

**It's All About You:**  
***Inner Adventures for Anyone***

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## Contextual Essay

As my thesis project for my masters and diploma in Process Work, I have written a book presenting Process Work (PW) inner work tools to an audience with no prior PW or other inner work experience. This contextual essay is intended to present that project to the PW Community, explaining what I have done and why, and describing some of my process during the making of it.

I chose to write about inner work because, for me, it is the core of Process Work. My self is the instrument I use for practicing PW in any context, so the more I practice inside my self, the more effective a Process Worker I become. Inner Work is also what brought me to PW, when I first read Arnold Mindell's Working on Yourself Alone. It seems logical to me then, to begin with inner work when presenting PW to a wider audience, which is my main goal in this project.

There are already many books about PW inner work, so why have I written another one? (I asked myself this frequently while writing it.) Firstly, different styles appeal to different people. In this sense, just as is often said, everyone has at least one novel in them, every Process Worker has an inner work book in them. Each of those books would take a different form and convey the principles and tools in forms accessible and appealing to different people, depending on their tastes and learning

styles. So there is always room for more PW books, inner work or otherwise.

A more specific reason for me is about the level of psychological and inner work experience of the reader. I personally found Arny's books immediately understandable and easy to use as my first guides to PW, but I already had several years of experience working on myself in different modalities, as well as having had a therapist who used some PW techniques. I think those books are directed at an audience with a similar level of prior experience to mine. What I believe is different about my approach in this writing is my attempt to be as basic as possible, with the assumption that many of my readers are not at all used to focusing on their inner worlds. What I attempt here, is to invite and guide readers who may never have questioned how they perceive the world, intimately to investigate their own sensory grounded information. It is, after all, what we do as therapists, and mine has been the challenge of translating live facilitation with an individual to the page for a more generic readership.

In writing for this audience, I have also avoided PW language as much as possible (with special attention to never using the phrase "working on yourself"). I believe these two choices help aim the book more at a "self-help" or "new age" readership, or generally anyone interested in exploring themselves without necessarily having previous psychological or inner work experience. I have pondered much on what

happens when I work with someone from this audience, imagining as I write that I am leading this person through an exercise, bringing his or her attention to the finest details of their perceptions. This, and studying my own inner work; breaking it down into as tiny steps and fundamental particles as I can, have been my guides in how to convey what we are actually doing when we practice in this amazing paradigm.

My goal in writing for this audience is to offer some useful tools, to give an opportunity to reflect on awareness, and for those who'd like to develop further, inspire some to seek a PW practitioner or to become students themselves.

When I decided to write this book, I immediately encountered several problems, which I paraphrase by saying: "It sounds like a great idea, but how exactly am I going to do it?" The main obstacles I had to resolve were how to convey PW inner work, how to negotiate my own large and life-long creative block, how to overcome my lack of confidence in my own authority, whether to write simply and superficially or to go deeper and necessarily more complex, how to write so anyone at all will want to read it, and what kind of voice to use. To my amazement and glee, I discovered that all these problems are totally interconnected, and working on any one of them unraveled and provided solutions to them all.

After struggling for many months with how I wanted to describe PW inner work; battling away with an academic mind-set, both unsuited

to my audience and critical of my knowledge, I began to explore what was happening with my creative process. What I was doing was sitting in a chair in front of a computer, and trying very hard to get the right words to appear on the screen. At this point, I had a momentous session with Kate Jobe, who doesn't identify herself as a writer, but is, among many other creative things, a dancer. Why not dance the book? I think that easily now. Kate encouraged me to play, to open up in all channels and mess around, not focused on the book or even on my subject matter.

What I did was a whole lot of bizarre, unrelated, and apparently useless, but playful stuff. I made patterns on my floor with tape and arranged objects in my room in configurations meaningful only to me. I put on loud music and danced a lot, and also screamed. I spent several weeks making a compilation CD for a man I hardly knew, obsessively replaying and changing the track order until I deemed it perfect. I baked bread (gluten free) and experimented with gluten, dairy and sugar free desserts, none with recipes, and all by throwing things together without measuring. I learned to play a Cowboy Junkies song on my guitar. I wrote cryptic messages to myself on note cards and pinned them on my walls. Eventually, I wrote a couple of poems. They had nothing directly to do with PW inner work, but the experience of creating something whole that might be of interest to others was exhilarating, and I began to appreciate the possibility that I could actually write something larger.

It's not that I didn't think I could write. I have always wanted to be a writer. It's that I needed to build a bridge across the void created by my vicious inner critic, which would lead me from my enormous high dreams to the humble reality of creating, bit by bit, in the moment. Suddenly, while doing all these crazy, time-consuming things, I remembered how I used to write papers in college. I must have picked up a belief somewhere that, as an adult, I should write entirely in Microsoft Word, and I forgot that I am basically a kinesthetic processor. When I remembered, I pulled out the biggest art pad I had, and all my colored Sharpies. The first step in writing a paper is making a huge mind-map in lots of bright colors, and you have to do it standing up and moving round in the middle of the room. Of course. How could I forget that?

Thus I planned out my first chapter, and wrote it when I decided I didn't care if it came out crass or naïve, so I solved the problem of voice too. It just came out in the words that occurred to me at the time, and since I've done minimal editing, has stayed that way. That's how I discovered that a book is a product of the moment just as much as any other creative endeavor, and I shouldn't hope to make it as perfect as the ideal in my highest dream.

My second breakthrough came with advice from Ingrid Rose, my project advisor, who suggested I track my own inner work and write it down to find out how to describe inner work in general. So I did inner work on my difficulties with writing the book, and wrote down

everything. I amazed myself at the huge leaps I took, without unfolding, or noticing specific channels or signals. Equally surprising was just how often I edged out and either spent long periods of time doing something else, or didn't come back to the work at all. I slowed myself down and tracked every detail, and the tracking helped me make sure I completed what I started. So I entered my own educational process of discovering exactly the steps I take and what I do with them when I work. It is nice, and also a little disconcerting to find those steps are basically the same as I've been taught all these years, although they also appear completely new every time I investigate them.

Taking this minute focus again and again, gave me practice in how I might ask readers to closely track their own sensory grounded information. My written works also turned out to be material for the exercises.

When I was stuck again, having completed the first chapter and not knowing how to repeat my few days of productivity, I talked with Ingrid again. We came up with the idea that I write exercises and give them to people with little PW experience and get their feedback. This meant I didn't have to try to write chapters at that moment, and also solved the problem of who I was writing for. Up to this point I had been making it really hard for myself with the idea that anyone and everyone who could ever possibly pick up the book would like it and want to read it. I would get lost inside the possibilities of how different people might interpret



what I wrote, and was struck by how the choice of one word over another can make a huge difference. Then I asked some friends and my father if they would help me by reviewing some exercises, as well as what they would like those exercises to be about. I then wrote the exercises with those people in mind and discovered that writing for a specific person is way easier for me. Funnily enough though, the problem vanished after this. When I came to shaping these exercises into chapters, I wasn't worried about who my audience was anymore. I also got some great feedback about the nuts and bolts of my exercises, and adjusted my style accordingly. I learned as well that some people don't do exercises, but still appreciate reading them, and this supported me to stay with my decision to include my own experiences.

This decision also mostly answered the question of depth. When I first started making plans for the book, I wanted to keep it simple and superficial in a way; just laying out the basic PW ideas, and the building blocks of how to use them in the moment. To be honest, I still don't really know what this means. When I work on something, it pretty much always gets into my life-long mythological processes. It's hard for me to separate out any kind of "bite size" chunks to digest. So including my own inner work necessarily defined the depth of the writing, and ensured I wasn't going to avoid going into potentially difficult topics. I had worried about what might happen if a reader touched on something traumatic, and I wanted to keep it superficial to avoid this. Then I

realized this is impossible, that if someone has trauma to work on, it will emerge, and it's up to them to seek external help if they need it. What a relief to remind myself I'm not responsible for other people's experiences.

Once I accepted including depth and my own inner work was the way it was going, my voice wasn't a problem anymore either. I was trying to write as if I knew what I was saying, when I felt like I didn't. My first efforts were stiff attempts at sounding academic, which was completely wrong for the whole idea of the project. Writing a book that would be personally useful for someone to honestly explore themselves needs to be done with my authentic voice. So, when I stopped trying to sound like something and just wrote, it came out just fine. Using words much in the way I might speak out loud, and without trying to show how knowledgeable and wise I am (but didn't feel) resulted in a style I'm very comfortable with. I think that means others will be comfortable with it too. There will be people who don't like it, and finally that's really ok for me.

I believe the book contributes to the field of PW study in two ways. Firstly, as is my primary intention, it will introduce PW to a wider audience. I do want to publish it, and look forward to seeing people's interest being sparked by it, and some of them may come to study PW in more depth and even formally. This contributes to the field of study because the more people studying and practicing, the deeper and richer

the field becomes. In the last few years, changes in the structure of the Process Work Institute and changes in a deeper attitude in the Portland based community have brought an outward facing aspect to the field in the U.S. Where previously Process Workers focused more on developing and studying within the community, more and more are diversifying their work and inviting more contact with other fields of study. It is in this spirit that I intend to publish this book. As a living and growing paradigm, PW is enriched by every person who comes into contact with it. It also is an opportunity, however small, to influence our mainstream culture with PW ideas. It can also help throw some light on how those ideas fit with and often coincide with many other wisdoms out there. Although I'm slightly embarrassed by the missionary connotation of this, it also would contribute to PW in making it more recognized and appreciated by that main stream, thus giving the field even more space and material to grow.

Secondly, the book also highlights a focus on teaching PW to people with no previous experience, which for me is related to the therapist's experience when practicing PW with non-Process Workers. As most students and practitioners know, it's very different to work with someone who has no format for tracking their sensory grounded information, or who doesn't share our beliefs about trusting something useful will come of what we don't initially like. Nearly all PW therapists and facilitators are doing it, but I'm not sure there's anything written that directly

addresses it. I believe there's also room in the teaching curriculum for more focus on this too. I know from my own experience how a practitioner can get so used to their tools of practice they forget that other people don't speak that same language in a sense. It is a gorgeous privilege for me to live in the PW community, attending group processes and socializing with others who all speak PW as well. It provides an indescribably precious vehicle for deepening anything I do, but it could also be easy for me to become exclusive. In this context, I see two broad cutting edges in PW; the depths we continue to plumb in working on ourselves and with each other, and the learning process of people first discovering the work. Both are deeply mysterious, and one cannot exist without the other. For me, learning about and clarifying how a person learns to learn about him or herself is a very big area of study, as well as enriching other areas of focus, and helping us remember to open to beginner's mind.

My humble little first book has its limitations of course. I couldn't put everything into it, and I could only write it in my style. There is room for others to write more and more and more. The form itself is also limited in that no general communication can rival a class or a session in person. PW is inherently about diversity; of experience and learning style. The explanations and instructions I've put down on paper will be wrong for many people, and part of me wishes I could be there in person for every reader, to assist them in facilitating themselves.

There are many possibilities for future projects. There are books waiting to be written on the same tools and techniques, just in a different format and in other people's styles. Books on specific aspects or topics of inner work, and step-by-step introductions to relationship work and small group work are calling to be created as well. I also feel possibilities for research and study into working with non-Process Workers. The process of facilitating someone to focus on their experience when they may never have really done so in such a pointed way, as well as the therapist's edges that come up while doing this, is fascinating to me. I would love to see this opened up more in research, exploration, teaching and study.

I have included my acknowledgements as well as a selected bibliography in the book itself. I hope that what follows is of interest and some use to my readers.

Portland,

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## Works Cited

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## Introduction: Process Work

Process Work began in the 1970s when Arnold Mindell, then a Jungian Analyst, began working with people's body symptoms as if they were dreams. From its beginnings in psychotherapy, it has developed and grown to include teachings from Taoism, shamanism, field and systems theories, and concepts from modern physics. No longer only applicable to the individual psyche, Process Work is also practiced with groups of all sizes, from couples to meetings of hundreds of people. Because its fundamentals are based on the experience of being human, they can be adapted and applied in any situation. It is most often practiced as individual and family therapy, as organizational development, and as conflict resolution. People are also using Process Work in the arts, education, sports and animal psychology and training. In fact, Process Work is applied in any area people who study it wish to take it.

And Process Work is far more than psychological and systems theory. It is, for the practitioner, an awareness practice in the same vein as any meditation, spiritual or philosophical school. I believe that wherever we apply our gifts and skills, it is our inner personal development that enriches and sustains our successes and informs how we relate to our failures. Accordingly, a major focus for students of Process Work is on their inner experiences and relationships between

parts of themselves. The more aware you are of yourself, the more choices you have in how to act, both toward yourself and to those around you.

I wrote this book because I want to share Process Work inner work tools with more people than committed students of the paradigm. There are, of course, many amazing and wonderful books written about Process Work theory and practice in all its many applications. Those interested to read further and deeper will find many of those books listed in the suggestions for further reading. My intention here is to present some basic concepts and techniques in an easily digested form that is also detailed enough for someone with no previous experience to follow. One of the things that helps me to learn new practices is specific examples, and so for many of the exercises I have included my own personal experiences alongside the instructions. I have also intentionally left out most psychological and Process Work jargon, and specifically have endeavored not to use the phrase “working on yourself.” This last is because of the harsh attitude I can have toward myself when thinking of investigating my experience as “work” and my “self” as something to be improved. In this book I’ve used words like “investigating” and “exploring” instead.

For me, writing this book has been an incredibly empowering and loving experience; in unlocking my own creativity, discovering some of my important strengths, and getting to know myself better. I hope you

also will find it useful. While you are reading, and perhaps trying out the exercises, please feel free to change anything, skip anything you don't like, and add whatever feels right for you. There is no one right way to do anything.

Before going any further, I must acknowledge my huge indebtedness to all my Process Work teachers. All of the concepts and tools in this book are learned from them, all of the exercises are adaptations of ones I've been taught, and anything I've got wrong is my responsibility.

Specifically, I extend my greatest gratitude to Arnold Mindell, for daring to explore his experience beyond what he was taught and in doing so creating Process Work. It is a living and growing paradigm, so I must also thank all other teachers and practitioners for their continued contributions. Thanks also to Ingrid Rose, my supervisor for this project, and to Kate Jobe and Salome Schwarz, the other two members of my study committee, without whom it would never have got out of my head and onto the page. All three of them have held, supported and pushed me in absolutely indispensable and loving ways. I thank my therapist, Jan Dworkin, also for holding, supporting and pushing me, and for her incredible humility, patience and expertise. Thanks also to all my fellow students, both in Cohort X and not, for us all challenging and supporting each other.

I also want to thank Peter Smith who, though not a Process Worker, introduced me to my life's passion by suggesting I read "Working on Yourself Alone." Thanks to my friends, Peter Irving, for helping me at my creative edges, Michael Graubart (my father) and Zoltan Gal for testing and reviewing the exercises. Lastly, I have to thank myself for beginning and for sticking with it until the end.

## Chapter One: Problems

We normally think of problems as something to be got rid of or ignored if we can. That's great if it works, but there are always those nasty ones that won't go away and stop bothering us. No solution seems to completely or permanently work. Perhaps this is just life, and we should learn to live with them, and that's true, but there's also another viewpoint that the thing that bothers us contains something useful, and may even hold the key to its own resolution.

When we don't like what someone does, or how they are, for example, we can investigate what it is about them that bothers us. It's counter intuitive, but often we can find the attitude or habit we don't like is exactly the right communication style for us to use ourselves when dealing with that person.

Physical symptoms also can hold pieces of wisdom. A person who suffers from asthma might discover the way to create stronger boundaries and protection for him or herself within the experience of tightness in the chest. The psychological boundary making can be paralleled in the body by dealing better with whatever causes the symptoms.

Any kind of problem can be addressed this way; creative blocks, difficult relationship patterns, addictions, moods, even strong

psychological disturbances. Even such serious things, when treated carefully and with respect, can be fun to explore and play around with.

Looked at very simply, a problem is a goal and an obstruction to that goal. Whether it's as concrete as wanting to get to an appointment on time when there's a bus broken down in front of you, or as seemingly undefined as feeling stuck in your life direction, a problem can be understood that way.

Think of a simple problem you have in the moment. It could be something that's easily solved. Pick something not too important or emotional. Think for a moment about how you view or address this problem. My problem is I have a friend coming over and I have dirty dishes in the sink. My goal is for my friend to think I'm clean and neat, and the obstruction is the dirty dishes. I see my problem from the point of view of someone seeking the goal, which is only natural, since it's my problem. But what does it look like from the viewpoint of the dirty dishes?

If we step out of our linear view of cause and effect, we could view the situation much differently. What if the problem exists in order to get us to change the way we view our lives and identify ourselves? Perhaps the dirty dishes have a purpose for me. Instead of just solving the problem by washing them, or ignoring it by pretending to myself I don't mind being seen as a little slovenly, I could take a moment to step out of my usual way of understanding. Perhaps the problem is asking me to



assess whether my goal is really what I want. Maybe it's also challenging who I think I am, and it could be giving me an opportunity to change a little how I identify myself.

So what does my situation look like from the viewpoint of the dirty dishes? And what does yours look like to the obstruction you named? If I play a little acting game and pretend I'm the dishes, I can get inside their skin, as it were, and feel into what they want or what they're trying to say. My dirty dishes are saying; "Get real. Life is messy. Stop trying to look perfect all the time because you're not, and imperfections are where the creativity and fun are." This challenges me to question what's important to me. Is it looking clean and controlled, or is it being more honest about who I am? After all, I don't worry about the dirty dishes when I'm the only one to see them. That is also a small challenge to the way I identify myself. It means as well as being a person who cares what others think of me (and that's ok) I am also someone who values honesty and creativity above image. We are challenged to enlarge our sense of ourselves like this in our everyday lives, and we can also choose the challenge and growth deliberately.

What also happens when you experiment with the point of view you look at your life from is it changes your perception of reality. The true nature of reality is a big mystery. No matter how hard we try, through whatever methods, scientific, spiritual or philosophical, we cannot definitively say we get how our world of experience works, or how human

consciousness fits in with it. We are part of a system that is infinitely complex and can be understood in a multitude of ways, depending how we look at it.

We have to have a working understanding of how our lives work, however. So each of us has an inner understanding of our reality that is based on our experience, and usually life conforms to this understanding. Every now and then something doesn't quite fit in, and that's when we are challenged to grow and to change a little how we see the world. That's why I see my world differently from when I was a child. It's important that our understandings of how the world works are fairly solid, but if they are too fixed or rigid they don't serve us as well, and can cause us to suffer. Sometimes our worldviews do change, but not very often, so it takes a big shift that can be traumatic to move us along. So experimenting with changing your view of reality can be helpful in loosening some of the rigidity, and it can also be fun.

Part of our working views of reality is how we define ourselves. We each have an identity, how we see ourselves, which informs how we act whether we are conscious of it or not. It's necessary for me to have an idea of who I am and who I am not. I am a responsible person and I am not a murderer. If I know how I am likely to act, then I have stability in how I relate to my environment. I am, however, occasionally at least a little irresponsible. I ride my bike on the sidewalk, and I spend more money than is really in my budget. And I also sometimes feel in a

murderous rage, even if I'm not going to actually do violence to anyone. I might feel attached to my identity as a reasonable person if I'm faced with someone else in a rage, and so I have the internal belief that the way that person acts is not like me. It can be really useful though, if I can do it in the moment, to recognize that I am not only my identity, that I can also be like the person in a rage. It can help me relate to that person usefully, and it can also be good for me in myself. If I never identify with, accept and work on my rage, it is more likely to take me over in ways I have no control over, and I also lose out on accessing the power inside of it.

