



Imaginal Cells

practice prompts emailed daily



February 2021

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February 1, 2021

Live Your Best Life

Self-Regulation — Sleep, Glorious Sleep

The importance of mastering sleep cycles on any “path of becoming” cannot be overstated.

So much of our quality of life is modulated by our capacity and willingness to consistently bring our awareness to our internal state and consciously self-regulate. Quality of consciousness as well as quality life in the matrix is about consistently updating our internal state to accurately match the prevailing demands of our external environment.

We’re always in dynamic interaction with our environment. Our central nervous system processes sensations and perceptions. Thoughts occur and feelings link bodily sensations to perceptions which in turn prompt behavior. In essence, we perpetually merge sensory data from the outside world with our interoception (internal datastream) to navigate the world appropriately. We suffer when the two are not in sync.

Awareness of these processes requires intent, focus and a commitment to remaining in the driver’s seat of “self.” It’s easier to sustain awareness if we habitually self-observe in any relaxed state that slows down brainwaves. The reward for such commitment is well worth the effort. Sleep cycles which condition how well our bodies serve us are the quintessential foundation of self-regulation.

Sleep, Glorious Sleep

Good, sound, restorative sleep and informed exposure to light are foundational to stress reduction, health, and wellbeing. More specifically for CSE purposes, regular periods of deep Non-REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep are essential for optimizing:

- Neural plasticity
- Learning and memory generally,
- and supporting learning in other reality frames.

Do you consistently get a good night’s sleep on a consistent basis?

When do you fall asleep?

How quickly and easily do you fall asleep?

How challenging is it to turn off the streaming ticker tape or revolving door of thoughts in order to fall asleep?

Once asleep do you stay asleep?

Do you feel fully rested when you wake up in the morning?

Our responses to these questions depends on how skillfully we self-regulate when we’re awake.

Anatomy of Sleepiness

Adenosine: Sleepiness is driven by a naturally occurring molecule called adenosine which builds up the longer we are awake. Adenosine creates a sleep drive or hunger. Caffeine blocks adenosine receptors and prevents sleepiness. It is an “adenosine antagonist.”

How well do you tolerate caffeine?

Pay Attention: How long a period do you personally need between your last cup of coffee that doesn't interfere with your falling asleep with ease?

The Circadian Force also determines when we feel sleepy. “Circadian” connotes an approximately 24 hour internal clock that links us to planetary cycles. Most people naturally wake up somewhere around the time the sun is rising. At that time a normal, healthy pulse of cortisol and epinephrine wakes us up and alerts our system to increase our heart rate, get us moving in the morning, and aligns us with the earth for the day.

When photosensitive cells in the retina receive the photon charge from the sun before 9:00 AM they relay a message to the hypothalamus which sets our internal circadian timer. A cortisol pulse sets the body's timer for the release of a pulse of melatonin, the sleep hormone from the pineal gland in about 12 hours. Light suppresses melatonin which the pineal gland released in darkneses. The rhythmic cortisol and melatonin cycle happens naturally within us independent of external inputs.

Nurture Yourself

Best quality sleep occurs when we:

Choose to refrain from:

- Exposure to device screens prior to bedtime.
- Eating two hours before sleeping.
- Caffeine and/or intoxicants before sleeping.

Consume those meals that are richest in complex carbohydrates closer to sleeping time, observing the two-hour buffer period. Carbohydrates closer to sleep time help us get deeper sleep (*Promotes tryptophan. Dopamine and GABA production.*)

Circadian Health

Practice Informed Light Exposure: The brain and body are well served by anchoring to as many healthy physiological regularities as possible. Regularity can most powerfully be established with light (sunlight). To that end:

Avoid all bright light from 11:00 PM - 4:00 AM (*Samara Matar, Chrono Biology Unit, NIH David Berson, Brown University*).

- Exposure to bright light during that period in the middle of the night:
 - Suppresses dopamine, the feel good chemical, can have depressive effects, and can trigger anxiety.

- Generates deficits in memory and learning
- The brain structures this acts on is directly connected to the pancreas and disrupts blood sugar regulation.
- Keep the lights dim.
- Keep lights low (*desk level, floor level*) as opposed to overhead in the physical environment.
- Candlelight and fireplace light is acceptable.

Institute a morning solar ritual that acknowledges the sun and offers your nervous, hormonal, muscular, and immune systems their morning nourishment. In order to thrive every cell in our bodies needs light information which is the best integrated at sunrise and sunset.

- **Morning light:** Regular exposure to bright light preferably at sunrise, but before 9:00 AM for 2-10
- daily is optimal. The neurons in the brain that set the Circadian Clock respond best to low angle sunlight at this time. It's much better to go outside and receive the sun at sunrise than to view it through a window. The process takes 50 times longer through a window and 100 times longer with sunglasses on.
- **Want to become an early riser?** Get morning sunlight exposure and exercise. After a few days you will start waking up earlier automatically.
- Even on cloudy days there are still a lot of photons transmitted. It's not about seeing or perceiving the sun. This is a subconscious mechanism by which neurons called melanopsin ganglion cells set our internal clock when activated by sunlight, even when coming through cloud cover. We do not need to actually see the sun. This morning process dictates when we feel sleepy and whether we get sound sleep at night.
- **Late afternoon light** helps counterbalance exposure to light in the middle of the night. Light exposure at sunset gives every cell in our bodies the information it needs about timing. This provides moorings for our bodies in the space-time continuum.

Notes

February 2, 2021

Live Your Best Life

Self-Regulating — Naps

Napping *rules!* Napping *skillfully* contributes to ruling mastery of our personal matrix world. *And* napping skills-development is extremely helpful in harvesting information from the daydream streaming process.

The multiple rewards of “power naps” have long been acknowledged. Winston Churchill famously extolled the virtue of his cherished daytime napping ritual. Churchill was so refreshed, and creatively energized by his afternoon naps that he kept a cot in Parliament. Inspired by the elder statesman, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson both enthusiastically adopted the napping habit. Kennedy began to take naps as a Senator and once in the Whitehouse he took a 45-minute nap every day after lunch. Rather than sleep in the office he retired to the residence and changed into pajamas. Lyndon Johnson broke up his long day with a nap and shower in the afternoon.

