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This free ebook is a full-text, fully-illustrated version of material from the CD-ROM edition of *The Mind Gymnasium - Letting the Heart Sing*, by Denis Postle

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Letting the Heart Sing and *The Mind Gymnasium* on which it is based draw on my 24 years experience as a facilitator, counsellor, humanistic psychology practitioner, and coach - and previous to that, free-lance film making - when I made over 40 documentaries, mostly for broadcast television.

I believe you'll find these *Letting the Heart Sing* eBooks practical, accessible and here and there, I hope, touching.

Denis Postle

INTRODUCTION:
Letting the Heart Sing

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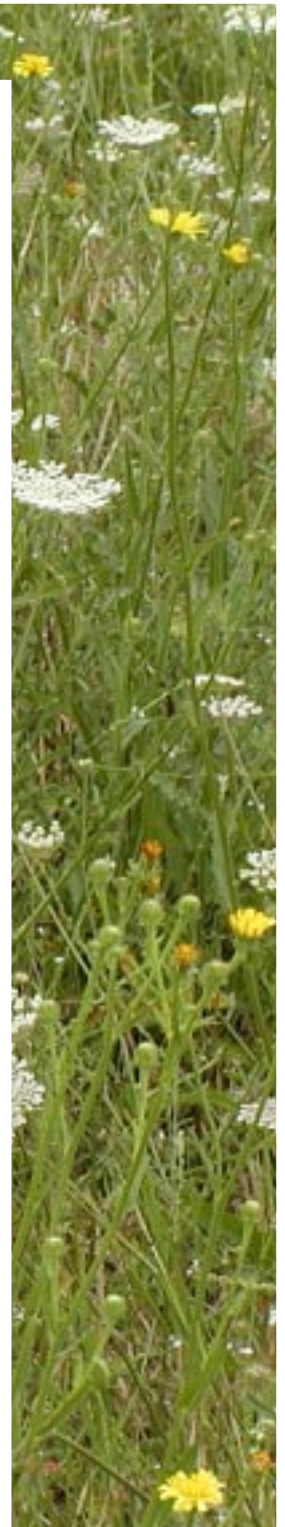
PHOTO: BONNY QUICK

Letting the heart sing

Letting the heart sing, creating a life of zest and delight in which we are engaged with others, and with our wishes and dreams, seems a deep human desire. It means touching and being touched by other's experiences. It means thoroughly inhabiting the present moment. It means honoring the zizz of life that throbs in us and all other living beings. It means living from love. Is this happiness? Perhaps. Except that happiness suggests a target reached, it implies the exclusion of unhappiness, and for this reason I prefer the notion of flourishing. Flourishing can include sadness, loss, disappointment and difficulty. Flourishing more accurately points us towards creating a life—the life we want. *Letting the Heart Sing* is designed to provide the nourishment you need for letting the heart sing, so that flourishing becomes a more approachable task, one in which you yourself are the chief consultant and expert witness.

What I have tried to do is provide guidelines for personal, professional and spiritual development, rules of thumb about what makes a difference, what is worth knowing about yourself, what is worth knowing about what others have discovered, and what is worth trying out. All are ways of approaching ourselves and reaching out to others that will help you install learning from experience. Use *Letting the Heart Sing* to find out for yourself where your strengths, weaknesses and developed capacities lie—identify deficits and hidden talents that merit attention—get a practical overview of what helps and hinders the process of letting the heart sing, of letting your heart sing, of personal, professional, and spiritual flourishing.

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An art of living

We can and do live haphazardly, inconsistently, explaining ourselves to ourselves in ways that are often economical with the truth. At one extreme we may be convinced that everything in life is up for grabs if only we can exert sufficient sustained control. At the other extreme we may believe that life is the plaything of karma and destiny, a cosmic arm lock that invalidates personal choice. Either way, and in all the places in between, our life choices, including those default non-choices, are overwhelmingly likely to be based on what experience has taught us, and as such are susceptible to change and re-evaluation.

To shift metaphor, small movements on the rudder can take us to very different destinations. Like navigation across oceans, once a windblown affair, now an accessible skill, so increasing knowledge about the human mind, however tentative, makes an art of life more feasible. In *Letting the Heart Sing* I assemble some pointers to ways in which you can begin, or continue, to develop an art of life that suits your story, your mix of opportunity and talent.

