. Stories get us out of our heads and into our hearts. They teach us without making us feel like we’re “learning a lesson.” They take us on a journey

and leave us changed. Stories are not simply for entertainment but also for catharsis, transformation, illumination, and possibility. Stories are a way we feel into our archetypal similarities and access the deeper myths that all humans experience.



As for why we need to hear each other's stories, and why it is time to dare to feel? **As we navigate lives spent more and more online, being in our bodies, in our hearts, open and revealed, human to human, breath to breath, becomes scarier, riskier, and more vulnerable.** Texting someone when something big or heavy comes up feels easier than connecting on the phone or having a coffee and chatting in person. The bubbles of fear and anxiety we feel in the face of real connection become less and less tolerable the less we practice feeling them. We unconsciously begin to skip out on in-person events or live experiences because we don't want to feel awkward, vulnerable, or exposed. Or we show up and reach for a drink or a joint to take the edge off, feeling all of this is too much for our system when we aren't used to it. Was it the pandemic? Is it technology? Does it matter? It is happening.

And slowly, we begin to shut down and isolate, spending more and more time staring into screens. We avoid taking a step closer to another person because we fear our feelings will be rejected or that we will say the wrong thing. We sidestep anything we deem "too intense," those moments of emotion or sensation that we cannot control. But in doing this, we avoid the miracles of *boundless joy*, *uncontrollable excitement*, and *overwhelming passion*. The more we try to control or retreat from feeling, the more we shrink away from some of the greatest parts of being human: crying, loving, connecting, and taking risks in love, work, and creativity. All of this requires a willingness to feel, to be present in our bodies, to OPEN, and to BREATHE. This is where we remember that we are not in control. This is where we recall an ancient spiritual path outside of any religion we were born into.

Where we leave the worship of money and productivity and fame and come into devotion to our shared journey, to the planet, to the Mystery, to something other than ourselves. **We do not simply enter the spiritual path to “feel” better. We enter to feel it *all*. We enter to know the divine. We enter to be fully embodied this lifetime and to awaken.** Feeling is a gateway to compassion and empathy, which pull us out of the experience of the self and into the greater collective experience. It takes courage to feel, but it is also a relief to stop trying to control everything and to stop feeling like we are each so different as individuals. As we feel more into our lives, we develop more empathy for the lives of others, seeing the universal experiences we are all a part of. We relax and open into our sameness.

This is when the armor begins to come down. This is when we begin to stop checking out, overthinking, fidgeting, grabbing for our phones, numbing out with substances, or running for the door. There may be tears, some awkwardness, some giggles. But when we stay ready to open up, heart to heart, body to body, there is a stillness, a gush of love, a shining jewel, a *something* that we cannot put into words. Our feelings are the messy indicators of our humanness, and this is what we miss when we spend our lives avoiding them. We must stay in the practice of feeling the real, the touch of life upon our skin, air, breath, nerves, tension, awkwardness, and all. **Feeling is a devotional act to living in the real world as opposed to existing in a flat, virtual simulation of life.**

But let it be known: daring to feel and to walk the transformational path of the heart is not for the faint of heart! It is dark and it is gritty. It is tears and blood and guts. It is flying high in the sky and descending below the earth's surface to sit in dark soul caves and listen and learn there. It is not clean and pristine; it requires you to roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty and dare to walk in the dark. Daring to feel requires a full activation of your being, your nervous system, your sensual body, your emotions, your fears. It also requires facing your past and the traumas and experiences that taught you it was not safe to feel. It requires laying your life on the altar of heart transformation even when doing so feels terrifying.

Not only will this daring eventually unleash your joy and bliss but it will also stir up any past hurts that have been imprinted in this body that has carried you through life. For anybody who has experienced deep hurt, and whose body has been holding and hiding this hurt away for years, this can be overwhelming. As a result, as you begin to dare to feel, you will sometimes feel backed into a corner, like you want to run from the room. Logic will try to convince you that there is somebody or something out there who is better for you, who won't trigger you to look at your blind spots, your hard spots, or your pain spots. All the voices of the conditioned mind will chime in at this point with their insecurities and fears; in an attempt to keep you "safe," they will instruct you to walk away. "This is *too much* feeling, too much openness," they will say. This is a part of walking the heart path. It has been said by many a mystic that it is a warrior's path to walk with an open heart in this world.

And it is in the seeming unsafety of staying with the feelings of your open heart, and keeping it open, that you break free. In these moments, the work is to feel the kinks and knots in your heart, and to sit with them and tend to them and breathe with them. To feel your stubbornness. Your inability to open. Your fear of commitment. Your fear of seeming needy. Your avoidance masked as "self-sufficiency." And, slowly, you will begin to see them simply as waves of experience, of karma, or as remnants of past moments in your life that are coming up to be burned away on the path of your soul's liberation from fear and suffering. That which was once so hard will become simple when it is approached as your daily spiritual practice, the practice you live into your whole life: living from an open heart and accepting all of your emotions as passing moments to feel into, without pushing them away.

**When we are able to move toward our feelings rather than running from them, these moments of deep feeling remind us of who we truly are.** They soften us, they teach us, they open us, they reveal artful, beautiful truths. The process of opening after deep closure is different for everyone. It may require time with a trusted mentor or therapist, or attending a twelve-step meeting. Or it could be you and your journal