Naps increase alertness and decrease fatigue. A short nap of around twenty to thirty minutes boosts our ability to concentrate by giving our bodies a chance to restore depleted energy.

Naps consolidate information that we’ve just learned. Regular naps improve memory. Napping for an hour or more during the day — long enough to allow us to dream improves mood, memory, alertness, and performance of perceptual tasks.

The key is to wake up from a nap in the light sleep period of our sleep cycle. The typical sleep cycle that we all repeat moves from light sleep, through deep, slow wave, regenerative sleep, and finally through REM (Rapid Eye Movement) dreaming sleep. Some researchers recognize four periods, calling the theta brainwave state “sound sleep” and breaking out “deep” and “deepest” sleep in the delta brainwave state.

1. Light - Napping, (*a little deeper than daydreaming*)
2. Sound
3. Deep
4. Deepest
5. REM

So our sleep cycle looks like: 1-2-3-4-3-2-REM-2-3-4-3-2-REM-2-3-4-3-2-REM-2-3-4-3-2-REM.

If we wake up groggy from a nap it means that we’ve woken up from having dropped very quickly into deep sleep which may speak to the quality of our sleep the night before. When we wake up in light sleep we feel refreshed because there is still brain activity in process. So set your intention and/or your alarm to wake you up either in 20-30 minutes or less, or 90 minutes.

To be even more precise about the process we can take “NASA” naps, favorites of pilots who use this method on extremely long flights while the plane is on autopilot.

NASA researchers discovered that a 26 minute nap increases performance by 34% and alertness by 54%.

Strategically choose when to nap. An opportune time to nap, schedule permitting, would be during the body's daytime fatigue dip between 1-3 PM. This is early enough not to interfere with nighttime sleep. The latest we want to wake up from a nap is 5 hours before bedtime.

A 60-90 minute nap improves alertness for 10 hours. Remember to set the alarm because napping much longer than that creates the sleep inertia, groggy feeling.

Quick Survey of Nap Benefits Research

Napping:

- Three times per week over a year-long period of time decreased death rates due to heart problems by 37 %!
- Naps improve decision making, creativity, and sensory perception
- Increases stamina by 11%
- Increases ability to stay asleep all night by 12%
- Lowers the time required to fall asleep by 14%

* More Information: Work of : J. Allan Hobson, Laboratory of Neuropsychology, Department of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School: 1977, "Body Rhythms," 1975, The Sleep-Dream Cycle: A Neurobiological Rhythm."

Notes

February 3, 2021

A Collection of Perspective Expanding Exercises

The following exercises celebrate, bring to conscious awareness, and imprint in our neurobiology the fact that we are multidimensional, non-local consciousness sojourning in the 5-sense world. We have the capacity to witness our lives, motivations, behaviors, and patterns from a multiplicity of vantage points in order to enhance self-awareness and grow.

1. See yourself, and group after successive group of the people who have been, or who are the most important people in your life over the years:
 - As various role-appropriate pieces on a chessboard. **You are:** The observer watching yourself stare at the chess board. You are staring at the board and You are one of the pieces on the board
 - As characters populating a video game. **You are:** The observer watching yourself at the computer keyboard or with the controller in your hand. You hold the controller. You are in the game.
 - On a theatre stage. **You are:** The observer watching yourself seated in the theater, you are seated in the theater, you are on stage.
 - On a movie screen. **You are:** The observer watching yourself seated in the theater, you are seated in the theater. You are on screen.

Watch the story(ies) play out. Witness how the people interact, whether: strategically, driven by rote, unexamined intergenerational patterning, controlling, thoughtfully and consciously. Sense love, pain, compassion, animosity, pent up rage, indifference, self-involvement etc, etc, etc. Where and how do you figure into the process and you are also participating in each scene.

2. Imagine yourself:
 - Looking into the window of your childhood and subsequently your adolescent home witnessing the interaction(s) that would become the seed kernel(s) of what has since become a recurring self-perception challenge,
 - Ten years from now looking back at yourself in 2021, taking stock of your life,
 - Hovering over your casket, urn, or burial plot hearing and witnessing to what people present at your memorial are expressing, feeling, and how they are interacting.
 - **You are:** The observer and are also participating in each segment of your life.
3. You are comfortably seated in a movie theater and witness yourself on the screen.
 - You are the protagonist of the projected scene
 - You appear as a resourceful, helpful presence who enters the scene stage

right to assist with whatever is transpiring on screen.

- You are sitting in the movie theater taking this in.
 - You are also the projectionist in the projection room above the theater watching yourself seated, as you gaze at yourself in two roles on the screen.
4. Watch yourself extend compassion to yourself in your zoom screen which can serve as a mirror. **You are:** The observer, the compassion extender and the compassion receiver in the screen/mirror.
 5. Witness yourself as an adult in a comfortable setting, tending to yourself as a child or as a young person.
 6. Witness yourself hovering over your body as you lay peacefully asleep in your bed. See yourself hovering directly over your body, or more toward the ceiling, be aware of the vantage point you have as a witness to the entire scene. You are observing yourself hovering over your bed. **You are:** hovering over your bed. You are sleeping in your bed.
 7. You are standing on a flat, outdoors landscape across which you can see for miles into the distance. This can be a meadow, a vast open plain, a butte, a plateau on top of a mountain, or a ribbon of beach that stretches miles long into the distance.

Look out over the vista of this flat space toward the horizon and see a figure coming toward you who looks no larger than a dot given the distance between you. It's a person who comes closer and closer until you can see their face and distinguish their features. You realize that the person is you. When you are no more than two feet from yourself, look deeply into your own eyes. Listen deeply in expectant, attentive silence for guidance to emerge. **You are:** witnessing the scene even as two versions of yourself meet.

Notes

February 5, 2021

Touching the Earth

The practice of Touching the Earth is to return to the Earth, to our roots, to our ancestors, and to recognize that we are not alone but connected to a whole stream of spiritual and blood ancestors. We are their continuation, and with them we will continue in future generations. We touch the Earth to let go of the idea that we are separate and to remind us that we are the Earth and part of life.