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A three legged stool

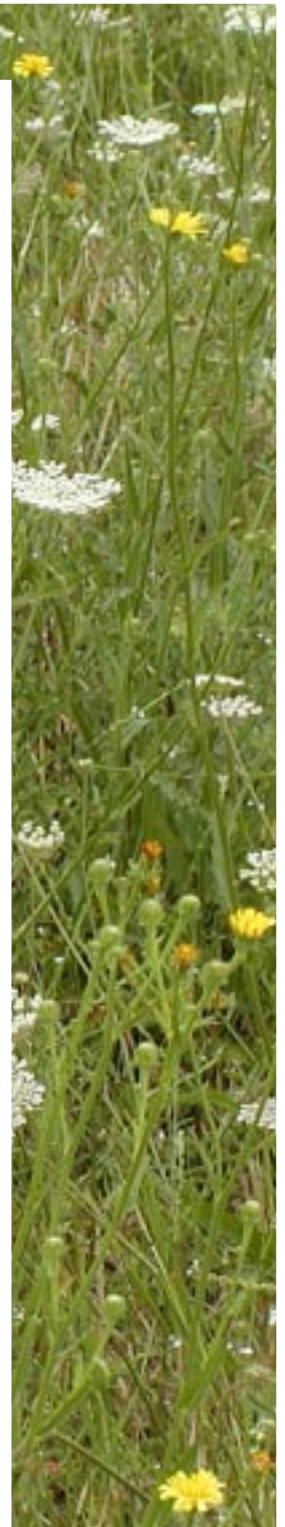
One of the fruits of personal development is that the galaxy of beliefs and perceptions that we live from, through which our world is manifest, becomes tangible; we learn to experience—to ‘see’ our worlds as perception-belief-created. This is a window that once opened can never be closed, and with it the notion that there is a correct, or right way to approach life and living tends to fall away. We appreciate that due to our history we embody, or inhabit, a ‘position’, an orientation, we have a ‘take’ on the world. In this sense, *Letting the Heart Sing* is my take on personal, professional and spiritual development. I have come to see it as a stool with three legs.

Psyche

In the last 40 years psychology has moved from being a hobby for rich and leisured people to become, at least in industrialized countries, a widely accessible, even a central way of understanding how we experience ourselves and others. One leg of my three-legged practitioner stool is what I call ‘psychologizing’, in which knowledge about the psyche—our galaxies of thoughts, imaginings, emotion and feeling; and personhood—identity and development—are brought to bear on the difficulties and dilemmas that we run into as persons.

Just as there are hundreds of varieties of roses that resemble each other, so there are hundreds of psychologies that share common roots. *Letting the Heart Sing* draws on several of them: identifying present time deficiencies in behavior that are susceptible to change, particularly how we use language; doing archeological research into the origins of our personal stories, with the aim of surfacing life experiences that cast a

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shadow forward into the present; and strategy—paying attention to core needs, rigid or over-arching beliefs, or priorities; and, as the title suggests, taking a gymnastic approach to engaging with this topics.

