



# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

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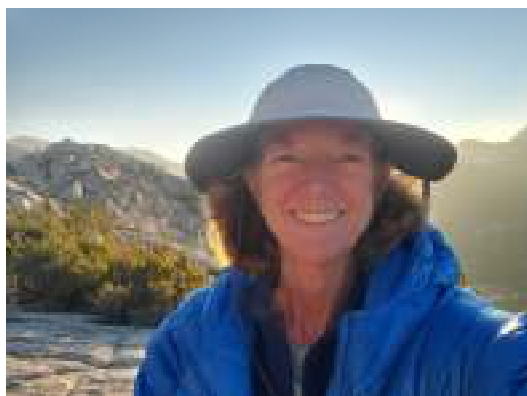


# Somatic Psychotherapy Today

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### **An Editor's Thoughts**

This has been an interesting year. With Covid 19 morphing into nasty variants, my parents aging gracefully yet with significant health concerns, and my taking a year long hiatus from work, life has been anything but familiar.

I found myself dipping in and out of overwhelm, feeling lost more than found. Then I did a three week solo backpack on the John Muir Trail. I

faced challenges head on. Some more successfully than others. I dealt with some tricky turn arounds that others might consider as failures, but I noted my flexibility, ingenuity, resiliency and resolve. I learned how to sense into my rhythm, to feel into my beingness and discovered that I was not happy living per other people's time frames and biorhythms. I realized I like moving slow. I appreciated time to simply sit and do nothing. I returned to the pages of a journal and stories flowed.

Coming home returned me to the same place yet in a different state. I wasn't the woman who left 21 days before. I valued the time apart, away, alone, and plan to make more space for solo treks into the wilderness, both on the trail and in my own living room.

This issue of SPT Magazine offers articles published online this past year for readers who do not follow us on Facebook and LinkedIn. I hope 2022 brings a return of contributors willing to share their experiences and clinical knowledge with our readers.

Warmly,

Nancy Eichhorn, PhD, Founding Editor and Chief, SPT Magazine

Front Cover designed years ago and never used by Diana Houghton Whiting



## The Online Setting and Body Psychotherapy



By Genovino Ferri

During the pandemic, I considered the repercussions that existed and the modifications necessary to use my time most effectively with clients in the online psychotherapeutic setting.

Despite the impositions and limitations of our electronic settings, I considered how we most effectively, most efficiently, and most nementropically adapted to our unanticipated, new reality.

Having examined the structural variations of the on-line psychotherapeutic setting, enriched with psychodynamic-neuroscientific aspects, I propose an increase in the intersubjectivity and in the intercorporeity in the setting from an analytical-corporeal perspective in psychotherapy. This objective can be achieved by increasing sensory intelligence centred on attention to facial expression and prosody, as well as on analytical-therapeutic bodily activations.



The psychotherapeutic setting during the pandemic can be compared to an open, complex, intelligent living system which requires a new equilibrium, a new structuring and renewed "cerebral plasticity" to continue to exist. It is a living system which must *learn to be aware of new dynamics* and must *re-individuate the two active ingredients representing its resilience in the setting, returning to them (the therapeutic relationship and analytical-therapeutic bodily activations)*, to continue being appropriate and potent, without getting lost, without becoming "de-material-ised" and disorganised in gradual entropic steps or slipping into entropic vortices.



### **Awareness of new dynamics**

We no longer inhabit the same space in the setting, there being two different locations for the analyst and for the person being analysed, which is to say that although the therapist and the patient are still present in the relationship, the reality of the distance between their two locations is evident and must be taken into consideration.

The dyadic relationship is more difficult, being filtered and reduced by having to pass through computer screens. The epidermis and contact (etymologically derived from the Latin *contactus, contingere*, meaning "to touch") are missing, olfactory exchange of aromas is missing, as is the energetic field interaction of being in the same, real space, which marks the field atmosphere in the setting on the person and on their movement and, in addition, all the associated enactivity is missing.

Postural position, on an online monitor, is largely facing the other and sometimes only from the chest up, or even only from the neck up. Feeling, like corporeity, which is the foundation for intersubjective communication, sees its means of connection reduced and sees its own space in the relationship reduced in a kind of "sensory bottle-neck".

To put it in bodily terms, feeling relies on the inter-ocular relational-space and on verbal dialogue, which, in fact, polarise online, psychotherapeutic portals.

We are still spending the same *time* "together" as we would otherwise, although it is now pervaded by the external "time of the pandemic", which is the new variable around the patient and therapist, obliging them to meet as analyst and person being analysed in the *online psychotherapeutic setting*.



The arrival of the pandemic has introduced new pathogenic factors, the consequences of which must be resolved in online psychotherapeutic setting time.

Neuroscientifically, it is the limbic circuits and, in particular, the anterior cingulate gyrus, that suffer most from time being stolen from relationships. It is the limbic circuits that carry the affective-relational spectrum to the central level, including themes regarding abandonment, loss, and exclusion.

Separation through social distancing, which is a paradoxically effective method of defence against the virus, leads to the activation of the "exclusion and threat of affective loss" receptors.

In addition to the threat of limbic, affective loss, the fact there is a pandemic caused by an invisible, lethal virus further reinforces the external threat to life which the amygdala is highly sensitive to.

Lastly, in terms of neuromediators, the fact that the already much reduced reserve of 5HT serotonin, which is fundamental in human mammals for affective modulation, risks being further depleted, brings to my mind important questions:

- ◆ Where has the previous dopaminergic acceleration, which is now being compressed by the limit the pandemic represents, moved to?
- ◆ What effect will it have on anxiety and panic disorders, on borderline and cluster B disorders, on depressive and cyclothymic disorders and, even, on psychotic decompensation?
- ◆ Will the extraordinary solution of online psychotherapy be sufficient for the new *internal time* in the setting?
- ◆ In Contemporary Reichian Analytical terms, will reinforcing the presence of the 1<sup>st</sup> relational bodily level, eyes, of the 2<sup>nd</sup> relational bodily level, mouth, and the rest of the face" be sufficient?
- ◆ Are our faces, through the facial muscles, currently the last, and only, areas of our bodies capable of expressing our emotions and our sentiments?
- ◆ Could these come to represent the only means of access for the psychotherapeutic relationship?



## Body Psychotherapy's Two Active Ingredients in the Online Setting

### The Therapeutic Relationship

The therapeutic relationship represents the first active ingredient in psychotherapy, and it is not merely simple, interactive communication entrusted to chance, but should, rather, be underlined as being a third presence and a third living entity, which can expand dialogue into tri-ologue.

This is the only way the therapeutic relationship can achieve its own individuation in the setting and, thus, also permit a new interpretation of the *placebo effect* which, according to confirmed evidence, can represent 40% of the improvement in cases of depression (Jama Psychiatry, 2015). The placebo effect is due to  $\mu$ -receptor (Mu-receptor) activation by opioids, which are clearly visible on PET scans, and produce a similar response to that produced after treatment with citalopram (a serotonergic antidepressant), which also activates those same central  $\mu$ -receptors.

The therapeutic relationship is a careful co-construction which responds to well-codified laws. Above and beyond the contents exchanged, the therapeutic relationship is built on "trait language" interaction through the expression of character traits in Contemporary Reichian Analytical terms.

Speaking psychodynamically, the implicit requests are deposited in the *how* of the communication and even more so in a complex scene such as in the case of online setting.





*How and where do you read the implicit requests?*

*You do it by increasing sensory intelligence!*

Man has two ways of communicating, one being numerical and the other analogical, both of which modify the synapses.

Numerical communication features content, while analogical communication features relationship.

Analogical communication belongs largely to body language and is expressed in the *how*. It orders and classifies what we say, and it communicates about communication and, in fact, it is meta-communicating and directing and delimiting the course of the Relationship.

Analogical language originated in ancient, phylo-ontogenetic time in our evolution and is defined by the nature of eye-contact, by facial expression, by voice prosody and by head, body, arm and hand and leg movements.



Analogical language brings *time* into the depths of the *body*, into *communication* and into *relationships* and, in particular, it introduces time for feeling, which is a time to be sensed three-dimensionally internally and connected to our "perceptive intelligence" (etymologically, "intelligence" is derived from *inter-legere*, meaning "reading into" or "reading between").

In expressive online language, the eyes' *how* (which could be empty, distant, terrified, suspicious or avoiding, for example, or may, alternatively, be joyous, luminous, moist or enthusiastic) is accompanied by the *how* of the facial expression (which may be smiling, supportive, or including, or could, otherwise, be reproachful, accusing or excluding) and they are both also accompanied by voice prosody (derived from the Greek *prós*, meaning "towards" and *ōidé*, meaning "song").

Prosody can refer to voice quality (such as softness/harshness, breathiness, and nasality) and suprasegmental prosodic features, such as stress, prominence, rhythm, and intonation. Prosody tells us about character traits (in Contemporary Reichian Analysis), but also, in other words, about the modulation of the voice, which is so dear to Stephen Porges (Porges, 2014), Bessel van der Kolk (Van der Kolk, 2015), and Giuseppe Ferraro, the philosopher, who defines the voice as "breath made into sound" (Ferraro, 2013).

The *how* becomes the privileged pathway for seeing, feeling, and listening "three-dimensionally", to be able to build the *relationship* together and, thus, the triologue, in the setting. This permits an appropriate counter-transferential response to the implicit request presented by the person in the setting.

*What about the rest of the body?*

Considering that bodily activations also modify the synapses, can we make the rest of the body a precious resource for the online setting, instead of excluding it?

### **Analytical-Therapeutic Bodily Activations**

Throughout the person's development, during the successive evolutive stages, implicit requests are stratified onto the respective prevalent bodily levels (for each stage), reflecting the needs experienced while passing through that relational period.

Implicit requests, therefore, inform our expressive *how* and are the outcome of our object relationships with the other-than-ourselves, representing the results of interactions which have been acquired during the real, unique story of each of our lives.

Relationships, with their unique, specific patterns from our own life-stories, therefore, dwell in the "Time in the Body"; they dwell in the relational locations within the body in which the ontogenetic, evolutive stages are the first to receive them as they are marked and deposited; (it could be said that they dwell in a kind of chest-of-drawers with each drawer representing a different level in our body, or on the different "floors" of an "apartment building" representing our personality, as I like to put it).



The relational imprintings from our lives, from our intrauterine time through to today, are afferent, in a bottom-up direction, moving from the portals represented by the bodily periphery to the central nervous system. Relational imprintings then return to the periphery, in a top-down direction, and are expressed from the relational locations.

Analytical-therapeutic bodily activations are, therefore, revealed to be extraordinary passwords permitting access through the body's afferent portals to travel along the corticospinal pathways (Ammanniti & Gallese, 2014) and reach the central nervous system; bodily activations are, thus, able to modulate the synapses and the neurotransmitters even in the individual central areas.

Moreover, bodily activations, which act on the relational bodily locations of the person in the setting, are informed by a set of phylo-ontogenetic movements, common to all individuals. These movements, performed in bodily activations, derive from specific periods of time in the sequence of evolutive stages and are stratified as confirmed by neuroscience.

Acting from the body to the mind, bodily therapeutic activations can "unveil" our specific historical life experiences while, at the same time, "revealing" which afferent pathways can represent precious therapeutic intervention for each of us.

Analytical-Therapeutic Bodily Activations can therefore signify (etymologically from the Latin *significare*, meaning to "mark incisively") psychotherapy, or, perhaps, rather, determine the *character* of psychotherapeutic intervention (etymologically "character", from Greek and Latin, means "incised mark").

### **Can we use the body definitively in online psychotherapy?**

My answer is "yes", even though I am aware that it can only ever be partially present online compared to a normal face-to-face session.

If the "setting" in psychotherapy means the space we operate in, then:

- The concept of setting can be understood as having variable geometry and can be expanded to also include online sessions.
- physical space for activations can be included in the online setting, in addition to relational time and
- when arranging appointments, the person doing psychotherapy can be asked to find their own physical space to do bodily activations during the online session. Thus, they can be protected from new risks and cannot get lost, dematerialised or disorganised in gradual entropic steps or in sudden entropic vortices.



In this way, you also implicitly pass on the request to act in terms of self-organisation in a different room to that used in the face-to-face setting, which represents a highly intriguing meta-message.

***Some preliminary conditions:***

Given that analytical-therapeutic bodily activations normally make psychotherapy more complex, because they add activation of the corticospinal pathways to cortical motor activation, the introduction of online activations raises the bar further in terms of complexity.

For this reason and to avoid increasing the risk of a "liquid" form of psychotherapy, as we do in Contemporary Reichian Analysis, before asking the person to lie down on the mattress, we must certainly be absolutely clear about the diagnosis.

**One indispensable consideration is: Which diagnosis?**

Etymologically "Dia-gnosis" means "through knowledge" or through "sapience". Sapience, from the Latin *sapere*, meaning "to know" or "to taste", hints at the journey from intuitively "feeling" or "sniffing out" something, to the feeling of knowing with certainty and it suggests how indispensable the body is to knowledge – You cannot know without feeling it and you cannot feel without the body!

I would underline that the diagnosis must be the unique, "polyhedral" solution to the combination of clinical, analytical, psychodynamic, relational, bodily and neuromediator aspects, all examined and provided by the incredibly careful anamnesis.



Only subsequently can the most appropriate activation be identified and proposed to the person in their own, self-organised, physical space in the setting.

Beyond the specific school of psychotherapy, the well-codified, systematized, guidelines offered by the intelligently flexible "body-code" should always be taken into consideration. These bodily guidelines have been established and validated during decades of experience and are epistemologically coherent with the latest neuroscientific developments.

