



The Five Longings: What We've Always Wanted and Already Have
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Below is the introduction section of David's book and offers signposts for the territory of his workshop.

I have immortal longings in me.
-Shakespeare: *Antony and Cleopatra*

We all sometimes feel there is something missing in our life. We long for what might make up for the lack, yet rarely with satisfactory results. How long have we longed for what keeps evading our grasp, the fruit far out of reach, the ship that has vanished over the horizon, the lips that decline our kiss? The impossible-to-hold-onto is precisely what arouses our deepest longings. What hoax makes us ache for what we are not equipped to keep? What is it in us that makes us spread too "narrow hands to gather Paradise," as Emily Dickinson says? Why are there existential hungers in us that don't go away, even at banquets? These are the questions we will address, however tentatively and gingerly, in the pages that follow.

The fact that we have longings for the lasting in a world that is always changing is not illogical. It is a clue to the presence of something transcendent in us, that which is and seeks the more than meets the eye in the world around us, believes there is more to something than what it appears to be, more to us than we think we are, more to our experience than we have noticed yet. The words "more than" do not indicate multiplicity. This is not more as in four is more than two. This is more as in two to the thousandth power. By the word "more" we are referring to what every longing promises, the more we always wanted. We will see that it is the more we were born with too.

Longings are defined as strong and lasting yearnings for what is ultimately not fully attainable in any final or fully fulfillable way. Our longings began in early life and stay with us until death. We find some fulfillment of them in the course of life, never enough to end them. Longings are uncertain, more easily felt than defined. Women particularly seem comfortable in that domain. Men prefer things to be well-defined, clearly expressed, goal-certain—what is possible in desire but not in longing. Desire is for what is clear and attainable; longing is for what is unspoken and not finally or fully attainable. The undefined style of women's longing is difficult for most men to grasp. It is quite a challenge for us men to follow Shakespeare's advice in Sonnet 23: "O, learn to read what silent love hath writ."

We all have many longings. In this book, we focus on five: love, meaning, freedom, happiness, growth. Each of these longings reveals us to ourselves, showing us what we want, what our ideals are, what motivates us, what we are really about as humans:

- Our longing for love shows us how we are meant for caring connection not isolation. The love-shaped hole inside us is filled only in those moments when we feel a sense of belonging, when we feel an authentic affection coming from or to us. Likewise, the longing to be seen as we are is part of the longing to be loved.
- Our longing for meaning shows us that we can never be satisfied with superficiality because our psyches are geared to find deep meaning and are able to construct it from anything. The meaning-shaped hole inside us is filled in those moments when we trust that there is a meaning in the world and in ourselves.
- Our longing for freedom shows us that we have a right to and capacity for the full range of human thought, imagination, feeling, and action. The freedom-shaped hole inside us is filled in those moments when we feel fully permitted to be who we are, no inhibitions, no compulsions, no shame. When we ourselves say yes to who we are we face our biggest challenge, the true freedom we never dared attempt.

- Our longing for happiness shows that our core self is nothing less than irrepressible joy. The happiness-shaped hole inside us is filled in those moments when we feel exultant about being ourselves, about letting others be who they are, about letting the world be what it is.
- Our longing to grow shows us that we are radically evolutionary, born to keep moving along on the journey to self-expression and self-expansion ultimately in the service of the wider world. The growth-shaped hole inside us is filled in those moments when we build and use our psychological and spiritual resources no matter what curve-balls are being aimed our way.

We notice in all the central five longings as described above the crucial importance of the part other people play. Longings call for responsiveness. A thriving conscious relationship within a family, friendship, intimate bond, is one that welcomes our longings. All five are held hospitably, acknowledged as legitimate, fulfilled without reluctance in whatever ways we limited humans can do so. And we are never too ashamed to have the longings we feel or too embarrassed to ask for them to be honored.

We can survive without the fulfillment of every longing. But we can't be fully human without having the five longings. For instance, in the example of freedom: I can survive in chains but I can't maintain my humanity if I am satisfied with them. Our longings reveal what it means to be human: to love and be loved, to live a meaningful life, to be free, to be happy most of the time, to grow beyond our self- or other-imposed limits. The five longings are indelible imprints in all of us from our earliest life experiences and from our common human heritage as well. We all have the same longings. We all have a different experience of how they landed in our lives, some with an attunement, some with a thud. This book lets you embrace your own longings and shows how to share them with those you trust.

The five longings are not goals; they abide in our true nature all the time. However, they are not in us like parrots in a cage we can easily see into. The five longings are in us like fish that swim in deepest waters, hard to catch, and hard to hold onto if caught. In the chapters that follow, we will learn how to trust their presence and how to build some angling skills as well.

We hear so much these days about being present. True presence happens in the present, that is, in a moment only. Thus, it too, like the fulfillments of longing, includes impermanence, a central Buddhist teaching. Given transience, true presence to our deepest longings really means continual relay between touching in and letting go, a way of respecting impermanence yet not giving up on yearning either. The problem is that we are sometimes trying to grasp the ungraspable. Not even this inclination has to be a source of despair however. We recall the encouraging words of Hubert Benoit in *The Supreme Doctrine*: "It is precisely the fruitless attempt to seize the unseizable...that results in awakening."

All of us have looked to others for the fulfillment of our longings. All of us have sometimes been successful, sometimes not. Yet, in the crater of deepest disappointment we awaken to the truth about ourselves and others. We can then adjust the way we seek fulfillment and how much of it we can expect. That is a yes to reality, such a gargantuan task for most of us.

David Richo