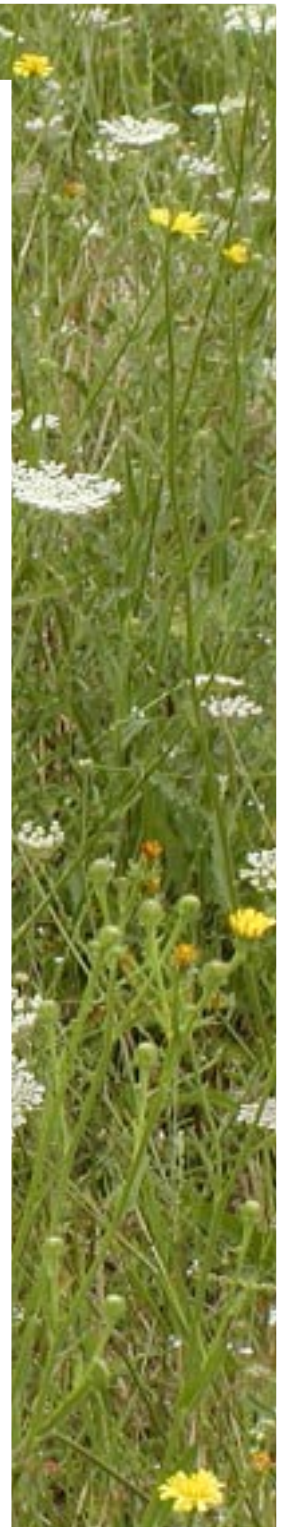
Politics

A second leg of my practitioner stool—politics, derives from the extent to which our lives are shaped by the power relations we subscribe to, and that impact on us from others. Tuning our perception to see how power is deployed, reveals an often shocking picture of domination and subjection—of it apparently being in the grain of the times—as though it was ‘natural’ and inevitable that some people will, even should, dominate others. Though we may have unwillingly learned to embrace it, I have come to see that domination as a social norm, a default way of relating, is very damaging. As we feel victimized, exploited, humiliated or ignored, this experience of subjection leads to damage in the form of violence, depression, illness and unnecessary stress. Domination is the antithesis of love and for this reason *Letting the Heart Sing* gives considerable space to it, and to the beliefs and institutions that are built round it. Interwoven with the material on conflict and bringing about change, I have included sections on living together, cooperative enquiry, co-counselling and peer assessment, these demonstrate how power can be more benignly expressed in couples, groups and organizations.

Spirituality

Psychology, though often haphazard, and full of contradictions, has nonetheless shed new light on systems of belief that claim unique spiritual authority, and that express dominance power relations, for example heritage religions. Coupled with

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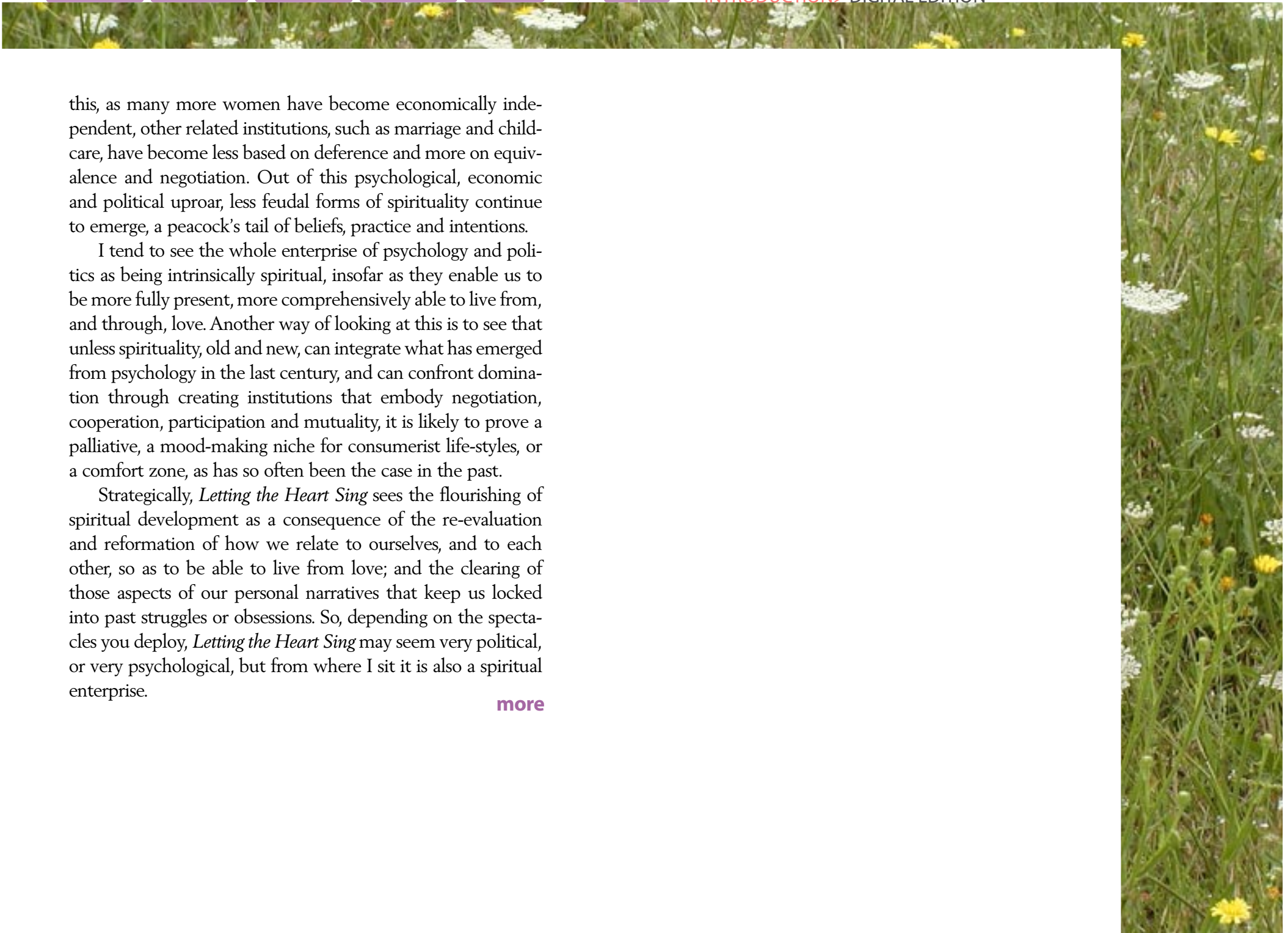


