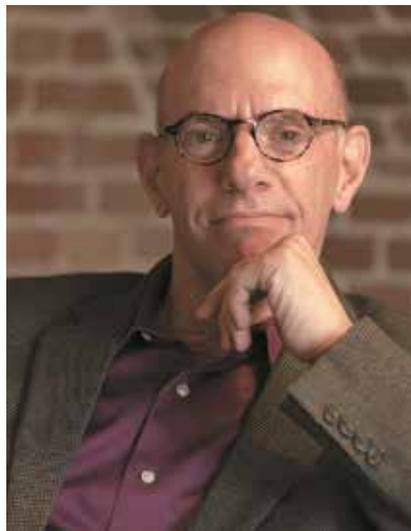


Mark Nepo on Living a Wholehearted Life

by Sandra Yeyati

Bestselling author, poet, cancer survivor and inspirational spiritual teacher Mark Nepo has published 22 books and made numerous appearances on Oprah Winfrey's *Super Soul Sunday* program. His latest book, published this year, is *The Book of Soul: 52 Paths to Living What Matters*.



need everything safe to heal.

How does acceptance strengthen our resilience?

Acceptance is not resignation. Acceptance begins with the hard task or practice of seeing things as they are. When we can see things as they are—clearly—then we have real choices. So,

if I am afraid and I give over to my fear, then I'm afraid of everything. If I can see things as they are, I can see more clearly exactly what I'm afraid of, and then I have real choices of what my next steps are. Acceptance lets us move forward.

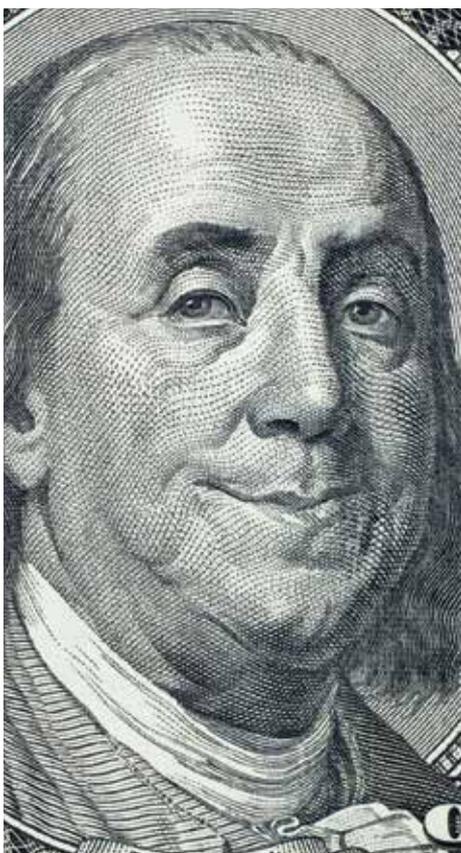
What practices do you recommend?

Two of the oldest medicines known to human beings are our ability to hold and our ability to listen. Even though there are times when I have been told things I didn't want to hear, there has never been a time that I have listened or been listened to that hasn't been healing. There has never been a time when I have held or been held that hasn't been healing.

Another practice is being completely present and holding nothing back. We tend to drift up into our minds, especially when afraid, and one of the reasons that all of the different traditions have breathing or meditation practices is to return

What do you mean by, "To be broken is not a reason to see all things as broken?"

In my cancer journey, after I had a rib removed from my back and a botched chemo treatment, I found myself in a Holiday Inn getting sick every 20 minutes, frightened and in pain, not sure what to do. As the sun started coming up, I realized that while this was happening to me, it wasn't happening to everyone. Somewhere nearby, a baby was being born and a couple was making love for the first time. Somewhere an estranged parent and grown adult child were talking for the first time after many years. That's when it came to me that to be broken is no reason to see all things as broken, because the wholeness of life is what is healing. When I am broken, I need the company of those who know what it's like to be broken, but I also need everything not broken to heal. When I'm afraid, I need the company of those who know what it's like to be afraid, but I



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us to where we are. If I start worrying, if I start getting lost in my fear, I try to look at whatever is before me. I'm in my study as I'm talking to you. I'm looking out the window. I'm seeing the leaves on the trees. I take a breath and try to give my full attention to whatever is before me, and then I start getting grounded again.

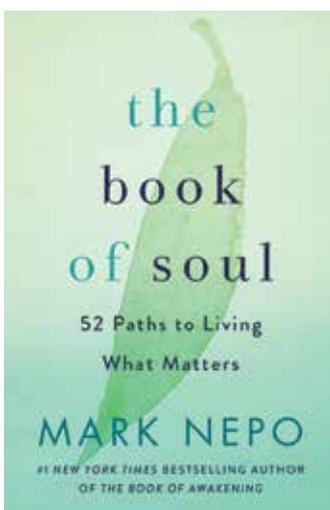
The thing is, we're never going to be free of fear or pain, because that's part of living, but when we can be present and practice being real and authentic, then the fear lives in us and we don't live in the fear.

What is the power of authentic expression?

One of the most powerful things we can do when feeling powerless is admit the truth. When I was a little boy, I was so captivated by a butterfly that I wanted to look at it closely. I didn't want to hurt it, so I carefully cupped it in my hands. But then I realized that as long as I had it cupped in my hands, I couldn't see it. I had to let it go to see its magnificent, colorful wings. Forty years later in my cancer journey, I realized that this [experience] was a teacher about expression. When we keep things closed inside us, they pound and make a lot of noise, but we don't see them. Once we express them, we're lighter and we see their true colors.

For more information, book readings and conversations, visit MarkNepo.com. For webinars, visit Live.MarkNepo.com.

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