Only by taking all these factors together can we provide absolute psycho-corporeal appropriateness in the analytical-therapeutic project for that specific person, to increase their "presence" and the "potency" of their actions.

Over the pre-established period, of three or six months, systematically revealed evidence will confirm the development hypothesized.

The psychotherapist being able to observe the activation and the person feeling observed will constitute a form of being together, which may be virtual, but is also certainly real. This represents an indispensable relational framework giving extraordinary value to the person's subjective experience, in addition to the activation produced by the objectivity of the psycho-corporeal experience.

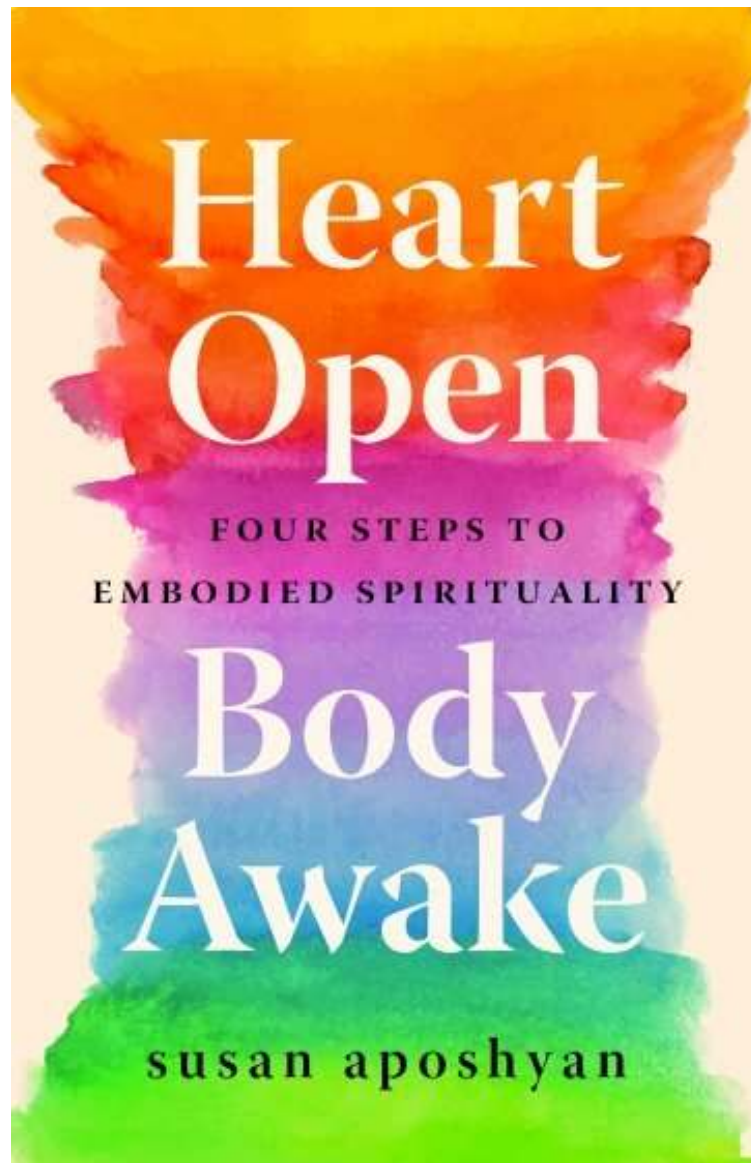
**Genovino Ferri** is a psychiatrist/Reichian analyst. He is the director of the Italian School of Reichian Analysis and the Director of Mind Body Collection of the Alpes Edizioni. He also directs the "Complex Operational Unit" of Psychiatrist e Psychotherapy of Atri, Asl Teramo, and the "Studio Analysis," ambulatory of Psychotherapy and Social Clinic in Atri. He is the President of the Italian Body Psychotherapy Association, and a member of the New York Academy of Sciences. Dr Ferri has published two books (hard copy and ebook formats): *Psychopathology and Character* and *Body Sense: Stories of Psychotherapy Supervisions*.

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Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

I recently received a copy of Susan's newest book, *Heart Open Body Awake: Four Steps to Embodied Spirituality*, from Shambhala Publications, Inc.

The book's title intrigued me. As I have noted in other reviews, books simply appear at just the right moment in my life. *Heart Open Body Awake* is another one of those times. Susan is not just sharing her life's work, she is also present on the pages of the text; she reveals her inner processing, her inquisitiveness as she explores her own protective defenses and faces the intensity of integrating new levels of openness.

*"Always, I am feeling my body. I am noticing mental beliefs, attitudes, positions that are stopping life from flowing through my body. I am seeking to release those and see what happens. I am asking myself if I can trust what is happening inside me and around me. By trusting, I can allow myself to be nakedly present within it and then see what happens next" (pg. 200).*

“All problems are psychological, and all solutions are spiritual.”

I met Susan Aposhyan during my graduate program at Santa Barbara Graduate School, Santa Barbara, CA. As a professor in somatic psychology, she designed her curriculum to be both brain/mind and body based—we read and talked as much as we moved into and through the content to experience it.

She had a calm quiet presence; her voice gentle to listen to, the materials easily absorbed. I remember she had us physically enact what she called the five fundamental actions: yield, push, reach, grasp and pull. I can still see myself reaching my hands outward as if trying to grasp something and pull it inward to my chest, then I pushed some invisible object away. To end, I yielded—I relaxed on the classroom floor sensed into my body and noticed the sensations arising. Her concept of bodily movements meaning more, being deeper than patterned physical actions/reactions fascinated me.

I had much to learn from Susan, then. And, as it turns out, I’m still learning from her now.





Sitting today with more awareness I see the power behind what felt like a simple exercise when I was a student, and I see the immense possibilities in the knowledge and exercises she is offering today. Pushing, pulling, reaching, grasping, yielding without collapse. They may seem like innocuous movements yet when I look at them in context everything changes.

For instance: What if I had been physically abused, attacked, traumatized, and I couldn't defend myself, I couldn't push someone (or something) off of me. What if this happened time and time again. Over time, I would no longer be able to push someone or something away. I remember trying to start a self-defense class back in the 1980s. One of the first lessons was to stand with your feet hip width apart, dominant foot forward so you felt grounded and steady. We were supposed to raise our hands up, palms forward, thrust them out as if pushing someone away and yell, "NO." My arms were limp, my push non-existent, my no a whimper. The teacher suggested I wasn't ready for a self-defense class.

Or, what if you constantly had your hand slapped for reaching out to touch things, to explore your world one finger at a time. That initiative, that drive would be stifled, stuck as you learned to keep your hands to yourself. That reach to explore, to be curious, to connect was beaten out of you so you no longer reach out.

Each of these movements, when viewed within life stories, has the potential to result in defeating patterns. Our entire being (body, feeling, soul) becomes stuck, unable to complete a fundamental action that is part of our innate need to survive and thrive.



## A Look Inside

The book is divided into four parts: Heart of Humanity; Body of Life; Deepening and Blossoming; and The Path of Opening. Its contents are derived from decades of personal and professional experience. Susan has spent her “whole adult life” exploring spirituality and how it fit with embodiment, the human body and human development. She came to realize that spirituality connects us to the larger world and dissolves the boundaries between self and other: “It takes us through our bodies into egoless union with the larger deepest world.”



Susan offers definitions, explanations/lessons, and short case examples; black and white anatomical drawings support the text. She also shares extensive mini practices throughout the book to allow readers to feel what is emerging in the moment, to support their natural and unique growth and development as they pause to feel and practice and reflect. Readers have the opportunity to see if they can feel the presence of emotion in their body, notice where and what sensations might be there and what wisdom might arise within or from that emotion.

My usual hiccup when reviewing books that offer experientials is that authors (or perhaps it is money-conscious publishers) expect readers to read these exploratory meditations and practices and do them at the same time. It is just not possible. In my experience, little to nothing good comes of it. I had one publisher tell me to record myself reading the exercise and then play it back. Like, how many people like the sound of their own voice on their answering machine?

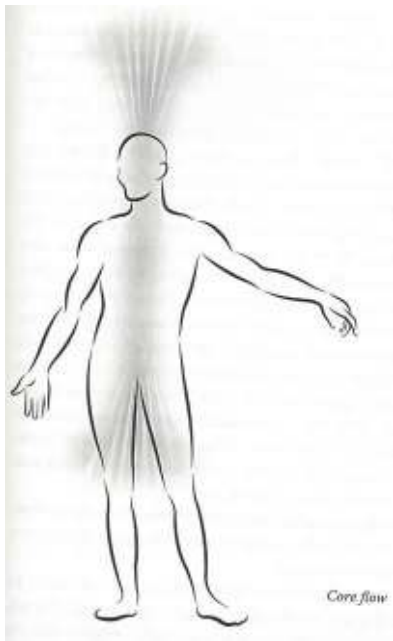
Susan’s ability to guide readers through similar experiences via recorded examples on her website is proof enough for me that a CD or mp3 or online website is warranted. Her skill of verbally guiding listeners into these practices is polished, grounded in years of experience. And her voice is pleasant to listen to, soft, nuanced, well-paced, encouraging, soothing. There needs to be a place for readers to easily access the experientials in the moment, to set the book down and be with Susan in these moments and then emerge and take time to reflect, to journal, to explore within themselves what arose.

I also think some readers might appreciate joining an online reading group, a place to share their experiences and process what is happening as they unravel past patterns, as they come into a sense of what it feels like to live life from their heart, rather than from their brain. To be open and witness to their becoming, moving from a domesticated human who is functioning according to societal expectations to a fully embodied, spiritually energetic resonance that transcends the egoic boundaries of framed and limited selves to expand into the limitless universal connections with all that is.

“Spiritual qualities emerge on a physical level as we become ever more familiar with our own bodily systems and their inner and outer relationships” (pg. 36).

According to Susan, Chinese medicine has long supported the belief that the heart is the center of our being and it governs the rest of our body. How? According to Susan, by listening to the blood, its rhythms, its constituents, by listening to all of the subtle information coming from every cell in the body. The heart guides by resting fully in its place in the center of the chest. “When we are living in our body, it is the center of here and the center of now.”

Susan delves into the body and teaches readers about the heart, about the wisdom of emotions, the breath, and what she calls portals of our body (face/head, hands, feet, and pelvic floor), which are pathways to open and bring the inside out and the outside in. “When we wake up the portals, we tell our sensations which way is out, where the door is” (pg. 70).



The spine and our core flow are also explored as they are important in most approaches in embodied spirituality. Opening to a greater energy flow through our core results in overall changes so Susan focuses on opening the heart, lengthening the spine, and strengthening core postural muscles to support spontaneous energetic flow through our body.

“Emotional awareness of the heart requires quiet meditation time to develop what feels right in your heart” (pg. 35).

Susan presents four foundations of mindfulness:

- ⇒ Mindfulness of body
- ⇒ Mindfulness of feeling
- ⇒ Mindfulness of mind
- ⇒ Mindfulness of phenomena

Each moment that we are mindful offers the opportunity to feel into our experience, to notice and be with sensations that are physiologically occurring in the body in the present moment. Sensations have an emotional tone, a quality of feeling associated with either wellbeing or distress, living or dying. Sigmund Freud said that much of human behavior is acting out unconscious emotional patterns (pg. 26).

From Susan's perspective, everything we do, all movements, states, and behaviors are founded in sensation. To live fully again she writes, we must practice allowing what we have silenced and held still to move, we must go beyond mindfulness of sensation and allow physiology to restart itself where it has been slowed down.

“Embodied practice finds safe ways to reintegrate parts of ourselves that we have shut down, to listen and allow whatever we feel to move and breathe in its own way” (53).

What is emotional tone in sensations? For that matter, what exactly are emotions? One online source notes: “Emotions are psychological states comprised of thoughts, feelings, physiological changes, expressive behaviors and inclinations to act.”

Many people might agree that they were taught to downplay their emotions, to tune them out, repress them. People often try to rationalize their way out of them. Per Susan, emotions often come with strong sensations, even overwhelming movements. She offers that, “The art of working with emotions is being able to express what needs to be expressed and allow emotions to move out of our bodies” (19).



## Deepening and Blossoming.

Here Susan offers experientials for readers to lean into their bodies, to listen to their sensations, to develop a deeper relationship with their body. She offers questions to ask sensations and ways to listen to what Eugene Gendlin called a “felt shift”, which is when we have the opportunity to acknowledge and allow layers of our sensations and experiences that we have not noticed before to come into contact, to offer a response to our questions if even a sense of yes or no.

She offers instructions for a formal embodiment practice, adding that we have the rest of our lives to let this practice develop—it’s not a sprint to the finish line but rather a lifelong quest to explore moment by moment.



Chapter 10 discusses the five foundational actions that I mentioned at the beginning of this review. She writes that by becoming familiar with these actions and in tune with them, we can make “the expression of our sensations in Embodiment Practice all the more articulate and meaningful” (pg. 97).

### A short insight into each Fundamental Action

“Yielding is relaxing into gravity but also into the fullness of our own beings, so it is multidimensional. Yielding is not collapsing. . . in terms of embodied

spirituality, yield is what allow us to not only relax into the moment but also relax into feeling our bodies, clearing out any old, tense patterns that obscure presence and finally, resting into a unitive state” (98).

“Push is the action that allows us to differentiate ourselves from the world. We need a balance here: we need enough push to find a starting point, to be clear about finding our unique path, and to have the strength to show up and stay the course moment to moment but too much can become its own obstacle” (98).

“Reach: more than a position, it is a state of mind, an openness a curiosity. On any spiritual path, we need to feel this kind of openness and expansion in our bodies to go beyond what we already know” (99).