So, even though the me/not me structure of our identities is necessary, it is not fixed over time, and learning to be a little flexible with it can be very beneficial.

Let's experiment a little with how we perceive our selves and our environment. We'll focus first on how we actually perceive the world through our senses.

Take a moment to notice where you are. Look around at the space you are in. See what surrounds you. Listen to the sounds. Feel what you are sitting or lying on. Maybe you notice a particular smell or a taste in your mouth. Notice if your body is moving or is very still. Take your time doing this. Just notice what's there. You don't have to do anything with it.

After a few minutes, ask yourself if anything you notice seems unusual to you. Is there something that particularly draws your attention, or does something appear dream-like or not consistent with concrete reality? Perhaps you heard a sound that seemed as though it was something that isn't "really" there, or you saw something move when nothing was actually moving. Everyone has these experiences. Our perceptions are not linear recording devices. We see, hear and feel things that apparently don't exist, and we tune them out because they don't fit in our view of what's useful. (Sometimes there might be a fear of being crazy if you notice these things, and that fear is valid. But it's not noticing these things that is crazy, it's when we lose our awareness of ourselves and something unconscious takes us over.)

These dream-like perceptions are part of the natural way we perceive and process information, and they can contain exciting and useful messages for us. They are parts of a different kind of reality showing through into everyday life. They are in a sense, doorways into it. This other level of reality is where dreams happen. We perceive it with a different kind of awareness than our everyday minds. It is the level of reality referred to in original cultures, both ancient and modern. It's the Dream Time of the Native Australians, and the Elf Land of the Celts. Every tradition has reference to it, until that tradition has become codified and fixed, which happens when the focus moves from individual experiences to tradition and ritual that does not change. Experiencing it

is about being open to the unknown, and realizing the depth, inherent importance, and meaning in all of your experiences.

This other level of reality is a state of mind where, as in our nighttime dreams (which are it's clearest manifestation) everything is overflowing with symbolism and meaning and nothing is fixed. Symbols and images can be understood one way in one moment, and in the next they have shifted and are growing into something new. It is a fluid and very alive place to be.

Now close your eyes, and notice what is going on inside you. Perhaps you are seeing or hearing something internally; that is sights and sounds that appear in you, not coming from your physical environment. Perhaps you are feeling something inside your body. Maybe you notice the movement of your breath, or your pulse moving through you.

Now your focus has shifted to your internal experiences, you may feel a subtly different state of consciousness from when you were simply reading. Without having to do anything with it, notice the difference. Do you feel slowed down? more connected to yourself? Or does the experience make you feel less at home or a little uncomfortable? Changing our focus also changes our identity slightly, and can put us into a frame of mind we're not used to. Such altered states may feel somehow wrong or detrimental because they are unfamiliar, but they can also carry information and advice that we really need. Sometimes it's the state

itself we need more of, to balance something in our usual way of being in the world.

Whether we think it's right or not, people always seek altered states. Mind altering drugs and alcohol would never be so popular if people didn't want the states they put them in. And many other things people do are attractive at least in part because of the states they produce; like aerobic exercise, meditation, deep sea diving and paragliding. One of the most popular reasons to drink alcohol is to help one's self feel more relaxed in a social situation. This in itself is not a bad thing, and only becomes a problem if the alcohol is hurting the person's health or relationships. What the altered state of "being more relaxed" is asking for though, is for the person to learn how to access it without having to drink, and that is definitely possible.

Altered states that we experience through chemicals, physical activity or through consciously changing how we process our perceptions are all doorways to including more unknown parts of ourselves in our identities. So, when you're practicing some of the exercises in this book if you occasionally feel a little weird, it's just an altered state, and you can get back to your normal state easily if you need to.

The simplest way to do that is to ask yourself, "how do I know when I'm awake in the morning?" You will have one dominant sense that you feel at home with, and that lets you know you are awake. For example, for me it's feeling. I know I'm awake in the morning when I feel

my body. Other people know they're awake when they see or hear something, or when they move. Which sense tells you that you are awake and not dreaming? Remember this, and if you ever feel too unusual, or as if you might get lost in your unfamiliar experiences, focus on that sense; notice what you are feeling, seeing or hearing, or how you are moving, and it will help you come back to your usual self.

Our physical senses are the basic ways we experience life. Everything we notice comes to us through one or more of our senses. It's how we interpret that information that creates our worldviews. So if we are to investigate our experience and find the hidden gems of wisdom trying to speak to us through our problems and things that disturb us, we have to get familiar with how our senses work.

Stop reading for a moment, and just sit. Close your eyes and relax. Let your mind go fuzzy and blank for a little while. Take a couple of deep breaths, and when you feel comfortable, open your eyes and just passively notice what you see. Let your gaze wander as you feel like, and see what catches your attention. It doesn't matter precisely what it is, and there's nothing to interpret about what you see, just notice it. As I do this, sitting by my window, I notice a distant bird circling high in the sky. It draws my attention because of the broad, slow circles of its movement. What draws your eyes to look at it? Is it an object in the room that has a particular color? Or a shadow with an interesting shape?

Whatever we are drawn to notice says something about ourselves. We are not just passive observers, taking in whatever is around us, but we are in constant interaction with our environments, and what we sense outside of us is also deeply related to something inside of us. The relationship between you and what you see or hear around you is a profound aspect of your reality, and the interaction is so constant it's almost arbitrary to say where the line is where you end and your environment begins.

The thing that drew your attention as you looked around is a part of you as well as your environment, and it can have a message or hold something important for you. You can invite it to teach you something about yourself. These dreaming message carriers are happening around us in all our senses. Try out listening for one as well.

Just as before, sit and close your eyes, and relax your mind. Then just hear whatever sounds you hear around or inside you. You don't need to interpret or try to understand them in any way. Just hear whatever you hear, and listen if one sound attracts your attention more than others. It might be something irritating, or it might be something that sounds pleasant. We won't do anything with it for just now, just notice and appreciate it.

As I said above, the raw information through our senses is the basis of all our perceptions and our beliefs and identities are based on how we interpret those sense perceptions. Perhaps these things can also



occur spontaneously, we might be born with them, but we can only experience them through our external or internal senses. A lot of the time, when we talk about what we perceive, we're actually focusing on how we interpret our perceptions, not the raw information itself. So when we wish to address our basic assumptions, or to allow new or hidden ways of understanding to come to our awareness, it's useful to pare our focus down to the actual physical sense of what we're focusing on, and to keep our interpretations out of the way. This is easier said than done, so it takes some practice.

Let's focus now on the sense of feeling. We'll do the same as with seeing and hearing; notice what draws our attention, and then we'll open it up a little, like a package, and see what might be speaking to us from inside.

Again, sit and relax. Close your eyes and let your mind drift a little. Take a few deep breaths. Allow yourself and everything around you to just be. After a little while, bring your attention to your body. Notice what you are feeling in different parts of you. You might feel the contact with the chair or whatever you are resting on, or the paper in your hand. Or maybe you notice a feeling inside of you. You might feel some discomfort, or something that feels good, or is just interesting. As I sit I notice I have interlaced my fingers, and I notice the warm feeling of contact between the bases of all my fingers.

Now, just feel whatever it is. Right now there's nothing to do with it but feel. How exactly is it? If it's pressure, what kind of pressure? Is there temperature? Is it a delicate, small kind of feeling, or is it solid and sure? When you focus on it, does it become more clear, or does it seem to be shy and almost disappear? Mine is gentle but constant. It isn't so much a pressure as just being present and in contact.

Now, as you feel the precise quality of it, notice if anything comes with it in another sense. You might get an image or hear a sound, or you might be inspired by it to move a little. As I feel my fingers, I notice the sense that my hands are enveloping each other. That's a movement, and I follow it by experimenting different ways of holding my hands together. They are holding each other. That is the important part of the feeling. I also see this holding. At first it's just hands holding each other, and then I have a curious image of a person who is also two people embracing, but embracing itself. Pay attention to your original feeling and pick up whatever comes along with it. Maybe there's a sound that wants to come from it? Really let your imagination unfold. It doesn't have to make sense.

As you fill out your experience with other senses, can you give this thing that is happening a name? I'll call mine, "embracing self." Let yourself watch, listen to and feel it until you're getting familiar with it, and then ask yourself where in your life could this thing be useful? Maybe it's something you know in yourself already, and you might just

spend a little time being more aware of it. Maybe it's something you don't recognize in yourself yet, but it could be just what you need in a particular way.

For me "embracing self" is something I can do more of consciously, as a part of my general attitude, whatever I'm doing, and maybe in particular I could use it more at work, where I tend to feel I don't quite fit in. Imagine yourself in that situation it will be useful in, and use it now. Add that thing to your attitude, or to your communication style, and see, feel and hear how that is for you. Take your time with this. For me it's an internal feeling of being warmer with myself, of literally giving myself a hug on the inside. And I can remember it by interlacing my fingers in that way again. Ask yourself what will help you remember. Maybe just writing it down is good, or maybe draw a picture, or similar to me the original feeling you focused on will come up again and remind you of what you learned.

Later we'll look at how to find the useful messages in things that are problems for us, not just things we notice. For now, I notice after exploring the feeling of my hands, and coming to "embracing self," and seeing how I can use that, I feel bigger in myself. I have included something more into my identity, and as a result I feel more whole. I have a physical sensation of gentle expansion and comfort. I feel profoundly gratified by this experience of becoming more whole every time I investigate what I notice like this. Although my main motivation

for doing this kind of investigation is usually to solve a problem, or to somehow work it through so it doesn't bother me anymore, it's this feeling of more wholeness that actually gives me satisfaction.

Solving problems is a good goal, and we need to keep on doing that, and feeling more whole is also a great goal to have. I don't always remember it though.

## Chapter Two: Sense Perception

Our understanding of the world and ourselves is based on how we interpret our senses. Our basic perceptions are the building blocks of awareness. We can't break down how we experience being alive any further than whatever we feel, see, hear, taste and smell. Whatever we sense is in itself neutral, in that it is just information with no belief or interpretation attached to it. The way our minds work though is to immediately interpret that information. We create belief systems about how life works and we fit our perceptions into them. Those beliefs support us to live functionally. They are necessary and can be ends in themselves for those of us who are consciously seeking meaning.

But those beliefs can also become limiting. Sometimes we can get so rigidly attached to our beliefs about the world that we refuse to change them even in the face of evidence against them. We can spend ingenious energy on forcing our experiences to fit into those beliefs, and we can suffer a lot, both from that effort and from the effects of whatever we're trying to make fit. All sorts of problems assail us, from arguments with our loved ones to accidents to pains and symptoms in the body that won't go away.

If we step out of a "usual" linear cause and effect view of life, and see these problems as potentially meaningful, we can see them as calling us to change our beliefs. Sense perceptions that don't fit in with how we

define our world and ourselves challenge us to change those definitions, to expand them to fit in more of what we perceive. Since these beliefs or definitions are what govern how we relate to ourselves and other people, when they develop, so does how we are in the world. Every time we notice something that makes us uncomfortable, or that doesn't fit our self image or world view, we are being called to become more aware, to become more whole, and to understand more our ability to choose how we act and relate.

Developing awareness of ourselves and understanding of how we interact with and affect others and our environments is a fulfilling end in itself. It has been the focus of spiritual traditions throughout the human story. More awareness also gives us more freedom to understand and access choices in how we live, both in how we are with ourselves inside, and with others. We can use the opportunities it offers to create more fulfillment and creativity in our lives and to lessen our suffering. This kind of awareness includes knowledge of our beliefs and how they pattern our behavior and choices. We can then choose to step out of our old beliefs and grow into new ones.

Heightened states of awareness and growing self understanding can also be the best antidote to the inertia and apparent meaninglessness that can be so much of modern life. If we are too much involved in trying to achieve outward goals or linearly solve our problems, we can become too separated from our experiences and this can make us depressed.

Simply slowing down and smelling the flowers, or focusing on our actual sensory experience, can bring us back to feeling more alive. Try it for a moment. Just sit for a moment and notice what you sense in or around you. Try and stay with what you perceive, just noticing it, without judging or trying to interpret it. When I take a moment to do this, it brings me back into a state of wonder at life and myself. If I never did anything but this to focus on my personal growth, I bet it would make a big difference in my quality of life.

Since our basic senses are the beginning of all our experiences, they are also the root of our awareness. Getting very specific about what you sense is the first step to finding out what beliefs and patterns are changing. The three main senses we focus on are sight, hearing and feeling. Taste and smell are just as important, but more difficult for most people to focus on for very long. For the purpose of exploring our perceptions, the experience of movement, although not technically a discrete sense, is as useful as the first three.

Everybody has senses they are more comfortable focusing on than others. The more comfortable ones usually bring us information that fits more with our current beliefs about ourselves. There are cultural preferences too. In modern European based culture, vision and hearing are dominant, so that in almost everything we do we are most aware of what we see and hear. The more internal sense of feeling and the experience of movement are not so directly addressed in this culture.

Every individual has their own preference as well, which may or may not be the same as the dominant culture. Some people know, for example, that they learn better when given visual information such as pictures than when just listening to words. However, the preference, or which sense you feel most your usual self in depends a lot on situation, and can be different for the same person at different times.

Focus on what you are sensing right now, and ask yourself which senses feel more comfortable and which more unusual to you. The question “how do I know I’m awake in the morning?” points us to the sense that we feel our most usual selves in as well. The information we want to access and investigate is usually in the more unknown senses, and is therefore not so easy to focus on. We can use the senses we know better to support our access to the less known ones.

For most of us, simply being aware of what we’re perceiving can be a disconcerting experience. All sorts of fears and insecurities can come up. For me there’s usually an anxiety about things I feel pressured by as well as a kind of startled feeling just about acknowledging I’m alive. Other fears that can come up are of unknown and undefined experiences, of not having what we need, or simply of being present with ourselves. We might become aware of critical or hurtful attitudes we have toward ourselves, or we might notice that we feel alone or unsupported. It’s important to acknowledge our anxieties and fears because they can become problematic if they’re ignored. We also don’t need to dwell on



them, but just notice they're there and set them aside. If we never felt afraid, we couldn't really be living, but if we let those fears control how we live we can't really become our full selves either.

What also can seem a little scary to our usual state of mind is the dreaming reality and dream-like things that we perceive when we pay close attention. Dreaming is the level of reality we experience in our night-time dreams and in waking experiences that strike us as odd or affect us deeply. It can feel scary to our everyday selves because within it things don't conform to the natural laws of the material world. Just as impossible, strange and socially unacceptable things happen in night-time dreams, so these things can emerge from our dream-like experiences during the day if we focus and draw out what's inside them. These weird and wonderful things are not only fun and creative, but also have their own fluid language of symbolism, stories and advice, all useful to our everyday minds. Usually these things come to us just through sleeping dreams or momentary experiences that we don't pay much attention to. Like anything else, dreaming responds well to attention, and we can invite more of it into our awareness.

One way to get into this dreaming reality and invite it more into our waking lives is through the doorways of our senses. Welcoming and living more in our dreams brings a numinous, or deeply meaningful sense to whatever we do. It reminds us we are far more than what we think,

and invites us to be less rigid in defining ourselves and how we find meaning in our lives.

It is the everyday definitions of ourselves, or belief patterns, that are a little afraid of dreaming. The fear is often about just recognizing that those beliefs aren't final, that they need to grow and change. As physical beings in a physical world, we need to have definitions and beliefs in order to function. It would be difficult to get anything done, or to live day to day, if all our thoughts and understandings were constantly changing. I need to believe the sun will rise tomorrow, and that the chair I sit on is solid, and I also need to have a resilient definition of who I am and how I behave. It's when those beliefs become too rigid they can be problematic. The dreaming nature of the world also wants us to know that everything is mysterious and fluid. It's a central paradox of human awareness. Many of us must somehow learn to live in the concrete, Newtonian world and be open to the unpredictable experiences of dreaming at the same time.

Something else we can notice more when we focus our attention is the sometimes critical or negative beliefs we have about ourselves. You might catch yourself feeling bad about yourself, and ask what happened right before that? It can be as if someone is talking to us, commenting on what we do, and sometimes that's a positive, supportive voice and other times it's too critical and not useful. Of course we can try and combat these voices or dream figures by making affirmations and talking

positively to ourselves. We can also decide to interact more directly with them, as if they are actual characters inside us, and we can bring them out and give them space to change and grow as well. An attitude that is helpful when dealing with difficult voices in ourselves is a trust that all the different parts inside us intend well, but may just be misguided or stuck in old patterns sometimes. Letting them come out more fully, interacting with them and giving them space to dream helps them to change and develop more useful patterns as well.

Take a moment to notice a critical voice in yourself. Sit and notice your breathing. Then pay attention to what you see and hear around you, and to what you feel. Now see if there's something you're criticizing yourself for. If you're like me, you're already telling yourself you've followed these instructions wrong. Maybe part of you is telling you to sit up straighter, or putting you down for not completing some task. There might be a voice that says something negative about your appearance or the clothes you are wearing. Many people actually hear the voice inside them, clearly saying critical words. I tend to notice first that I feel constricted and put down. I don't hear words, but know what the critic is saying to me by putting words to the feelings it evokes. I often notice a slumped or tight posture that is my reaction to the criticism. Perhaps you see the negative figure somehow. Take a moment to acknowledge it. Hear what it's saying, but pay attention to your reaction, and notice what it is.

Do you slump in your posture, like me? Do you become defiant and angry, sometimes treating other people as if they're the one criticizing you? Let's see what it's like if we talk directly back to the critical dream figure. I might simply say, "Don't talk to me like that." I might appreciate its good intentions, but need to criticize it back, and say, "You're wrong. I need to do things the way I'm doing them right now." While writing this book, I am constantly having to deflect my perfectionist critic. It has a good point. I want this to be as good as possible, but that attitude is not helpful for writing a first draft. If I listen to it, I get paralyzed, actually. I end up thinking so hard about exactly what I want to say that I can't write anything at all. Even in this moment, I am constantly appeasing that critic by telling it I will use its exacting and perfectionist skills later when I rewrite. I push it away right now because it has no place here where I'm just starting from scratch. Often I even say out loud, "Go away! I don't want you here now. I'll listen to you later!"

What do you say to your critical dream figure? Say it out loud and mean it. You might have a movement to make along with it, like a pushing away or brushing aside with your hands. Go ahead and do that and notice how it affects you.

Let's go back again to those anxieties and fears that come up when we focus on our senses. Similar to the critical figures who talk to our everyday selves, there are also dream figures in our experience of fear.

When we feel afraid, we are being the dream figure who is afraid. There is also a figure who we are afraid of, and there is also someone around who is not afraid.

Take a moment again to pay attention to your senses. What do you notice around you and inside you? And see if there's some little anxiety or fear that comes up. Imagine you are playing a part in a play and that your character is someone who is afraid at the moment. Right now you are in that character. You have its point of view and its emotions. Now see what the other characters might be. There's someone who is doing something that scares this one, and there's also someone else in the play who is supportive to your current character and is not afraid. Imagine this person now. What is the unafraid character like? What does she or he look and sound like? How does this character move? Imagine this person somewhere in the room with you.

Now, since you are an actor, playing the role, you can change your role too. Stand up and move away from the one who is scared, leaving the character where you have been sitting. Walk over to the supportive, unafraid character, and step into it. Become that one now, just as an actor plays different roles in a scene.

Stand like that person and move like her/him. Feel what it's like to be inside its skin. Now look back at the other role, the one who is afraid. What do you, in this role, feel towards her/him? Tell that character

something about how you feel. Maybe you have some advice or something useful and supportive to give. Give it to them now.

You can step back into your everyday self and accept what the other you said or offered. Take a few minutes to sit with this experience and notice how it is for you to try shifting your identity that way.