this, as many more women have become economically independent, other related institutions, such as marriage and child-care, have become less based on deference and more on equivalence and negotiation. Out of this psychological, economic and political uproar, less feudal forms of spirituality continue to emerge, a peacock's tail of beliefs, practice and intentions.

I tend to see the whole enterprise of psychology and politics as being intrinsically spiritual, insofar as they enable us to be more fully present, more comprehensively able to live from, and through, love. Another way of looking at this is to see that unless spirituality, old and new, can integrate what has emerged from psychology in the last century, and can confront domination through creating institutions that embody negotiation, cooperation, participation and mutuality, it is likely to prove a palliative, a mood-making niche for consumerist life-styles, or a comfort zone, as has so often been the case in the past.

Strategically, *Letting the Heart Sing* sees the flourishing of spiritual development as a consequence of the re-evaluation and reformation of how we relate to ourselves, and to each other, so as to be able to live from love; and the clearing of those aspects of our personal narratives that keep us locked into past struggles or obsessions. So, depending on the spectacles you deploy, *Letting the Heart Sing* may seem very political, or very psychological, but from where I sit it is also a spiritual enterprise.

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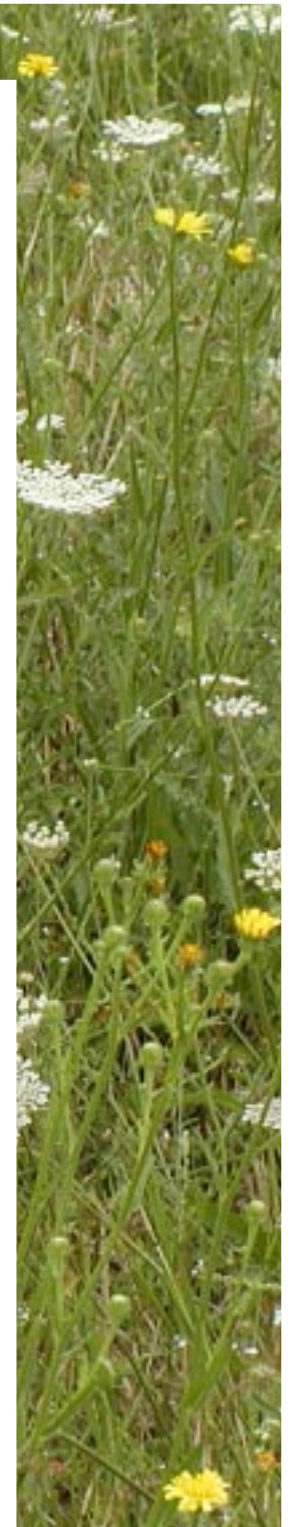


Learning and unlearning

How can we cut through the luxuriant flora and fauna of the innumerable approaches to personal, professional and spiritual development, in a way that does not disallow the benefits of other approaches, while avoiding establishing yet another monoculture of the mind? The organizing principle of *Letting the Heart Sing* is the notion that becoming a person is a matter of learning, learning that builds on genetic predispositions and capacities, and that adapts to environmental factors. Who we are, is who we learned to be. While our bodies are astonishingly stable in the way that they regenerate and sustain themselves, we also have a considerable capacity for learning new ideas and behaviour, and as important—unlearning redundant attitudes and ways of being.