“Grasp and Pull: sometimes we need to take hold of what we experience and bring it into our beings and our lives. What do we need to grasp on to that experience and pull it into ourselves?” (100).



“The purpose of relationship is the spiritual growth of people.”

The last part of the book deals with relationships, making friends with death, and realizing your own path of Embodied Spirituality. The overriding question in terms of relationships is: What is the purpose of the relationship for me in the first place? Followed by: Can I continue to feel my own body and give my sensations permission to express themselves while I am in relationship with others?

Susan recommends Embodiment Practice as an approach to embodied spirituality. She discusses six principles of embodied spirituality and how the four foundations of mindfulness meet the four steps of embodied spirituality.

#### A Quick End

There is so much within this book that I have not even mentioned. The depth and expanse are amazing. This is not a once around read but rather a guide to use to create and continue your journey into bodily and spiritual awareness and in turn embodied spirituality.

Susan ends with these words:

May you continue to find your way.

May your embodied spirituality mature and ripen to its fullest capacity.

May all beings find their own way and develop to their fullest capacity.

Readers who are interested in buying this book can receive a 30% discount with code HOBA30 from Shambhala.com through September 2021



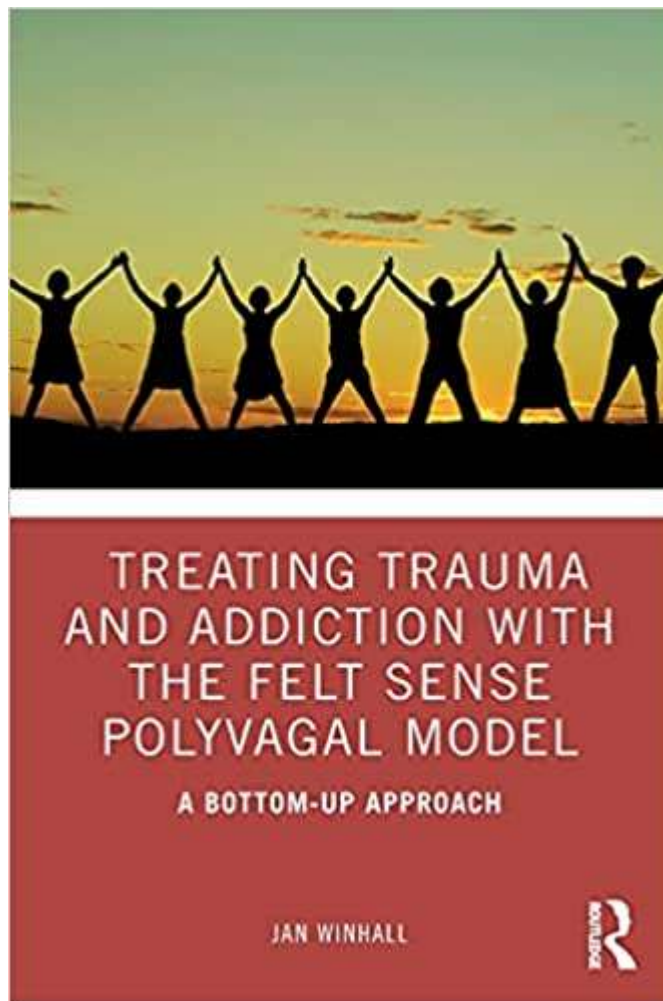
**Susan Aposhyan** has been teaching and practicing meditation for 45 years. She is the author of *Heart Open Body Awake: The Four Steps of Embodied Spirituality*, *Natural Intelligence: Body-Mind Integration and Human Development* and *Body-Mind Psychotherapy*. Susan trains professionals in her Body-Mind Psychotherapy, integrating science with healing and meditative experience.  
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Nadine Shaabana from Unsplash, push; Hudson Hintze from Unsplash, move emotions; Openicons from Pixabay, Yield; Patrick Schneider from Unsplash, sitting.



Reviewed by Dr. Leslie Ellis

Just at a time when the wider world is waking up to a more compassionate and inclusive way of understanding trauma and addiction, a timely book that addresses these issues in personal, historical, embodied, and practical ways has arrived. In *Treating Trauma and Addiction with the Felt Sense Polyvagal Model: A Bottom-Up Approach* (Routledge, 2021), author and psychotherapist Jan Winhall both demystifies and depathologizes addiction. She does so by demonstrating in theory and with compelling case studies how addictive behaviours are in fact resourceful attempts to regulate a body that has been thrown out of homeostatic balance by traumatic experience.

Winhall’s new book incorporates both focusing and the polyvagal theory to create a treatment model that is both effective and humane. It’s a model to help those afflicted with addictions and other effects of trauma understand their own physiological and emotional responses and begin to take steps toward change that are both self-compassionate and doable.



Winhall explains how addiction is a propeller of neurophysiological state change, and in doing so, she solves the mystery of addictive behavior that often puzzled her as a young therapist. She begins with a compelling story of her first women’s group and the mystery of their deeply self-harming behaviors. At the time, she simply couldn’t understand why this fascinating group of young incest survivors engaged in such self-destructive acts. Rejecting the idea that they were simply damaged, broken and ‘borderline’, Winhall went on a decades-long hunt for a more compassionate understanding of how to help these women heal.

A consistent thread through the book is Jan’s story of her own development as a trauma therapist. It illustrates an evolution of ideas about the etiology and treatment of trauma over the past 40 years. Early influences include Ellen Bass and Laura Davis’ (1988) *The Courage to Heal*, and Judith Herman’s (1992) classic, *Trauma and Recovery*. Add to this mix a deep

understanding of Eugene Gendlin’s focusing, which brings a method of listening to the body in a manner that assumes it knows the way forward. Stir in a healthy grounding in Dan Siegel’s interpersonal neurobiology, John Bowlby’s attachment theory, the compassionate views of Gabor Maté, the relational wisdom of Harville Hendrix and Helen LaKelly Hunt, and finally, the updated understanding of the nervous system’s response to threat and connection as proposed in Stephen Porges’ polyvagal theory.

When you combine all these embodied, compassionate approaches to working with trauma and addiction, what emerges is a model that stands in stark contrast to the medicalized version that pathologizes those who have already suffered so greatly. As Jan so aptly demonstrates, those who suffer trauma(s) and subsequently engage in a range of addictive behaviours are not broken, but in fact, are doing their best to manage their pain and overwhelming emotions in the ways that are most available to them. It reframes their stories from tales of illness to journeys of triumph and liberation.

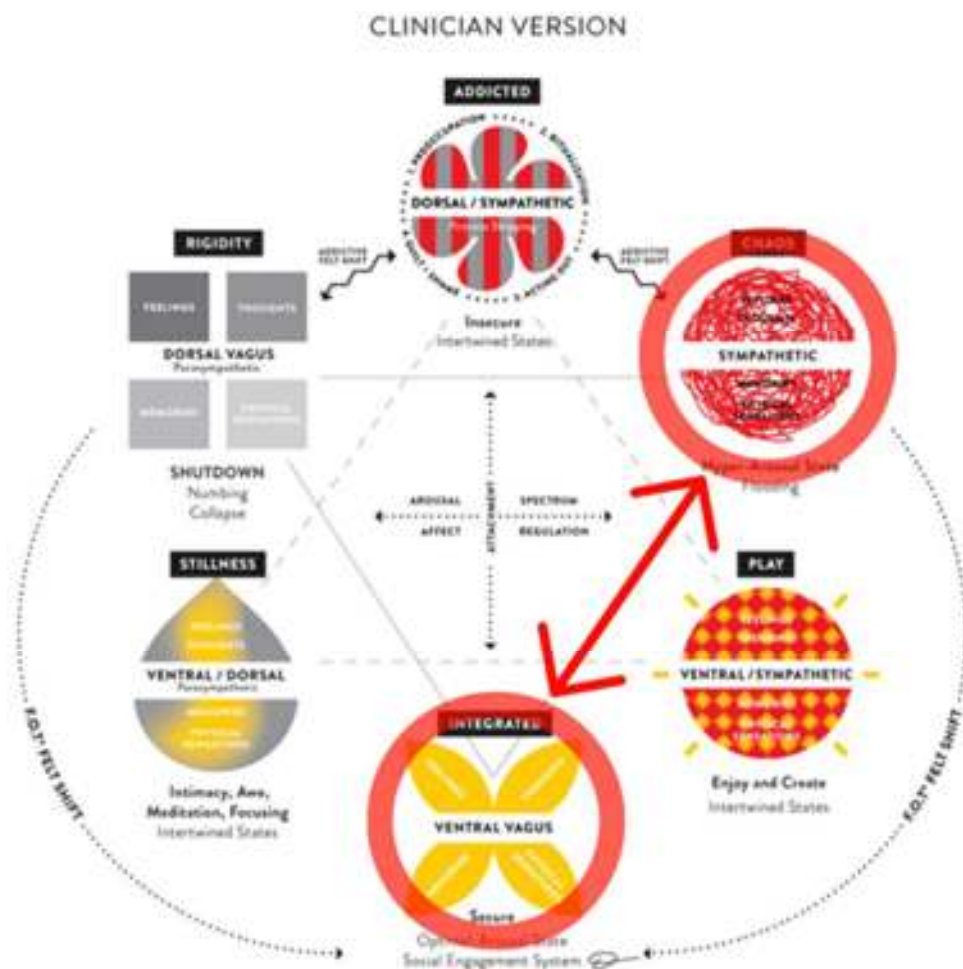
Winhall's definition of addiction is a simple and non-judgmental one: "It helps you in the short term, hurts you in the long term, and you can't stop doing it." However, the historic view of addictions is not so kind. Winhall leads readers through a history lesson that shows how the war on drugs, and the controversial evolution of the 'disease model' of addiction, has led to racist and pathologizing ways of viewing addictive behaviour. It has also prompted many resilient trauma survivors to view their own attempts at self-regulation as shameful and bad, an attitude that hampers their recovery.



## The Felt Sense Polyvagal Model (FSPM)

Over many years of working with those who have suffered from trauma, and with a naturally compassionate and inquiring approach, Winhall has developed a model that makes sense of addictive responses that alleviates blame and shame and replaces it with ways that clients can make sense of their own shifting states. Through a clear, graphic diagram of the physiological states described by Porges' polyvagal theory, and guidance on how to map one's unique pattern of experiences onto this chart, clients can begin to make sense of their own behaviours. They are then offered tools to help them decide how to take systematic and doable steps toward changing those behaviours that are most hurtful in the long term into more healthful ways of managing intense states.

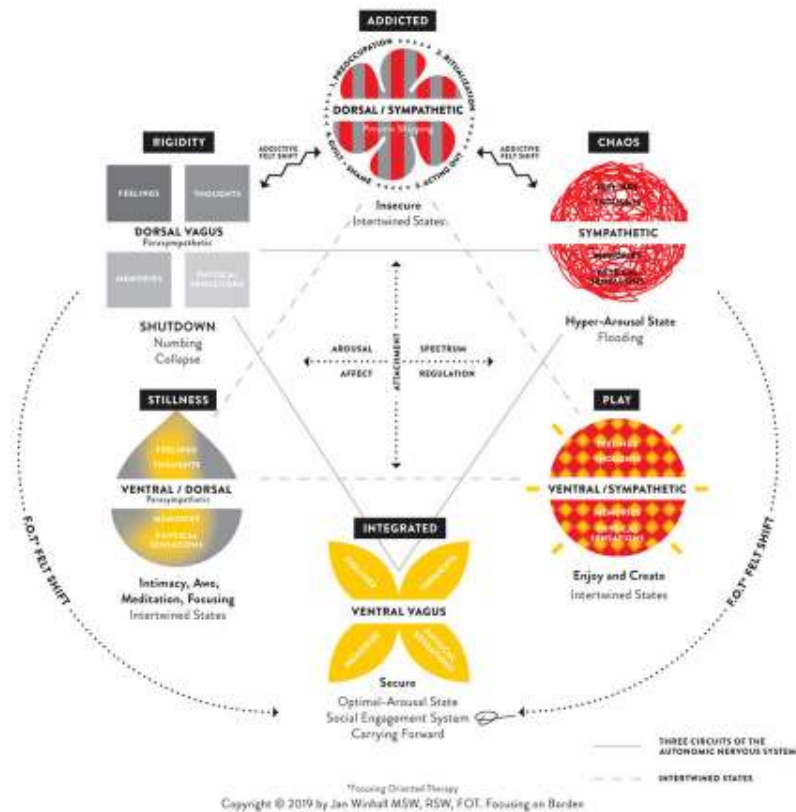
Winhall has included both a detailed model for clinicians and a simplified one for clients in the book as a visual aid for understanding patterns of behaviour that can readily be reframed from addictive to adaptive (see pages 27-29 in this article). In addition, she offers a detailed Embodied Assessment and Treatment Tool (EATT) and a comprehensive list of focusing-oriented strategies that can be tailored to clients and their unique challenges. There is also a version for couples that includes a case study detailing how these tools led a couple struggling with the impact of childhood sexual abuse toward deeper connection, understanding, and mutual compassion in the face of the painful experience of sex addiction.





## FELT SENSE / POLYVAGAL MODEL OF TREATING ADDICTION

CLINICIAN VERSION



First are the three circuits of the ANS, connected via a solid lined, inverted triangular

- A) the ventral vagus is in yellow at the bottom of the page,
- B) the sympathetic in red on the right, and
- C) the dorsal vagus is in grey on the left.

Next are the Intertwining States, connected by the dotted line triangle. Intertwining states are states in the system that utilize two pathways. The ANS has the capacity to blend states creating a greater range of experiences. The intertwining states are represented in the model in mixed colors.