When we touch the Earth we become small, with the humility and simplicity of a young child. When we touch the Earth we become great, like an ancient tree sending her roots deep into the earth, drinking from the source of all waters. When we touch the Earth, we breathe in all the strength and stability of the Earth, and breathe out our suffering, our feelings of anger, hatred, fear, inadequacy, and grief.”

We too can see that the Earth is a living being and not an inanimate object. She is not inert matter. We often call our planet Mother Earth. Seeing the Earth as our mother helps us to realize her true nature. The Earth is not a person, yet she is indeed a mother who has given birth to millions of different species, including the human species.”

With each step, I come home to the Earth.

With each step, I return to my source.

With each step, I take refuge in Mother Earth.

There is no difference between healing ourselves and healing the Earth.

Thich Nhat Hanh
Love Letter to the Earth

Notes

February 6, 2021

Live Your Best Life: Self-Regulating

The REM Sleep Reality Frame - Our Body's Therapeutic Gift

We are called to learn how to fluidly move back and forth between high alert, activated and calm states as global crises accelerate. We can do this by skillfully regulating our:

- *Sympathetic nervous system*: states of alert and stress response and the,
- *Parasympathetic nervous system*, relaxed states when the body is at rest.

We are called in uncertain times to dynamically adjust our internal state to respond appropriately to the demands of the external environment. Our ability to achieve this is contingent upon: 1) our ability to extend focus and, 2) to tap into and master internal reward and effort systems. Both are intricately intertwined with the quality of our sleep.

We spend one third of our lives in the sleep state. This incredibly important aspect of our lives resets our ability to be alert, focus, feel motivated, and experience uplifted moods. Our emotional stability correlates directly to the quality of our sleep. Given the amount of time we necessarily invest in sleeping, it's comforting to know that we can intentionally team up with our bodies and shape our sleep life.

Sleep is a completely internal space where, all things equal, we are not processing outside sensory data. There are no distractions. What we do in the waking state determines when and how quickly we fall asleep, how long we stay asleep, and how rested we feel when we wake up. We don't usually think of sleeping as an art. It's just something the body requires is to do. Yet mastering the art of sleeping is pivotal to internal and external environmental resilience building.

Sleep is broken up into 90 minute cycles. Sleep early in the night is characterized by more non-REM shallow, and then slow wave states. With every 90 minute cycle, REM periods get longer and periods of slow wave sleep get shorter. REM and non-REM have different roles in learning and unlearning, and the two states do this for different types of information.

REM sleep is the perfect cognitive restructuring work space because it is literally our benevolent, organic, nightly internal therapy session. During REM sleep we:

- Consolidate motor skills and spatial information we've absorbed during the waking state, and we,
- Unlearn trauma.

The Key Players

Synopsis - Neuromodulators: Norepinephrine, Acetylcholine, Serotonin, Dopamine

Acetylcholine has a chemical signature that activates focus and attention on what is in front of us. It is the intense spotlight of attention.

Norepinephrine in the brain (*same chemical as adrenaline existing in the body*) -

effort mechanisms, alertness, gets us going, generates the desire to move,
Adrenalin (same chemical in the body as norepinephrine in the brain) - - effort mechanism, alertness,

Serotonin - (endogenous opioid system) bliss, and the desire to remain still; rewards for what we already have, gratitude, appreciation. Restores your ability to subsequently be outwardly focused again.

Dopamine - reward of effort and external effort (Resource: The Molecule of More Daniel Z. Lieberman, Michael Long). Dopamine is the ancient system that puts us on the right path, pursuing goals, pleasure and reward.

During REM sleep, the lucid dreaming reality frame, the neuromodulators* serotonin and norepinephrine are absent. Therefore we can re-experience, unlearn, repattern, and reprogram the emotional content of traumatic experiences in the dreamscape without fear (*i.e., minus norepinephrine*).

REM dreamscapes naturally work to balance out painful waking experience (*compensatory*) in this way. However, when we learn to skillfully use intention and internal imagery to navigate this dreamscape, we offload the emotional baggage of trauma exponentially faster.

A neurotransmitter is a chemical released at the end of a neuron when it is activated by a nerve [electrical] impulse. It diffuses across the synapse [a space] or junction and transfers the impulse to another neuron or another kind of fiber. Neurotransmitters act locally across the synaptic junction to affect maybe one or two neurons.

A neuromodulator is a substance (such as a polypeptide) that acts together with neurotransmitters, to effect synaptic transmission of impulse and enhance the excitatory or inhibitory responses of the receptors. Neuromodulators are released by neurons farther away from the target cells which are larger groups of neurons.

Notes

February 9, 2021

Water: 21st Century Gold

Let your mind rest on water.

- The human body is 60% water.
- Brain and heart 73% water
- Lungs 83% water,
- Skin 64% water,
- Muscles and kidneys are 79%,
- Eye - 95% water.
- The human body cannot survive beyond 3 days without water.

Let your mind rest on water.

- 71 % of the Earth's surface is water-covered,
- large amounts of water have likely flowed on Earth for the past 3.8 billion years,
- 97% of the earth's water is in oceans (too salty for drinking, growing crops, and most industrial uses except cooling).
- 3% of the earth's water is fresh.
- 0.5% of the earth's water is available fresh water.
- half of the world's freshwater can be found in six countries: Brazil, Russia, United States, Canada, China, and Columbia.
- 2.5% of the earth's freshwater is unavailable: locked up in glaciers, polar ice caps, atmosphere, and soil; highly polluted; or lies too far under the earth's surface to be extracted at an affordable cost.
- 3.6 billion people worldwide, (slightly less than 50% of the global population) presently
- live in water-scarce areas at least 1 month per year. This number will increase 4.8- 5.7 billion by 2050.
- 1.1 billion people in the world lack access to clean freshwater.
- in the United States 2.1 trillion gallons of treated water is lost each year from pipe leaks.
- A UN and Pacific Institute report estimates that 2 billion tons of human, animal, and industrial waste are dumped untreated into freshwater bodies each year.
- According to modeling by NASA, megadroughts in the 21st century will span multiple decades.
- By 2040 there will not be enough water available to meet global demand for both drinking and energy production.