This shows an important and very helpful attribute of dreaming reality. Everything you need is present in the dreaming field around you. This is true because if you are able to imagine something, or even if you are just aware of its absence, it exists in your dreams. To get closer to it, or to get to know it better and have more access to the gifts it has for you, you can allow yourself to dream about it more. Even if it doesn't make logical sense that dreaming of what you need will help it develop, it's like planting seeds in dreamland which also grow into your everyday world too.

Think of a small problem right now, something that's not too pressing, but you haven't quite solved. My problem is I'd like to be more organized with my time so I can get more writing done. What is your problem? What would you need to solve it? Is it something practical, or do you imagine a person who could help you or fix it for you? Maybe what you need is something other-worldly and magic. What I imagine I need is a clock that lets me know when it's time to do what. It's in tune with my needs, and knows how to balance my time and energy so they are all met and expressed. If you are imagining an object or something

magical, turn that thing into a person. What human-like being would that object be? Mine is a friendly teacher kind of person who gently and supportively tells me what to do and when, so I balance my needs and am efficient, as well as nurturing myself. I feel I can trust her and she has my best interests at heart, as well as speaking to me lovingly and supportively.

What does your person look like? How do they relate to you? Listen to them. What advice do they give you? And if there isn't some concrete advice, just keep on imagining them and see, hear and feel what they are like. Like in the previous character switching, get up and leave your everyday self, and go and be this new person. What's it like being them? Move around the room how they move. You don't even have to get anything concrete or linear from this. It's enough just to imagine and get to know this new part of you. When you do this, it feels invited more into your life, and you might notice yourself using its attitudes and talents more without thinking about it.

Exploring, interacting with, and becoming your dream figures is one way to bring more dreaming and creativity into your life. Since our sense perceptions are the basic building blocks of how we encounter ourselves and our world, they are also the magical doorways through which we meet the parts of ourselves we need to know better. The more you experiment with your senses, allowing yourself to see, hear and feel the strange and unexpected, and to unwrap the gifts within them, the

easier you will find it to flow with change. Seeing situations from different perspectives and giving yourself more choices of how to act in them can be deeply freeing. Your usual, every-day definition of yourself won't disappear, but it will become more flexible and able to grow.



## Chapter Three: Fantasy

One of the best things in Process Work is the idea that whatever I feel I'm missing, I can find within myself. This one belief, and the proof of it that I've experienced over and over again, has changed my world view from a bleak confusion to something much more intimate and loving. Having been beset my whole life with the feeling of never fitting in and never being able to achieve anything, my main focus has been on my personal development, using many different tools and techniques, to try and change the world from within.

Of all the different practices I have used, physical, psychological or spiritual, Process Work is the one I have never given up. I remember first reading about Process Work when I was 21 in "Working on Yourself Alone," by Arnold Mindell, and my excited reaction, which was: That makes sense! That explains my experience of life in a way that nothing I've touched on has before.

It's not that Process Work is better than anything else. All the other practices I've tried have been great. I still work at them from time to time, and I'd probably do more regularly if I had a different relationship to discipline. But Process Work not only provides a fluid structure that can adapt to any situation, it also is inclusive of any other belief or practice. That's what makes it so good as an overall structure for living.

But you don't have to take that on to use the tools, either. Use what you want, pick out what works for you, and throw the rest away, or put it back on the shelf where you might look at it again sometime if you want to.

So, according to the Process Work worldview, whatever you need is something you can find in yourself or in the dreaming field around you. That means also that whatever is happening in and around you is potentially useful. Things that bother us in other people and our environments can be the disguised faces of attitudes and powers we need to express more in ourselves. Likewise, things we are attracted to and admire in others are also attributes of our own that we can recognize and make more use of. A lot of problems in intimate relationships come from expectations that our partners will be a certain way or do a certain kind of thing to support us, and the other way around. It doesn't take much to see what we're asking our partners to do is something we can do for ourselves, and usually a lot better.

There are many ways we try to get the things we're missing. There will always be something we're reaching for. It's in the nature of being human. Once we achieve something, or grow into a new part of ourselves, there will then be something yet newer to develop and go for. It can be interesting as well as very powerful to take the attitude that everything you notice is in fact part of yourself you just don't yet identify with. A simple example of this is when I imagine one of my teachers

giving me advice, I can also see her as a part of me. She is a symbol of my inner teacher, the part of me that has knowledge to share, and I can use my imagination to get to know that part better and ultimately identify more with being a teacher myself. Likewise, if you think of a spiritual leader or some kind of master you admire, in addition to the actual person, they also represent the inner leader or master in you that is developing and asking for your attention and nourishment.

Many of the things we're reaching for are clear to us, and others need a little focus for us to understand. Some of these include the powers and gifts hidden inside problems like body symptoms and difficulties working towards personal goals. Others can be found by investigating behaviors and substances we are addicted or almost addicted to. In a similar vein to that, when we let our minds go to daydream, whatever we fantasize about will contain something we need in ourselves. If we daydream about performing heroic acts, it may be we are developing our inner heroes, and could do well to acknowledge our courage, even if it only shows itself in small things in everyday life. If our fantasies involve romance or sexual encounters, we may in fact be opening to something more mystical within the experience of satisfying those needs. It isn't possible to predict what is asking to be discovered, as each person and each fantasy is unique.

One of the things that is problematic for me is I'm always getting caught up in my daydreams. Does anyone else ever have that happen too

much? I'll be riding along on my bike, intent on being present and enjoying the ride, or I'll be working out a plan for something in my head, and I'll start having an imaginary conversation with someone instead. Then I'll tell myself that's a bad idea, and then I'll do it some more, just to be a rebel, and before I know it, half an hour's gone past and I've neither thought through what I intended to nor satisfactorily completed my fantasy. In fact, I usually get stuck repeating the beginning over and over again, as if I'm trying to get something just right.

Conventional wisdom says daydreaming is a waste of time and is unhealthy. It's usual in current western culture to tell ourselves to cut them off, and do something useful instead, although often that means indulging in pre-made fantasies like TV shows instead. Many spiritual disciplines tell us that daydreams are part of the spiritual chaff that must be swept away on our mission toward enlightenment. Most meditation schools tell us to detach from our thoughts and daydreams, with the goal of achieving a state that is focused only on present experience. All of these views are great. There are definitely times to follow each one. And daydreams can also be useful. Not only that, but I want to go so far as to honor them. All the unprompted, mischievous, inappropriate and energy wasting fantasies are exalted and celebrated manifestations of consciousness and life, especially the ones that get you all emotional and riled up when you mean to be calm. There's some really good stuff in those fantasies, so let's find out how to access it.

Here's an idea that can help not only with the time used up by daydreaming, but can also get around the critical self talk that says we shouldn't be doing that. Partly, your daydreams are just fun. You should enjoy them when you can. Partly, and especially with those ones that don't ever seem to get to the point, they are about you reaching for something you need. It's something you see, or think you see, in the other person, place or situation you are dreaming about. You can find out exactly what that seemingly elusive thing is, and you can find out how to give it to yourself, instead of constantly trying to find it somewhere else.

So, what have you been fantasizing about recently? It could be something relatively tame, like a vacation on a desert island, or it might be some hot sexual adventure with someone considered inappropriate. Or it could be the kind of heroic story where you get to prove yourself worthy of praise and honor. I usually feel particularly guilty about those ones because they usually involve someone else's misfortune, so that I can save them.

Before you start, ask yourself who you are in your life right now. What do you put most of your energy and attention into, and what kind of things trouble you or get in the way? Write down a couple of sentences about this and set it aside.

Now think of a daydream or fantasy you've been having recently. Choose one that's about being attracted to someone or something.

Maybe it's a place you want to go to or a person you admire. Go ahead and have that fantasy now. Close your eyes and give yourself permission to fully indulge yourself for five minutes. See, hear and feel what you're imagining fully. What does your fantasy smell and taste like? Who is there and what do they say and do? Are you your everyday self there, or somehow different? Just enjoy the daydream right now.

Is there a tendency or a part in you that says this is not appropriate, silly or a waste of time? Notice what kind of person says this. What is this dream figure's attitude towards life and you? Then set them aside. Let that figure know you understand its concern, but that it may actually be wrong in this instance, and you are having this fantasy to find something you need in it and make it useful. If this critical person comes back at any point, just tell them to stay away for now until you've finished the exercise.

Now look back at your fantasy. Play it over briefly and choose one thing that particularly attracts you or draws your attention. If it's a person, what is it about that person that you're drawn to in this moment? Choose one defined attribute or feature.

As I do this exercise, in my everyday life I am working on completing the first draft of this book. I procrastinate, and it's easy for me to use up a lot of time doing other things instead of focusing on this.

In particular, I keep daydreaming about a man I met recently whom I'm attracted to. It's not a satisfying experience because I don't go fully

into the fantasy, I just keep starting it at a conversation I had with him, and then I try to stop myself fantasizing more. It doesn't work, and instead of writing, I am going back to that conversation over and over.

My inner critic figure has some scathing things to say about wasting my time and having inappropriate feelings. I dismiss that critic because I'm really interested in what might be hidden in this fantasy, and I let the critic know it can come back later and see if it was right or not.

As I give myself permission to fully have my fantasy, I notice it doesn't go where I expected it to. Earlier I had been focused on looking into his eyes, and I'd thought the next thing would be a kiss. But what actually happens as I watch it unfold is the conversation ends and he turns away from me to leave. Just as he does, I notice in this moment I am mostly attracted to the back of his neck.

Now focus on what you are most drawn to in the fantasy. Are you seeing it, hearing it, feeling it or a combination of senses? Do you taste it or smell it? Describe this thing as intimately as you can. What exactly is it about this thing that attracts you? As you focus on it and describe what you perceive, also pay attention to which senses you are using. Does your experience change from one sense into another?

I am looking at the back of his neck, but at the same time I am feeling what it would be like to touch him there. (It's interesting to me that I feel the most attracted when he turns away from me.) In this moment what attracts me is something exquisitely sensitive and delicate,

yet upright and strong. It's the line of his posture, and of course the texture of his skin. But right now it's the graceful curve of his spine.

As I describe this to myself, I notice I am seeing my hand drawing that graceful line in the air. I am changing from just seeing and feeling into movement.

Movement isn't a comfortable sense for everybody, but partly because it's pretty unknown, it's a good way to move from your everyday awareness into something new. As you observe and describe your attractive object or person, where are you also beginning to use movement? Do you see something moving? Or is one of your hands moving along with your description? If you're moving, go ahead and keep doing it. If you aren't moving already, get really specific about what attracts you about the object or person. Is it a particular shape or line, like mine? Or is it a color or sound? Focus on that quality and, imagine you are holding it in your hand. Allow your hand to move the way that quality moves. Let your hand be directed by it, and make a gesture that expresses that quality. If you're hearing or feeling but not seeing it, let that sound or feeling direct your hand in a gesture.

Stand up so you can move more freely, and as you move your hand, let more of your body move with it. Turn off your linear mind and just let your body make that movement over and over. Slow down and maybe close your eyes if you're comfortable doing so. Make that movement as slowly as you can, until you have an image or other sense of what that



movement is. What moves like that? Keep on making the movement and be that thing. As if you can shape shift into anything, let yourself go fully into the dream and become that thing that is moving. What are you? Find one or two words that name it, and keep on being that and make the movement as much and as slowly as you can. Stay with it and allow whatever happens, (while making sure your body isn't over stretched or anything) there may be another image, feeling or sound.

As I make this beautiful curve with my hand, I bring my whole body into it and it becomes a reaching up and taking off like a bird. I notice I'm holding myself back from immersing myself in this because part of me thinks it's silly or somehow not like me. I slow it right down and now I'm almost taking off, up on tip-toes and my hands reaching straight upwards. It is the experience of ascending. I am in the sky and all around me is light. I keep on staying with the ascending movement, and then I feel myself disperse into the light. I am boundlessly free, throughout the sky. It is an ecstatic experience.

From being fully inside this experience, look back at the chair you were sitting in and imagine the everyday you sitting there. What does this other you see? What do you feel toward the everyday person, and what advice do you have to give him or her? Recall the focus of that everyday life and the obstacles in it. What do you have to give that will help there? Stay in this place for as long as it feels good. Experience it as

much as you can. These states we reach for can be like water when we're thirsty, so we can take our time to take them in.

From this place of ecstatic freedom and formlessness, I look at my everyday self who wants to write this book. I say to that self, "Loosen up. Enjoy it all." I also realize I can use this experience in the book too.

Before coming back to your more usual self, find a way you will be able to remember and get back to this experience. It might be the words you named it, what you see or how you feel in part of your body. It also might be the movement itself. For me it's the movement and posture of reaching up and taking off. When I do that I feel the freedom in my upper body, mostly in my chest.

If you want to, you can check in with that critical figure we dismissed at the beginning. It might be surprised at what came out of your daydream, and it might think again about criticizing you for trying something it thinks is silly.

Uncovering and taking into ourselves what we see in others and our fantasies is one way of becoming more whole in ourselves and is also good preventive medicine for conflicts in relationship. If we own what we see outside of ourselves, find access to it through our senses and allow ourselves to experience it fully and as often as it comes along, we don't have to rely on others to give it to us. In this way we become more self-sufficient and less co-dependent.

Paradoxically it doesn't reduce the importance of our actual relationships, but can enhance them. Once I take this ecstatic experience as my own and stop wanting the man I saw it in to give it to me, I am freer to relate to him as he actually is, without my need for that state getting in the way. I am also free to talk to him about it and find out if there's something useful in my experience for him too. It can be an amazing way to communicate and build trust and intimacy to explore and share these discoveries with a friend. You can even help each other by talking each other through the experience. And if you don't have a friend you want to share this with, that's great because primarily it's about discovering and creating more intimacy with yourself.



## Chapter Four: Dreams

Dreams, like all other strange, interesting or troubling experiences, are doorways into the wider reality of Dreaming. At night, when our everyday minds are asleep and out of the way, the experiences that are unfolding just on the outside of our identities are free to come into our awareness and play. Night-time dreams can be anything from mundane to wild, wacky, bizarre, scary or just too out there to quite remember, let alone describe. Often we don't remember our dreams at all, and this can be because they're actually so different from our everyday realities and our usual ways of understanding ourselves and the world that we just have no point of reference to pin them to, nothing to keep a grasp on them with, and they wash away as soon as we begin to wake up. For some people who don't often remember their dreams, it's more just a habit of mind, and that can be changed by doing things that invite the dreams to come more into waking life. Keeping a diary of what you dream can be useful not only for working on those dreams later, but the more you write down, the more you will remember.

If we understand reality as a wide spectrum of experiences, then the parts we are aware of are a narrow band like the visible light in a rainbow, but the larger, in fact infinite part is what we don't see. We are constantly broadening our awareness to include more, always growing through what draws our attention to include more in our understanding

of the universe and our definitions of ourselves. Seen like this, night-time dreams, as well as all the dream-like experiences we have while we're awake, are glimpses into our futures, or the first manifestations of the new part of reality we're getting to know. They are glimpses into the future because they show us what new ways of being we will include in how we see and define ourselves.

Partly, dreams are just fun and they're there to be enjoyed. I love having flying dreams, and dreams where I have other magical powers. I also love dreams that are so totally weird they're like a stream of bizarre sensory experiences drawn out with some deep sense of meaning that I can never quite grasp. I even enjoy my nightmares, and that's mainly because I recognize that the fear is in reaction to something very unknown and new, and therefore very important for my personal development. There is an exhilaration and sense of power for me in nightmares, somewhat similar to what many people enjoy in horror movies.

Dreams are also useful for our everyday lives. Just like all our dream-like experiences, we can investigate them to find attitudes and powers that are helpful for real life issues.

Remember something you dreamt recently, maybe last night. Most of us are using our inner sight above other senses when we dream, although other senses are often important too. Close your eyes and see the dream again. (If you don't remember any dreams, recall a memory

that is somehow special or strange.) You don't have to do anything with it, just be back in the dream again. Notice what you see and what you are interacting with. Do you see colors, or hear sounds? When you put your relaxed focus on the dream again, do you notice how your state of mind changes? Are you feeling differently from when you were just reading? Maybe you feel something specific related to the dream, or maybe you feel a little looser or softer around your focus of awareness. Our dreaming awareness is usually different from our everyday selves.

When you pay more attention to your dreams, you begin to notice how they show up all the time, not just when you're sleeping. It's usually in small things, but sometimes there are so many synchronicities and unusual connections with things from your dreams, it's like you've stepped into a magical world.

I dreamed recently I was playing with marbles. I investigated this dream when I woke up and came to an appreciation of being a clear glass marble, as something with strong boundaries but also transparent. For me in the moment it meant being firmer with how I want to relate to people, but also being transparent and communicating to them about it. A day or so after this, I was cycling through the city. As I glanced down in the middle of an intersection, I saw a clear marble on the pavement. It's not a big thing, but clear enough for me to notice strongly, and it helped me to focus again on the message in the dream. Other times I have had people say things to me that are relating directly to a dream I've

just had when I haven't mentioned it at all. Most things like this can be explained by cause and effect, or at least coincidence, and that's fine. In the dream world it doesn't matter what comes first. In a sense, everything just is and cause and effect don't matter. Everything is so full of meaning and symbolism, it's just like all the parts of the dream and how things remind you of it in waking life are constantly referring to each other and themselves. I like to think of them as little creatures who love to express meaning and explore different configurations of their meaning. They're like little faeries running in and out of our consciousness, creating and recreating stories as they go.

These little faeries, or the parts of ourselves and our world that are in the midst of creation, are constantly giving us curious things to investigate, just on the edges of our awareness. They give rise to symbols that are always evolving, changing form and meaning, like living things growing, developing and dying and giving rise to more. We can always reach out to this dreaming world and find something useful and meaningful for ourselves in the moment, any moment. In our technology and efficiency based culture, we often become split off from our sense of meaning. It can be easy to get only focused on linear, cause and effect issues, and practical concerns. Then our lives become somehow flat, or monotoned, and we miss the deep sense of being alive that comes from welcoming in our dreams. Living more in contact with and relating to our dreams can deepen our sense of fulfillment in all areas of life.



Each dream is also its own world or reality. It has its own mythology, even laws of physics. It's like each dream we have is a fantasy novel set in another universe that relates to, and communicates with our own. In the fantasy story, you are a character, and that isn't always the same as who you are when you are awake. Often we feel pretty much like ourselves in dreams, but often we're also a bit more something else. I might dream I am in a Broadway play, for example, and in the dream this feels normal. I am a character who has the stage presence and confidence to do this, but in waking life I'd have to address my nervousness a lot first, not to mention my acting technique. Sometimes we can be someone totally different, and what's really cool about that is whoever we are in the dream is also part of who we really are in waking life. More than that, everything in the dream is a part of the person dreaming it. It's like all the characters in the fantasy story, all the things they do and any objects they interact with are all parts of you. The dream is a little glimpse into a universe where all the facets of your personality, all your moods, attitudes and capabilities are represented by dream-faerie actors. They put on a show just for you, all about you and your current stage of personal growth, using your experiences and expressing, through symbols particular to you, infinite layers of meaning that are tailor fit to you.

Because everything in the dream is a part of you, you can choose anything in it to focus on and you will find something meaningful in it.

That means it doesn't matter if you don't remember all of a dream. You might only recall one image, and that's enough to work on to find your dreaming wisdom of the moment.

Remember a nighttime dream of yours. It can be the same one as you focused on earlier. You might want to have a pen and paper handy to take a couple of notes as you go. When working with a dream, it's useful to describe it always in the present tense, as if the dream were happening right now. This helps us get back into the world of the dream and gives us easier access to its full experience.