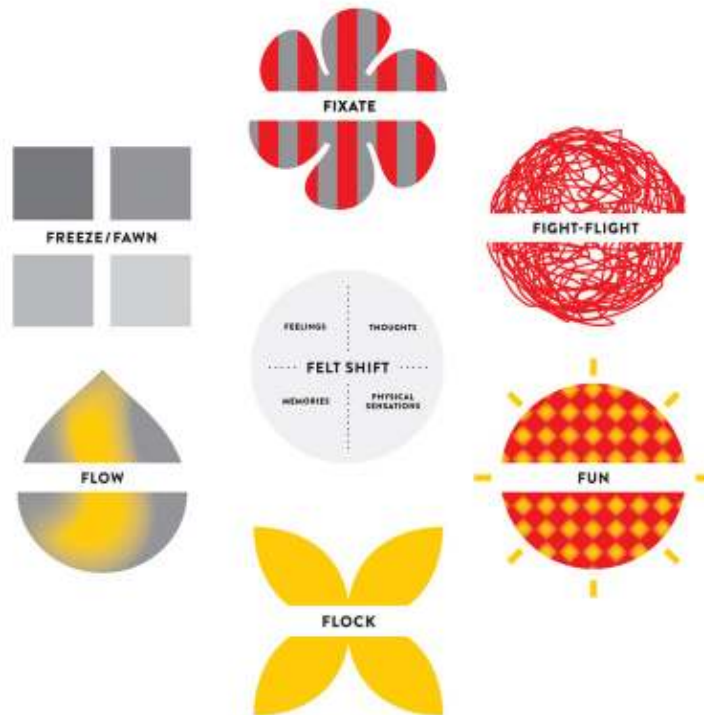
- A) Play is on the bottom right in yellow/red.
- B) Stillness is bottom left yellow/grey.
- C) And the FSPM proposes a third intertwining state of Addiction, which is at the top of the model, red/grey.

As a state, Addiction is a blending of sympathetic and dorsal. Without the presence of the ventral vagus, the Social Engagement System is offline. When trauma and other states of emotional dis-regulation occur, the capacity to regulate through the ventral vagus are compromised. The ANS shifts into survival mode. People then employ addictive behaviors to seek relief from suffering.

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**FELT SENSE / POLYVAGAL MODEL OF TREATING ADDICTION**

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**THE 6 F'S CLIENT VERSION**

Focusing Oriented Therapy  
Copyright © 2019 by Jan Wirthall MSW, RSW, FOT. Focusing on Borders

The simple version for clients uses what Jan calls the 'Six F's' to define the states of the autonomic nervous system: Flight/Fight, Fawn/Freeze, Fixate, Flow, Fun, Flock.

1. Sympathetic Response: Flight is a state of fear and anxiety. In this state the body mobilizes to run and escape. Fight is a mobilizing state of anger.
2. Dorsal Response: Fawn is a state of surrendering to someone with power over you. Freeze is a collapse of the ANS into a dissociative state when sympathetic response is ineffective.
3. Fixate is the intertwining state of addiction that acts as a propeller between Flight/Fight and Fawn/Freeze.
4. Flow is an intertwining state between ventral and dorsal. A state of safety with stillness.
5. Fun is an intertwining state between ventral and sympathetic, a state of playfulness.
6. Flock is the ventral state of grounding and safety.  
With time our clients learn how to identify and track the state they are in and to use the tools that we teach them to move more into the ventral vagal state.

## **Focusing and Thinking at the Edge**

Focusing, developed by Eugene Gendlin, is another thread that runs through this book, and is a foundational practice for Winhall. She takes us back to her first meeting with 'Gene', as he is affectionately called, and the ways in which his conception of the *felt sense* brought all the pieces of the puzzle together for her. She writes, "The felt sense contains the whole of our experiencing, including content *and* process, thinking *and* feeling: the sweet spot of integration" (pg. 130).

Winhall's book not only contains a primer on focusing concepts and their rich underlying philosophy, but also practical examples. There are many places in the book that invite readers to pause, check inside, and engage in the material in a focusing-oriented way. In this way, the book is an example of what it describes: a personal journey into the heart of addiction and trauma that invites an embodied response to the material, not just an intellectual one.



Winhall weaves historical and factual information with personal vignettes and poignant case studies told with the mastery of a novelist. Another enduring theme also emerges: one of *consilience*. What we see, over the course of this immersive journey, is how all these ideas are related and how they are often different ways of saying the same thing. This makes sense: we are all human beings, sharing the same basic emotions and responses; Winhall helps us see how we are truly all in this together. Addiction and responses to trauma are not something 'out there' that only ill and damaged people engage in. Rather, we are all 'shaky beings' (to use Gendlin's phrase) that are doing our best to self-regulate, to engage in life, and if needed, to liberate ourselves from patterns of behaviour that were brilliant solutions at the time and may need updating.

The FSPM teaches us all how to identify our autonomic states, to feel into them in the moment, and to understand what drives them. It teaches us how to deepen into our own experience and to subsequently guide others into this inner terrain in ways that feel safe and respectful. It moves us from a medical model to one of both self and co-regulation, from framing responses to trauma as acts of triumph and courage rather than freakish acts of self destruction.

This book reads like a story that begins and ends with Winhall's first women's group, and her lifelong drive to understand and help these women heal. She offers the example of Bridgette, who was convinced she was a 'freak' because of the times she would awaken from a dissociated state to find she had taken a razor to her own vagina. Winhall speaks of how she knew, even before she had fully articulated her model, to ground and connect Bridgette, and to 'validate and celebrate' her body's response to trauma, to see it as a way to release the pain and shift away from an unbearable state.

*Jan writes, "As I explain this new way of understanding, her face opens. She looks around and sees the women in the group riveted by her journey. It is their journey too. Looking incredulous, her jaw drops, and she lights up. Bridgette moves from feeling like a disordered person to a hero who made it through living hell. It is a moment of liberation, a profound shift that changes everything. These moments of liberation, arising out of a system that shames and pathologizes, are the heart of transformational healing. I pause here inside. These are the moments that I live for in the work" (pg.148).*



Dr. Leslie Ellis, author of *A Clinician's Guide to Dream Therapy* (Routledge, 2019), offers online programs to therapists on dreamwork and focusing-oriented therapy. She is an expert in nightmare treatment for trauma relief and suicide prevention. She writes and speaks about embodied experiential ways to cultivate inner life. She is vice president of The International Association for the Study of Dreams and coordinator and past president of the International Focusing Institute.  
[www.drleslieellis.com](http://www.drleslieellis.com)

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### Photo Credits

Man in mirror Med Ahabchone from Pixaby

Charts from Winhall, J. (2020). *Somatic Psychotherapy Today, Volume 10, number 1, Spring 2020*, pp. 64-73.

**For further information you can access Jan Winhall's PDF slide show explaining her process during a webinar for the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy, open access online : [Click here](#)**



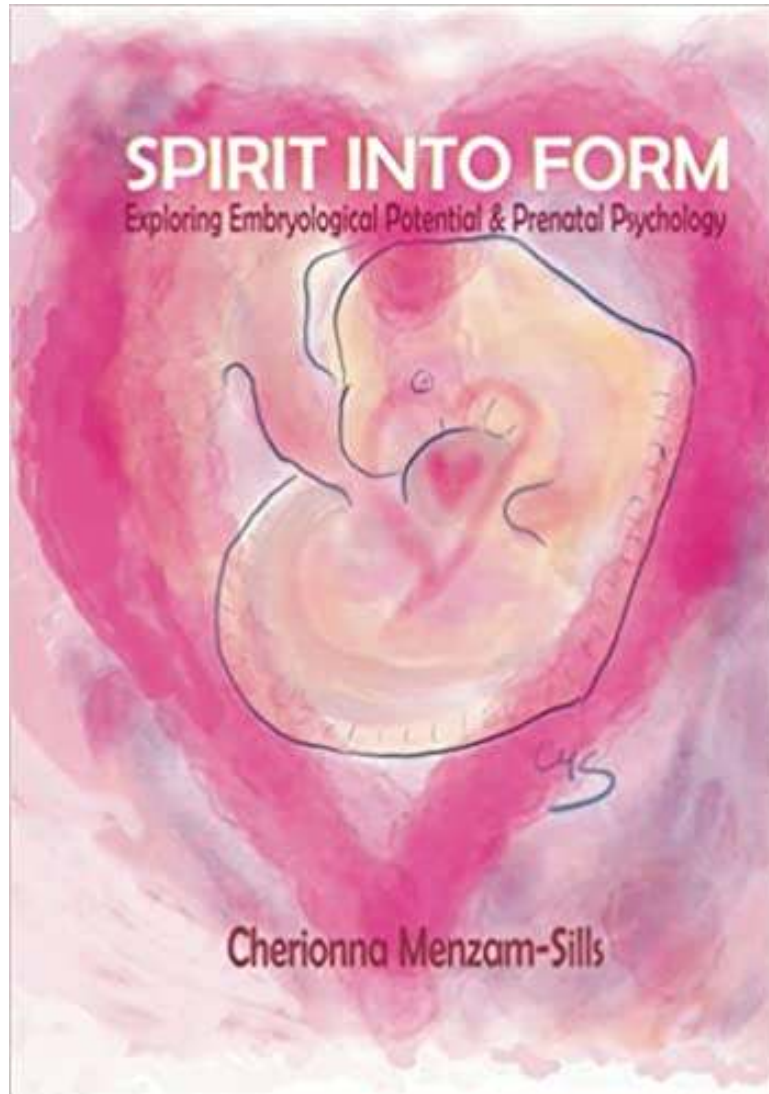
An underwater photograph of a person swimming, viewed from above. The person is in a streamlined position, with their arms and legs extended forward. The water is dark blue, and there is a lot of light reflecting off the surface, creating a shimmering effect. The person's head is just below the surface, and their hair is floating around it. The overall mood is serene and focused.

**LESLIE ELLIS**

**A CLINICIAN'S  
GUIDE TO  
DREAM THERAPY**

Implementing Simple and  
Effective Dreamwork





Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Forewords written by Jaap van der Wal and Marcy Axness





There's something sensationally delicious about sinking into a good book, letting characters replace my reality with theirs. I breathe deeper, fuller. Expansive inhalations. Pauses become paced exhalations. I submerge, eyes first, into the depth of the white expanse, then trace black printed shapes etched in a linear fashion. The lines, lockstep, herald the bell ringer's message lodged within my no-nonsense brain: diversions are not allowed. I embrace the simple grace that comes with letting someone else's words take command, their pace now my pace, their depth now my depth. I flow in synchrony with what is and allow it to simply be. My mind fashions thoughts, tags after sensations in between blank spaces. My intention is to be with the text without an agenda, without expectations or preconceived notions or definitions of what is to be read. I clear my essence, become a human tabula rasa as I avail myself to what comes from the inner reaches of my knowing and the outer reaches of all knowing. My energy synchronizes with that emanating from the text, words once static on paper are now alive flowering within me, through me, developing meaning within the context of my being that enables me to learn, grow, share, release.

Sitting with Cherionna’s masterful weaving of science and wisdom, I watch as she unveils her mystical process of embodiment from preconception through pregnancy, birth, bonding, even into death through pictures, words, experientials. Her pacing, word by word, page by page, chapter by chapter, matches her belief that when we, as therapists, are working with ‘little one states’, it is essential to slow down, to stay in the present time and connect with resources available in the here and now. In a present time, safe relationship, we can differentiate between then and now. Slowing down the tempo is useful in working with any kind of trauma, Cherionna notes, adding that emotional healing can happen more readily when we de-accelerate and avoid knee-jerk automatic reactions. In this place of peaceful mindful pause-filled presence, we have more possibility to perceive and access options that allow us to heal and grow (adapted from pg. 53). She offers a treasure trove of data with a first-person familiar voice—it’s an academic book that reads easily, no tripping on oversized words or floundering with a distant/disconnected authorial tone. Cherionna is present on the page as details are fleshed out, time and time again. Each thought is stretched as far as one might in a taffy pull, the materials sticking together yet thinning so one can almost see through it, capture the once imperceptible grains creating the whole, resulting in a clearer picture of what some might consider ungrounded, unsubstantiated, perhaps even shadowy concepts.





Cherionna lives and breathes this text. The stories are hers. The knowledge hers. The interweaving of all she has gleaned from others, acknowledged, she is clearly grateful. She is one woman comprised of many souls, her energy tapping into the universal abundance that is available to all if we resonate with the fields surrounding us, embracing us, supporting us. If one reads this book slowly, methodically, with an air of open curiosity and willingness to explore, one avails themselves to the chance of a lifetime, to experience a cleansing rebirth starting from one's cellular beginnings through conception, gestation, developmental phases, birth, bonding and beyond.

Deepening movements into the essence of being, beginning with the smallest cell to the largest sense of differentiation, Cherionna explores, expands, presents our creation for reflection and experience. Nothing is left to chance. There is no guessing. All details are presented with the invitation to be open, curious to consider what you might at first think strange, unmentionable, outlandish. She invites room for our spirit to coexist in science, not an either or but a merging, a weave, a space for all that exists to truly exist as it is without distortion or contortion.

According to Cherionna, *"This book attempts through words, images and guided experiences, to share aspects of my own efforts to answer the question, "Where did I come from?" My intention is to help soften the journey for others who have been as haunted and fascinated by the question as I have"* (pg. 15).