February 10, 2021

Perspective Exercise

Decision Making: Bishop, Queen, King, Knight, Pawn, Rook?

We have the capacity to witness our lives, motivations, behaviors, thought and emotional patterns from a multiplicity of vantage points in order to enhance self-awareness and grow.

The quality of our lives is a function of myriad decisions, large and small that we make in each moment of every day. So if quality living is a goal, it behooves us to hone our decision-making skills. One of the best ways to do this is to frequently step into one of a variety of metacognitive perspectives.

The Chess Board Vantage Point is a useful perspective we can use to survey our lives, and the decisions that we make which condition the quality of our experience. Irrespective of whether we are actually chess players or not, thinking about the chess board itself offers the baseline “aerial-survey-position” advantage of metaphorically seeing the forest for the trees. We’re able to dispassionately witness the intrinsic role of each chess piece and learn from observing their movement patterns and interaction with other pieces.

The Chess Board Vantage Point Exercise:

1. Imagine yourself and successive groups of people who have been, or who are the most important people in your life over the years as role-appropriate pieces on a chess board. For example your parents might be the king and queen. Or perhaps a sibling that consumed most of your family’s attention and required everyone’s protection might be the king or queen.

And/or

2. Imagine yourself and the objectified parts of yourself as role-appropriate pieces on a chess board. For example, your existential fear might be the king or queen relative to yourself as a pawn or perhaps relative to yourself as a crafty knight with the wherewithal to keep the fear in check. And remember not to underestimate the collective power and influence of the pawn structure on the overarching game.
3. After assigning the people who populated the pivotal scenarios in your life chess piece roles (see below) watch the stories play out in your internal landscape. Witness how the pieces interact, whether: strategically, driven by rote, unexamined, intergenerational patterning, power-and-control dynamics, thoughtfully, consciously. As you observe, sense the love, pain, compassion, animosity, pent up rage, indifference, self-involvement etc that is operative within the interactions.
4. Consider where and how you figure into the process.
5. Consider how you might reconfigure the game and the interaction among the pieces to achieve the healthiest outcome.

Creative Response: Moving beyond the baseline “aerial-survey-position,” to contemplate the dynamics of the 1500 year old game of chess is to contemplate unleashing our creativity in response to challenges as they present. The game requires us to make strategic, tactical decisions under pressure and to persevere as the pressure continues for protracted periods of time.

Pattern Recognition & Reinforcement: A life lived as a skillfully played, growth producing game of chess, like the game itself, involves incessantly recognizing and practicing patterns that “work” until they become intuitive. In this way we wire our neuronal pathways to serve our greatest good. We learn when to relax, when to watch and give the other player the opportunity to reveal themselves. We are aware of which moves are generally supportive and which are pivotal, vital crossroads actions in the game and act accordingly.

Exchange Control for Awareness: Anything, any set of circumstances, can change at any moment on the chess board as a function of our engagement with another player; as in life. We’re in the driver’s seat of our own lives but there are other drivers. Ongoing, heightened, panoramic awareness of the entire environment is crucial. When the need to dominate the board and be in control become our predominant driving forces, we diminish the quality of our experience. In the extreme, the need to control what is inevitably uncontrollable generates blind spots that can set us up to fail.

The Players

Bishop: The bishop is a long range, long game chess piece that helps stabilize and maintain balance on the board. The piece moves in any direction diagonally and captures other pieces by landing on the square they occupy. Bishops that begin on the light squares may only move on light squares, and bishops that begin on dark squares can only travel on dark squares.

Knight: The horse, symbolizing the knight is the only piece in the game of chess that can “jump over” other pieces, regardless of whether those pieces are light or dark. The knight moves unconventionally in an L-shape compared to other chess pieces that move in straight or diagonal lines. Knights can move two squares in any direction vertically followed by one square horizontally, or two squares in any direction horizontally followed by one square vertically.

Rook: The castle-turret shaped rook moves horizontally or vertically, through any number of unoccupied squares and can dominate a lane if unopposed. Rooks support the movement of other pieces and are especially effective in supporting the advance of pawns. In the endgame rooks can immobilize the other player’s king.

Queen: The queen has the most liberty on the chess board inasmuch as she can move any number of squares vertically, horizontally or diagonally.

Pawn: The pawn, the most numerous piece in the game of chess, originally representing the infantry, or armed peasants, is often viewed as the weakest. However the pawn-structure can have a tremendous impact on an unfolding game because, with the exception of knights, other pieces can’t jump over pawns. They

impact the mobility of the flashier pieces. Individually pawns are vulnerable, however a strategically configured pawn structure can be powerful.

Pawns are the chess equivalent of essential grassroots movement builders. At the outset of the game half of the players are pawns and the structure they adopt can be a determinant factor in the outcome of the game. Pawns serve as blockers who run interference and prevent the other player's pieces from moving into squares. It's unwise to underestimate the aggregate power of pawns.

"...Play the pawns well; they are the soul of chess: it is they which uniquely determine the attack and the defense, and on their good or bad arrangement depends entirely on the winning or losing of the game." - Chess Master, François-André Philidor

Chess was originally conceived as a war game with opponents, adversaries, enemies. There is a winner and a loser. This dynamic isn't helpful for our purposes. So to reframe, when one player tips their king down and resigns at the conclusion of an inspired game, the real victory is a successful exercise in seeing above and beyond subjective immersion, exclusively in one reality frame.

Chess trivia:

The English word "chess" is derived from the French échec meaning failure or defeat.

The derivation of the "rook" chess piece is from the Persian rukh, meaning either "chariot" or "boat."

The chess piece that we know as the "bishop" began at the inception of the game in ancient India and subsequently Persia as the war elephant. The groove in the head of the piece represents the elephant's tusks. In the west the English chose to call the piece a bishop because the top resembled a bishop's mitre.

Notes

February 13, 2021

Group Participation: Personal Inventory I.

Question: Why on earth would we want to participate in a group when the “group process” makes everything take longer, we’d rather do whatever needs to be done ourselves, and it’s frustrating to deal with the idiosyncrasies of others?

Answer: We join groups when we want to accomplish something that we cannot, or would rather not do on our own. We will not thrive in the challenging times that lie ahead unless we learn to function effectively in groups.