Take a moment to ask yourself how you are in your life right now. What takes your attention? What feels easy and what are you struggling with? Take a few moments to think about something you would like some advice on. If you have a pen and paper, write that down.

Remember a dream you had recently. Maybe you remember what you dreamed last night. If you don't remember one, an old one is fine, or even an old memory, as our memories are dream-like too. Close your eyes and see the dream again now. Play through it like a movie, and notice what characters and scenes there are. Notice who you are in the dream. How are you different from in everyday life?

Now, as you go into your dream, notice what and whom you are interacting with there. Does something particularly draw your attention? Choose something or someone that attracts you or that disturbs you; something you are drawn to or have a noticeable reaction to. Step out of

the action of the dream, as if you've pressed the pause or slow motion button, and just observe that thing or person.

What does it look like? Do you hear it, feel it, taste it or smell it as well? Let yourself notice all the details about it. What is it exactly about that thing or person that you like or feel disturbed by? Is it a color, a texture, or an attitude? Go ahead and just see, feel or hear that quality. Find one or two words that name that quality. You can write those down if you want to.

Express that quality in a hand gesture. Just move one of your hands in a way that goes along with that quality and keep doing that. Repeat the gesture and slow it down. Make it so slow it's hardly moving, and notice how it feels to move that way.

Feel that feeling and allow it to spread out to include the rest of your body. Feel it up your arm, into your chest and throughout your body. Allow yourself to take in that feeling and the attitude that comes with it. Be that feeling.

When you are completely inside the feeling, notice your attitude to life. How do you feel towards your environment and other people? Now, still from within that feeling and attitude, remember the issue you asked for advice on at the beginning of this experience. What advice does this feeling attitude have? What do you want to say to your everyday self? Take a few moments with this, and write it down if you want to.

As all the people and things in the dream are parts of you, the way those dream parts relate to each other is important too. We are all familiar with inner conflicts. Sometimes we don't give ourselves the respect or support we need, and sometimes we want two equally attractive but mutually exclusive things. Inside us are many different aspects of our personalities that are all growing and developing and learning to get on better together. Just like the characters in our fantasy story. So, just as it's important to talk things through with a friend we argue with, and try to make the relationship work better for both of us, it's also important to work things out between parts of ourselves that are in conflict.

For example, I dreamed recently I had a small furry animal that I needed to take care of. I was holding this creature and I was in a room full of sweets and ice cream. The creature managed to scamper away and got lost in all the decadent treats around me, and then there was a strange, forceful woman there who was eating the sweets. I was desperately looking for my creature, terribly afraid it was going to get eaten! In this dream, it's easy for me to identify with the part I'm playing, or where my point of view is located. It's really similar to me when I'm awake. It's also easy for me to imagine the little creature is somehow part of me, but the forceful woman and even all the sweets are parts of me too.

I can investigate each part and find what important message it has for me. When I focus on the creature, I remember holding it and I remember its soft fur. Also that it is very small and somehow fragile or vulnerable. As I recall it, I have a sensation in my chest and throat of a slight constriction. Just letting myself feel that for a moment, I notice inside it there is a feeling of exposure, of sensitive skin open to the air. This body experience is symbolically the same thing as the small creature. It is the same dream “figure” just being represented physically rather than in dream imagery. If I allow myself to experience that sensitivity more fully, I feel it spread over my body, up over my face, and I experience a widening and relaxing of my whole self. I take a deep breath. In this state I feel more physically in contact with myself, and more sensitive to my environment. It is very different from my more usual slight guardedness that I don’t even notice because it’s so normal for me. That is usually manifested physically in a slight tension throughout my body, and that is lessened right now when I allow myself to be more of the little vulnerable creature. It seemed to me to be vulnerable from my more usual point of view, but from my perspective now inside this part it is sensitive and relaxed, which isn’t actually vulnerable in the sense that I need protecting. The sensitivity itself is what protects me, as I can use it to know whether I’m in danger or not.

Now, the forceful woman in my dream is also a part of me. I identify with her much less easily, but let’s take a closer look at her.

Actually, I don't really see her in the dream, and I'm going to try something a little strong and just step into her character. Remember, she is a character in the fantasy novel of my dream, so I can be an actor and step out of my normal point of view and play her part instead.

It's hard for me to use the first person here, and I want to describe her as if she's still someone else, but describing her as myself helps me become her. In this character, I'm tall and strong, with straight blonde hair. I'm wearing a white blouse with a blue vest and some kind of denim skirt and shiny leather boots. (This doesn't feel like me at all!) In this character, I feel like I know what I want and I am just going for it without question. I know there are other people around, but I figure they can look after themselves and I don't need to be careful about stepping on their toes. What I want right now is to eat all these sweets, and that is what I'm doing. I have no qualms about it. I am just taking and consuming what I want, and I feel very strong and fulfilled. This powerful woman character, though disturbing to me, feels really important, and so does the relationship between her and the little creature.

In the dream imagery as it comes to my normal point of view it looks like not such a good relationship, especially for the creature. I'm pretty sure the creature is going to get eaten. I think it's defenseless. But having unfolded that part a little, I now know that's not true. The creature is a symbol of an evolving part that is actually very sophisticated

and can deal with danger quite well. The powerful woman, who looks from first glance just to be insensitive and selfish, is actually all about going for what she (!) wants, and not being condescending to others by acting as if they can't take care of themselves. In my normal way of being I have a problem with taking too much care of other people's feelings and needs much of the time. Incidentally, I sometimes get in trouble for being insensitive, and that is when the powerful woman dream figure is coming out of me while I'm not aware of it.

Now these are both parts of me, not just characters in my fantasy story, so it makes me wonder, how do the powerful woman and the sensitive creature get along inside of me? Not always very well, is the answer, which I can say from knowing how I push myself too hard sometimes, or often wimp out on something, claiming to myself that I feel too sensitive. But I can also tell this from the dream. The two don't even relate directly to each other in the dream, and if they do come in contact, I imagine, it's by the creature getting accidentally eaten. From my normal point of view this sounds like a bad thing (for the woman as well), but actually, in this magical world where the laws of physics are different, that might not be the case.

I can experiment by becoming the sensitive creature and feeling what it's like to be eaten. And I can play the other part and find out what it's like to be the woman eating the creature. Wow. Who knew I could have so much fun with this one funky dream? I can also focus on the

same dynamic at a deeper level by taking the deeper attitudes I found in each one and seeing how they would interact.

You can try this yourself too. Think of a dream and choose two parts of it. They could be two people or objects. One of them could be the character you are playing in the dream. Focus on the first part or figure, and really see it in detail. Are you seeing it? Or is another sense more important? Sense it in detail. Notice everything about it. Just take your time to observe and be with it, and when you have a thorough sense of it, notice what describes it's most essential quality. For me it is the vulnerability of the creature that I notice most. When you have one or two words that describe it, imagine you have that quality in one of your hands, and move your hand in a gesture that expresses it. Make this gesture a few times and slow it down and really feel what it's like to move this way.

When you're ready, go on and do the same for the other part, and use your other hand to make its gesture. Then sit with one part in each hand. Make the gestures both at once. It might not be easy at first to do both, especially if they're very different. Take your time and notice how it is to do this. Do they interact? If so, what is the interaction like? Consider that these are two parts of your self that are getting to know each other. You don't have to do anything beyond giving them the space to do that. Maybe there's a story unfolding between them? What does it



seem that they are doing together (or apart)? How might this be significant for you right now?

As well as the relationships within our dreams and within our selves, the worlds of our dreams also have a relationship to our everyday world. Really, our everyday world is part of the Dreaming too, but from our normal perspective we see it as concrete reality and dreams are something coming into it from outside. The communication between them goes both ways, and can be nurtured by us. As I said before, you can invite your dreams to be more memorable by writing them down, and you can invite more dreaming experiences into your whole life by paying more attention to them and working with them. Obviously our dreams are influenced by our waking lives, sometimes very literally, when we dream about whatever we have been doing the day before.

Among all the different kinds of dreams – and there are many. It never ceases to amaze me when people tell me how they usually dream and it's wildly different from what I experience. – there are two basic kinds to work with. There are dreams that are relevant for us in the short term, maybe just for that day, or over a few weeks, and there are mythical dreams that carry important information for us over our lifetimes. These dreams inform us about the ongoing issues we deal with for long periods of time. We work on them in all sorts of ways, and we grow and develop through them, and they change, but always continue to

be a theme throughout our experiences. In the last chapter there is an exercise for investigating your mythical childhood dream.

## Chapter Five: Body Symptoms

As I've said before, we dream all the time, not only when we're sleeping, and our dreams are also expressed through our bodies. Our physical bodies are like intermediaries between the material world, which they are emphatically part of, and the subjective experience of Dreaming, which they are definitely part of too. Any physical experience can be unraveled to find the deeper meaning within it. Because of their problematic nature and because they can carry such strong messages for us, I will focus mainly on symptoms.

From the point of view of our everyday identities, symptoms that disrupt our normal body functions are in the way of what we want to be experiencing and doing. They cause discomfort and often a lot of pain. We spend a lot of money and time on healthcare in this culture. It is normal and natural that we want our symptoms to go away and stop bothering us, especially when they interfere strongly with our activities or become life-threatening. We should seek medical attention for our symptoms. Addressing the experience as a dreaming message is not intended as an alternative to that, but as an additional tool for awareness and growth. It is true that sometimes a symptom can change or even disappear after working on it in this way, so I like to keep an open mind, but following our practical wisdom means taking care of the body physically as well.

That said, let's look just at the experiences and what we can find in them. In most of modern culture, we don't identify with our bodies. We are centered a lot in our thoughts, in what we are trying to do, and our focus is often on achievement in the practical, objective world, not on our private, inner experience. As with anything that is ignored over time, the body makes its presence known by doing things that irritate and upset us. It stops working as we think it should, and develops bad habits and causes pain. In this way, symptoms bring our attention back to our bodies, to their wisdom and the dreaming experiences and meanings inside. What we experience in our bodies are immediate gateways into the otherworld of the unknown. Investigating them, we can go quickly into alternate ways of viewing reality and into deep altered states; usually experiences that we in some way really need. In our modern "extroverted" culture, where so much emphasis is placed on how we interact with and appear to others, simply the experience of going inside your self can be profound. This is one of the major benefits of any meditation practice. When we turn our attention inward, focusing on our subjective experiences and unwrapping what's inside them, it's then more possible for us to bring what we find there out into our relationships and our world. In this way, we can enrich our own lives and positively affect those of others too.

Another aspect to working with body symptoms in this way is how using our awareness affects our experience of pain. Have you ever

noticed that something that hurts when you are trying to focus elsewhere actually hurts less when you pay direct attention to it? That's because when you focus on the pain, you begin to perceive the quality of the sensation itself, and stop labeling it simply "pain." Of course this isn't always easy to do, especially with really strong sensations. In this way, symptoms become invitations to use our awareness, and also to view our selves differently and do things differently from our usual ways.

When a symptom is very strong, as in something that disrupts our lives or causes a lot of pain, it's an indicator of the kind of power it has for us when we unlock it for ourselves. The shift in perspective is similar to the idea in the martial arts of using your opponent's energy to benefit yourself. If the force of the symptom is only seen as being against you, you will always be fighting against it. It may or may not get better, but you won't get to take it's power as your own, and that power will most likely turn up again in another symptom or problem, making you have to deal with it again. If you can step away from your normal definition of yourself and discover the part of you that's expressing itself through the symptom, you can turn the pain into your own power and use it however you want to. With strong symptoms that we suffer from a lot, this process needs to be taken with care and while keeping awareness open for all parts of ourselves. The part that feels like a victim of the pain should not be pushed out of the way or treated in any way ungently, especially if you ignore it or silence it in every day life. It's not useful to

focus on the suffering too much, as that can make it last longer.

However, if we deny it, or try to ignore or push it aside, it can get worse in the long run. Everyone needs to find their own balance between these two extremes. That takes paying close attention to your own perceptions of what is right for you. It's important to make your own distinctions between something that is simply wrong for you, and something that feels uncomfortable but is a positive challenge.

In most body symptoms there are two parts; the part we're most familiar with is the one that's experiencing the problem and is reacting to something that's being done to it. The other part is the one that is doing that something. That's the one that is most different from our definitions of self, and that holds the most unknown information and meaning for us.

For example, if I have a headache, I could describe it in material, medical terms as a sinus headache or a tension headache, or whatever I believe to be the physical cause. Anyone who's experienced them knows each kind of headache feels different. We can't make any assumptions about how each kind of headache feels for other people, or even the same kind of headache at a different time.

When I have a sinus headache there are many aspects to the sensations, but the predominant feeling is pressure. So, the part of me that feels pain is reacting to that pressure. The other, unknown, part is the one that's making the pressure. It might physically be inflammation

in my sinuses, but in the dreamland of my perceptions it's a character who's deliberately applying pressure to my head, maybe by pumping it up with a bicycle pump. When I have a tension headache, as I have a slight one right now, I feel it in the back of my head and behind my ears. It feels like the skin is too tight. So, the usual part of me is reacting to this tightness, while the unknown part creating the tightness is what I need to investigate to learn what the headache has for me. This part that creates the pressure or tightness seems like a mean person from my usual point of view, but once I step out of that and investigate it, I might find its intentions are actually supportive, and it's only causing me discomfort to get my attention. The level of discomfort is higher the more insistent that character is that I pay attention to it.

So let's investigate a body symptom now. While you work, pay attention to how your body is in the moment and don't do anything that aggravates the symptom or hurts you in anyway. Have a large stuffed animal or a pillow near by.

Take a little time to reflect on how you define yourself in the moment. What is your daily life like? What are you focused on these days? Is there something in particular you are struggling with or would like some insight into? It could be a decision you need to make or a conflict you are in with someone. Write down a question about that issue. At the moment I am putting a lot of energy into my job with a mental health agency, though I prefer to define myself in terms of my

studies and private practice. I guess that means I identify as someone who is partly in a job that doesn't completely satisfy me, and I'm hoping to move more into the one that satisfies me better. My question is, how to keep my energy going, so I have enough focus for all the tasks I have to do, and still enjoy the ones I like best.

Now place your attention on your body. Make sure you are sitting comfortably. It may be helpful to close your eyes. Feel what it's like inside your body; your head, shoulders, arms, chest, abdomen, pelvis, legs and feet. Just notice what sensations there are. Now choose a body symptom you can feel and lightly focus on it for a moment.

How do you experience that symptom? Imagine you were explaining to an artificial intelligence - an awareness that doesn't have a body - what it's like to have that symptom. Exactly what are you sensing? I'm going to focus on my stuffy sinuses. What I sense in the moment is a constriction of my nasal passages and a tickle that builds up into a sneeze as I focus on it. Since the tickle is the strongest sensation in the moment, I'm going to focus on that. If there are different aspects to your sensation of your symptom, choose the strongest or the one that seems most mysterious to you to focus on. This tickle I feel isn't constant. It begins as a very slight itchy feeling at the back of my nose that feels like a tightening of the skin. It builds in intensity and spreads through my nostrils. As it does that it becomes a sort of crawling sensation, as if something with lots of tiny, spiky legs is gripping onto the membrane. If



I gently focus on it as it builds, I can feel just what it's like without reacting with a sneeze, which makes it disappear for a while. Now I'm noticing the production of mucous, but it's the itchy, crawly feeling I'm focused on for now.

When you are clear exactly what the sensation is like, as a dream in your body remember, not necessarily what corresponds to the biological explanation of the symptom, ask yourself, "What could be making this sensation?" For me, the sensation in my nose is caused by a sort of centipede-like thing that has many rows of legs, not just two, so it hooks onto my skin across its entire surface area. Someone investigating a pounding headache might imagine a person hitting the head with a hammer. Someone working on nausea might imagine someone or something stirring their stomach with a big spoon, or someone working on heartburn might imagine a fire inside them. The possibilities are limitless.

Now, as you describe that person, creature or object to yourself, ask yourself; what size and shape is it? What color(s)? How does it move? Notice if you move your hands or another part of your body along with the description. Keep describing it to yourself, and allow the movement to happen. If you don't notice a movement create one. Move one of your hands the way that thing that makes your symptoms would move, and keep moving your hand that way as you describe it. Make that movement again, and make it bigger, using more of your body. Stand up and use

your whole body to move like that thing. Again, like an actor completely in role, become that thing and move around the room like it.

I become this weird centipede-blob thing, and I'm crawling on the floor, clawing onto the carpet. It feels strangely sensual, and my fingers, which are the hundreds of legs, feel very strong.

Now, staying in your role, approach the soft animal or pillow and make it have the symptom you started with. For example, my symptom is caused by the gripping of all those tiny legs. Now, I can't grip inside my teddybear's nose, so I use my fingers to grip its body that way. If you're working with something pounding, pound on your animal. If you're stirring, make that action on it. Give the animal or pillow the same experience of the body symptom. Keep doing that and pay attention to how the action feels. Really fully experience doing that. Notice what feels good about it, and while you are still doing it, still in that character, answer the question: "Why am I doing this?"

I am gripping onto this big teddybear with my fingers, clawing into it and also grasping little parts of its skin and letting go, as each of those hundreds of spiky black legs is doing. There is something so satisfying about doing this. It's forceful, yet intimate. I am feeling the bear, but also making it feel me. It's like I'm saying to it, "Wake up and feel!" I want the bear to be more in tune with its physical sensitivity.

Now look back at the question you wrote down at the beginning of this exercise. Still in character, and making the animal have that

symptom, answer the question. My centipede-blob says, “You’re using a lot of energy blocking out your sensations. If you enjoy your feelings more, you’ll have more energy.”

When you have an answer, come back to your everyday self and take that information in. I notice how much I tune out my physical sensations most of the time because I’m focused on trying to do something, or I’m thinking or worrying. I listen to that thing with its grasping little legs, urging me to feel more. It seems like a good idea, and it also feels relieving and I recognize that I do use a lot of energy unconsciously ignoring how my body feels.

It also feels a little strange for me to be more receptive to my body feelings when I’m going through my day. It’s something not really encouraged by our thinking-focused work culture. It feels a little mischievous to me, like I’m ten years old again, doing something I think I shouldn’t. I’m just noticing my discomfort around this, and at the same time acknowledging how right and relieving it feels to be more aware of my sensations, allowing myself to be more physically and feeling oriented.

Notice in yourself if there’s any way which you feel strange about doing what your symptom recommends. You may not feel anything uncomfortable at all, in which case just go ahead and do what it recommends. If you do notice something in your usual self-definition that disagrees with it, just notice the two points of view. You don’t have

to choose one or the other as better, but recognize how both are parts of you. The one that comes from the symptom is the newer part that wants more expression. The older, more usual way of being is probably going to change to accept the new one, but you don't have to force it to. The more you experience both consciously, the closer they can come together. One way of doing this is to play around with being that character, just experiencing what it's like there, and then coming back to your usual self and noticing how that is different.

The character that creates your symptoms is a part of yourself that doesn't quite fit in your everyday identity. Through investigating the sensory experience of your symptoms, you can find the messages contained in them, or the parts of yourself that are emerging and want to be expressed. It doesn't mean that the new information is more right than what you already know, though. The parts we don't identify aren't any better or more desirable than the parts we know and accept already. They are just different parts. What can be most useful is not always just trying to do things the way the new part suggests to us, or to become more like that part, but the interactions between the two. As your everyday identity meets and interacts with another part, they both learn and are affected by each other. This can eventually lead to more freedom to choose how to act; to be more like one or the other in any particular situation, or to blend qualities of both.

You don't have to have strong or difficult body symptoms to do this kind of work. In fact, working on small, almost non-existent feelings that could almost become symptoms could even be preventive medicine. You can unravel the dreaming experiences in any sensation, no matter how small it is. Let's explore a small sensation right now.