There is necessary caveat to this. Our capacity for learning is very dependent on how it is framed. Deep enquiry into, and transformation of, the more intractable of our human stories does seem to require ownership of the process of inquiry and change. This, coupled with a capacity for self-direction, is perhaps the inescapable first requirement for significant personal development. For the same reason, self-direction, and a developed ability to ‘learn how to learn’, seem essential ingredients in flourishing, and letting the heart sing. Following on from this, and in keeping with the notions about power outlined earlier, you’ll find that, rather than impose, or entrance, *Letting the Heart Sing* seeks to facilitate your self-directed enquiries.

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A new paradigm

I'm sometimes tempted to think that talk about new paradigms is idle chatter, mind fluff, a denial of the seamless complexity of history, both personally and politically. However, the last thirty years do seem to have been witness to several converging shifts in how we live and work. The values that have emerged from and/or shaped these changes, appear to amount to a step change, or paradigm shift, in human affairs.

I greatly value the idea put forward twenty years ago by Lloyd de Mause and others, that changes toward a more nurturant, less autocratic, more child-centered childcare, would be manifest eventually in a less domination-driven politics. Is this beginning to be apparent? Perhaps. Is it gathering support? Yes certainly. The erosion of the belief that domination is 'natural' and inevitable, does seem to point to the emergence of a new paradigm of ways to structure human relating. For example it is possible to see recent changes in social and interpersonal relations—where racist, gender and other kinds of discrimination are deprecated and made illegal; where abortion rights were established, and where there is an increasing focus on ecological accountability in business and government—as part of the continuing paradigm shift in which slavery was abolished, and adult suffrage was established. Whether or not this amounts to a new paradigm, *Letting the Heart Sing* supports it.

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Authority

And so, since these are times where authority is contested, and deference can not be taken for granted, what, you might ask, is my authority for writing and producing *Letting the Heart Sing*?

While *Letting the Heart Sing* presents a wide range of theory, speculation and discussion, it is a work primarily of practitioner knowledge, with the special benefits, and no doubt limitations, that such origins entail. Everything I write about, I write about from experience, a mixture of three decades of personal development, and almost two decades of practitioner experience, working as a counselor, psychotherapist, facilitator, coach and supervisor. Secondly, half a dozen colleagues, or people in adjacent lines of work, whom I had learned to respect, and all practitioners of one sort or another, checked the original text. This current edition has had the added benefit of three editors, all of whom are psychopractitioners.