Do We Know How to Best Contribute in a Group Setting?

When we show up in groups we bring with us our worldviews derived from a lifetime of cultural, relational, professional, and previous group experiences. Proceeding from that context our ideas, mode of self-expression, traumas, memories, dreams, beliefs, fears, behavior patterns, and self-concept are on display as we interact with others.

Are we fully aware of what we bring to a group conversation?

Do we compassionately create room for the varied experience that others bring to the conversation?

Comfort Level

- Do you feel comfortable in group discussions?
- In what types of group conversation settings do you feel most comfortable? What circumstances are most often prevalent when you feel ill at ease, and conversely when you are most at ease?
- Do you feel comfortable in smaller groups, larger sized groups, or at ease in both?
- How does the composition of people in the group affect your comfort level? (e.g. shared interests, class, gender, race, age, educational level, nationality, regionality, political affinity, predilection for introspection, etc.?)

Self-perception

- Do you fear public speaking and/or expressing yourself in a group?
- Do you question whether what you have to say is worth others hearing, or is helpful?
- Do you question whether you have the right to say what you want to say? *Selftalk:* “Who am I to put this idea forward?”
- Is there a point in group conversations that you feel as though continuing to express yourself would be tantamount to being pushy, egotistical, domineering, too directive, or selfish?
- Do you compare yourself to others in the group?

- Do you feel elated, and/or as if it's *essential* that either: 1) you **are** the smartest person in the room, and/or, 2) you **feel** as though you are smarter than others, and/or, 3) you **are perceived** by others as being the smartest person in the room?
- Have you ever been a newcomer in a long established group where members already had a great deal of history with each other? How did that feel? How did you adjust? How and when did you know that you had been fully accepted and/or begin to feel comfortable?
- Have you ever been in a group where you felt as though, or you actually were expected to “represent” people or an idea in:
 - A homogenous group of people with whom you resonate?
 - A group of people where members’ worldviews varied greatly?
 - A group of people with whom you have very little life experience in common?
- What is your experience of “representing” either by formal selection, or by default and group perception/projection of who you are?

Aspiration

Synergy: A coherent, palpable flow of energy within and around a group of people that manifests when their combined effect exceeds individual contributions.

Notes

February 14, 2021

Group Participation: Personal Inventory II.

Formal & Informal Roles: Contributions & Tensions

Tensions are valued and lifted up in groups that prioritize equivalence. “Tensions” are often perceived by “conventional” groups and organizations as bottlenecks, problems, or challenges. A tension in an egalitarian group process is defined as *the feeling we get when we sense a gap between the way things are, and what potentially and optimally could be*. As we build evolutionary 21st century culture, “tensions” become our guideposts on the path toward greater awareness. A tension is an instrument of a group or organization’s ongoing self-assessment, and the growing edge of creative, constructive change.

Group Roles & Tensions - Where Do You Gravitate?

Task and Procedural Roles are those officially associated with carrying out duties and responsibilities in accordance with group policies and norms.

Informal Roles are those which group members adopt as a function of personality traits and life experience.

Collaborative Co-Partner (task and procedural role)

- **Contribution:** Cooperative, mild, perceptive, and diplomatic. Collaborates well. Pitches in wherever needed to help the group accomplish its goals, Listens, builds, and averts friction.
- **Tension:** May ignore or actively bury conflict that needs to be addressed, and/or be indecisive in a crunch.

Convener - Facilitator (task and procedural role)

- **Contribution:** Confident, blends macro and micro perspectives, clarifies goals, mission and keeps the group on track, delegates well. Helps the group modulate tensions as they arise.
- **Tension:** May dominate and thereby block opportunities for co-partners to step up, learn, and take on more responsibility.

Idea Sparker (informal)

- **Contribution:** Creative, imaginative, uses out of the box thinking to solve difficult problems with innovative strategies.
- **Tension:** May be overly optimistic and/ or lose interest beyond the initial enthusiasm.

Kumbaya Love Cocoon Dweller (informal)

- **Contribution:** Seeks stabilizing group harmony and demonstratively expresses concern and caring for others.
- **Tension:** May go through the motions and use the language of love and

harmony to bypass or ignore tensions that need to be addressed. Can seek harmonious stability to the point of group stagnation.

Devil's Advocate, Naysayer, Catastrophizer (informal)

- Contribution: Invites the group to consider opposing viewpoints. Challenges group to engage in self-inquiry, review norms and policies.
- Tension: May reflexively and consistently find fault and bring worst case scenarios into the conversation, disrupt, or slow the group down, create derision and factionalization.

Specialist (task and procedural role)

- Contribution: Single-point focus, self-starting, dedicated. Provides in-depth information, research and knowledge in a specific field of expertise.
- Tension: May only feel comfortable contributing in a narrow lane and dwell on details and technicalities.

Strategic Observer (informal)

- Contribution: Strategic discerner who sees the big picture and all potential options. Keen, accurate judgement.
- Tension: May be an armchair quarterback lacking drive and willingness to follow through on their own keen perspective. Discernment may not translate into doing work, or inspiring co-partners.

Tension Reliever (informal)

- Contribution: Introduces humor into the group to lighten and make the process enjoyable. They help co-partners keep things in perspective so they don't take things too seriously.
- Tension: Humor may devolve into subtle or overt sarcasm and derisive meanness; Humor used inappropriately or inordinately can be disruptive or steer the group from its mission.

Wallflower (informal)

- Contribution: Rarely talks, quietly listens, observes, and absorbs everything that's going on; could be a resource.
- Tension: May disagree with ideas or the direction of the group. Since the disagreement is unexpressed, it could fester into resentment and eventually surface to create a range of challenges for the group. May assume that an assertive, engaged person in the group will carry the conversation, offer the ideas, and shoulder the bulk of the work.

Proposal Shaping Roles

Shaper (task and procedural role)

- Contribution: Dynamic, strong drive, good writer that sees the big picture, works well under pressure
- Tension: May offend people and inadvertently step on toes given the level of personality intensity.

February 15, 2021

Simple Favorites

The longer we listen to one another - with real attention - the more commonality we will find in all our lives. That is, if we are careful to exchange with one another life stories and not simply opinions.

