

A NEW EARTH ONLINE CLASS

COMPANION GUIDE

CHAPTER 4

1. ***"What really matters is not what function you fulfill in this world, but whether you identify with your function to such an extent that it takes you over and becomes a role that you play. When you play roles you are unconscious. When you catch yourself playing a role, that recognition creates a space between you and the role"*** (p. 90). Common roles people play include working woman, stay-at-home mom, macho male, female seductress, nonconformist artist, cultured intellectual, world traveler, etc. You also assign roles to others and then treat them accordingly. (How you speak to the janitor may be different from how you speak to the chairman of the company.) What roles do you play at work, home, or in the world? List some of them here. What roles do you assign to others? List them, too. This week, see if you can create a space of awareness between you and the roles you most identify with.

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2. On page 90, Eckhart writes, "*I usually congratulate people when they tell me, 'I don't know who I am anymore.'*" Why do you think he does that?

3. "*The more shared past there is in a relationship, the more present you need to be; otherwise, you will be forced to relive the past again and again*" (p. 101). See what happens the next time you are with your parents, siblings, an old friend, an ex-lover, your grown children, etc. Observe the same old reactions in them as in yourself. Rather than talking about this book or course, see if the relationships can feel different just by loosening the grip of your own ego and becoming more present—less identified with the old stories you tell yourself about who you are and who they are. Write your observations here.

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4. If you are a parent, you are probably used to giving form-based attention to your child: "Have you done your homework? Eat your dinner. Tidy up your room. Do this. Stop doing that..." In *A New Earth*, we read that, "*Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven*" (p. 105). This week, as you attend to the "Human" in your relationship with your child, can you also bring the "Being" into your family life? As you go about a specific task with your child (or better yet, as you spend time with your child doing no task at all), let go of your parent role and just be fully present, observing, listening, not wanting any outcome. Can you sense how your formless attention allows your child to feel loved and recognized for the Human Being he or she is? Try this and write your experiences here.

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5. **"You will be free to let go of your unhappiness the moment you recognize it as unintelligent. Negativity is not intelligent"** (p.112). This week, pay close attention to negative thoughts, feelings or actions and any background unhappiness, including resentment, discontent, nervousness or being "fed up." Become alert to your negativity and repeat silently: "At this moment, I am creating suffering for myself." List three examples of times this week that you chose not to suffer by releasing negativity.

6. You will find some of the most common unconscious thoughts and beliefs that feed people's feelings of unhappiness on page 114. Write a few of your own **"Why I Cannot Be at Peace Now"** stories by filling in the sentences according to your personal situation. After you have done that, read this quote: **"The ego doesn't know that your only opportunity for being at peace is now. Or maybe it does know, and it is afraid that you may find this out. Peace, after all, is the end of the ego"** (p. 115). The next time one of your **"Why I Cannot Be at Peace Now"** stories is activated, practice making peace with the present moment and see what happens.

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7. ***"In Zen they say: 'Don't seek the truth. Just cease to cherish opinions'"*** (p. 121). What do you think that means?

8. ***"A collective ego manifests the same characteristics as the personal ego, such as the need for conflict and enemies, the need for more, the need to be right against others who are wrong"***(p. 125). Can you see any of those characteristics in a group you are part of—your company, team, organization, church, country? Write about them here.