For this next exercise, you'll need some paper and color pens or pencils. On your paper, draw a quick outline of a human body on one side of the paper, leaving part of the paper blank. The point isn't for it to look like good art, just make a line outline, (like a crime scene outline of a body). Add a simple face, so it's easier to relate to.

Close your eyes for a moment now, and scan your body. Notice how each part of you feels, from your toes to your head. What little sensations are there, very subtle things you wouldn't even notice if you weren't specifically feeling for them? Choose one of those feelings, and focus on how you sense it.

Then choose a color that fits with that sensation. Draw what it feels like onto your outline with that color, on the part of the body you feel it in. Don't think too much about what you are drawing, just let your hand draw while you feel that sensation. Let it come out whatever shape it wants to be.

Now look at the drawing, and imagine the thing you've drawn there is alive. It could be an animal or human, or some kind of nature spirit or sprite. I have drawn an orange shape in my throat, which comes from a

dry and parched feeling there. My picture looks like a fire, so I imagine it as a fire spirit. What kind of being is your drawing of? Let yourself dream about this being. Half close your eyes and imagine it in front of you. What is it doing? Where does it live? How does it interact with the things and people around it? How does it move, and what is its voice like? Practice making the sounds it makes. Step into its character and become it for a minute or two. Find out exactly what it's like to be that being.

Now draw this being in the empty space on the paper next to your body outline, and give it the qualities you have found in it. You can add other colors if it feels right. Don't worry about making it look good, just make a simple sketch, but give it the same quality of shape and line as the first one. Even if this figure is a nature spirit or an object, give it a simple face with eyes and mouth.

Sit back and look at the dream figure you have drawn. Inside yourself, ask this figure what it's trying to tell the outline figure when it makes that body sensation. Let your mind go fuzzy and see what answer you get.

## Chapter Six: Depression

Closely related to physical symptoms are psychological issues such as depression. This way of working can be applied to any emotional or psychological problem, such as anxiety, mania and even hallucinations and delusions. I have chosen to focus on depression here because of space limits and because it affects so many people in today's world.

There are many kinds of depression. In fact, there are as many kinds as there are people who experience it. It ranges in severity from a slight melancholy that dampens the spirits, to a severely debilitating condition in which the person doesn't even physically move. All of us experience some kind of depression at some points in our lives, though we often don't identify it as that.

Because depression can be a big problem that interferes with a person's lifestyle, and because psychological issues like this are not as well understood as purely physical symptoms, I feel it's important to acknowledge again the power of changing your viewpoint on a problem. Even the very worst things can become useful to us, if we look at them from a different perspective. Of course there are problems that cannot be solved, but finding the hidden messages and meanings within them can also change the way we are affected by them, and help us to suffer less. Deep depressions and ones that last long periods of time are related to long-term life issues. Probably it will take someone working

repeatedly over time to change it, but it will change. That person's awareness and relationship to their inner experiences will develop and they will find they have more choices over their state of mind.

As with most problems, in our culture we tend to try and make bad moods and melancholy go away by focusing on something else. This can be a great tool, and should never be thrown out as no good. If I wake up in the morning feeling sluggish and like all I want to do is stay in bed all day, it usually helps if I get up and do something active, though I also try and stay present with the sluggish feeling until it changes, rather than forcing it away. Conventional wisdom tells us not to dwell on such issues because it makes their effects worse, and this can also be true. Simply giving in and being depressed, staying in bed and avoiding whatever I find challenging isn't useful and usually makes things worse. Consciously deciding to go into the experience with the aim of finding what is trying to develop through it is the path less traveled.

The actual causes of depression and other psychological disturbances have been understood in many ways over the years. People have believed they were caused by spirits, by one's family of origin, and most popularly now by biological imbalances. All of these are probably true. We know there are physical components to our states of mind, but we also know that circumstances can make us depressed, which will also be reflected physically in our brain chemistry. So which is the cause? Just as with purely physical symptoms, we often need medical help with



our moods, and here causal thinking makes sense. It can be extremely helpful to find medication that enables us to live better without being oppressed by such symptoms. When working on the experiences themselves, though, the cause doesn't matter anymore. That's where we enter the land of dreams and biology, psychology, environment and mysterious spiritual experiences all interrelate together.

Broadly speaking, there are two basic kinds of depression. One is the kind where you know you are depressed. With this kind, a person often feels hopeless and gives in to feeling down and oppressed. This is what in its strongest forms is diagnosed as a major depression by psychiatrists. The other kind is when you don't think you are depressed. You are focused on your usual activities, but you feel as if something is dragging on you, or as if you're not as inspired by your life as you want to be. This is usually diagnosed as a mild chronic depression. The focus when working with these two different kinds is slightly different, so I have an exercise here for each.

This first piece is for working with a depression which is not overwhelming, for when you mostly feel fine but notice a tendency to feeling down, especially when not keeping busy.

There's no standard time for this exercise. You can take as long or short as you want, but as you need to follow what emerges, you should give yourself at least 45 minutes when you won't be interrupted.

Sit and make yourself comfortable. Check in with yourself. What's been on your mind? How are you feeling? How is your body doing in the moment? Do you have a question or a problem you've been trying to solve? If one doesn't come to mind, think of one now. At the moment, I've been wrestling with how to stay close to my own needs while I also support others in my work and in writing this book. Write your question down so you can go back to it easily later.

Now sit and notice how your body feels. Feel what you are sitting on, whatever is touching your skin, the temperature of the air, whatever you may feel inside your body. Notice how you are sitting. Are you upright or leaning? Is there a small tendency in your posture that doesn't go along with the main posture?

Now remember what it's like when you feel down. Get in touch with that and experience it now. Is there a sense of disinterest in what usually excites you? Do you feel emotions you usually put to the side? Perhaps you feel physically or emotionally tired. Notice what happens in your body as you let these things just be.

For me, even though I don't identify with feeling depressed right now, as soon as I start to focus on this exercise I sit and hold my head in my hands and stare down. I have the physical sensation of being pulled downwards in my chest, neck and head. I sit with that feeling; feeling the weight of my head against my hands, my elbows on the table.

Notice your body's tendency to move in a particular direction. For me it is straight down, but it could be in any direction. Notice what in you seems to move in that direction, and if there is anything against it, or that moves in a different way. (Staying still is also a movement.) Maybe your whole body moves in the same way, and the chair is opposing it.

I notice two parts in myself; the head that goes down and the hands that hold up. I notice also a third part that feels like it's outside of me, which is what's pulling me down. I could explore any of these parts. They are all parts of what I label depression, and are all useful to get to know better. But the part that has the depression, and which doesn't get much attention through my day, is the one that goes down.

Feel the parts in yourself and choose the one which appears to be depressed. It is probably not the part that sits upright, and it may feel like something you don't want to focus on, but would rather push it away. Just for now let it be how it is and explore it. Maybe close your eyes. Feel that part again and notice which direction it wants to move. Right now, just notice the impulse to move, and don't follow it yet.

I sit with the feeling of something heavy leaning on something strong. My hands press inwards to support the weight, but my head slowly slips through. I wonder for a moment what it's like to be these strong hands. Even though that's the part I live from more, even my experience there feels unexplored. I will do that later. For now I'll focus on being the head, the one who is supported, the heavy one who sinks.

Take a second to address the part you're not going to explore, and let it know you'll come back to it later. Then slowly let your body move in the direction of the other part. It may be helpful to start from a standing position. Go really slow, and pay attention to the direction. It might change as you begin to move. If you are going down, it may curve out, or it may continue straight down as mine does. If you are moving to one side, is it leaning or do you get up and move your whole body now? Move as minutely as you can, paying attention to how it feels.

I feel heavy, and the hand supporting me actually feels in the way. I will see what happens if I let myself go down. I let my head slip between my hands to the table. My pen rolls off, onto the floor. Now the table's in the way. I stand, and very slowly let myself crumple all the way to the floor. As I go, I keep my awareness of where my body wants to move, not following where I think I should move, and the movement continues to be straight down all the way. Head down first, then knees bend and hands on the floor in front of me. I am crouched on my toes and hands, head hanging.

Keep going until you get to where that direction goes. You might need to move out of your chair or to another part of the room. Notice your position. Are you standing, reaching up, lying, sitting or curled in a ball? Do you feel you have arrived where your tendency takes you, or could you keep on going, though the physical environment prevents it? If something gets in your way, if it's something you can't move or move

around, let yourself keep moving internally, as if your body is fluid and you can move through anything. Be the movement. Go to where it goes. If anything is uncomfortable for your body, shift your position or get a pillow to lean on. When your body is taken care of, you are free to follow your imagination and be what moves in that way.

I'm feeling like I want to keep falling, but the floor is in the way. I go forward and down onto knees and head. The floor is hard, so I get pillows to lie on. Then I go through the floor. The floor is not there. I keep on going down. Just down. At some point I lie down flat, but I'm not even aware when I do this.

In this dream-like experience, what kind of place are you in? Have you gone deep inside your own body, or are you in the clouds? Feel the space you are in inside this dream, and notice if you see, feel or hear anything there too. If you are distracted by sounds in the real world, or other thoughts, just notice them and let them go.

As I keep going down, I see blackness. I'm going deep down into the earth. There is nothing there but deep blackness.

What do you see or feel? Or maybe you hear something? See, feel or hear it. Enter into its space and just be there. Notice how it is there, and what unfolds for you. Feel your body. What sensations are there? Do you see or hear a person or object? Or maybe you just notice a simple perception, like darkness or a particular tone or a physical feeling. Keep on experiencing it. What do you imagine is in that color, or what makes

that tone, or produces that feeling? When you know what it is, imagine it becoming a person or a spirit. Complete this phrase; “If this were a living being, it would be ...” How does this figure relate to you? Stay in its presence for a while.

I am deep in the earth and it feels safe here. Everything relaxes. I feel my weight pressing down. I feel my pulse in my legs and head. I feel I could fall asleep here, but I keep my awareness on my perceptions. I feel my sweater, a little rough, against my wrists and the weight of it on my back. I feel my body relaxing and letting go. I notice also some tensions that don't let go, and I notice my thoughts going to something else. I let these things be as they are, and keep sinking deep into the earth. I have the sensation of being held in the center of the earth. I ask, “who am I held by?” and I see a mother. She is naked and I feel her skin on mine. I am a baby being held by a mother in the center of the earth. It feels good for me to just stay here a little time.

The place you have come to may also be something you need to just stay with and take in. It may be a relief, or it may feel difficult to stay there. Perhaps difficult feelings and memories come up for you, as they do for me. Let the feelings come, and keep coming back to the dream space you have found, and the figure. Let that figure hold the space for you and your feelings, whatever comes up.

It feels vulnerable to write about my experience. I am a baby, totally accepted, with no demands. I am just held intimately, skin on

skin. I could stay here forever! And I also don't. I notice how I don't completely take it in, and that's also ok. There may be ways in which you too don't fully complete this experience. It is probably a core issue for you, which you are working on over time. It will come up again and again. There's no rush. This may be enough for you, or you may want to continue with the next step.

If it feels right for you, now put yourself in the position of the figure you have met there. Like an actor stepping into a role, become that person. What does it feel like to be in that body? What posture does it take? Take that posture, and fully become that person. Move as that person. How do you walk? How do you take up space, and how do you speak? Make sounds as this person. Keep on moving and vocalizing until you are totally in this role.

I become this relaxed, unhurried mother. I am reclining on something soft. I feel well and comfortable in my large, soft body, and loving the baby in my arms.

How do you, as this figure, relate to the other you there? How do you relate to the world? When you are totally that figure, look back at yourself as you are in everyday life. Remember the question you wrote down earlier. How does this figure respond to the question? Give your everyday self some advice.

Like a Goddess, I feel love for the world and everything in it, including myself. It is a blissful experience. I stay with it a little while,

and then I look at myself in everyday life. I remember my question about looking after my own needs while also caring for others. As this Goddess, my advice is; I am always with you. Let yourself receive what you need, and it will come to you all the time. When you are always receiving my love and nourishment, you can't give anything away. Giving is the same thing as receiving.

This next exercise is for working with a stronger, acute kind of depression. It's for when you know you are depressed and either feel you are struggling against it all the time or are overwhelmed by it. It's for when you feel oppressed by something inside or outside of you. Give yourself at least 45 minutes with no interruptions to do this, though it may take longer or shorter depending on your process. You will need two stuffed animals, or you can use pillows if you don't have any. It's possible they might get a little damaged, so use things that won't matter so much.

Sit for a minute and check in with yourself. Notice how you feel in your body. What's been occupying your thoughts recently? What question do you have about your life? Or what problem would you like to solve? Pick just one thing and state it clearly. Write it down so you can come back to it later.

My question is how can I fulfill all the demands on me without becoming anxious and overwhelmed, which exhausts me.



Before you start, there's one useful piece of information you may need. Remember what it's like to wake up from sleep. How do you know you are awake? Do you know when you open your eyes and see? Or is it sound or touch that lets you know? Whichever sense confirms for you that you are awake is an anchor for safety when exploring possibly difficult material and strong inner experiences. Write down which sense tells you you are awake. If at any point in the exercise, or at any time really, you feel unsafe or out of control in an unpleasant way, come back to that sense. Stop what you're doing and see, hear or feel whatever is happening. It will help bring you back to your usual self.

Now take a few breaths. Notice what you are perceiving. If you are depressed at the moment, just pay attention to how you experience that. If you aren't, remember what it was like in the past. You don't have to do anything with it, just notice. Put a stuffed animal in front of you and describe this animal's experience of being depressed as if it's you. You are no longer having the depression. You are the narrator of a story, and the animal is the one in the midst of it. You get to be a child playing now. Put the animal in the posture of depression, and move it around according to the story.

I have a big, soft bear, and my story goes like this: Bear feels hopeless and useless and feels she can't change the things in her life that make her suffer. She has so many impossible problems she doesn't know

how to solve, and she believes there really are no solutions. She feels them piling in on her and she feels crushed. She can barely lift her head.

You can go into detail about the things that oppress your animal if you want, or you can keep to the general feeling. It's up to what you feel you need in the moment. Then continue with the animal's physical experience of that oppression. How does your animal feel? What kind of force or forces seem to be affecting it? How? Is the animal physically manipulated or acted on by those forces? Find out exactly what is happening.

When my bear feels depressed she feels like she can't move. Whatever she plans to do, she takes a long time to get to because she will often just sit still, as if physically stuck. Sometimes it's something as simple as brushing her teeth or eating. When she does push through it, she feels like she's moving through molasses. I make the bear walk really slowly through the molasses air until it's too much effort and she can't move anymore. Bear is stuck. Something is keeping her still. It constricts her and she feels defeated by something impossibly stronger than her.

Now let's go into the world of this story, and fill out the character that is acting on the animal. You can do this by acting that part yourself, or you can use another animal or pillow. Take a moment to check inside yourself which one feels better. Then go ahead and do to the first animal what that force has been doing. If it's crushing, go ahead and crush it. If

it's throwing it around, throw it around the room. Of course, keep a little awareness on safety so nothing gets broken or hurt.

I act out the oppressing character myself. This works well for me because I've worked through a lot of the painful stuff around my depressions, and am familiar with it. If the feelings are too strong, or I feel like it's overwhelming, keeping out of the story and using another animal for that role helps me be detached, as I witness the story. The point of acting the role myself is I get to experience its energy in my own body. There are times when one or the other is right, and neither is better. Try what feels best for you, and you can also change back and forth.

I get up and stand over the bear on the floor. I crush it with my hands. It's very satisfying because it's a soft bear and easy to crush. I crush it into a ball and sit on it. I throw it on the floor and stamp on it. I'm exploring how it is to be the one who crushes. It feels strong. As I trample it, I slow down to experience it as much as I can. It feels so good to crush this person under my feet.

Take your time to follow exactly what that oppressor does to the animal. Act it out, being mindful of what's happening for you. There might be some painful feelings. Take your time and go slow. Allow those painful feelings to belong only to the first animal, and focus on the experience of the one who's oppressing it. See it in the animal you're acting it out with, or feel it in your body. Notice the strength and power

in it. Perhaps you can suspend your judgment of the effects of this power, and just appreciate it as power. Speak out loud about this character's inner experience. Experience it intimately, and really fully become it. Stay with this and make it your own.

For me, as this crusher, I have no compassion. I am here only for myself and it feels so good to feel my strength in crushing this other. I feel the muscular strength in my arms and legs and in my whole body. I celebrate this. "Yeah! It's great to feel this strength! And I love crushing you, Bear!"

Now take this energy with you and become yourself again. Continue knowing that power in you, and look at the animal that represents the oppressor. (If you've been that part all along, just have the second animal take that character now.) Use that physical power to do to that oppressor whatever comes to you. Physically do something to it. Tell it what's on your mind.

I keep that sense of how good it feels to feel my own strength as the crusher, and I become myself. Now I am no longer stuck, and I face the one who was crushing me. I represent it with another bear, and I crush it back! Oh, that feels so good! I shout at it, "I don't care how big and strong you are! I can crush you too. And I like it." I really get into it. I take my socks off so I can feel my feet crushing it with every step.

Don't hold anything back and keep going with this. Pay attention to what comes up for you. While you do what you're doing to the one

who oppressed you, what do you see, hear or feel? What ideas come to you?

I keep on crushing, playing like a child with this. I feel a sense of all the things I want, and instead of curbing my desire as usual because I don't believe I'll get them, I feel great in just feeling it. I keep on crushing, and I notice I am seeing the thing I'm crushing, the crusher, under my feet and pushing me back. It's like it's in a mirror world beneath me, and every step I take it comes up to meet me, crushing upward, as I crush down. Seen like this it isn't crushing but supporting me. We are pushing against each other with our feet and truly meeting each other with our full weight and strength. It feels really good.

Explore whatever image comes to you and keep on acting it. Continue using your full body, and follow what comes. When you have a complete sense of what you're doing, slow it down. Keep the intensity of feeling, seeing and hearing, but slow your movements down as much as you can until you are almost not moving at all. Then the body may become still, but the movement and feeling continues inside. Close your eyes and be with that experience inside you and find what it is at its deepest, simplest level. What is the spirit within that experience? It is almost unnamable, but give it a name. Find one or two words that describe it.

As I keep going, another image comes to me, of a huge tree, with roots supporting it from way underground. It is a giant redwood (like my

name) and its magnificence is possible because of the unseen half of it, underground. I stand in this place and feel and see my trunk and branches tall and powerful and pushing down on my roots which reach as far underground. The spirit deep in this is one of stability. Not a static or inert kind of stability, but the dynamic balance of forces meeting each other in mutual support.

Being this spirit; feeling, seeing and hearing it in you, look back at the question you wrote earlier. What is the answer this spirit gives? What advice do you have for the everyday person who deals with that question?

My advice to my usual self is, feel this power of dynamic stability. You will get out of contact with it, but also come back to it. Keep on coming back and it will be easier to access. Bring this spirit into everything you do.

I understand right now that the things that oppress me are that strong because they are awakening the strength I have to push back. If they were less, I wouldn't be put in contact with my whole power.

As a last step, still within that essential spirit, look at the one who has been oppressed and feels depressed. Look at the first animal who is playing that part. What does this spirit say or do for that one?

I see that part of me that hurts and feels hopeless. There is still this impossible, stuck feeling about life there. As the dynamic balance of the redwood, I care for that part. I don't try to change it, but know it

needs protection, and I will carry it with me. I pick it up and hold it in my branches. It doesn't have to change or do anything.

How is it for you to relate from the essential spirit to the part of you that's been depressed?