— Barbara Deming

To find our calling is to find the intersection between our own deep gladness and the world's deep hunger."

— Frederick Buechner

*Our own pulse beats in every stranger's throat,
And also there within the flowered ground beneath our feet;
And - teach us to listen!
We can hear it in water, in wood , and even in stone.
We are earth of this earth, and we are bone of its bone.
This is a prayer I sing, for we have forgotten this and so
The earth is perishing.*

— Barbara Deming

*Go forth on your journey,
for the benefit of the many,
for the joy of the many,
out of compassion for the welfare,
the benefit and joy of all beings.*

—Siddhartha Gautama Buddha

A liberation movement that is nonviolent sets the oppressor free as well as the oppressed.

— Barbara Deming.

The human being in whom the earth has become spiritually aware, has awakened into consciousness, has become self-aware and self-reflecting. In the human, the earth begins to reflect on itself. In our deepest definition and deepest subjectivity, we humans are the earth. Conscious.

— Sister Miriam McGillis

I think the only choice that will enable us to hold to our vision. . . is one that abandons the concept of naming enemies and adopts a concept familiar to the nonviolent tradition: naming behavior that is oppressive.

— Barbara Deming

Something inside me has reached to the place where the world is breathing.

—Kabir

February 18, 2021

Group Participation III.

Listening as a Meditation - 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

So many of us have never really learned to listen in a group setting. People enjoy talking, being heard, and expressing opinions. Our society which lauds competition, enculturates us to view the way we express ourselves in a group as an exercise of power that earns us rank in a group. This competition may be subtle or overt. People often vie to distinguish themselves as the smartest person in the room. One upmanship, a power and control dynamic eclipses deep listening.

We can set the intention to shift these dysfunctional and damaging cultural patterns by observing how we've been taught to habitually listen, ...or not, and intentionally course correct. To that end we can train to recognize and shed bias that blocks listening and compels us to: 1) enter conversations thinking about how we can make a decision or situation go our way, 2) download inflexible belief systems on people and, 3) debate to defend our belief systems.

Listening is a form of focusing meditation. Before we can effectively listen to others we must learn to listen to ourselves. Clarity in our relationship to ourselves improves our relationships with others. Conversely, the more noise and information bombardment we experience, the more we are chronically stressed, the less we're aligned with our true-selves and therefore cannot be present to listen to others.

When there is a perpetual stream of thoughts running like a ticker tape or revolving on an endless loop in our minds, true listening will be a challenge. Work on mastery over our own minds therefore is a prerequisite to being fully present as listeners.

This work involves among other cultivated self-oversight abilities:

- Self-observing skills,
- Impulse control,
- Present moment awareness of cognitive biases,
- Calm, abiding presence with sources of attraction and aversion,
- Capacity for emotion and thought pattern interruption and redirection.

Just as meditation stills the mind when we focus exclusively on one thing such as breath, a candle flame, or a mantra, so too, deep listening is an opportunity to develop one-pointed awareness. As in meditation, when we listen well, we tune out everything other than the person in front of us. Listening consciously, skillfully, and deeply to ourselves and to other people as they speak is great practice for inward listening for internal guidance.

Listening 1.0 - Listening Baselines

Environment: Screen out environmental background noise.

Body language: Fully face the speaker(s). Maintain eye contact (*as culturally appropriate*), your body is in a relaxed yet alert position. Lean very slightly forward, maintain an interested and engaged facial expression.

Practice wise, compassionate restraint: Refrain from - rehearsing your responses, jumping to conclusions, offering advice, posing solutions, mentally criticizing the speaker, fixing or solving, defending, or sharing similar personal experiences.

Pay attention: Be aware of when your thoughts have drifted off somewhere and bring them back to focus on the speaker.

Listening 2.0 - Technical Skills-building

- Sustain a genuinely curious predisposition as you pose open questions and focus on what the speaker conveys. Encourage the speaker to feel heard, to speak openly and honestly.
- Form a picture or a mental model of what the speaker is saying in your mind's eye.
- Ask questions only to clarify rather than opening the door to tangents that diverge from the original topic.
- When posing questions, adjust your pace to accommodate the more thoughtful communicator who needs time to process, or for someone who has difficulty expressing themself.
- Be aware of nonverbal cues.
- Notice what words and phrases, especially nominalizations [states of being, e.g. fun, freedom, recognition] that the speaker repeats. These are called a person's "criteria" and are indicative of priority areas for them.
- Notice repetition of words that indicate whether the speaker processes information visually, auditorily, or kinesthetically, e.g: I see what you're saying, I can imagine, I envision, I hear you, It sounds like, I sense that, It feels like.
- Offer neutral, non-interpretive feedback using brief, paraphrased repetition of what the speaker has said.
- Refrain from worrying about whether you're "doing it right."
- Listening 3.0 Introduction to Full Receptive Presence
- Suspended Self-orientation:
- Make a conscious decision to listen past your personality structure of egoic construct filters and lenses.
- Let go of self-absorption in your own story and narrative, worries and planning.
- Practice Active Presence
- Bring as much of your awareness, and non-judgmental, encouragement as possible to the interaction, eliminating external and internal distractions.
- Allow yourself to fully absorb what the speaker is saying.
- Practice empathy by putting yourself in the speaker's shoes. See what they are conveying through their lenses. Be aware of what they are feeling.

February 18, 2021

Listening Deeply for the Song of True-Self

When a Himba woman in Namibia, on the southern coast of Africa, decides to have a child, she goes out a certain distance away from the tribal area and sits alone under a tree. She turns her attention inward. She waits in expectant silence and listens deeply, aligning herself with the consciousness that wants to come into being through her, and waits to hear the child's song.

When the song emerges, she sings it repeatedly. She communes with the child through the song, inviting the consciousness into her energy, into her biofield. The consciousness of the mother and consciousness of the child who will come into form meld through the frequency of the song.

After this energetic communion the mother goes to the man who will be the child's father and teaches him the song. They sing the song together before they make love to physically conceive the child as a way of inviting the child into physical embodiment.