### **Why did I agree to read this book?**

When I initially heard about Cherionna's new book, *Spirit Into Form*, I wanted a reviewer's copy because I valued her contributions to our field. Having written together before, I knew her research, methodology, wisdom, and writing style were solid. However, I didn't realize the enormity of this text until it arrived. At 539 pages, *Spirit Into Form* covers an expanse of 17 years of life and study and relationship. Cherionna integrates her experiences with pioneers in the field of and founders of numerous forms of body psychotherapy and prenatal and perinatal psychology and health including but not limited to: Emilie Conrad, William Emerson, Ray Castellino, John and Anna Chitty, Franklyn Sills, Thomas R. Verny, Jaap van der Wal, and more.



According to Michael Shea, an educator and author in the field of somatic psychology, myofascial release, and craniosacral therapy, her "narrative helps us enter the mystery of conception, birth and death." He adds: "This beautiful and spellbinding book must be required reading to become a full human being inherently complete from a single celled conceptus through the moment of death" (pg. #iv).





Thomas R. VERNY, another noted educator, author, researcher, clinician in the field of pre and perinatal psychology and health (PPPH), notes that Cherionna takes readers on a “tour of important developmental stages during gestation” and in addition she offers much regarding the “larger fields of Love, Spirit and Soul” and how they are connected to the human body (pg. #i).

Cherionna’s background in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy and Continuum Movement are infused within this comprehensive tome resulting in a lifetime compendium that can fulfill anyone’s curiosity about how our earliest experiences impact our lives. The content herein will offer readers support and tools to potentially shift and change and heal their early imprints. We can move through trauma we’ve experienced from pre-conception onward and embrace and embody each stage of our life to live fully present with a compassionate heart. She offers us the grace of awareness and acceptance of all aspects of ourselves, including those areas we tend to relegate to what she calls the shadows.

This is what many professionals in the field call a “definitive book for the prenatal and perinatal enthusiast, and a layer of support for the serious student”.

Kate White, a leading expert, educator, and author, in the field of pre and perinatal psychology and health, writes: “This is a book for our times when we now know so much about the baby’s experience, especially how we can support our unfolding into relationship with our parents and others and the importance of acknowledging our sacredness and sentience from the very beginning of life” (pg. xii).



### **From Cover to Cover**

The cover image and the 90 illustrations within were drawn by Cherionna. She offers clinical case studies, noting that client names, characteristics and events were changed or collaged with several other clients to protect their identity. There are two forewords. One by Jaap van der Wal, a spiritual embryologist, and another by Marcy Axness, a colleague who Cherionna met while at an APPPAH congress when both were new to the field.



The Introduction starts on page 13 and from there 15 chapters follow, adhering to phases one might experience in the birthing process, albeit allowing for oscillations rather than a strict point A to point B direction. She begins with Establishing a Context: Creating a Field, then flows through meeting and being with our early history in healing ways. She moves on to discuss preconception, conception, implantation, layers of support, embryological arising, folding into form, nerves, brain, and consciousness, digesting experience, the portal of birth, beyond the womb, grace, peace, and passing, and prenatal and birth experience, to finish with shadows and potential. There is an appendix that offers a prenatal and birth history questionnaire, a glossary of terms, an index and information about Cherionna.

### **Going Forward**

Jaap van der Wal writes: *"The book is imbued with the serious belief that the human mind and soul is not an accidental side product of genes, brain and body, but a dimension in the human where he/she strives to fulfill his/her talents and aptitudes, including the possible healing of traumatic experiences in earlier stages. Spirit as well as body as necessary but not sufficient condition for being and becoming human"* (pg. 7).

He notes that Cherionna offers a *"phenomenological description of the body as soul, of embryo as incarnating being, and of the human as a lifelong self-organizing and orchestrating appearance . . . this is a book about the human body in which notions such as Spirit, Love, Soul, and Meaning are not avoided"* (pg. 7).

According to Jaap, the book is filled with insights, inspiration, and guidance. It adds to what will be an ever-growing body of literature whose orientation is not to a person's trauma but to the inherent impulse toward health. Cherionna "traces the contours of our earliest days of existence as we merge our mysterious spiritual essence with the shapes we enfold ourselves into. She dares to use the S word weaving the scientific and spiritual into synthesis" (pg. 11). She is clear that our conception and early development in the womb involve a transition between spirit and form (pg. 19).

### **Bits and Pieces**

*"Imagine if you didn't need to shut down? Imagine if we could all feel and be safe to fully express our fullest potential? Our health, our wholeness, our brilliant bio-intelligence? That is what this book is about"* (pg. 49).

To cover a book of this magnitude in precise detail demands a review beyond the length most readers are amenable to . . . in today's society it seems as if readers want sound bites, small bullet points that bring out the most critical aspects of what is being said. I have already allowed myself the luxury of dropping into my experience of Cherionna's book, tried to impart more of a feeling with the text than data about the text. Coming to a sense of closure, then, I offer a few remarks or concepts that stayed with me:

Doing Not Doing: Wu Wei. Cherionna discusses action that is non-action and offers that the human embryo is spirit coming into form: it is passively growing and developing. Yes, it is actively engaging in life, but it occurs at a more subtle level than we are often aware of.

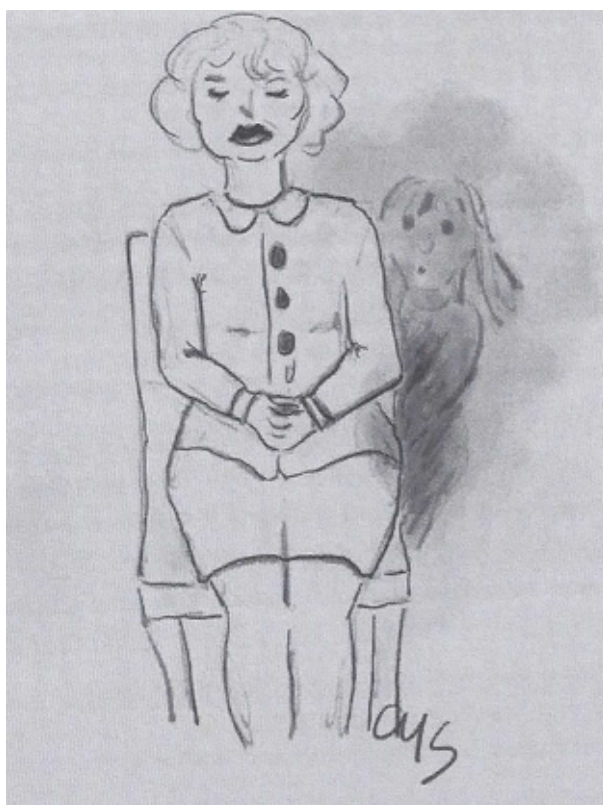


*"The human embryo forms itself naturally, without attachment to how it evolves . . . embryos are masters at being . . . metabolizing, growing, dividing, shapeshifting, migrating . . . all involve communication at a subtle level . . . they interact with what surrounds them, simply being with what is . . ."*

*"As we are born, so we die. Birth and Death are two portals, leading into and out of life as we know it. We arrive from a mysterious source and leave at death into an equally mysterious something"* (pg. 421).

Our 'Shadow' material . . . is destined to unconsciously pervade our lives. It deprives us of choice, leads to suffering . . . when we explore aspects of our prenatal experience and our accompanying embryological development in relation to both trauma and potential, we have the chance to release ingrained patterns, to come into new ways of being, to heal and grow beyond.

At this point, I offer my recommendation to not just buy the book but be with the book, take time to read and experience it.



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Embryo spiraling into form: Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Shadow material: Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Headshots: from SPT Magazine files and online sources

# SPIRIT INTO FORM

Exploring Embryological Potential & Prenatal Psychology



Cherionna Menzam-Sills



**Reflections on Writing  
Spirit into Form:  
Exploring Embryological Potential and Prenatal Psychology**

**By Cherionna Menzam-Sills, PhD, RSMT/E, RCST**



*Spirit into Form* led me through a profound and lengthy journey I can only equate to the birth process. I admit that after seventeen years' gestation, I felt an unavoidable urgency to see it take shape as my clients and students eagerly, albeit patiently, awaited its arrival, too. During the final moments, I felt like a small-bodied woman giving birth to a 10-pound baby.

### **A Budding Writer: The gestational phase**

I had known from about age eleven that I wanted to write. Although my stories impressed my elders at that time, it took many years of experiencing life – my own and my clients' - before I felt that I really had something significant to write about. My first book, *The Breath of Life: An Introduction to Craniosacral Biodynamics*, served to warm me up for writing *Spirit into Form*. By the time *The Breath of Life* was published, I couldn't wait to focus on birthing what felt like a record of my life's work.

When I began organizing my notes and bits of writing, I discovered I had initiated the writing process in 2005 in preparation to meet Emilie Conrad, the founder of a mindful-movement inquiry process called Continuum. Her writings were so inspirational I struggled to record thoughts speeding through me. *Spirit into Form* was conceived during those moments. My inspiration intensified as I met and then spent years in close contact with Emilie, who became an important mentor for me. Her visionary ideas and words are infused throughout the book.





### **Developmental Experiences: My own healing journey**

I have been passionate about pre and perinatal psychology and therapy since my first encounter while training in somatic psychotherapy at Naropa University in the early 1990s. I had already experienced my bodywork clients “birthing” themselves off my treatment table. One had called me a “midwife of the soul.” I knew my life’s calling related to this. I had also just begun my own healing journey.

Later in this journey, I often told people I pursued my doctorate in pre- and perinatal psychology mainly because it provided the necessary structure to do my own work. I look back on six years intensive study with pre and perinatal therapy pioneer William Emerson and then four years intensive work with another pioneer in the field, Ray Castellino, and reflect on how essential it is for each of us, as therapists, to do our own work in order to be fully present and to appropriately meet our clients.

The final chapter of *Spirit into Form* is about pre and perinatal experience as unconscious shadow material. I see it as particularly important for therapists to shine the light on our own early prenatal and birth experience because it is so easily relegated to shadowy aspects of ourselves. Without awareness, we tend to project and act out our challenging or traumatic history. My own journey and witnessing my clients and students over the years as they came to terms with their own early history convinced me that my passion for this territory and communicating about it has value.



### **Coming into the light: Clarity in Conscious awareness**

My intention in writing this book is to spread the word. As long as our early history remains in the shadows, we remain powerless to create anything different in our lives and relationships. We perpetuate what we are unaware of. In the process, the amazing potential of that time may become occluded by traumatic imprints.

I feel fortunate to have been exposed not only to pre and perinatal psychology and therapy but also to the transformative practices of both Continuum and Craniosacral Biodynamics. Through studying and practicing these visionary healing arts, I learned about what I came to call our "original embryological potential," and how that original blueprint is always available to us. Biodynamics emerged from the field of Osteopathy, carrying with it a basic understanding that there is always Health with a capital "H" and Intelligence with a capital "I" present and alive in our system. When we orient to these universal biodynamic forces expressing a mysterious essence we call the breath of life, we can begin to remember and return to the health that we are. Through Emilie Conrad and Continuum, I learned to further embody these principles through mindful fluid-movement explorations.

*Spirit into Form* is about understanding where we have come from and who we are. Where we have come from includes both our ineffable spiritual source and our early physical development in the womb, known as embryology. My studies and clinical experience have demonstrated to me repeatedly that these are not separate. The developing psyche is intricately intertwined with how our cells and tissues interact and transform our shape in our early months. I often think of embryonic life as resembling that of adolescents. The body is changing from moment to moment. How do we know who we are when we keep changing?

Life is about change. We cannot avoid it, even when we try. Our earliest experiences can profoundly affect how we meet the changes life brings. My hope in writing this book is that the awareness it offers will support us as therapists, parents, teachers, birth practitioners, and anyone else who spends time with little ones or people of any age who have little ones within them. I observe our world today and wish for everyone conscious awareness of the original potential that awaits our discovery.

**Cherionna Menzam-Sills** draws on her extensive background in prenatal and perinatal psychology, embryology, bodywork, Continuum, and other somatic therapies, as well as years of working with her husband, Biodynamics pioneer Franklyn Sills, to enhance her writing, teaching and clinical practice. She is certified as a teacher of Craniosacral Biodynamics with the Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy Association of North America (BCTA/NA), and as a supervisor by the Craniosacral Association of the UK. Authorized in 2007 as a Continuum Movement Teacher by Continuum founder, Emilie Conrad, she integrates Continuum into her work, to enhance embodied understanding and experiential exploration of important concepts. Continuum is a mindful movement practice involving perceptual shifts and healing potential similar to those of Biodynamics.

More information on Cherionna and her work at [www.birthingyourlife.org](http://www.birthingyourlife.org)

### **Photo credits**

Emilie Conrad downloaded from <https://continuummovement.com/founder-emilie-conrad-bio/>

Generational layers drawn by Cherionna Menzam-Sills

Coming into the light: Stefan Keller from Pixabay





A MINDFUL PROGRAM  
FOR LASTING CHANGE

# The Proactive Twelve Steps

Serge Prengel

ALL-NEW 6TH EDITION

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

**“The attempt to escape from pain, is what creates more pain.”**

— Gabor Maté

This is a first. I started writing a review of a trusted and valued colleague’s text and discovered that much of the material, including detailed resources and information that can truly help readers, was accessible online, for free.

Honestly, I have prayed for colleagues to offer their knowledge, their clinical expertise, their methodology and experientials to readers/clients for free during these tumultuous times.

We are immersed in a strange vibrational resonance with traditional approaches to health challenged to extremes. Serge Prengel is willing to show up for people without a personal agenda, without strings attached. His knowledge and support have the potential to help people initiate lasting changes to improve the quality of their lives.

In this light, I offer a brief introduction about the book and then links to hopefully save time-starved readers and perhaps some frazzled readers from investing time in my thoughts about Serge’s revised edition and what’s involved. If we can cut straight to the chase and get this material out to people who can benefit from it, all the better. From there, I share my thoughts on why this is a useful book to purchase, read/experience, and share with other people.