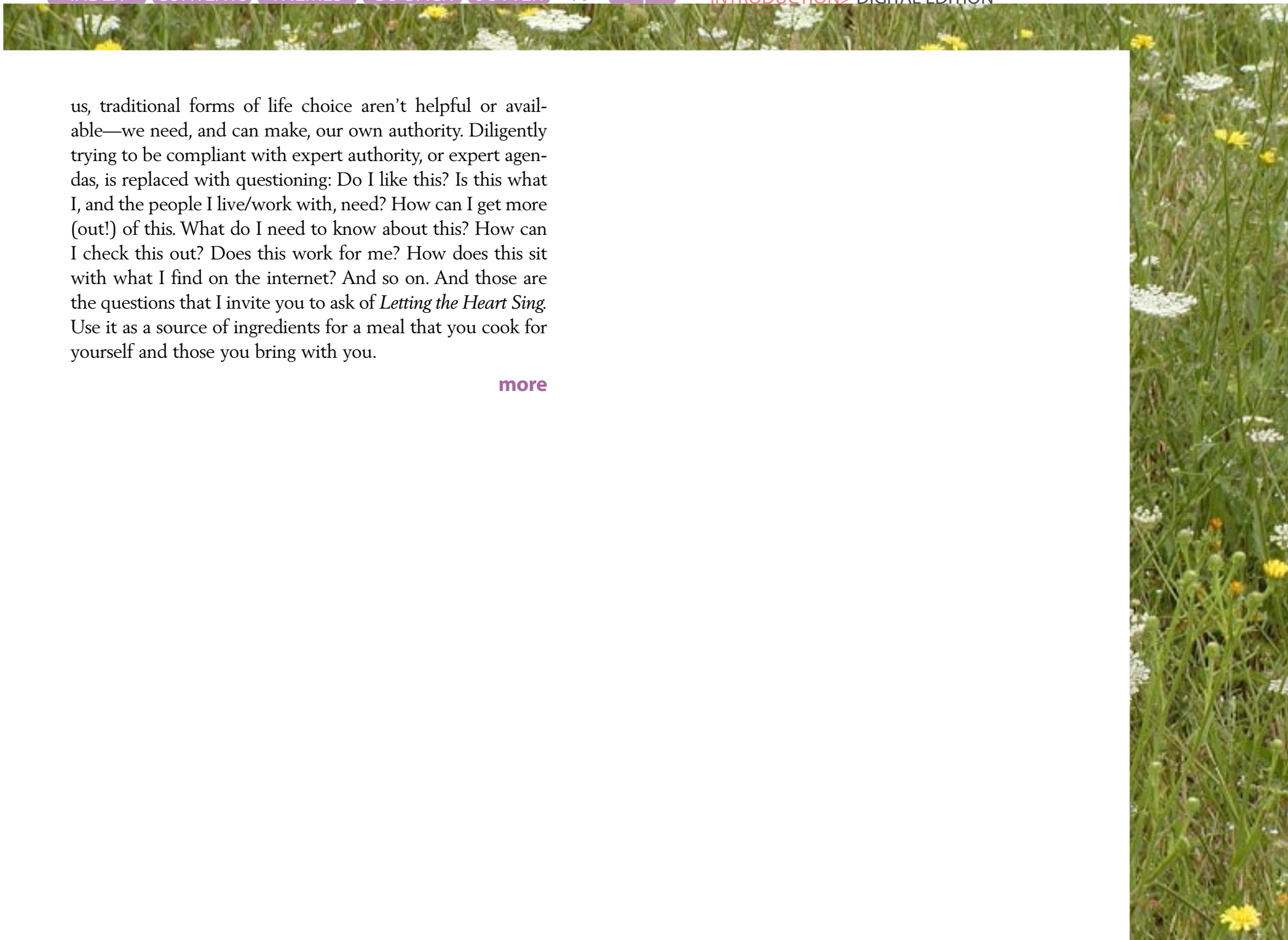
Part of the paradigm shift I referred to earlier, also includes a severe narrowing of what might be reliably thought to be 'objective', so that the scientific, medical or economic authority for determinations of what is right and proper in human relations, becomes unsettled, or fluid. In consequence, as I often find myself saying to clients, these days we are making up how to live a life, as we go along. The regular channels, such as marriage and life-long, pensionable jobs, have lost much of their certainty (though this is not to dismiss them). As we live longer, previous destinations on our life trajectories such as retirement, look very different than they did a generation ago. Out of all this, for many people, comes a realization that is very unsettling—that for many of

[more](#)



us, traditional forms of life choice aren't helpful or available—we need, and can make, our own authority. Diligently trying to be compliant with expert authority, or expert agendas, is replaced with questioning: Do I like this? Is this what I, and the people I live/work with, need? How can I get more (out!) of this. What do I need to know about this? How can I check this out? Does this work for me? How does this sit with what I find on the internet? And so on. And those are the questions that I invite you to ask of *Letting the Heart Sing*. Use it as a source of ingredients for a meal that you cook for yourself and those you bring with you.

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Cottage industry

The original editions of the precursor to *Letting the Heart Sing - The Mind Gymnasium*, had to sell in 7 markets to be profitable, it was written, illustrated, and printed in around 9 months, and sold around 70,000 copies. The creative intensity this entailed, meant that some sharpness and detail was lost, or had to be smoothed, and that here and there we were flying by the seat of our pants. Because I now own the text and the means of production, the present edition has been able to grow more organically, taking root creatively and technically in current technology, with more relaxed lines of enquiry into what else I wanted to include. It is now more personal, less mid-Atlantic in voice and much longer. Though reminiscent in appearance of a book, it is more accurately software, with the corresponding flexibility and accessibility that brings. Because it is structured as a web site, I have seen no reason for either the seamless consistency of presentation that the finality of printed books commonly adheres to, or a seamlessly consistent voice. Different topics, you will find, may have different 'voices'. Dip in. Taste. Try out. Enjoy and return again and again.