When she becomes pregnant, the mother teaches that child's song to the midwives and the elder women of the village who will assist with the birthing. And all who are gathered around at the time of the birth sing the child's song and welcome the baby as it comes into the world, into their community.

As the child grows up, the other villagers are taught the child's song. If the child falls, or gets hurt, whoever picks them up offers comfort by singing the song to them. When the child does something well or achieves a life-marker milestone such as the puberty rite of passage, the people of the village gather and sing the child's song to honor and celebrate them.

If a Himba person commits a crime or transgresses a group norm they are called to the center of the village. The community forms a circle around them and sings that person's birth song to them. It's understood that the transgressor has simply forgotten or gone astray from their true song. Correction is therefore not a punishment, but an act of love — a remembrance and a collective re-calling of one's true identity. When we recognize our own song we have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another.

The song of bride and groom are both sung at marriage ceremonies. And when the Himba are lying on their deathbed, the villagers gather around them and sing the person's song for the last time.

Musica Humana

Every human biofield* has its own unique harmonics, its song.

*Biofield: In 1994, a panel of scientists at the National Institute of Health (NIH) chose the word "biofield" to describe the field of energy and information that surrounds and interpenetrates the human body. The biofield is composed of both electromagnetic energy and subtle energy, or chi.

February 20, 2021

The Wall

Take a moment for yourself.

Pause and sense your physical presence.

Get comfortably settled, and stop moving.

Relax, and become completely still.

Close your eyes and ease into calm, tranquil silence.

Breathe deeply and direct your attention inward.

Bring the image into your mind's eye of yourself traveling in a vehicle over rough terrain on a long, arduous road trip to the ocean.

You're pleased that you've been making steady headway for some time now on a challenging road, overcoming obstacle after obstacle along the way. Although difficult at times the journey thus far has been satisfying.

Most recently you've entered into a prolonged curved bend in the road where it has been almost impossible to see what lies ahead for any significant distance. But you're staying the course, sensing that there's a straighter stretch of road ahead.

Just as you come around what appears to be the last curve where the road promises to straighten, you see a massive, towering wall of stone a short distance up ahead.

As your vehicle approaches the wall, you think to yourself that you may be about to simply trade lack of visibility one sort for another version of the same, because nothing is visible over the wall. The road to the ocean is completely obscured.

The apparently impenetrable barrier wall stretches horizontally so far to the east and west that you're unable to see where it ends.

It appears to be at the very least, six feet thick.

Stop the vehicle and take in this sight through the vehicle's front window.

Then get out of the vehicle and close the door.

There is no one in sight.

The road is desolate. The air is still and all is silent.

Walk up to within 100 yards of the wall and stand facing it.

Center and compose yourself.

Focus.

Look at the wall intently, allowing it to fill your mind up completely, pushing out every other stray thought.

Raise your arms perpendicular to your body, palms up, facing the wall.

With arms and palms outstretched toward the wall, close your eyes.

Focus all of your attention on the wall in your mind's eye.

Draw deeply from the enormous reservoir of your inner strength and summon forces from the east of your vastness.

Summon forces from the west of your limitlessness.

Summon forces from the depths of your being.

Summon forces from the heights of your potentiality, and open yourself to the full force of the energy transmission that roars through your body, rushes through your

February 22, 2021

Being With Water

Listen, Look, Live in Its Flow

Listen to...

A babbling mountain brook

Soft patter of raindrops on a window pane
Ocean waves crashing against the shore
The roar of cascading waterfall
Bubbling of a stream bubbling around rocks
Rush of a forceful river

The sound of water impacts, and changes brain physiology and bodily systems, helping us to relax. Spending time around, in, and even thinking about water has a tremendous relaxing and stress relieving effect on the body, especially the central nervous system. In fact, a [2020 study](#) in the *Journal Frontiers in Psychology* found that as little as 10 minutes spent in natural settings may be enough to provide well-being benefits.

Many of us swirl around in the murky well of the social media rabbit hole which is designed to activate, co-opt, and entrain our brain's arousal and threat detection system. Social media and intense, emotionally gripping screen-fare stimulate our autonomic nervous system in order to bracket our attention on the screen. Generation of fear and elevated levels of anxiety which makes us more manipulable is a goal.

Conversely, rhythmic water sounds that build up and dissipate gradually soothe our nervous system. Playing recorded "water sounds" affects the flight-or-fright and rest-digest autonomic nervous systems, putting us at ease.

Gaze upon...

A still, tranquil lake at dawn
The seemingly endless ocean that stretches to the horizon
Gentle ripples on a pond.

Looking at water, or even pictures of water holds our attention, not as an information-rich stimulant but in a way that soothes and tranquilizes. It can put us in the deeply relaxed, cusp of low alpha/theta brainwave state, from which the deepest creativity may emerge.

Water takes you away from distractions and simplifies the visual landscape.

—Wallace J. Nichols, author of *Blue Mind*

Take the Plunge...

Interestingly, "water *submersion*" has a calming effect when our faces are underwater! Research indicates that when our faces are submerged in water our heart rate slows and certain blood vessels constrict. Blood is redistributed from our

limbs to the brain, heart, and other central organs. Function of the vagal tone and the parasympathetic nervous system which control the body's "rest-and-digest" states is heightened. The sympathetic nervous system, seat of the "fight-or-flight" response simultaneously stands down. This water submersion effect is known as the "dive response"* which is thought to help the body conserve oxygen while underwater.

Our deep connection to water, AS water ourselves, is unequivocal. So it behooves us in stressful times to honor that reality and incorporate it as a part of our ongoing selfcare.

If you don't have access to a beach, a lake, a pool, or some other swimmable body of water, listening to water, looking at pictures of water, or even taking a shower could offer rewards. If you cross a river on your way to work, just pause and appreciate it. When you take a shower, be more aware of how the water feels on every part of your body.

—Wallace J. Nichols, author of *Blue Mind*

More Information:

[Orfeu Buxton](#), PhD, a professor of biobehavioral health at Pennsylvania State University.

Study published in Scientific Reports by Dr Cassandra Gould van Praag at Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS)

Wallace J. Nichols, *Blue Mind*

[The "Dive Response," Roly Russell, PhD](#), the Sandhill Institute for Complexity and Sustainability

"Blue Health" initiative University of Exeter in the U.K.