### **A brief look borrowing many of Serge’s words**

*The Proactive Twelve Steps*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, teach readers how to transition from feeling stuck and powerless to enjoying a balanced and happy life. The steps offer a revised perspective built on the original Twelve Steps developed by Bill Wilson and Bob Smith (Alcoholics Anonymous founders). While Serge offers an alternative version without a reliance on God, the book is not just for atheists and agnostics; it is for anyone who wants to make sense of how change happens. Serge describes the steps as a mindful program instead of a mystical experience in which change somehow happens to you when you release your control to a higher power and let this power source purge you of your sins and moral defects (of character).

*The Proactive Twelve Steps* offers readers a way to develop a deeper understanding of behavioral change, codependency, stress, and trauma, as well as look at neuroscience and the Polyvagal Theory and their impact on our physiology and behavior. Serge presents a clear roadmap for self-compassion and mindful self-discovery and provides specific step-by-step instructions within a broader context that helps readers make sense of the healing process.

In short, this book is “a user-friendly guide to the application of mindfulness in everyday life”.

### **Links and More Links**

*The Proactive Twelve Steps* and a discussion of each step are available at [www.proactive12steps.com](http://www.proactive12steps.com).

You can follow Serge’s work on [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

You can follow the Proactive 12 Steps podcast from your phone, on [Apple Podcasts](#) and on other podcast apps.

You can also access his newsletter here: <https://www.proactive12steps.com/newsletter/>.

He offers numerous articles online: [Articles](#)

[How to work the 12 steps online workbook](#)

[Serenity, Courage & Wisdom](#)

[The mindful process of change in Steps 4 through 10](#)

[Codependency: Symptoms of codependent behavior in relationships](#)

[Higher Power as Inner Power: Lasting change from inside out](#)

[An ecosystem for mindful self-discovery & recovery](#)

[“I” vs “We”](#)

For people who are in recovery, Serge offers the following resources for people seeking kindred companions on the journey to living an alcohol free life:

- [AA Agnostica](#)
- [AA Beyond Belief](#)



### **In My Opinion: One Reader's Experience**

For those interested in the book and what I think, I offer the following review.

To start, I believe that there is no one form or kind of addiction, no one single cause. Some claim addiction is a medical disease, others cite it as a mental/emotional/spiritual concern. Addiction takes on whatever shape, form, intensity that serves the person living with the experience. Some say the brain remembers and no matter what one does to stop, one false step and wham you are back in the muck, mired in a destructive relationship with seemingly no way out. Frankly, there is no 'right way' to treat addiction.

When Bill Wilson met Bob Smith, their synergy resulted in Alcoholic Anonymous. Bill stressed that alcoholism was "a malady of mind, emotions, and body." He believed that humans could not solve their addictions alone. The process needed to include both community (i.e., AA meetings, books, and the twelve steps) and a belief in a higher power, something beyond themselves to turn over their essence for forgiveness and be given the power (courage, wisdom, serenity) to move beyond needing to drink. God was the chosen one.

Serge's book is about the practice of being human and living with human concerns dealing with addiction. His mindful process of self-discovery is a path to lasting change. His goal in writing and revising the book was to describe the original twelve steps in a way that grounded the healing process within ourselves. Readers have the chance to learn how to make change not only possible but also to happen. Serge believes that we don't change by giving our power away to some energy outside ourselves but rather by making conscious changes in the way we live and relate to ourselves and to other people.

The proactive steps are suitable for anyone wanting to adopt a mindful, proactive approach to change (this version has nothing to do with faith, religion, belief or not in God). Serge explains that addiction is not about sin or moral defects but rather a means to an end, a way to cope with trauma/abuse/whatever overwhelming experience that we lacked the skills to deal with.



According to Serge, the core of the book is Part 1: Step by Step. Reading the book is like taking part in a workshop. Readers are called on to do the work, to be an active participant, one step at a time rather than by simply reading through it as if the material will simply be internalized and change will occur. Serge encourages doing this with someone, with a group perhaps (he offers advice for working with a group in Appendix 2). He suggests readers take time to be with each step and offers advice in his chapter: How to Walk the Walk.

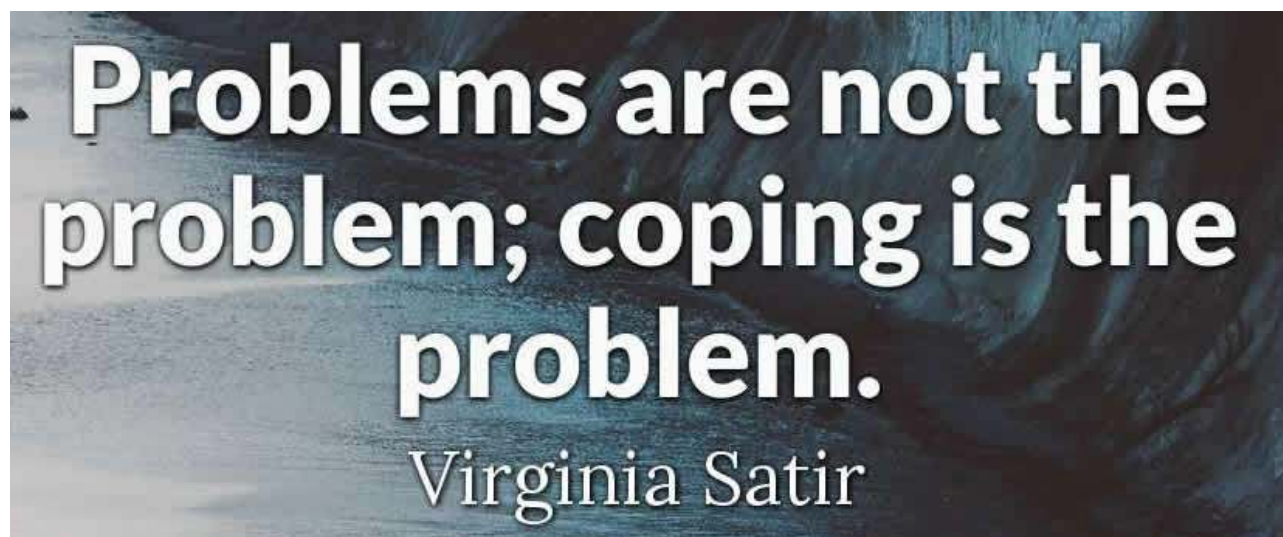
The process is not supposed to be harsh or intense. It is designed to be a gentle process of self-discovery, simply being with yourself compassionately and exploring, watching, wondering. Serge encourages readers to keep a journal and track their experiences and feelings and outcomes. The experience is meant to help readers be proactive and reflective, to create a mindful orientation toward their felt experience, a quality, Serge notes we want to cultivate in our present life.



## **Part Two: A mindful and proactive roadmap**

In this section, Serge covers ways to stop self-defeating behaviors as people move from being reactive to proactive. He writes about ecosystems and codependency, how to have a creative dialogue with your inner critic, and why dysfunctional behaviors make sense. He discusses the potency of using the word "I" versus "We", noting that I-statements convey a sense of personal journey, of self-discovery and self-development, where you confront complex issues, makes choices, and learn from experience.

The difference in word choice provides the grounding for a reader to say, "This is important to me, and I will do what it takes" (pg. 75). The I, the self, is empowered.



## **Part Three: A perspective informed by neuroscience**

In this section, Serge writes about the three circuits of the autonomous nervous system, what happens in civilized life, how coping mechanisms work, and the healing process.

He begins with Stephen W. Porges' Polyvagal Theory and how it describes our autonomic nervous system. Basically, it consists of three circuits: shut down, flight/fight, and mindful engagement. He talks about these innate systems and how they are triggered by and trigger our responses to stress and trauma, and how they impact our resiliency and health.

Coping mechanisms arise to alleviate suffering. Addiction is said to be a copying mechanism, a way to medicate the pain, to feel some release even if only temporary. However, coping mechanisms come with side effects and lack solutions. The patterns we develop become our way of making it from moment-to-moment to get through life rather than fully embrace and live life in the moment.

## The healing process ala neuroscience

Healing starts with the acknowledgement of the situation. Step 1: I am not in control, and this has serious consequences. This usually means we are in flight or fight mode or in shutdown mode. We cannot easily move into mindful engagement mode and use co-regulation with others (also known as social engagement).

Can we find safety in connection with another person?

I venture to say that in the beginning many addicts lacked the ability to self-regulate and in turn to co-regulate their emotional states. They are carried away by the tide and find themselves drowning without even calling for help. There's no life preserver just a bottle or a chocolate cake, or whatever substance or activity is used to numb out, distract, dissociate.

From a therapeutic stance, if we were not in a safe relationship early on, if we did not have the opportunity to be co-regulated as a child, our ability to self-regulate is compromised. Interactions with threat, trauma, abuse, and neglect resulted in difficulties in co-regulating and became manifested in relationship difficulties.

Co-regulation is necessary for many reasons. For one, the process helps us develop resilience. When our body is physiologically regulated it is calmer and in this 'parasympathetic nervous system state', we feel safe and can in turn develop trusting relationships. The quest for safety is an innate need; we need to experience safety in co-regulation. Our physiology craves social interactions that provide the chance to co-regulate. It is not about the removal of threat, but rather how to find safety in interaction (with people) not in withdrawal and isolation (in substances).

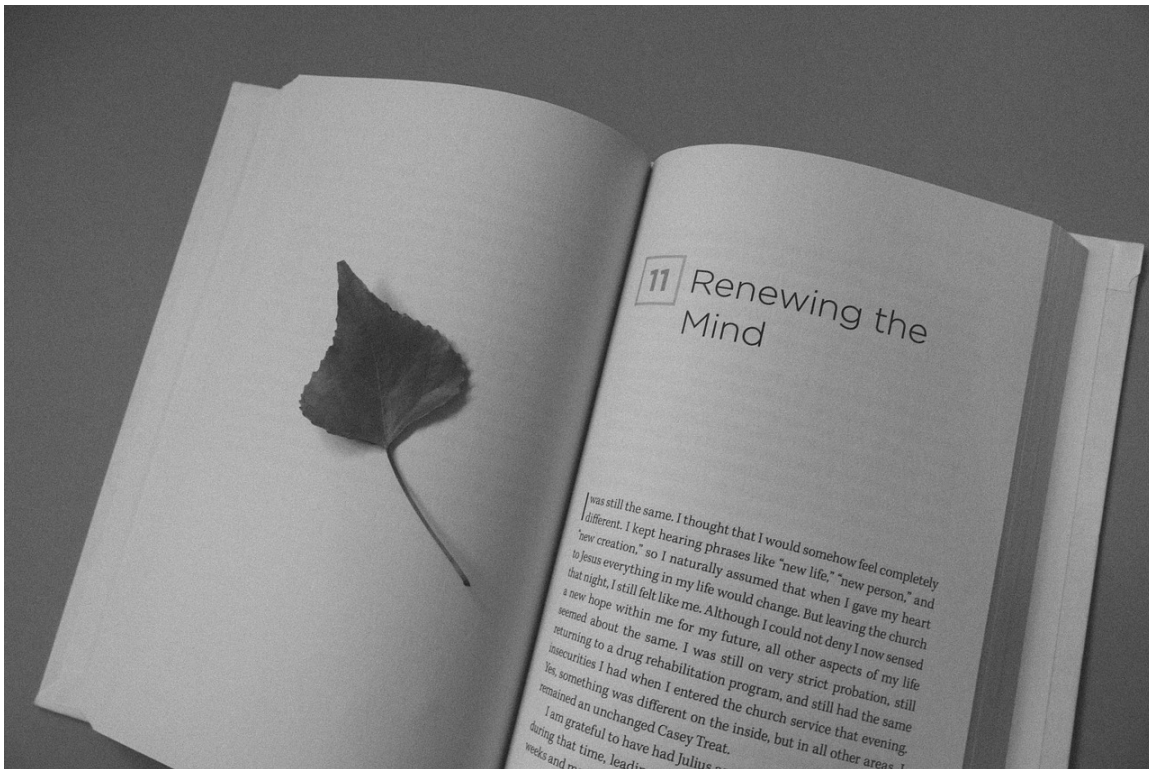
Mindfulness is not a cognitive learning process but rather one way to retrain our nervous system to classify threats as manageable so we can be less reactive.

## Healing is not a linear process

The steps allow readers to find a way to be calm, patient, to be mindful and engage. Readers learn how to pay attention to their patterns (behavioral and in relationship) and see how they have become coping mechanisms. Readers learn



how to develop the desire to understand what is happening and to develop self-empathy as they get in touch with the intensity of their fears and vulnerability. Strategies are created to change these patterns, they are rehearsed, and then used with an eye for what happened—the causes and the effects.



## **Part Four: A spiritual and philosophical context**

This final section involves a discussion about how agnostics and atheists might feel when working in a traditional 12-step program when they are immersed in a God environment. There is a conversation about juxtaposing a higher versus inner power and about faith in human nature. Serge poses the question: What happens when you are in a 12-step program but don't believe in God? The result, he says, can be a sense of failure, absence, isolation etc. . . . the issue of God is not merely a spiritual or philosophical one. It's about being who you are and how you can forge a relationship with the group without losing yourself.

The book closes with three Appendices, a list of useful resources, information about Serge and the process and endorsements.

## **In Conclusion**

I offer my review for readers to consider several questions: is this process something that resonates with me? Am I curious to learn more? Can this mindful means support me to make changes in my life?

