

Q&A with Colette Lafia
Author of
The Divine Heart: Seven Ways to Live in God's Love

Can you tell us what you mean by the Divine Heart?

The essence of all that exists comes from the flow of Divine love, pouring itself out and creating all things. For me, it was getting closer to God. Others may have another vision of what's divine for them.

“Our relationship with the Divine is the love story we are all living.” Can you explain?

Once we awaken to the Divine as a dynamic force of love within ourselves and in the universe, we gain a new perspective and begin to cultivate a spiritual identity. For me, being in the flow of God's love is the very purpose of our lives. The movement of our hearts towards Divine Love is the essence of spiritual experience. It's the basis of who we are and all we do. It allows us to grow love-centered and divinely inspired relationships with everyone and everything around us.

During a moment of inspiration the seven qualities of receptivity, delight, expansiveness, acceptance, vulnerability, mystery, and gratitude came to you. Can you elaborate?

I cannot recall another time where I was overcome with an impulse as strong and as clear as this was. I was clearing up clutter in my little home art studio when in a flash, I was suddenly inspired to tack up some papers on the wall and I started intuitively drawing. I used charcoals and pastels and then those words just streamed out of me, and I went from paper to paper, adding one word to each sheet. At the time, the idea of a book wasn't even in my consciousness. Yet, in the aftermath, I felt so inspired and curious about these words that I explored them for many months, making notes in my journal and letting their meanings unfold within me.

You refer to these seven qualities as “invitations.” What do you mean by that?

Each of these qualities is an invitation – a door opening with the encouragement to “come in and explore.” Each invitation shines light on the connection between intimacy with the Divine and intimacy in daily life, and is supported by reflections, texts, prayer suggestions, and journaling encouragement.

You weave together many personal stories of your own upbringing and experience. What is the benefit of sharing these personal moments with readers?

By showing how spiritual experiences manifest in the daily context of my own life, I hope to help readers awaken to their lives as sacred and see that divine intimacy is unfolding in their lives, as well.

You describe numerous prayer and reflection practices. Why did you include such a broad range of exercises and meditations when addressing each invitation?

The spiritual life grows and blooms from consistency, commitment and attention. My intention is to offer some practical steps that readers can take to deepen their experience of living in love and to help them realize that living in the flow of Divine love is a daily practice. My hope is that the journal prompts and practices will offer moments of reflection and quiet. They're meant to inspire readers to undertake their own spiritual journeys in simple and immediate ways, guiding them towards wholeness and peace.

Of your seven invitations, do you have a favorite?

At different times in my life, I've been drawn to one or more of these qualities depending on what I was going through at the time. Gratitude is my favorite quality, because gratitude is the heart of life, the heart of prayer, the heart of spirituality. So often we use the word "love" loosely, and my book enriches, expands, and deepens our understanding of love and our capacity to live in love.

The last year has been stressful in many ways for people. Do you think any of the invitations can be helpful to people who are struggling, right now?

You've probably heard the axiom: "love is stronger than fear." It seems to me, we're at a time in history that's calling for us to put that affirmation into daily practice. We must ask ourselves, "*How can I bring love forward and be a part of the healing process?*"

Acknowledging our **vulnerability** at this time invites us to open more deeply to the healing power of love. **Acceptance** helps us to stay calm in the face of so much uncertainty and change. And **expansiveness** allows us to see the opportunity for growth that's inherent in this difficult time.

What was the greatest surprise that you discovered through writing this book?

The greatest surprise to me was that my intimacy with God not only impacts intimacy with myself, others, and nature, but with the world around us. I kept returning to the teachings of St. John of the Cross, who consistently spoke of divine love as the template and model for all human love, and human love as the necessary school and preparation for any transcendent encounter.

What were the circumstances, in your personal life, that led you to be closer to God? Why doesn't one need to belong to an organized religion to find spiritual satisfaction?

I was raised in a home with an alcoholic mother, who did recover when I was sixteen, yet finding inner resilience and comfort as a child was critical for my survival. I found that my personal connection to God really helped me. God was a source of unconditional love and friendship for me during those chaotic and frightening years. Later in life, I went through the struggles of infertility and my husband and I were not able to have children. Again, my deep inner connection to the Source of love and life brought me healing and acceptance. And later in life, when I was in my early 30's, I lost my 35-year-old sister to breast cancer, and I found strength in my faith. My personal experience of finding comfort, resilience, and healing from a source within awakened me to an inner sense of a loving God, which was not contingent on a belief system.

I think mature spirituality takes us on the journey of moving beyond God as a belief system and into the experience of trusting one's own spiritual intuition and experiences.

Your loss of your brother and father-in law during the pandemic came at an especially tough time. How did you cope and how would you suggest others deal with loss during difficult times?

Grief is difficult and painful—there is no way around it. It's critical to find others to share our grief. Both of these deaths were sudden and unexpected, so I found being in grief counseling helped me with the shock and difficulty of coming to terms with them. I would recommend that people find a support system and not isolate themselves. It's important to find people to talk to about the depth of feelings in grief and loss. Sometimes our immediate family members are also coping so they might not be available. Finding a grief support group or a counselor can be very helpful.

Throughout your life, have you explored different spiritual paths to end up where you are now?

I was raised in a traditional Catholic upbringing, and married a Jewish man in my mid-twenties and set out cultivating an interfaith perspective with love at its root. I was also drawn to mindfulness as taught by the spiritual master, Thich Nhat Hanh. When I went to the Living School, sponsored by the Center for Action and Contemplation, I began to study the contemplative and mystical path of Christianity. Believing that spirituality gives meaning, purpose, and fulfillment to life, for me, spiritual connection is the foundation of contentment.