So, even though in our everyday selves we experience depression as oppressive and often impossible to deal with, it is also an invitation (or demand) that we go deeper into ourselves, slow down or become more meditative and be more intimate with our inner experiences. It can be a call to get in touch with our deeper powers and use them in our lives.





## Chapter Seven: Relationships

We all get into conflicts. It's in the nature of human relationships because we are all different and we necessarily see our situations and each other from the viewpoint of those differences as well as our similarities. Some spiritual disciplines propose not dealing with relationships; that we should either become hermits, or if conflict arises to turn inward and resolve it within ourselves. For most of us it's not possible to be hermits, but working on a conflict inside yourself can be very powerful for personal growth. Bringing what you learn back to the relationship can be very helpful too.

Even avoiding relationships can't keep us out of conflicts, because if unfamiliar parts of ourselves want to be expressed that way, they will find a way to do it. If you live and work by yourself and keep people at a distance, you will probably get into arguments with people at the store or have minor traffic accidents. Intrusive things may happen to you like people breaking into your house. Many of us just try to avoid open conflicts in our relationships by putting up with things we don't like, or trying to get what we want indirectly instead of asking for it clearly. Even these strategies don't work, as everyone knows the unpleasant tension it can place on a relationship when we don't address our differences. Usually we can feel a distance from our friend or loved one when we're avoiding confronting something. Even if it's over a small issue, these

things build up over time and can then explode into a messy fight or eventually even undermine the relationship completely.

The distance we feel in relationships when we don't address our problems with each other is also a waning of intimacy. Sometimes it's right to be distant from each other, and intimacy is a living, changing thing that naturally ebbs and flows. However, when it is blocked by an unaddressed or difficult conflict, it might not flow back so freely.

When those differences are addressed however, often intimacy can reach new depths. I'm using the word intimacy here to mean all forms of closeness, emotional as well as physical. What intimacy is for any person in any situation could be described in any number of ways, but I think an essential part of it is the experience of feeling seen or understood at the same time as seeing or understanding the other person. This means that communicating through and about our differences as well as our similarities creates intimacy. So, maybe when we try to avoid all the difficult feelings involved in conflict; anger, fear of rejection, etc., we're also avoiding their call to deeper intimacy.

This can easily make sense in our close relationships, but it might seem weird to think of a conflict with a neighbor we dislike in this way. The best solution may appear to be for the neighbor to move away. If we look at the problem with the idea that the neighbor represents part of ourselves, we can see why we might need more knowledge and understanding of them. Perhaps the situation isn't only about you and

the neighbor, but is about the whole neighborhood, the city, even the world. There are so many of us humans, and we are living increasingly close to each other and cannot avoid being in each other's lives whether we choose it or not. This is giving rise to all sorts of conflicts, small and large scale, including air and sound pollution as well as wars. It also forms the opportunity for great creativity and community. I think conflict and community come together; they create each other, and in a real sense if we take care to address our small differences as they arise, we prevent them building up over time and across communities into something much more destructive.

Just like all difficulties we encounter, relationship conflicts can be seen as problems to unfold, in which we can find the gifts we didn't know are ours as well as how they create their own solutions.

When investigating a relationship issue, there are basically two ways we can approach it. One is to see the whole situation as your own dream, so that the other person and all aspects of the relationship are dream-like parts of yourself that you are getting to know better. The other is to recognize yourself and the other as separate entities as well as being parts of the relationship between you. Seen from ordinary reality, of course, you are separate beings, but seen from the Dreaming, both descriptions are true, as well as the relationship being a living, developing entity in itself. Neither viewpoint is wrong, but can be of greater or less use in any moment.

The individual focus I'm suggesting here takes the initial view that the relationship problem is your own dream, so you can work on it alone in yourself, but you can then take what you learn to the other person in whatever form you like. Even if you don't specifically use what you've learned, it will still affect how you relate to that person, and in turn how they relate to you. There are also many ways and tools to address conflicts directly with the other person. Using them can not only help a relationship grow through the immediate difficulties, but can become an excellent vessel for supporting each other's personal growth. I have no room to describe these tools here, as I'm focused on inner work, but I want to note that neither way is better, and they actually go hand in hand.

Often we experience a problem in relationship when the other person does something or uses a style of communicating that we don't like. If it irritates you or makes you angry, you might just react from there. The other person reacts back, and then you are in a fight. Or you might withdraw from that person and stew over or try and ignore what bothers you. A third option is to pay attention to what it is that you don't like and see it as something unconscious that needs you to be more aware of it, so you can express it consciously. From this perspective, the irritating behavior doesn't belong just to the other person, but to both of you, and there is then no place for assigning blame about it.

Think of someone right now who bothers you or has bothered you in the past. It could be someone you are close to, or it could even be someone you only met once. See yourself talking with him or her, and doing the things you usually do together. Notice how you feel around this person. How do you act and relate? What would you like to do that you aren't doing?

Now see the other person. What does he or she do that disturbs you? Imagine that this behavior represents a quality that belongs to your relationship, not just to the other person. It is trying to express itself through you both, but because it is unconscious it comes out in ways that are hurtful.

Move one of your hands in a gesture that expresses this quality. What movement describes the thing that disturbs or upsets you? Make that gesture with your hand and slow it down. Feel the quality of that gesture in your hand as you make it. Slow down until it almost stops, and give this quality a name.

Imagine a person who would use this quality in a constructive way. It could be someone you know, or a public figure, or you can make someone up. What does this person do with this quality that is helpful to him or herself and others? If the quality seems selfish or disregarding of others, how is this sometimes right?

Imagine you are this person. Take on their role like an actor and see yourself doing your everyday things the way that person does. Take

your time with this and really feel, see and hear what it's like to live this way. Now come back to yourself, but bring that quality with you. Be your usual self and use the quality that person uses well in your life. See, hear and feel yourself doing your daily things and interacting with people. If it helps, repeat the gesture of that quality.

Now imagine the person you are in conflict with. Go to that person in your mind and bring that quality with you. Communicate to him or her using that quality.

You can use the gesture from this exercise to remind you of the quality even when you are in the middle of a fight with that person. See what happens if you bring this quality into your real life interactions.

One thing that complicates communication in relationships is differences in communication styles and different ways of interpreting things we do or how we say things. We are always interpreting our present interactions through the lenses of our past. So, if one person in a relationship grew up in a family where people always shouted and openly fought with each other, and the other person grew up where no one ever raised their voice, you can see that they are going to have problems to work out. What for one person is normal animated speech, for the other would be impossible aggression. On the other hand, the first person might not understand the importance of what the second one says because it's not stated emphatically enough. The point in understanding

such differences is that neither is right or wrong, but both need to learn to appreciate the other if they want to keep relating.

We communicate through so much more than our words. There is tone of voice, as well as body and hand gestures, to name but two ways. We are not aware of most of the ways we communicate, and so not really even aware of all we are conveying. As we speak to someone, conscious of the message we intend to give them, other parts of ourselves, parts that don't fit our self-identity in that moment, are also sending out messages. These messages are easy to misinterpret or be hurt by when there's no intent to hurt from the other person. When we get into fights because of such miscommunications, one person will accuse the other of something they're not aware of. When someone accuses me of something, if I just react by saying it's not true and then accuse them of something back, it starts a cycle that will go round and get more destructive.

So, when someone accuses you of something, especially if that's someone you're in a long-term relationship with, it can be useful to take that accusation as your dreaming speaking to you and to investigate what useful part of yourself is hiding in there.

Think of something you've been accused of now. It could be something really small. A friend of mine recently accused me of being controlling. Think about that accusation and really examine what it means. Maybe you feel it's completely wrong, or maybe you just hate

being accused of anything. Defend yourself now. In your imagination, tell that person how it's not at all true and show yourself to be right. Do this until you feel satisfied in standing up for yourself, so you can now be ready to listen to what's true in the accusation. I can't actually defend myself against this accusation, as I know it's right.

When you have stood up for yourself enough, think again about the accusation and answer the question, "How is it actually true?" It may be just one percent true that you do this thing, or you are the way they say you are. If you really know it's not true, imagine how you could be just a little bit that way. For me it's true in that I keep people at a bit of an emotional distance a lot of the time. I kind of field the conversation so the other person is more revealing of themselves than I have to be.

Now ask yourself why you do this, or how is it useful to you. It might not be immediately clear why, so take your time. I ask myself why I often "control" my relationships by keeping an emotional distance, and come up with the answer that I don't always feel comfortable revealing myself. To me, it feels more vulnerable than I want to be in most situations, so it's useful to keep myself from feeling too exposed.

When you know how you do what you were accused of and how it's useful for you, stand up and make a posture that expresses it. I stand up straight and put my hands out, as if I'm holding onto some people I'm talking with. I'm not holding them tightly, just enough to guide them away from topics that feel too vulnerable or personal for me. Take your



time with this. Allow your body to take on this attitude or action and express it completely. Notice how it feels in you to do this. To me it feels strong, but also contactful. I like the contact with the other people that it implies. In the moment, it's not the controlling aspect of it, not steering the conversation that is important. It's the standing strong and making contact with whomever I'm talking to.

How would you do this thing even more? If you are only going part way with it in your interactions, how would you do it completely? You could even imagine a physical interaction to express it. For me there's definitely an experience of meeting the other person with my physical strength, not as a fight, just appreciating each other's energy and strength. There are also words that come with it. I hear myself saying, "I don't want to talk about that right now. It feels too private for me in this moment." So for me, doing the "controlling" thing even more would be to say directly what I want rather than try to manipulate the conversation. Get into your posture, and imagine doing that thing completely. What is it when you go all the way and do the thing you were accused of even more?

Imagine yourself doing it fully, and even act it out if you want. You might be doing something socially "acceptable" like my example, or you might be acting out something more dream-like. Perhaps you are pushing someone away, or cutting through them with a knife. If that's the case, let yourself follow this fantasy and ask yourself what words go

along with it. For pushing someone away, it might be, “I don’t want to be close right now.” For cutting through someone it could be, “Stop your bullshit, and tell me what’s important.” Keep going until you find the message you really want to convey.

Where in your life would this be useful? Is it with the person who originally accused you? Or maybe it’s in several situations. Imagine yourself now in one of those places, using this gift. Talk to the person with this attitude and do that thing completely and consciously. It may be helpful to remember this when you’re with the person who accused you. Try out fully doing it consciously and see what happens. The other person might even like it!

Because we are all so intertwined with each other in our communications, when one person in a relationship changes, the other one changes too. Notice what happens with other people when you relate to them differently or with a different attitude. You might even want to tell them about the inner explorations you’re making and ask what their experiences are in relation to you.

As we are always dreaming as well as living in the concrete world, we also see other people through the lenses of our personal dreaming lives. On the one hand, the other person is his or her own self; another point of awareness much like my own but in his or her own story. On the other hand, the other person is also parts of my own dream. Sometimes we can only see our own dream, and not the other person’s reality.

Often, especially in long-term relationships, this goes both ways, and both partners get into states where they see what they want the other to be, or what they most don't want them to be, instead of the complex human they are. Have you ever noticed you're relating to your friend as if they are a character from your own psychology? We all do this all the time. Sometimes we get so used to it we even start acting like the characters our friends think we are, and they do ours. It's not something we can tell ourselves to stop doing, but when we notice it, we can wake up from the dream. We can look at it soberly then, and find out what we need from the characters we've cast our friends as, and also find out more about who those friends really are behind that image.

These things don't tend to go just one way. If you are close with someone that you are somehow working out a personal dream with, chances are that person also has you cast in their own story and you're helping them work out theirs. The stories tend to interlock and overlay each other. People get into relationships either with people who are dealing with the same issues, or with people who have the opposite going on. A shy person who needs to be stronger in their interactions with people might be attracted to someone who is very strong. In return, that strong person might need to learn to acknowledge their own shyness and the sensitivity within it.

If you imagine the relationship itself is a living being that is exploring its own development, you can see the people are somehow

invited into that being. The relationship chooses its partners just as much as they choose each other, maybe even more so. Often the issues people are dealing with belong to their whole culture. The global Dreaming finds people to interact and work out what it needs to express. It can help take the pressure off feeling like you're the only one who finds relationships so hard to think of it this way. You are not only dealing with your own individual problems, you are also living a dream for the planet. Maybe the purpose of it, or part of it anyway, is for the Dreaming as a whole to gain more awareness of itself and its parts.

It can be hard to find a perspective on our own relationships, especially with difficult conflicts that play out over time with those closest to us. It can really help to step outside of yourself, or how you are usually in the relationship, and see what it looks like from there. Here's an exercise that can help shift your perspective. It's good for any relationship situation and can be especially helpful in those difficult, long-term conflict patterns that seem to be impossible. You will need three small objects to mark places in the room. It will probably be helpful to write down your experiences at each step as well.

Stand in the middle of the floor, and mark this as your beginning point with a small object. Close your eyes for a moment and center yourself. Remember what it's like for you when the relationship isn't going so well. Maybe you have a lot of arguments, or there is strong tension. What issues do you conflict about? Remember the things that

happen that make it more difficult and the things you don't like about the other person and yourself. Feel how this is for you. What is it like in your body to experience the problematic part of the relationship? Feel this inside you and imagine it is a force that can direct your movements. Standing at your beginning point, turn slowly on the spot and feel which direction this force wants to move. Imagine you are a compass needle and this force is the magnetic field, pointing you where it is drawn to. It might be toward a particular part of the room, or an object, or it might be that you just feel the direction as if drawn by magnetism. Take a few steps in this direction, and stop when you feel the force directing you has gone far enough. Mark this spot on the floor.

Now forget about the bad stuff. Recall when the relationship feels really good. What attracts you to the other person, and what enjoyable and fulfilling things do you share? Take your time to recall these things and notice how you feel in your body while you do so. What does it feel like when things are at their best between you? Imagine this great feeling is a spirit which can move your body, and slowly turn to find out which way it wants to move. Like a salmon finding it's home river, find which direction this spirit wants to go. Take a few steps until it feels like the right place, and mark your end point.

Now, let go of that feeling and go back to your beginning point. Starting from the beginning, you're going to walk the third side of the triangle. Close your eyes for a moment and let your mind relax and go

fuzzy. Remember what it's like to be almost asleep, and feel that now. Then open your eyes and, still in this fuzzy state, walk toward the end point of this line. (The last spot you marked on the floor.) As you walk, don't try to do anything, but just notice if something occurs. There might be something unusual about your gait just now, or you might have an internal image of something, or you may have an experience of walking through a particular landscape. Maybe you hear something. It could be something you hear inwardly, or something outside. Maybe you are aware of the part of the room you're walking toward.

Still with your mind fuzzy, just notice that thing and allow it to be there, and become stronger. You can go back to the beginning point and walk this line as many times as you want while you focus on your experience.

If the focus is something about the way you are moving, let yourself move that way even more. If you see something or hear something, pretend to be that thing and move how it moves. Remember this is dream-land, so it doesn't have to be literal. If you see a book, move how a book would move in a strange dream.

If you imagine walking through a landscape or a particular place, go there in your mind, and notice how you walk there that is different from your usual walk. Keep moving and let this difference show itself more and more. It might be that there is no actual movement, and you

become absolutely still. If so, explore how it is for you to be still in this way.

Let the movement you're exploring move you, allow your body to follow its lead, until you are walking or dancing in a new and special way. Like a theatre performer, become the character that moves this way and dance its dance until you feel you are fully in it. Now, still in character, address your everyday self and give some advice about the relationship difficulties. What new quality can this character bring to your interactions with the other person? Imagine acting on the advice or relating to the other person using this quality now.

Relationships can be the most amazing and the most difficult things. Many of us are so caught up in our relationships, we often don't know how to describe what happens in them. Working on resolving conflicts can then seem impossible, as both people are often unclear and confused. Investigating your relationships alone by yourself can help you build clarity in how you view them, and can become a powerful tool, not only in helping yourself communicate more effectively, but also in helping the other person relate better to you as well.





## Chapter Eight: Exploring Yourself over Time

As you investigate your experiences, getting to know your inner life more, maybe you will form a practice of it over time. At some point you might ask yourself, what is your goal? For me there are several goals, and I approach them from different areas of my life. One is to help make life easier. I want to resolve or find ways of working with my problems, I want to discover more about my inner strengths and make them more accessible to my conscious mind. That way I can be more effective in whatever I'm trying to do. I also have the goal of experiencing more creativity, whether that's in producing some form of art, or simply bringing more expression into my life as a whole. Working on myself is also a core component of working with others. To be an effective facilitator, I need to have the consistent practice of unfolding my own experiences, as well as be able to do so when I'm facilitating another person or a group, if it's needed. Another goal is that it deepens all my experiences and relationships, and through that I feel more grounded in my life and more fulfilled.

As I've mentioned before, a goal that emerges from doing the work, if it isn't there already, is developing awareness. Gaining greater awareness of ourselves, our experiences and relationships and the world around us, can be a deep fulfillment in itself. It is at the heart of many spiritual and psychological traditions. Greater awareness also gives us

access to clearer choices in how we act, which of course helps us make our lives more fulfilling.

But greater awareness, like feeling happy or excited about life, isn't something that stays with you at the same level once you've accessed it. Like all learning processes, it's an individual journey that can be very non-linear. It takes you through all sorts of territory and back. When I get in contact with a profound part of myself, or step into an experience that gives me an expanded awareness of myself and my situation, I very often then have the experience of losing it and being frustrated by not being able to get it back again. I nearly always say to myself, "This is how I want to live. This is the attitude I want to take from now on." I take the belief that if I just hold onto it, I can stay there forever, and that will solve all my problems. Of course I always move on from it. I can rarely access it again the same way I got to it in the first place, and when I reach a place with a similar sense of clarity or power again, it feels as if I'm getting there for the first time.

Awareness of this sort is something that happens in the moment. It's not something we possess over time, or something a person can be as a permanent state of being. Choosing to become more aware of ourselves in any moment and doing that repeatedly over time, is a practice that develops our skill as a muscle, like doing math problems or drawing pictures. The more we do it, the more ease we have in doing it, and also the wider our general or more comfortable level of awareness becomes.

Similar to how practicing yoga affects our natural posture, the more we practice our awareness, the more we find it naturally available to us.

I like to think of it as a spectrum of wakefulness. At one end is a sort of sleepy, hypnotized state where I don't self reflect, and at the other is an ideal Buddha-like total consciousness. It's not my goal to reach the highest level of awareness and stay there. After all, there are many things I can't enjoy if I'm not totally absorbed by my experience. But I see myself as living on this spectrum, repeatedly waking myself up on purpose, which gives me more freedom of choice what kind of awareness I want to have, and continues to make those choices easier for me to make.

So, as we investigate and get to know ourselves, developing awareness and fluidity between different parts over time, what can it look like? And what are some useful attitudes to develop alongside this?

It's easy to appreciate that holding an accepting, supportive attitude to yourself is both more enjoyable and more useful than being overly critical. When I pay attention to it, I am sometimes quite shocked at how critical and hurtful I can be towards parts of myself, especially in judging that I'm not growing well or fast enough. Reminding myself to accept where I'm at, and to acknowledge that the things I criticize also contain gifts and strengths I'm not recognizing, is a practice all by itself. As I work on broadening my awareness, I also work on waking up with

love and compassion for my whole self. That includes also accepting the critical part, and allowing it to bring out its own gifts too.

Because the meanings of these words are difficult to define and are different for different people, I'll try and explain how I'm using them right now. I think of love in this context as supporting growth. It's an attitude that opens potentials, and it wants its object to become as free and strong as it can be. Looking at myself and all the parts of myself with this attitude, I feel expansive and parental at the same time. It is a gentle kind of support though, and I don't want it to slip into something more forceful which says I should or have to grow. It helps then to temper this with what I'm calling compassion. For me right now compassion is accepting what is. It's seeing, hearing and feeling all the parts as they are and accepting them just as they are, no matter how much other parts may judge them, or how much we feel we suffer through them. Really being loving and compassionate towards oneself is mostly either distorted or discouraged in modern culture. In a sense, taking this attitude toward yourself is a truly revolutionary thing to do.