And when I say changes, perhaps they are not related to addiction but just behavior patterns that have been longstanding, frustrating. Things that obstruct your path to living a happier, fuller, more present life. There is much here for readers wanting to explore.

Photo credits: Man alone and next step by Gerd Altmann from Pixabay; Be here now by Harald Lepisk from Pixabay; Renewing the mind from Olya Admovich from Pixabay. Virginia Satir quote from BrainyQuotes.

# You Are What You Click

How Being Selective, Positive,  
and Creative Can Transform  
Your Social Media Experience

**BRIAN A. PRIMACK, MD, PHD**

You  
Are

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn, Ph.D.





**I started to write,** “I’m the worst person to review a book on social media! I don’t use it.” Then, nearing the end of Dr Primack’s book, I realized, I use it more than I think.

I don’t Twitter, nor Instagram. I don’t TicTok or Messenger. I post articles on LinkedIn and use Facebook for the magazine. But a sense of who? me? reached out and grabbed me when Dr Primack discussed Facebook and canned birthday wishes: how people, like me, are reminded of “friends” birthdays so we can offer a greeting, an emoji. What truly tripped me was his discussion on our own take away. I rarely post on my personal page, but I do look forward to my birthday and to reading all the greetings from people I don’t connect with the rest of the year. It’s like some sense of *I matter* because all these acquaintances are sending me an online birthday card. Strange? Scary? Sick? Flabbergasted is the best term for me. And this is only one of the many areas that Dr Primack, Brian, delves into in his recent publication, *You Are What You Click: How Being Selective, Positive, and Creative Can Transform Your Social Media Experience*.

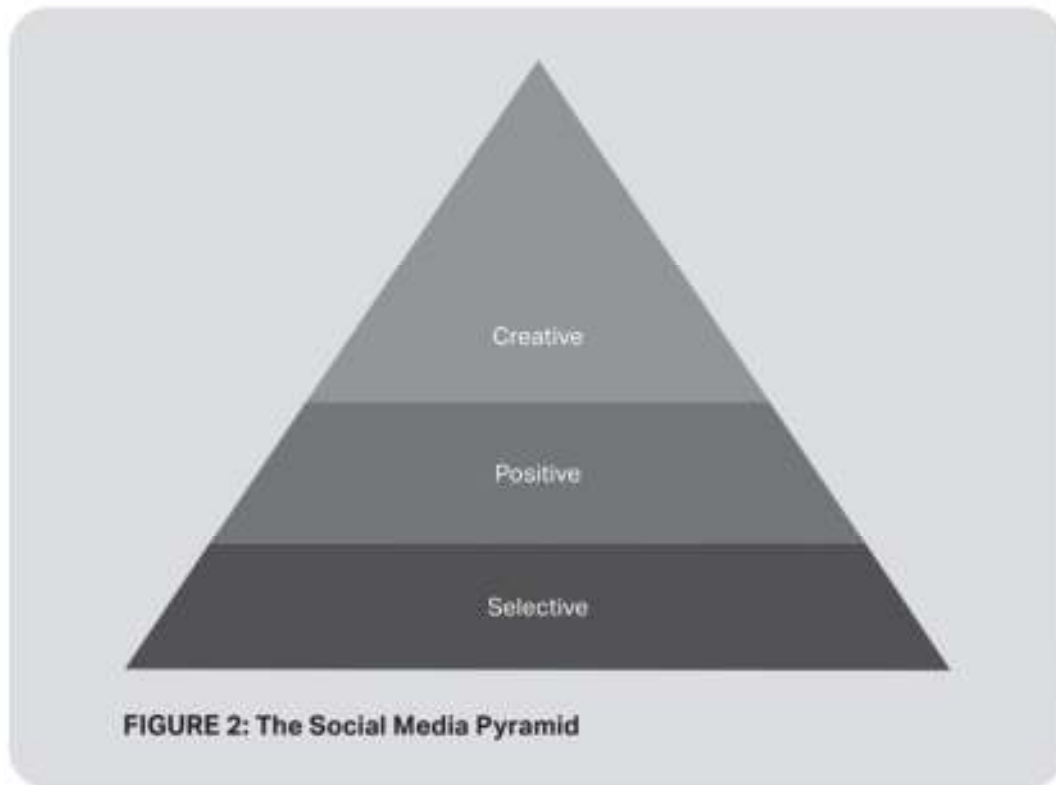


**Dr Primack's text** is organized into five parts; part one lays the foundation for the following four: Why we need a "Food Pyramid" for Social Media; Be Selective; Be Positive; Be Creative; and How To Live Now. Part one includes a personal anecdote about Brian's use of social media during a grim time in his and his family's life: a terrorist rampage left numerous friends dead and others injured in their synagogue. He offers data from studies, his and others, to support his premise that we need to develop a healthy relationship with social media—it's not all or none but rather we need skills that enable us to be selective, positive, and creative in our approach to and use of social media. When we learn how to analyze, evaluate, and critically think about ourselves, we have the chance to discover how we spend our time and energy in life and online, which in turn may trigger changes that might ultimately improve our lives.

**Parts two, three, and four** are each focused on the three attributes that he wants readers to acquire. Overall, he offers strategies to help readers make positive changes when and where needed. In Part two, readers are invited to think consciously about how much time they spend online, how frequently they engage, which platforms work best, and how to schedule breaks, aka holidays, from online time. Part three investigates positivity, from the perspective of positive psychology to one's predetermined attitudes, and ways to reflect on toxicity and positivity in regard to social media. Part four focuses on creativity and how we need to tailor our online use to fit our personality and lifestyle as well as our needs and wants. Rather than being a lemming following trends off the edge of some virtual cliff, we need to look inward and find places that nourish and nurture our inner being, that bring joy to our lives not deplete and depress us. Dr Primack is clear, by reading his book we can:

- Tailor social media use to our personality
- Select positive relationships over toxic ones
- Overcome the comparison syndrome and the fear of missing out
- Fill our feed with meaningful and uplifting content
- Manage our news intake, stop doomscrolling and more

**The content** within each section builds from the basic of why, to how to consider, and then what to do. He notes that he offers "short actionable chapters" with "innovative science" and "immediate strategies" to enlighten and engage readers.



**Reading this book** with the initial attitude of *it's not about me* gave me the space to consider who might benefit. Friends? Family? Clients? Several names came to mind. But then I thought I might offend someone, might make a statement they disagree with and potentially hurt or anger them.

**Brian addresses** this fear of response, not in my particular instance but in all situations related to posting social media content and how the medium affects other people. Discussing the concept of what he calls our negativity threshold, Brian asks readers to consider the following questions before posting something:

- How willing are you to offend people?
- What is your negativity threshold?
- How willing are you to post something to brighten someone else's day knowing it may be potentially irritating to others?

**As a writer** and an avid reader, I know words impact readers. I know I cannot control how my words land on someone else, their experience of my words is entirely their own. But I also know that certain words can inflict pain and cause permanent ruptures in relationships. Images can be just as, if not more, devastating. And social media is filled with both. What we do and how we do it matters not only for ourselves but those we interact with.

**One tool that** comes near the end of the book is the Social Media Checklist. It includes all that Brian discussed thus far and offers a way to organize and guide reflection and change. Each section includes a drop-down list to consider, terms/situations he has explored in depth, for instance:

### **Personalize engagement**

- ◇ Amount of daily time I'm aiming for
- ◇ Daily frequency I'm aiming for
- ◇ Target number of platforms
- ◇ Specific platforms that fit me best
- ◇ Which apps to keep alerts and notifications on



**The bulk of his research** shared in this book addresses depression, anxiety, loneliness, and social isolation associated with social media use—the more time online, the more time down in the dumps. Seeing all these images, reading fascinating stories of grand accomplishments and adventures can send people reeling downward into the *I'm not good enough* void. Time becomes overwhelming as one feed leads to another. People scroll without a clear purpose.

**While Brian covers** expected areas such as body and self-image, bullying, and missing out, he also brings in fresh ideas to stimulate one's thoughts about online use including extroversion versus introversion, one's visual quotient, the impact of neuroticism, the double-edged sword of agreeableness and the many meanings of openness.

**The stark reality** that marketers are manipulating viewers was scary for me—not so much new information but the depth and reach of their tentacles stunned me. Brian's' example of a teenage woman's father upset that Target was sending her ads for pregnancy and childbirth items when she was not pregnant, only to learn that she was indeed pregnant and hiding it from him but Target surmised based on her online use was appalling. These people track every single thing we do online and use it for marketing purposes. After I've bought my mother's incontinence pads online, I received adds for diapers and women's hygiene. They may have the item right but the person wrong. But the truth is, they are watching and recording and what we post online may come back to haunt us.

**I shudder when I think** about my extended family and some of their online postings. The pictures are sensuous, sexy, tantalizing. These girls are in high school, yet they have 800 plus people looking at pictures reminiscent to me of pin up girls. Other relatives post every thing they do from the mundane to the magnificent. It honestly care less about what they had for lunch. I haven't checked my "family" page since my mother's stage 4 cancer in 2011, which was the only reason I created it, to share what was happening with our extended family. And when I get a notification in my email folder, I check some, delete others. I just don't have time nor the care to see it all. I don't feel like I'm missing out, that's for sure.

**But I have friends who are** constantly on their phones. I've had to ask them to put them away while we're having dinner so we can focus on one another. I carry my phone for emergencies; I live with elderly parents with health issues. But I turned off notifications. And when I'm hiking, I'm in airplane mode, relying on my phone for GPS tracks and photographs but nothing more.

**I'm not sure why some people** are more into it than others. The newest users cramming the field are people in their 60s. Younger ages seem to trend more toward images, i.e., Instagram, than words. It's not my arena to surmise who or why but Dr Primack clearly has a keen sense of what's happening, the pros and the cons. In this book, he offers readers useful strategies to make substantial changes if they so desire.

**Just an aside.** One personal anecdote Brian shared involved his wife and daughter and some guinea pigs. I appreciated his acknowledgement at the end of the book:

*"As for Ellie the dog and Bella and Zoey the guinea pigs, I must acknowledge that they have no idea that there even is a book. And yet, they somehow still know how to make me feel good about it. Go figure."*

**His humanness** radiates throughout the book.







Dr. Brian A. Primack, MD, Ph.D. is internationally known for his research in the complex interrelationships between media, technology, and health. He has degrees in English, Mathematics, Educational Psychology and Human Development. He graduated with an M.D. first in his class from Emory Medical School and received his second master's degree and Ph.D. in Social and Behavioral Science from the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

He has obtained over \$10 million to research media, technology, and health. His discoveries have been published in several medical and social science journals, such as NPRs All Things Considered, The New York Times, Washington Post, US News and World Report and CBS Sunday Morning with Jane Pauley.

Dr. Primack joined the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine faculty in 2002 and has served as the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Research on Health and Society, the founding director of the Center for Research on Media, Technology, and Health, and the Dean of the Pitt Honors College.

He currently works for the University of Arkansas as the Dean of the College of Education and Health Professions while serving as the Henry G. Hotz Endowed Chair in Educational Innovations and a Professor of Public Health and Medicine. In this role he is responsible for 6000 students, staff, and faculty involved in the "caring professions," including public health, education, nursing, counseling, occupational and speech therapy, and much more.

Dr. Primack lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, with his wife, two children, mother-in-law, family dog, and two pet guinea pigs.

Website: <http://www.primack.net/professional/?professional> | FB & Twitter: @BrianPrimack | TedMed Talk: <https://www.tedmed.com/talks/show?id=292976>

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Guinea Pigs: Michael Mosimann from Pixabay

FOREWORD BY IAN MORGAN CRON

KELLY FLANAGAN

AUTHOR OF *LOVEABLE*



TRUE  
COMPANIONS

A BOOK FOR EVERYONE ABOUT THE  
RELATIONSHIPS THAT SEE US THROUGH



**Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn**

How can I feel connected to someone I have never met and in turn feel more engaged in my own real-life relationships from reading a book?

Therein lies the mystery and the magic of writing. When an author is authentic and shares their vulnerability and humility, their compassion and love openly, palpably, figuratively, and literally, the reach of their words knows no bounds. True, the reader must be open minded and open hearted, curious enough to willingly step into the author's world and feel the text, as both a bodily and a cognitive experience.

**When a book is crafted just right**, the author walks side-by-side with the reader through the text. Together they are immersed in the muck as well as in joyful laughter; they grieve losses and repent miscommunications and misunderstandings all the while forgiving the distances within one's self and others. The author must knowingly, yet subtly, offer their experiences as a mirror or perhaps as a shadow as they present ideas and feelings that both reveal themselves and entice readers to look deeper within and see themselves in the author's words. It cannot come straight away, like a sermon espousing the sense of I am greater than thou so follow me to the promised land. No, the writing has to flow from an inner place of knowing, of being, from a serenity that comes with stillness and silence that arises from doing the work to know one's self, to love and accept one's self wholly, completely. From this place they can reach outward, touch the hands and hearts of those in their lives and witness their presence without the need to fix or cure anything, without the drive to compete or protect with anger and withdrawal. There is a balance of me and thee within a larger sphere of all that is, Universal Love for some, God for others, Jesus for Dr Flanagan.



**Kelly Flanagan** is present on the pages of his newest book, *True Companions: A Book for Everyone About the Relationships that See Us Through*. His stories resonated deeply in my body triggering tears, gut swirls, and deep breaths as well as times where I found myself holding my breath. I also felt it in my soul as I sank into stillness, into moments of contemplation that led to surrender and acceptance.

## **The book is divided into three parts**

Grow Quiet: Befriending Your Loneliness

Grow Strong: Embracing Your Struggle

Grow Old: Cherishing Your Time

**Each part begins and ends with a letter to his wife,** also a psychotherapist named Kelly, who he nicknamed 'M' 20 years ago when they met because she is his miracle. The nickname was based on many personal reasons and to this day the reasoning has deepened.