[more](#)

Start a huge, foolish
project, like Noah.
It makes absolutely
no difference, what
people think of you..

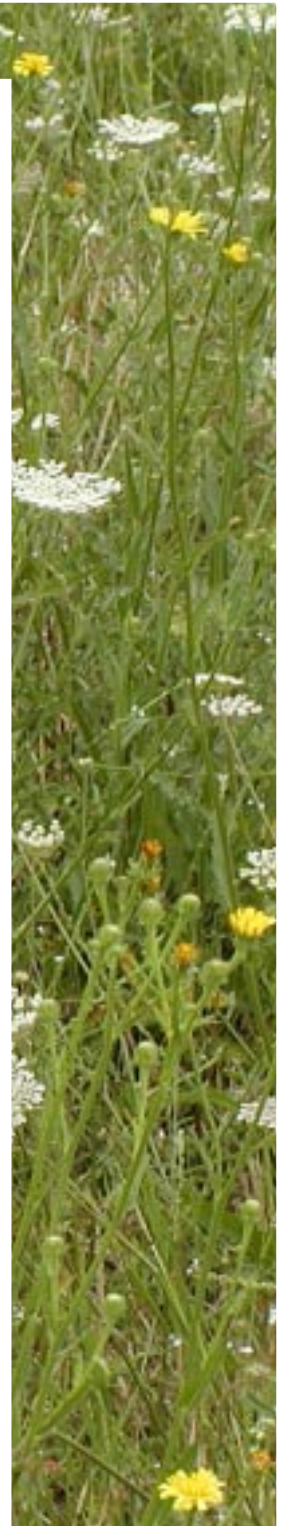
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Content overview

The CD-ROM version of Letting the Heart Sing the Mind Gymnasium has comprehensive interactive help with navigating its contents - an Index, Contents and Theme pages that are not available in these free ebooks. Browse the list of ebooks for what takes your fancy and keep returning to the others for more of its richness.

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Omissions

Being based primarily on my experience as a practitioner and as exponent of personal development in my daily life, *Letting the Heart Sing* does not attempt to present a comprehensive review of the field of personal, professional or spiritual development. I have been preoccupied with usability and relevance to lives as they are lived.

That said, the domination section might have had more on slavery, the civil, human rights movements and trade unions, and the material about the influence on our mindscapes of heritage religions would be improved by the inclusion of more about Islam and the Hindu traditions. I also feel that I give insufficient attention to gay issues.

Some of the exercises in the Mind Gymnasium are trance related, but I regret not yet being able to include more on hypnosis, one of the most potent and extraordinary human capacities, that presently seems to have become submerged in the medical and dental professions.

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Health warning

I re-iterate here that—while all the exercises and quizzes in *Letting the Heart Sing* are in principle innocuous—for some people at some times—due to their particular history—they may **re-stimulate** feelings, emotions, thoughts or images that have been previously out of reach. Such echoes, if they come into awareness too abruptly may take you by surprise. Should anything in *Letting the Heart Sing* brings up distress that you feel you can't handle, or that seems out of proportion to sitting watching text and sound on a monitor, close the programme and take a walk in the sunshine. Return later to *Letting the Heart Sing* check out, **Self-defence**, and **Becoming a person**.

If your **attention** is quite marginal but you are convinced that *Letting the Heart Sing* is right for you, be sure to have some support at hand as you work through the quizzes and exercises. If your attention is good, dip in. Explore. Feast. Enjoy.

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Author's key points

Letting the Heart Sing contains many models, theories, and recipes for action that contribute to our notions of what the mind may be, and what might enhance, or restrict it.

What are the key notions that I want to put forward?

Here is a selection... not necessarily in order of importance. Click on the 'see also' buttons for drop down menus of links to relevant pages.

[more](#)

Just as, through coaching, support, and appropriate exercise, athletes develop their bodies—we can similarly develop our minds.

[See also ▼](#)

How and who we are as persons, is immensely dependent on learning from experience.

[See also ▼](#)

The earlier, and more intensely imprinted, the learning, the greater its formative effect on later life.

[See also ▼](#)

Some of how we learned to be persons, can be unlearned.

[See also ▼](#)

Despite some progress, emotionality and imagination continue to be unhelpfully overshadowed by intellect and action.