Notes

February 24, 2021

Open-Possibility Spaces

Listen, Share, Learn

How much time do you spend talking on any given day? To what extent are you routinely engaged in conversation with friends, family, neighbors, co-workers, and in groups working toward a goal; expressing your opinions, taking positions, comparing notes, and debating issues via zoom, in the virtual world, or otherwise? You are cordially invited to take a break. Consider another, complementary and graceful way of engaging with people.

Imagine an open-possibilities, listening-learning environment where everyone feels completely at ease because they know that they've entered a space where there is no chilling effect on self-expression. "Open possibilities space" does not connote that anything goes. It is an environment in which an explicit architecture has been created that evokes freedom of expression and creativity.

In an open-possibilities space....

- All ideas are welcome.
- Everyone's ideas are explored until they are fully understood by everyone present.
- The language used is kind and respectful.
- The space is crosstalk-free, so one interrupts.
- No one prefaces their remarks by apologizing for interrupting and then interjects anyway when they see fit to do so.
- The space is sarcasm, snark, and ridicule free; both subtly and overtly.
- No one judges, devalues, or conversely lauds the contribution we offer. Each contribution is greeted by an ambiance which conveys dispassionate, deep compassionate respect.
- Tensions and objections are valued as tools for learning and growth.
- No one verbally compares or contrasts their own experience to what we say.
- We hear from everyone in the space. Each person has no more or no less time to speak than another, and all assembled self-monitor to use time with respect for the whole.
- We generally know when our opportunity to express ourselves is coming up.
- We can leave our spoken comments out on the ether for all to consider and know that other speakers will not reference it or interpret it in order to build on it for their own purposes.
- Every contribution, beyond being articulated and heard, helps shape the learning outcome and action forward in some way.

- There is an anticipated, designated time for:
 - Contributing ideas for everyone's consideration,
 - Offering uncensored, unchallenged reactions to ideas,
 - Clarification of ideas,
 - Contributing to the building and shaping of everyone's ideas which eventually become the fully thought out, comprehensive "learning" of the whole.

A norm of sharing and deep, commentary-free listening to the ideas and experiences of peers is counterintuitive in western society. Adaptation requires adjustment and self-discipline. Our auditory and visual diet of incessant noise and screen-driven stimuli fills up our minds with a stream of chatting, arguing, and banter that consumes our attention from dawn to lights out. So, pauses and moments of quiet discernment in conversation feel odd.

Most of us are not accustomed to refraining from gabbing, weighing in with our opinions, giving advice, or immediately affirming or disagreeing with what has been said. The impulse is so irresistible for some that they become extremely uncomfortable and feel constrained if they can't jump right in and add their thoughts when others speak. In an open-possibilities space we are asked to bear witness to our thought processes and how we feel as we redirect our habitual impulses and refrain from commenting.

Those of us who feel the need for external validation, approval, and immediate feedback on our ideas and experiences may initially find such a communications process challenging. In an open-possibilities space we are invited to stand in the integrity of our own personal inner truth and build the capacity for self-validation.

Self-observation - metacognition is key to the deep listening process. It may seem strange to think about ourselves in an attempt to be present and listen to others. Yet self-observing, seeing from a metacognitive position as we simultaneously tune into others is the goal.

Participating in conversations from at least two vantage points is the key to being constructively empathetic rather than subjectively sympathetic. The latter is a recipe for overwhelm which serves no one's purposes. We can empathetically put ourselves in the other person's shoes to understand them, while not being sympathetically pulled too deeply into their emotional orbit. Ongoing heightened awareness of the dynamic between ourselves and the speaker as we apply appropriate elements of our communications skill-set in the moment is the hallmark of this level of listening.

Self-observation - metaconscious awareness of ourselves as the listener who is fully present for the speaker is the best case scenario vantage point. In this instance we are aware of ourselves beyond the avatar body who is engaged with the listener. We bear witness to the two avatars engaged in conversation or see ourselves and engaging a group. as if we are a third party in the room -- a fly on the wall so to speak.

However, beyond third party observation of ourselves a meta-conscious perspective draws from a reservoir of insight and information in subtle realms that dwarfs the

communications skills-set honed by the avatar brain. Listening from metaconscious awareness brings to bear the big picture, the potential lesson set that's in play for both the listener and speaker.

Deep listening practice evokes internal self-discipline and enhances self-mastery. Creating an open possibilities space requires strong commitment to growth. Both are an acquired taste that yields a subtle peace born of greater perspective, and can be deeply satisfying for all involved.

Notes

February 26, 2021

Examined Life Optimization

We learn to ...

Be authentic, genuine, and completely comfortable in our own skin.

Be humble yet stand firmly centered in our integrity.

Be aware that everything that occurs is relevant. Nothing happens for naught. Every occurrence and encounter is part and parcel of a lesson-set offered for our learning.

Tend lovingly, skillfully, and consistently in a balanced way to the avatar-vehicle which is ours for this particular sojourn in the matter-sphere.

See clearly when we look.

Hear clearly when we listen.

Think carefully before and as we speak.

Clarify and inquire with open curiosity when in doubt.

Strike a balance with feedback as a resource. We use it to broaden our perspective, yet external approval or validation doesn't determine how we think, feel, or act.

Show deep respect for those we serve.

Acknowledge, encourage, and affirm others.

Maintain calm and respond rather than react when we are challenged.

Notice quickly when we are triggered by our own, or others blockages. *We..* Don't take anything personally. Pause so as not to be pulled into the drama vortex. Witness to the dynamic in play. Extend compassion to the trigger initiator (*including triggering parts of ourselves*) and recenter.

Consider as wide a spectrum of consequences as we are able when we decide.

Sense and adapt to what is happening in the moment.

Intuit what is needed and improvise rather than relying on habitual ways of doing things that may or may not be optimal in the moment.

Do what is appropriate for the wellbeing of all involved when we act.

Lighten up. Allow for a life experience that's interlaced with playfulness and joy. Know when and how to remain steadfast without taking ourselves, our work, and everything else in the holographic world we inhabit too seriously.

Generate growth producing results through our work.