Although the words love and compassion usually come together, holding both these attitudes as I've defined them can be somewhat of a paradox. Accepting ourselves exactly as we are and also supporting ourselves to change can seem contradictory. Doing both is also a long-term area of growth, which is great to approach with a loving and accepting attitude! Like other long-term processes, we find ourselves in

moments reaching new understandings, moving on and then finding understanding again. Each time our understanding is somehow deeper or includes more of ourselves.

Similarly, with the issues we work on over time, we find basic patterns we encounter and reformulate throughout our lifetimes. Whether it's a kind of relationship we get into over and over again, or a physical health issue or an addictive behavior, as we pay close attention to unfolding long term issues over time, we can see there are patterns that structure them all. Each time we encounter them in a different way, expressed in a different part of our lives, the underlying pattern is the same, but changing. The parts or figures in them usually develop and grow over time and the interactions between them become more fluid and communicative. However, these patterns can be painful and become destructive when we don't learn from them. Life tends to go in cycles and we will encounter the same stories over and over again. If we are open to change and to accepting the parts of ourselves in the stories that we don't yet identify with, each time we cycle we can go deeper and feel more fulfilled. If we are unable to change our identities, each time life cycles back to that story again, the problems seem bigger and affect us more, as if they are shouting louder and louder to get our attention.

One way to help recognize these patterns is to look at your childhood dream. That is the first dream you remember, or your first memory. That dream or memory is an allegory for your life path. All the

things in it are symbols for what you will encounter again and again. Imagine for a minute that nothing has a literal meaning, and that all objects can be symbols for something else. Then you might see your life's path as many dreaming experiences reflecting each other as they develop in depth and interaction between the parts. I see the similarity between the boy I was friends with when I was four and a man I am close to now. I also appreciate similarities between both of them and my own sense of independence and creative expression. In turn, I discover those same qualities in the star in my childhood dream, and they all are connected to a certain strength of purpose I contact through my hyperactive adrenal glands.

Much of the time it can seem as if there are several conflicting or even contradictory patterns, or we just get so knocked out or overwhelmed by our experiences we can't keep track or make any sense of them. It can help to keep reminding ourselves there is a way it makes sense, even if we can't see it from where we're standing right now. For me, just asking myself how what's happening now reflects my childhood dream or long-term body symptom patterns can help me to find my feet again. Here's an exercise that can help you focus in such moments. It's especially useful if you feel you need a fresh viewpoint or are looking for something you can't quite define.

Get yourself a large piece of paper and some color pens or crayons. What dream do you remember from your childhood? It might be the first

ever dream you remember, or it might be a recurrent dream you had many times. If you don't recall a dream from back then, what is your very first memory? Imagine this memory is actually a dream.

Play the dream over in your imagination, like a movie. Notice the colors, sounds or smells in the dream. How do things move, slow and smooth or fast and jerky? What characters are there, and what are the relationships between them? Remember that who you are in the dream is also a character. Don't leave yourself out. Who is trying to do what in the dream, and how does that affect others?

Divide your piece of paper into six boxes, like panels in a cartoon strip. Play the action of the dream again, and pick out four important moments, like scenes, and draw them in the first four boxes so they tell the whole story of the dream. Don't worry about making it a finished piece of art, just use the colors that seem right in the moment, and sketch the scenes quickly.

Now look at your pictures, especially at how the characters interact, and ask yourself what other character could also be present. See it as a play that's missing an actor. There's somebody else who's supposed to be there, but they need your help to turn up. Maybe in the dream there's a scary character that is doing something hurtful to a child. I'd imagine a character that's missing here is an adult or hero who protects the child. Other characters that might be missing are one who is loving and supportive, or one who is wise and knows important things. It could also

be that the more positive characters are present and the one who's missing is the troublemaker, or one who gets people to relate more by creating conflict.

In the fifth box, draw this missing character, and in the last box draw it in the dream, interacting with the others. Look at how they are with each other. Just observe them. Then ask yourself, what is the most important quality of the new character? If you were to feel that quality somewhere in your body, where would it be? Go ahead and feel that quality. Where in your life is that quality useful right now? Perhaps when you're in a situation where it would be helpful, you can remember the feeling and the new character in your childhood dream, and they can help you with what you are trying to do.

As you develop your self-awareness over time, you will notice many of the on-going issues you address can be understood to relate to each other in multiple ways, as if one story is being retold with different actors playing the roles a little differently and the action being seen from a different point of view. In this sense there is never anything really new, but the number of permutations of the same pattern is limitless.

There are many possible patterns and everybody experiences and expresses them in their own unique way. Likewise, everyone's process of growth and learning about and through these patterns is different. There is no formula for any of them. Hearing other people's experiences with something similar to our own can be helpful in many ways. They can



help us recognize we're not alone or deficient in some way because of our issues. We can also get inspiration from others for ways to address our stuff, but ultimately it is each person's individual experience that shows what works or doesn't work for them.

The dream figures within these patterns, as I've said before, are parts of ourselves that we need to identify more with. You may first experience them as very different from your usual self, fragmented and split off. Over time you'll get to know them and each time you meet them it may be just the same or a different aspect of the same basic figure. As you practice acknowledging them and including them in your definition of your self, you become more fluid and so do your parts. They grow and change with you, so the process never stops. Even as they become more integrated into who you are, you will keep on discovering new aspects of them and new gifts that they bring. Long-term change and growth results from accepting our parts into our identities over and over again, in many different ways and on many different levels of experience.

One long-term issue that can be good to focus on is our relationship to change within ourselves. For many of us change can be frightening, and we keep on clinging to our everyday identities even as parts of us have moved on and we are developing in other ways. The biggest change that can happen is death, which taken literally is a great subject because it doesn't often get talked about in modern culture.

Death is also a metaphor for change, and it shows up as that in our dreams, mythology and in divination tools such as the Tarot. In most spiritual traditions there is some kind of rebirth, and always what is old must die for the spirit to be born again. Death seen literally can also be a symbol for change. Sometimes a person might feel they are at the end of their life, or even feel suicidal (which most people do sometimes, at least for brief moments) and they might be feeling this because it's time for them to change. Sometimes the physical body isn't ready to die, but a habitual or old way of being or living needs to leave and make way for the new. As we so stubbornly hold onto what we're used to, it can take a shock, like a near-death experience, to get us to let go. This next exercise can help avoid the severity of such situations arising.

This is my favorite exercise. It's good for when you have suicidal thoughts, or for any reason feel you might die, but is also good for anytime there's an experience of stuckness, as if something needs to die or change radically. There could be an impossible situation inside or outside of you, that it seems the only escape from would be death. Or you can just do it because you feel like it. For me it's a great way to change my mood and perspective, or to just get away from my everyday self for a while. It's interesting for me that each time I do it I don't necessarily go to the same place.

Sit or lie down comfortably. Close your eyes and go inside your body. Notice your breathing, any movement in your digestion, tensions,

feelings of warm or cool, or your pulse. You don't need to change anything, just gently pay attention to how things are. Feel your weight against your chair, bed or floor. Notice if you are seeing or hearing something internally.

Now imagine that you are not your body, that the body is a place you have been living, and you can leave it if you want. It's ok, the body will look after itself while you are gone. You are a vapor inside this body. Imagine this vapor gathering up from the extremities and leaving out the top of the head.

You are a vapor, free now to go anywhere. Allow yourself to float and see where you go. Do you go up or down? Do you go to somewhere on the earth, or somewhere on another plane?

I'm leaving out the top of this head, and I look down at the body. I have a moment where I want to make sure it's going to be ok, and I reassure myself the body will be fine. Then I am able to relax and let myself float away. I immediately find myself in the clouds. It's a white sky, all clouds, just blank. It feels relieving to be in such simplicity, away from everything.

Where do you float or get blown to? Do you go up and out into the universe and beyond? Do you go deep into the earth? Go there and see, hear and feel the place with your vapor. Hang out there and take in the atmosphere and spirit of the place. Notice if you are drawn further. If you're in the earth, are you drawn inside a rock, or into the molten core?

If you're in a geographic place are you drawn to a particular part of it, or to go inside a cave or to the top of a building? What do you see, hear and feel? You'll know when you've got to the place you need when something feels like it's being deeply satisfied inside. Feel being in that place and feel that place in you. You don't have to do anything but be there, and just notice how it is there.

As I float around in the blank, white clouds, I'm aware of rain forming, and then I am hitting the ocean in a multitude of raindrops. It is exhilarating to fall, hit the surface, and merge with the enormity of the ocean. Then I am the ocean, and that's great, but I feel less fulfilled by that. For me, it's the experience of being rain hitting and merging with the water that is most satisfying right now. I stay with that. I feel the strong but very pleasant impact, and myself transform and spread out, and it happens millions of times. Changing from this falling, round form, through this delicious impact, to something formless yet still sensate and part of a larger whole.

Stay in this place for as long as you want.

When it's time to return, feel what's most satisfying about it and bring it with you. Breathe that spirit into your body. Feel it filling you down through the top of your head as you breathe in. Feel see and hear it coming into your whole body, and notice what that's like.

This is probably enough, but if you're interested to take another step, you can ask yourself what in your everyday life died in order for

you to have this experience and bring it back here. What's been keeping you in an old identity that has become too constricting? What is it time to let go of?

Paradoxically for me, it's a sense of slight dissociation from my body. The experience of being in the clouds is more usual for me; of getting away from physical life. The feeling of water impacting on water to me is a confirmation of coming into my body, of being physical and present. It's new because in the past when I've done this exercise it's been about getting away into a more spiritual, out of body state. It's amazing to me that the same exercise can take me to both directions. So what is dying in me right now is the need to escape physicality. I don't need to do that anymore. And what also needs to die and change is the experiences that led to the dissociation.

As you can see, going through the same exercise at different times can bring different experiences. Investigating the same issue, symptom or relationship problem at different times can also show us different aspects of ourselves. Just like our nighttime dreams, the Dreaming behind our everyday experiences is always shifting and growing, but also still connected deeply to our life patterns. To somehow track this for myself, over the years, I have been keeping a sporadic diary of how I investigate my experiences. It includes drawings and diagrams as well as words. I've also kept objects that symbolize parts of my process, such as rocks and feathers, photographs and figurines. It's interesting and

sometimes useful for me to appreciate how my patterns emerge again and again and also how they change, by looking back through what I've put on paper. For me, there is a spiritual sense of honoring my patterns and their parts that is supported by this and other ways I support my inner explorations of myself. You might want to keep a similar record yourself, and see what looking back over it brings to light for you. Have fun with it too. You might want to use a lot of color, add photographs, or cut pictures from magazines. Maybe you want to make a three-dimensional journal in sculptures?

When focusing on and unwrapping your experiences or taking an overview of your investigations over time, your attitude toward yourself is always important. Whether we are addressing a life-long and serious issue or something that just catches our attention in the moment, all of us can be self-critical or impatient, and sometimes downright cruel to ourselves. It's great to be able to tell this critical part to back off, but ultimately even that part needs to be appreciated. So holding a loving and compassionate attitude to yourself and all parts of you may be the most effective and important work you do. Just that in itself can allow positive changes to flow, and can change the way you live your life and relate to other people.

## Chapter Nine: More About Patterns

We live our lives constantly interweaving our everyday and dreaming experiences through our mythical patterns. What's happening in these patterns over time is all the different aspects of them are getting to know each other and themselves, as they change and grow. They all need our attention and awareness to develop and relate to each other more. Often a part or figure is pushing you to act it out more in your life, or to get into a particular state of mind. When I work on core issues, I often find myself drawn into a state of being deeply inside myself and detached from other people and my surroundings. This changes over time for me, as it used to be that I needed to cut myself off from the world and just go inside myself, but at the moment I am beginning to relate to others more while still being deeply in this state.

There are as many different patterns as there are people, but there are also common themes. An individual's life will be their own unique expression of one or more themes, much like each novel or movie expresses a mythical theme in its own particular way. I can't make a list of all the possible themes, as there are always bound to be more I haven't encountered yet, but here are a few that I have.

One example of a pattern that turns up over and over again for some people is one of introversion and extroversion, or being in one's own experience and the experience of relating to others. It will show up

in relationships in many different forms. A person will find themselves being the introverted one in some situations and being the extroverted one in others. It may also appear in body symptoms, such as repeated muscle strains or headaches, where one part of the experience is pushing for more expression and the other is trying to stay inside. It might also appear in a struggle about creativity, where the person may wish to produce something but feel held back by shyness or artist's block.

Another common pattern is one about communicating directly. This often shows itself where someone doesn't speak straight about what bothers them or what they need. He or she might hurt others unconsciously, as the energy of their hidden directness comes out accidentally and beyond their control. That person also might have dreams of guns, or may often cut themselves. They could have body symptoms that feel like something sharp or shooting pains.

Another long-term pattern is one about trauma and power. People who have been traumatized or very hurt can access a lot of personal power by investigating the part that does the hurting. The power itself is neutral and, even though it has been expressed in a destructive way, when the person can use it for him or herself it can be very positive and creative. People with this kind of process might not have had an external trauma or abusive experience, but may experience deep depressions, oppressive body symptoms, dangerous addictions and other forms of inner oppression. In their relationships they may tend to take a



submissive role, but may also have one or two friends whom they dominate.

There are patterns that are asking a person to open to spiritual experience, and there are ones that can bring you more in contact with physical reality. Some states come to people simply to make them dream more. We need all these different states of mind to be more whole. Life can become confining and two-dimensional if we always stay in our usual states of minds. These drives to experience different states can also create addictions or addictive tendencies. In fact, whenever we're really drawn to something, whether it could be harmful to our health or not, there is a dreaming experience within it, waiting to be explored. Seen in this way, even the potentially destructive forces of addiction can be unfolded into something useful. As we get to know the state we're reaching for from a sober state of mind, the addictive behavior may lose its power over us.

Such crucial life issues are also deeply connected to our patterns of hope and fear for what might happen to us. Seeing either the worst that could happen or the best way things could be is a viewpoint people can feel stuck in. This can apply to anything, relationships or individual issues, long or short term, as well as to how you see your personal development over time. Sometimes a person will go rapidly from believing in the best to believing in the worst and back again. Sometimes people will not be able to move from one or the other, and become

depressed or manic. The most useful long-term view is usually somewhere in between the two.

Let's do an exercise based on this best and worst idea. This is for when you have a dream of what you want or where you want to be in your life, and you also have fears about things not working the way you want them to. You can do this for any and all aspects of life, career, health, relationships, etc. I have focused on career, but as you can see, all aspects tend to come together when you work on one of them.

Get yourself comfortable and imagine what you want to be doing in life. It could be soon, or in several years. It could be a development of what you're already doing, or something completely different. Don't worry about how to get there, just imagine you are there. Write down what you do and what your life is like.

As I put myself in my dream for the future, I'm practicing process work with individuals and groups. I have a thriving practice and I also travel to many parts of the world to work with people and teach, especially in places of difficult conflict. I work with governmental organizations in places where people are at war. I'm good at what I do and I have a positive impact on the world.

Go completely into your dream and experience it fully. You can write down details of all aspects of your life if you want. What is your home life like? Your relationships? What do you do with your time that isn't spent working? What kind of vacations do you have? Get a sense of

what it feels like to be living that life.

In my dream I feel strong and uncomplicated. There's something very straightforward in how I express myself and use my skills in going for what I want.

Now put that aside and ask yourself what you fear could happen instead. What's the worst outcome for your life? Be honest with yourself and imagine how it would be if things turn out badly and you get all the things you don't want instead.

In mine, I've been laid off from my job and I'm working as a waitress or some other job that I am unsuited for and exhausts me. I don't make enough money to live well or to change my situation. I'm not skilled or well enough to keep up. I'm anxious and depressed. I get sick and have to live with family, which I feel very conflicted about. I can't get on with them, and end up living on the streets.

Investigate the details of where you're at in this worst place. What do you focus on? What do you have to deal with that otherwise wouldn't matter? What do you need here, that you wouldn't notice your need for if you were luckier?

You might notice a new strength coming out in you in this situation, or you might be focused on something you wouldn't have to deal with in your ideal life. Or perhaps the most pressing aspect of your worst life fantasy is noticing something you need. Choose which one of these is strongest for you and work with that.

My only focus here is survival. All my attention is taken up with what I will eat, where I will sleep, and how I will keep myself safe from predators. It's very hard to find food that's healthy for me, as I have to rely on charity, so I have no energy for anything but basic survival. As I focus on this, I feel surprisingly alive. Something primal in me is awakened and strong, that I otherwise might not notice if I had an easier life.

If you find a kind of strength in you here, investigate it. What is this power? Where does it originate? How do you feel it in your body?

If you are forced to deal with an issue or situation, explore what comes up for you as you focus on it. Leaving the fantasy aside for a moment, ask yourself how that issue shows up in your life right now? Where or how are you not invested in it? If you experience problems with it, what causes those problems? What feeling or belief gets in the way of you being more satisfied about this issue? How do you notice it that thing that gets in the way? Do you see, feel or hear it? Maybe you taste it? Give it your attention now, and bring it to all your senses, one by one. Feel how it is in your body. Make an image of it. Hear its sounds and voice them. Move like it. Remember that staying still is also a movement.

In my example, addressing basic survival needs feels like it needs more attention, so I question if I'm addressing those things enough in my life now. Maybe I am, at a real life level, but inside myself am I really invested in my survival? Where am I not?

This is difficult for me to focus on, and that tells me its important. I close my eyes and go inside myself, and I look for what I'm doing that doesn't support my own survival. I have a physical sensation of not quite filling my body, as if I'm holding my energy in. My hands and feet feel weak. Part of me is holding back. It feels deep in my chest. It's holding tight and holding my breath. I want to know why it is doing this.

I could investigate this in many ways. I could draw a picture of it, or I could use a stuffed animal to represent it, or I could just become it myself. I decide to become it and I step into it inside me, like an actor stepping into a role. I sit a little curled over and I clench my fists close in to my body. My feet curl up too. At first I feel angry, but as I keep with it, I feel more the strength of the tension in my core and hands and feet. I am holding on to myself, so I can feel only myself and not anything outside of me. My fists come up to cover my eyes. I'm bearing down on the muscles deep in my body and feeling myself deep inside. I'm blocking everything else out. I refuse to let anything in. I see nothing but the darkness inside my own body. The tension comes up out of my throat in a growl and I shake my head with it. It feels really good to just connect deeply with only myself.

This is a focus on a different aspect of survival. It's my insistence on being myself and having my own experience of myself, not influenced by anything from outside.

If what stands out for you most is that there's something you need

in this worst life scene, pay attention to that need now. Is it something someone else could give you? Even if in reality it's not, like better health, imagine somebody is giving it to you. What is this person like? Close your eyes and imagine you are with this person now, and they are giving you the thing you need. Notice how it is to receive it. Are you seeing it? Feeling it? What senses do you notice it with? Accept this gift and allow your body to move or change posture along with the experience of accepting it. Feel how your body feels to receive it and allow yourself to be immersed in this feeling. Notice if it changes the tensions in your body, or your breathing.

What do they look like and how do they move? How do they relate to you. How do they give you what you need? Become that person and give that thing to yourself now. Take your time and notice what it's like to move, speak and feel as this figure.

Whichever you are working with, the life issue or the unfilled need, explore and enjoy it. You might draw a picture of it, write a poem about it, or sing a song. Get into it and feel how it is in your body. Scan your body and find the place where you feel it most. What part of your body does it feel most a part of? Describe to yourself what it feels like there.