[See also ▼](#)

Emotional intelligence and emotional literacy point in the right direction but emotional competence has deeper roots.

[See also ▼](#)

Anxiety that self-exploration 'creates problems', is generally misplaced. Hidden or not, our history is always with us, acting to drive us on, or hold us back.

[See also ▼](#)

Surviving early traumas sometimes requires that we 'forget', i.e. split off, the experience from consciousness, or adopt stories that help us make sense of being so insensible.

[See also ▼](#)

Being (understandably) preoccupied with survival and recovery, can blind us to the rich possibilities of flourishing.

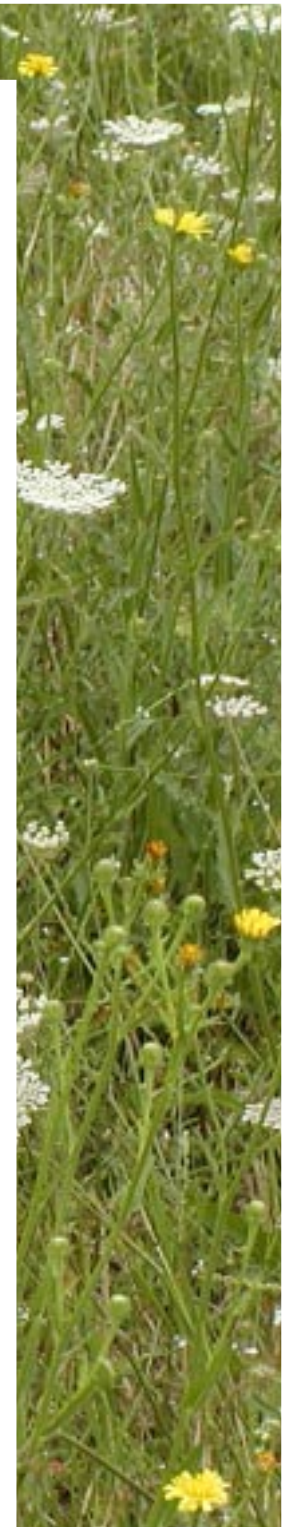
[See also ▼](#)

We often conspire with ourselves, and others, to create better and better ways of avoiding an emotionally authentic engagement with love, understanding and choice.

[See also ▼](#)

Living from love entails embracing hierarchy, cooperation, and autonomy.

[See also ▼](#)



Key points continued

[more](#)

If, and when, early elements of our history are re-stimulated by present time events, we are likely to behave as if we were there then, rather than here now.

[See also ▼](#)

Disembodied, alienated notions of 'evidence', and objectivity, double-blind us to the value and methods of cooperatively enquiring into what matters to us.

[See also ▼](#)

With help and feedback, an educated person is better able to reliably self-assess their capacities and strengths, their liabilities and deficits, than external examiners or supervisors.

[See also ▼](#)

Positive feedback in marketing and the media—giving us what we already buy, only what we buy, and even more of what we have already bought—disguises as riches, the poverty of monocultures.

[See also ▼](#)

Heritage religions too often tend to save us from the risks and work of baking spirituality afresh in our own lives.

[See also ▼](#)

The human mind's capacity to become entranced, along with damage due to psychic wounding, is probably quite sufficient to account for the notion of Evil.

[See also ▼](#)

Fundamentalism, the belief in literal truth of whatever kind, leaves a lot (the whole of the rest of creation) to be desired.

[See also ▼](#)

Flourishing is a better indicator of well-being than success.

[See also ▼](#)

The shaky emergence of a new paradigm of nurturance as a basis for human value and action, continues to be threatened by the old paradigm of patriarchal dominance.

[See also ▼](#)

Patriarchal dominance is a damaging human construct that conceals male vulnerabilities, and as such, can be unravelled and buried with the rest of history.

[See also ▼](#)

Our political preferences, and how we organize work, are often a direct reflection of the family style of our upbringing.

[See also ▼](#)

The presumption that creativity=innovation concentrates too much esteem in too few hands

[See also ▼](#)

Personal and planetary sustainability can no longer afford monocultures of the mind that see wildness and diversity as something to be harvested, tamed, or colonized.

[See also ▼](#)



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An interactive guide to personal and professional development

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