

## **The Four Levels of Healing:** *An Interview with Shakti Gawain*

by Sean Meshorer



**Shakti Gawain** is one of the best-known personal development teachers in the United States. Her first book, *Creative Visualization*, has sold more than two million copies, and is widely considered one of the catalysts for the Consciousness Movement. In her new book, *The Four Levels of Healing*, Shakti provides a comprehensive healing program for the Western seeker.

**Sean:** Your first book, *Creative Visualization*, has sold over two million copies and is a classic in the field. Why do you think that book struck such a chord?

**Shakti:** *Creative Visualization* is very simple, clear, easy to read, and easy to put into practice. Rather than a theoretical book, it offers some practical things that people can use.

**Se:** What's the main technique of *Creative Visualization*?

**Shakti:** The basic idea is to allow yourself to experience an internal reality that you would like to create externally. In other words, to give yourself an internal experience of what it would feel like to accomplish a particular goal or fulfill a particular desire. Close your eyes, relax, and think about something you really want, and imagine it as if it were already happening. There is something quite powerful about allowing ourselves to have that experience. It seems to have the effect of opening doors and allowing things to move in that direction.

**Se:** Your new book, *The Four Levels of Healing*, is both a synthesis of your previous work and an attempt to take it to the next level.

**Shakti:** Yes, it is kind of a synthesizing book. The whole point is that we all have at least four levels on which we exist and interact with the world: the spiritual, the mental, the emotional and the physical. The book is about integrating all four levels in our lives.

**Se:** The first level you mention in your book concerns the need "to find and maintain a strong connection with our spiritual source." What does that mean, and how might we do that?

**Shakti:** I emphasized that one first because it's the core of who we are. Our spiritual essence exists beyond this lifetime. It's important to be in touch with that part of ourselves. There's not any one way to do that. Everybody has their own way. It's whatever you do in your life that brings you a deep experience of being connected to something greater than your own individual personality. I think it's very important that we have a regular daily or weekly spiritual practice that can help us find that kind of deep experience and deep connection. It gives us the foundation we need to live in the world.

To me, a spiritual practice can be *anything*. For some people it might be going to church, or a meditation. For many people, it's going out into nature. For some it's through a creative process -- dancing, playing music, painting or sculpting -- that they find that sense of flow and connection, meaning and purpose.

**Se:** The second level of healing is the mental level. You write that "we need to let go of old beliefs that limit us and open up to new, supportive ideas." In what way do our beliefs limit us, and how do we overcome that?

**Shakti:** Starting from when we're young, we pick up and take in -- from our families, our churches, our schools, our culture -- beliefs and ideas about the nature of life, our own nature, and how things are. Mostly we're not conscious of holding these beliefs. But these deep beliefs really *shape* our life experience.

For example, I may have a belief that life has to be a struggle. That's not something I consciously chose, I just picked it up from my early life experience and those around me. Not surprisingly, I will find that I'm always struggling in my life. When we become aware of these old beliefs and limiting ideas, we can begin the process of allowing the ones that don't really serve us to dissolve, and open up to ones that work better.

**Se:** On the third level, the emotional level, you write that "we need to learn to experience and feel comfortable with our emotions." Is there a primary technique that you recommend to do this?

**Shakti:** There's no one right way to do it. We usually have to find someone we feel comfortable with: a friend, romantic partner, therapist or support group. The basic healing most of us need is to have at least one other person to say "Yes, I understand." Almost all of us have picked up from our families and culture the idea that certain emotions are bad or harmful. We try to get rid of them, to suppress them. That doesn't work very well, because our emotions are part of who we are.

**Se:** The fourth level of healing is the physical. You say something very interesting about this. The physical level is not just learning to take care of our bodies. It also includes, as you say, "learning how to function successfully in the world." What does that mean?

**Shakti:** The physical level is not just our bodies -- it's the whole material plane. Being healthy and developed on the physical level also means knowing how to move around in the world: how to get our needs met, how to survive, how to thrive, how to create our physical surroundings in a way that reflects who we are -- a lot to learn in that for all of us.

**Se:** What do you see as the most important lessons that we need to learn now to move into the 21st Century?

**Shakti:** The key is integrating all aspects of ourselves. So many of us have focused only on certain aspects of our beings: developing spiritual awareness, or doing emotional healing work, or working on the physical level. If we don't develop *all* the aspects and bring them into balance, sooner or later we will feel imbalanced; it will become a source of great pain in our lives.

This has worldwide significance, because our world reflects who we are as individuals. When we're out of balance, our world is out of balance. I think the most important work we need to do right now is to develop all the aspects of who we are, because that's what will ultimately bring our world into balance.

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[Back to theTop](#) / [Table of Contents](#)