What place on the earth is like this feeling? It could be somewhere you've been, somewhere you've heard about, or somewhere you imagine. Go to this place in your mind and take in its atmosphere. What is it like to be present there? Feel that.

When I do this, I'm working with my experience of holding into myself, because that's the strongest for me. In my body, I feel it most in my lower abdomen. It feels like a solid presence, and I see it as dark grey. It feels like a place I've been in England, called Ludd's Church, which is a small canyon-like cleft in the rock of a hill. It is dark and cool there, and there are bats. It feels to me there like being in contact with deep forces in the earth.

Now make the presence of that place into a person. What human or human-like character embodies it? Mine is an androgynous person made of rock. It's large and heavy and moves very slow. Now step into this figure. Take some time to really become it, and then look at your usual self with your concerns about where your life is going. What do you as this earth figure do or say? Do you have a gift for the everyday self? What is your advice?

My heavy rock person says, "Feel the weight of your body. Be in the physical strength and inner sensations of your body. Explore and experience yourself. The outside stuff will come along from there."

When you've finished, if you're wondering about the good dream where your life is exactly as you want it, you can also do the same and find a figure in that. Just go back fully into that dream and notice how you feel there. Find out where that is strongest in your body, and find a place on the earth that feels like it, and then the figure that embodies that.

You might get a figure very similar to the one from the worst life dream, or they might be very different. It could be fun to play with these and see how they might interact with each other. You could do this with stuffed animals, or you can act them out with your hands, or any other way you come up with. Does something more come from their interaction that's useful for you?

Picking up what's useful in our best and worst possible outcomes can also help us be more comfortable living somewhere in between them, where we have a lot of what we want, and things are also not perfect. For me, it's also a place of acceptance similar to the attitudes of love and compassion I wrote about earlier. It's also just another place we get to be in for a time until we move on, always continuing through the different states and experiences of our lives, until we come back to it again, discovering it as new, and experiencing it slightly differently. Along the way we develop our capacity for awareness, getting to know and flow with the many different aspects of ourselves, and giving ourselves access to more choice and freedom both inside ourselves and in our environments. While we do this and also interact with the others in our lives, we also have an effect on them, perhaps reflecting for them the awareness and choices they have access to, and deepening all our relationships and experiences of intimacy.

On the other end of the spectrum from exploring intricately the patterns that govern our lives, we can also sometimes get to what we



deeply need quite quickly. When faced with a difficult decision, all our usual ways of thinking as well as the underlying patterns can get in the way of our seeing clearly what we need to do. Usually the way we make decisions or the difficulties we encounter with them are intertwined with our long-term patterns. Sometimes, instead of going deeply into the problem itself, it can be right to take a lighter approach. The following exercise can be done quicker than those described above, and may be a less intense experience. It can bring just as profound insights, though. It's similar to the one in chapter seven about the good and the difficult parts of a relationship. It's based on the mathematical concept of vectors, and it can be adapted for any topic. As I describe it here it is useful for when you need to make a decision between two choices, but you can add in as many as you need. Just walk as many lines as you have choices to consider, starting each time from the end point of the last. In the last step, walk from the first beginning point to the end of the last line. You will need three or more small objects to mark places on the floor, and pen and paper.

Think about a decision you have to make. What is the situation around it? How would you usually address such a situation? What are the pressures on you surrounding it? What would you achieve by making the "right" decision? Write down your answers.

Stand up and mark a "starting point" on the floor, probably in the middle of the room, so it gives you freedom to move in any direction.

Keep the other two objects with you, in your pocket if you have one, so you can mark the other two points easily.

Now, think of one of your choices. Imagine yourself taking that course of action. See yourself in this scene and interacting with other people in it. Feel in your body how it is to take this course.

Stand at your starting point, close your eyes and put your attention inside yourself. See, feel and hear yourself making this first choice. Keeping deeply in contact with this, slowly turn around on the spot and feel which direction you are moved in. The scenario you are imagining of this first choice can be represented as a compass direction. Your body is the needle in the compass, and you can find it just by turning slowly and finding the way that just feels right with the choice scenario in your imagination.

When you find it, slowly take a few steps in that direction. Walk until you feel you have arrived there, and mark your place on the floor. If you encounter an obstacle, like the wall, mark your place and continue in that direction in your mind until you feel it's completed.

Stay at that point on the floor, and think of the second possible choice. Close your eyes and imagine doing this. See, feel and hear yourself going through the actions of that choice, and turn slowly on the spot until you feel which direction that choice moves you in.

Slowly take some steps in that direction until you feel you've gone as far as it goes. Mark your end point on the floor.

Now go back to your original starting point and stand facing the final end point. You are going to walk the third side of the triangle, or the sum of the two choice vectors.

Stand at the starting point and face the end point. Forget everything you've been working on, all the choices, all your imaginings, everything around you. Let your mind go fuzzy. Maybe half close your eyes and take a few breaths. Now walk in a straight line to the end point. As you walk, keep your mind and eyes unfocused. Allow your body to move however it wants to. If your feet seem to place themselves slowly and deliberately, just allow them to do that. If your arms or other parts of your body move quickly or jerkily, do that. There is no goal here, just walk the line, feel the direction you are walking, and let your body move any way it wants to.

When you get to the end, go back to the beginning and walk the line again. Each time you walk it, just notice how your body walks this line and allow these movements and feelings to happen. Keep on repeating the line, and walk it slower and slower, keeping the same quality to your movements. Notice if you have an image or sound emerge from this experience. Keep walking and see and hear what you're experiencing. Make the sounds that go along with the movements.

Like an actor putting on a role, totally become the character that's emerging. Move like it. You can move any way it wants to, not just on

the line if it feels right. See the world as this character. What kind of being are you? Give this being a name.

Now, as this being, look back at the decision between the choices. What do you notice from there? Is there something you have to tell the everyday you about the overall situation? about one or another choice? What advice do you have for yourself from this being? Take some time with this part. Stay in this character and fully experience it relating to the everyday you. How do you as this being feel towards the everyday one? Do you have something to give her/him? Do you suggest one choice over the other? Or is your advice more about how to make the decision than the decision itself?

Write down what this being says and does.

When you are ready, come back to your everyday self and look at what you've written down. Imagine how you will use the advice. Maybe there's a change in your attitude to the situation. Look back at what you wrote at the beginning of the exercise. How do those answers relate to the advice from the sum-vector being? They might represent two different attitudes. Take a few moments to appreciate them both, and know they are both parts of you.

## Chapter Ten: Beyond Patterns

Where do the patterns that structure our lives come from? In the western psychological tradition people are usually seen in terms of their personal history; how they fit in their family of origin, what stressful experiences they've had, etc. Seen from a more dreaming perspective, personal history is one expression of our life-myth or pattern, and there is also much more to each one of us. There are those traits that people seem to just be born with and they don't share with other family members, and people often have experiences of having come from somewhere bigger or deeper than their current life situation.

Personal history expresses and reflects the dream figures and patterns beneath it, and beneath the stories of those dream figures is a realm of Dreaming where conflicts and separateness don't exist. I believe we and our experiences arise from here; the deep mystery of existence. It is the Tao that cannot be said, and also the Judeo-Christian God, as well as the Hindu God Vishnu who dreams the universe. It is also Native American Great Mystery, and all the other names that all forms of spirituality have given it. By definition, it is unknowable, but we can track our senses to get close to it. We can discover experiences that are just differentiated from it; nameable, but not yet caught up in a story. Discovering the parts of ourselves on this level can be a powerful way to work with our everyday relationship to ourselves as well as our big

concerns. It can also be a spiritual practice by itself. In Process Work, this part of the Dreaming is called Essence.

Sometimes when addressing a problem, it can be more helpful to drop down to the essence level. Doing this momentarily bypasses the drama of dream figures. We can find a way under them to where new parts of our identities are emerging, rather than pushing ourselves where it can feel too difficult. This is because dream figures can be perceived as positive or negative, while the spirit or essence that drives them is neutral. If I find a dream figure of a monster that is too scary for me to interact with or try to play, I can focus instead on the essential nature of this figure. When I do this, I am going to the essence level. Doing so can be especially useful with issues around trauma or abuse. Each approach will be useful at different times.

For many people it feels more natural to investigate experiences at this level because they are already very connected there and are aware of it. People who are in contact with their deeper, more essence-like, experiences often need to find a vocabulary with which to understand and express them. When we don't have a way of naming and comprehending what we perceive, we can feel split from ourselves, or as if we aren't quite whole much of the time. We need to find ways to bring those less understood experiences into more contact with our everyday lives. Much of modern western culture doesn't address or acknowledge deep, difficult to express, or spiritual experiences. If they are recognized,

they are often classified to fit into a belief system, and rarely investigated, as if it is somehow wrong to explore them. The cultural norm of not talking about or discovering more about them can make people feel crazy. Bringing awareness to these deeper experiences is a way to honor them, which can bring them closer to our usual identities and give us more access to our wholeness.

When exploring such essence type experiences we can also feel a profound connection with our environments and other people, or an awareness of how inseparable we are. When we do so, we address global issues like the modern split between humanity and the rest of nature, and the divisions within our species. We are in a sense, then, investigating these things for everybody, not just ourselves.

The following exercise, which is one way of exploring essence level perceptions, can be done anytime. You can do it as a regular meditation or to ground yourself in your deeper experience in times of confusion or stress. You can start with a question or an issue you'd like advice on, but you don't have to. Just exploring and contact with your essential self is a goal also. If you have a question, ask it clearly and write it down.

Sit comfortably and just notice your body. Close your eyes and feel how it is inside of you right now. Notice your breathing. You don't have to change anything, just feel how it is. Notice how it feels to be in contact with your chair or the ground. How do your clothes feel against your skin? Now put your attention inside further and observe what it's like

inside your body. Maybe you notice particular tensions, some aches or other symptoms, or the movement of breath and blood. Just feel what you feel for a minute.

Now scan what you feel internally and notice which part of your body feels most connected to something deep right now. Whatever that means for you in this moment is right. Find that part of your body that is deeply connected, and feel what it feels like. Notice the particular quality of that feeling. You don't have to name it or describe it. Just feel its unique presence. Feel this for a little while.

Now, what place on earth has the same quality as this feeling? It might be a place you've been to, or seen pictures of, or it could be somewhere you've never heard of. What place feels the same as that feeling inside you?

Go there in your imagination. See the landscape, the plants, and any buildings there might be. See the quality of light. Is it night or day? Hear the sounds there. Is there running water? Birds? Other sounds? Feel the air temperature and humidity. Really be in this place and take it all in. Stay here for as long as you want.

Then imagine the spirit of this place as a being. It could be humanoid, or like an animal or a tree or rock. Let this being visit you now, still in this place. Notice how it feels to be in its presence.

Now, step into this being. Become it, like you are taking on its role, and feel what its like to be inside its body. Take your time with this, and



notice what this being sees, hears and feels. How do you move as this being? Move your hands how this being moves, and even get up and move your whole body like it. It may stay still, in which case, just feel what that particular stillness is like. Make sounds as this being, and find out what its voice is like.

When you have become this being fully, look back at the human self. What do you see? Acknowledge and appreciate the human you are meeting with from the deep spirit of the land within you. Is there something you want to tell this human? Is there something you have to give her or him? Say it or give it now. You may have an impulse to touch or hold this person. Trust and follow your impulse. If there was a question or a specific issue, address that now. Give your human self some specific advice. Take your time and experience this.

When this feels complete, step back again into the human self. Stay in this place, with this being, and experience receiving what it has given you. Hear its advice, and physically accept what it gives you. Stay with this experience as long as feels right for you.

As you prepare to come back to your everyday world, notice again the unique quality of this place, which you first felt inside part of your body. Feel this quality around and in you now, and give it a simple name. It could be “solidity of black rock” or “soft warmth of tropical night.” Find a few words that convey this quality for you.

When you are ready, open your eyes and write these words down, as well as any other part of the experience you'd like to record. Later on, you can experiment with coming back to this quality whenever you think of it. Notice if it changes how you are with yourself and other people. When I do this exercise as a morning meditation, I go inside and reconnect with the quality each time I think of it through the day. I sometimes go to the same place, but often the place and the quality are very different each day.

Doing this exercise and other explorations like it can bring us totally new perspectives on life. The attitude of the nature spirits you meet there can bring change and new possibilities to your usual outlook on life, even if it feels stuck. It can be quite amazing to see how your problems look from this perspective. Even the worst things that seem impossible to fight or accept can appear as more of nature unfolding, which can soften how much we suffer from them. New ways of relating to and dealing with our problems can emerge that can be truly life changing.

We can also learn to access these viewpoints quicker by stepping briefly out of our usual point of view. Remember to ask yourself once in a while, "what do you notice?" and recall that what you notice has meaning for you. When addressing an issue or situation you might like a fresh viewpoint on, or some advice, you might catch something out of the corner of your eye. Your attention might be caught by a sound, you

might feel something in your body, or you might recall a fragment of a dream. Unwrapping the messages inside these often subtle and transient experiences can bring immediate insights and tools for addressing the issue at hand.

Here's how you can practice doing that. Ask a question or think of an issue you would like some insight into. Now, close your eyes and let your mind go fuzzy. Go into that state you're in just before you fall asleep; not focused on anything, and kind of cloudy. Still in this fuzzy state, gently open your eyes and look around in a relaxed way. Just notice something that calls your attention, and allow your gaze to rest on it. What is it about this thing that draws you? Is it the color, texture or shape, or is it the whole object itself? Is it something that moves in a certain way, or has a particular purpose?

Now, as if that object or aspect of it were a character in a play, become it. Experience yourself as that particular shade of orange, or as a tape dispenser, or as a fly. Just step right into it, fully be it, and then look back at the question. What answer or insight do you have from here? The more you practice this, the quicker you can do it. You can get to where it only takes a few seconds to notice something and find out its message, and then take that into consideration in whatever you're doing.

Following our momentary messages, as well as contacting deeper parts of ourselves, helps us to find our own guidance and follow our own paths rather than trying to follow what others or our culture expect. It

might feel strange or uncomfortable to focus on your inner reality so much. As you explore more and use what you find over time, though, you can find yourself able to follow your inner experiences and relate to others at the same time. If you have a similar experience to me, it might feel like bringing two worlds together, and they fit surprisingly well. If it's right for you to practice often, you will probably find yourself bringing more of your deeper dreaming experiences into your everyday activities and relationships.

As well as finding those dreaming messages for insights into the moment, we can also consult our deeper, essential dreaming for guidance over things more long-term. Here's a way to access the wisdom of that deeper level to help find your way when there aren't clear choices. You can use it for help with a particular issue, or in a broader sense as deep path finding. You will need a large piece of paper and colors, and a camera if you have one. You will also need to go outside for part of the exercise. This may work best in a natural setting, but you can also do it in the city if you won't be distracted by people.

Before you start, ask yourself who you are at this point in your life. What are you most involved with, or what has most of your attention? What do you enjoy, and what troubles you? What large or long-term issue would you like some guidance on? Even if it is a general question, formulate it clearly and write it down.

Now remember your childhood dream or first memory. Who are you in the dream? Are you a child or something else? What other characters are there? Where does it take place, and what happens? Remember the whole dream. Choose one moment in the dream that has the most charge for you now. It could be part that you really like, or part that is scary or mysterious. Take a large piece of paper and draw this scene from your dream. Don't worry about making a great piece of art. Stick figures are fine, but represent everything in this scene, including the general atmosphere or mood. Use colors that feel right for each part.

When the scene is complete, stand back and look at it. (Put your camera in your pocket, as well as some paper and a pen, so you have them with you later.) This picture is one face of your life's dreaming, and you are going to ask it for guidance. Ask out loud the question you wrote down earlier.

Now stand and, as you keep looking at the picture, allow yourself to go fuzzy. Let your focus soften and finally close your eyes. Feel your body, your balance, your breathing and any other small movements, and notice if you have a tendency to move in some way. It may be that you stay still, and this is also a movement. Stay fuzzy and unfocused, and feel how your body wants to move on its own, without the mind giving it directions. Does your body want to lean to one side? Does it want to twist or stretch up? Do your arms or legs move or shake? Just observe

this tendency, and then very very slowly let your body move. Stay fuzzy and just follow as your body slowly moves the way it wants to.

Keep on following this, and imagine that something is moving you. Allow this to happen, give up any intention you may still have, and allow this thing to move you in its own particular dance. Now, still moving with the flavor of that dance, allow what's moving you to walk you around the room a little, and then outside. Of course, remain safe if you are near a road or anything dangerous, but keep your mind fuzzy, and allow what's moving you to choose the direction. Don't worry about where you might be going. Just follow for a while.

From your fuzzy mind state, notice one thing that draws your attention. Walk to it, or as close as you can get, and see what it is that draws you to it. Is it one particular aspect of it, color, shape, or texture? Is it something you see, or something you hear? Imagine what dream like thing makes this sound, or imagine a character that embodies the quality you see. Allow yourself to experience just this quality or sound, and then become the character that embodies it.

Stand like this being. Feel how it feels inside of it, and make its sounds. Begin to move like it. When you are ready, recall the question that your human self asked earlier. As this being, answer the question. Write down your answer, and also give your human self any other message you as this being might have. Take your time with this.

When you are finished, take a picture of the object that gave rise to this being. If you like, you can print up the picture, and write the being's message on it, and pin it up somewhere you can see it. This can help bring the dreaming message into your everyday life, both because of the effort it takes to do it and through remembering your message every time you see it.

As I have said, investigating these deeper levels of dreaming, as well as the parts and patterns in our lives, helps us to be more fluid in how we identify ourselves. This can make it easier on us when we face problems or big changes. If we investigate and accept the nature spirit and essential parts of us, they can open our attitudes to life and other people. Often we find a place from where we view ourselves and others with more love and compassion, which changes us, and also changes the world we live in.

As we become more and more comfortable including other parts of ourselves in our self definitions, in moments we can even expand those definitions to include our world. We can experience at first hand the interconnectedness, in fact oneness, of all beings, and this gives us an invaluable tool for addressing difficulties and conflicts. From here there can spring an easy understanding of humanity and the family of all species and beings.

In this writing I have tried to lay out some of the wonderful ideas and skills I've learned from my teachers in Process Work. As I mentioned at the beginning, learning these things has radically changed my life, and over the years allowed me to become who I am. I hope I have conveyed them to you in a way that is readable and useful. As with any teaching, I suggest you take what works for you and leave what doesn't, and change whatever you want to change.

If you are interested to read further, take a look at the suggestions for further reading. If you'd like to find a Process Work practitioner or take classes, look online at [processwork.org](http://processwork.org). This is the website for the Process Work Institute in Portland, Oregon, USA. There is contact information listed for local Process Workers, as well as classes and trainings available at the institute. If you click on "Therapy" and then "International Process Workers," you will find links to practitioners and trainings in over twenty countries. Many teachers of Process Work travel, so if you live in a country not listed, it's worth contacting the Process Work Institute to find out if someone teaches classes near you.

I wish you the best of adventures inside your wonderful self, and to live more and more of that whole self in the world.



## Suggestions for Further Reading

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## A Note on Grammar

For the pedantic grammarians among us, of which I am usually one, I need to note my repeated use of the plural third person when referring to one person of indeterminate gender. This may be technically wrong according to the current authorities on such matters, but is the least clumsy way I have of avoiding saying “he or she” every other sentence. For me it is also the most politically correct pronoun to use, since “she or he” excludes people who define themselves as both or neither.

I have also read that not so long ago, before English grammar was officially codified, using “they” as second person singular was entirely acceptable, and was used much like its equivalent, “sie,” in German.