**The stories he shares are personal.** They involve his wife and children (Aiden, Quinn and Caitlin) as well as their extended family, friends, neighbors, community and colleagues. They are poignant, down to earth. Humanness shines in their simplicity. Kelly offers his path seeking true companionship by sharing what he has learned even when it's messy. There is no rosy picture here, no promise for a remedy to make your life better, your relationships better. But there is a person willing to witness the journey with you if you are willing to try. There is also a companion study guide that invites readers to join a five-week Companion Camp to explore how to show up in their most important relationships that can be completed alone, with another person, or in a group setting. Having read the guide, I think doing it with someone or a group might yield a deeper, richer knowing.

### **On with the Review**

**As is my way,** when I read a book to potentially review it, I take notes, including choice comments, insights, and language use. I also capture what I am feeling while reading so I can reflect and weave my impressions in the review as appropriate. It is a concentrated, orchestrated effort. Today, however, having just finished the book in two sittings (I was immersed), my response thus far has flowed without the aid of my notes.







## **Befriending Your Loneliness**

**I started Part One a bit hesitant.** The crux of my drive to distract and avoid abysmal feelings is loneliness—it tears into the tenderest most vulnerable parts of me, leaving me in shreds. I felt old tears creep up from deep within while reading many paragraphs in Part One. My longing for connection, for a ‘true companion’, and my inability to fully experience it was laid out in this section with a clarity I lacked but clearly needed.

**When Kelly defined loneliness** by extracting what it was not: abandonment, shame and isolation, I felt it: a spontaneous awakening. The difference in his examples were mirrored in moments in my life; memories followed where I had felt abandoned, shamed, isolated, left alone with my feelings, my thoughts, my being. I always mistook loneliness for less than, not good enough, clearly not loveable. And when he offered that loneliness is human, essential, and in fact valuable, I felt a sense of relief. It changed my perception and in turn piqued my curiosity.

**When we befriend loneliness**, Kelly writes, it can become a “valuable space in the human experience, the quiet that our souls grow into, the fullness of the beauty, wisdom and capacity for love” (22).

**According to Kelly**, we are all alone on the inside, there is a place that exists that is uniquely our own where no one can really join us. Loneliness is God at first glance, he writes. “God comes to us disguised as our loneliness” (70) and offers us our “first taste of holiness” (71). Sitting in stillness, listening to the whispers that come in moments of loneliness, affords us time to be with ourselves, to delve within and explore the person we were at the moment of our creation, the person who lives and breathes within this bodily shell, the holy being that energizes our essence each and every moment of our lives.

**True companions then** afford the space where we can share our loneliness if we choose. Not to heal it, fill it, fix it, or cure it, but to witness it together and appreciate our uniqueness. To feel the connection as we stand with one another and honor the feelings, allow them to be. Instead of having to feel them alone, we can reach out and connect with another. There’s time for quiet personal reflection and time for shared communion. Loneliness is no longer the big bad wolf but rather a shining light, a beacon, a way to come home to myself.



**While reading**, I found the poetic prose engaging. Figurative language enlivened small moments. Snippets, scenes, flashbacks stood for expansive possibilities ripe for reflection and exploration. In Kelly’s hands, even rust takes on a new dimension—it is steadfast, enduring, beautiful: “When two things rust next to each other long enough, they rust together. Rusted things are almost impossible to separate” (197). His use of repetition creates a cyclical sense of familiarity, of knowing; stories, concepts and analogies reappear throughout the book becoming foundations to support expansion.



## Embracing Your Struggle

**Part Two focuses on core ways we disconnect** and how in turn to connect. For example, he shares how anger distances while focusing on our fears and speaking to them brings us closer together. Certainty creates an atmosphere of closure while curiosity opens our minds to explore, wonder, learn, grow. 'Yessing' and withdrawing, 'peacefaking', fixing, helicoptering, competition, and excitement versus ritual and regularity were discussed along with healthier ways to honor one's self, to be authentic and set honest boundaries, to move within and be mindful, to be present before reacting. Taking time to thoughtfully respond that honors both people in the interaction can change patterned behaviors that usually tear people apart.

**I believe Kelly has perfected the power of the pause.** Consider punctuation when writing, think of a comma versus a period. When you hit a full stop, when everything comes to an end, you get a period. There is nothing more to say in that sentence. Done. Final. Yet, a comma gives time to consider, reflect, perhaps add in a few more thoughts before moving forward to complete the sentence. Kelly uses pauses to go within and consider his feelings, his knee jerk reactions and how he wants to respond before interacting with the other person. He uses moments of silence to stay supportive of himself and others. Kelly calls this pattern of response IOU for inward (self-reflection), outward (connecting with others) and upward (acknowledging the existence of a higher power), which is introduced and discussed in his Companion Camp guide.

## Cherishing Your Time

**Part Three. Grow Old.** Because I am not that 'old' (although I think I am two decades older than Kelly), and I am not growing old with anyone as a true companion, I read this section with an eye and an ear for my parents. I live with my 92-year-old father and 91-year-old mother. We celebrated their 66<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on November 23, 2020. During the pandemic, despite the fear that has kept them housebound since January of this year, we agreed to go to one of our favorite family restaurants for an outside, socially distanced brunch. Mom wanted to recreate a moment from their wedding day: the feeding of the cake. We brought their wedding picture with us and after a delightful meal, the waiter brought us a piece of chocolate cake. It took several tries to get things organized considering their mobility limitations etc. but we did it and in that moment of success the other diners applauded. I had no idea anyone was watching us. When I said it was their 66<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary I felt a communal sense of awe—here they were alive, certainly rusty, limited bodily and memory wise (Alzheimer's), yet loving one another to their fullest ability. Their hearts know one another even when memories go blank, when a word or a thought drops off. Their rituals constantly fill my being with love as they make their way through this pandemic like they have through all the seasons of their lives.





It hasn't always been easy, there have been years of indifference, divisiveness, externalized and internalized battles. And there have been years filled with love and compassion. Today they are true companions without knowing what it means or looks like. They just are. They have evolved together in ways that no one expected, planned for, intended. Yet they are here together letting their memories gather as Kelly writes, cherishing the time they have with appreciation for one another as individuals and as friends, lovers, and spiritual travelers. Reading this chapter in the light of my parents' relationship made it feel real and true.

### **In conclusion**

**To close this review**, I offer an invitation to read a special section, an SPT reader exclusive, excerpted from "True Companions" by Kelly Flanagan, taken from Chapter 6, "Observe Your Protections". You can get a feel for his voice, his presence on the page.

Please check the website for an active link at the end of the preview.

You can also follow Kelly on Facebook and sign up for his blog.

And no, I do not receive any compensation for my review or for any book sells. I write what I feel when I read a book; my intention is simply to share what I consider quality literature with colleagues. Although, I do appreciate readers who share their response to my writing, [Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com](mailto:Nancy@nancyeichhorn.com)

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## **The Sounds Behind Our Voice**

By John A Baron

What do seasoned actors express that is more than the lines they say?

What do the 'raw/gut' sounds behind our words actually mean?

How aware are we of the underlying causes of our own and of others vocal tensions?

How might professionals intentionally access 'sound' to persuade clients more effectively ?

And baby talk. What do we know about this?

The bridge between early childhood sound and adult vocal tones is an area that requires better understanding if we are to more fully realize the potential and depth in our communication. The sounds behind words often express unconscious aspects of ourselves and our memories. This is one reason they tend to remain unknown or unclear to us.

As an ex-actor in my native England, then businessman, mind-body-plus teacher and voice coach, these questions have lived with me over the years. I'm wanting to share some of my observations and hunches with the Somatic Psychotherapy Community as to why sounds behind voices often say much more than mere words.

### **Tone of Voice**

We use the phrase 'tone of voice' from time to time. But what do we mean when we say or hear it?

Most of us can recall being told "do not use that tone of voice at me" as a wannabee delinquent teenager by an out-of-patience parent. Our tone at that time may have sounded:

persnickety  
cool  
sarcastic  
entitled  
arrogant  
victimized  
demeaning  
supercilious  
whiney  
aggressive

and these are just ten tones of voice for this one example. The list, of course, is endless. Well, at least as endless as grouchy teenagers are.

The truth is our 'tone of voice' actually communicates far more than the words we use.

We all used our innate sound to communicate as infants before our words started to show up. But these innate sounds don't suddenly stop when we begin to 'speak.' They develop alongside our acquired vocabularies. This development synchronizes with our expanding vocabulary. These sounds can be as sophisticated as the most complex sentences we use. Yet there seems to be little study about their meaning, at least as far as language communication is concerned. There are not thousands of innate-sound dictionary equivalents; no university chairs devoted to the meaning of sounds behind words.

**Our tone of voice expresses our emotional connection behind the words we use.**

Our emotional states fluctuate throughout the day. Take the following string of words, for example: "pass the salt!" There are millions of ways to say this. Deliver this line to just three people you know (better if there's a salt cellar around when you do). As you say 'pass the salt' to each of them, you will sound different every time. Why? Because you have a different emotional connection to each of them. Your sound will reflect that.





### **To Be Or Not To Be**

In my work with actors, I have had them experiment with a character they're playing by exploring the bare sounds behind each character's words. Let's say the actor is playing Hamlet and we're using his famous speech "to be, or not to ...." A little time may be spent saying the words of the speech to themselves. It's best if the actor is NOT interpreting at this stage but feeling how the words land as they continue to contemplate them.

After a while the actor can start to experiment with voicing the sounds behind the words. These sounds may sound peculiar at first, even Neanderthal-like at times. But at least this gets the actor away from literal (or wooden) interpretation. In this case the actor plays with exploring the raw emotions of their character via the exploration of these raw sounds. At times we may hear:

whimpers  
guttural sounds  
breathing expressions  
shouts  
varying vowel sounds



clucked consonants  
soulful cries  
sounds of contentment  
humorous sounds  
pitiful noises  
and other sounds.

If you'd like to experiment here, use the line 'to be or not to be.'

- Sit with it for a while.
- What emotional perceptions come up for you?
- Let sounds (not words) come out of you via this connection. (It doesn't need to be dramatic.)
- What raw sounds express the meaning, for you—right now—of the unspoken words behind 'to be, or not to be?'
- Now say the line a few times out loud, connecting the words to the sounds you were making.
- Note the sounds and the words. How is one affecting the other?

With actors I will have them take this crazy experiment a step further.

- From these raw sounds I will ask them to explore their movement, letting the movement be a direct expression of the emotion they've connected to, not to the character they're playing or the character's situation, but the emotion itself.
- The actors will make a variety of movements—large movement, still movement, fast, slow movement, gesturing movement etc.—all emerging/happening.
- See what shows up

Asking the actor to explore emotions and sounds behind words in this way reveals expressions that cannot be accessed by words alone. The results of this experiment are often startling, so much so that movements which arise via this process can be choreographed into the actor's staging when appropriate.

Accessing and exploring the sounds behind our words open up a new understanding, not only in the actor's communication, but in our own.





## **How Voices Come Into Being**

For the first few months of their lives, infants express themselves by the sounds they make. Some familiar examples:

- gurgles
- cries
- shouts
- screams
- grunts
- sing-song sounds
- laughter
- 'Ooh's' and 'ahs'
- fear sounds
- cries of hunger
- conversation noises
- giggles
- 'coos' and happy sounds

In other 'words,' infants express themselves via these kinds of raw sounds. These raw sounds do not simply disappear after words come along. They become part of the foundation of sound behind our individual voices and are the basis upon which our emotional world is built and conveyed.

These noises without words are part of the struggle the infant has in communicating. This may be one reason that some of us still struggle with our emotional expression today. The noises, tones, and sounds behind words often communicate the memories of struggles; struggles that can induce stress triggers.

If emotional expression is discouraged in infancy this will create vocal blocks/ tensions, both then and later. If so, the vocal instrument is compromised. This happens before full sentences come along and can continue far into adulthood.

A child will copy the sounds / tones of voice of people in their lives. They will even embody them over time to some extent. Voices—pleasant and unpleasant, loud, and soft, threatening, and welcoming—all stored in memory.

In a pioneering study, Australian opera singer Priscilla Dunstan, outlined five basic sounds babies make:

- 'Neh' (hunger)
- 'Eh' (burping)
- 'Eairh' (gas)
- 'Heh' (discomfort)
- Owh (sleepiness)

This may seem to be a basic observation, yet it did start a recognition of the benefits of considering the meaning of sounds in infants.

Research also claims that between the ages 0 to 3 months neonates' sounds are not speech or language but an activation of the voice box. Whether future research continues to expand these initial findings remains to be seen.

## Baby Talk

From the ages of six months to nine months babies start to copy basic sounds like 'mama,' 'papa,' etc.

The *Journal of Neuroscience* (2018) published a study referencing 'Baby Talk'. Their findings were dramatic. Back and forth conversation between parent and infant developed better language/comprehension skill. This was irrespective of the socio/economic group of the parent and child.

It was the back-and-forth conversation, not the drilling of individual words and meaning, that proved more relevant. This back and forth was even more successful when the adult spoke with the child and not at them. When the adult practiced turn-taking, i.e., pausing between the exchanges, this invited the infant to connect. Observation skill, interaction, and imitation skills improved.

Adult parents speak to their child in an endearing way using familiar baby talk sounds. The adult may blabber in fun, use gentle noises, or raise pitch to communicate with the child. Conversely, the disconnected parent may yell, speak loudly, use a high accusatory sound or even a low threatening one. All this affects the child for good or for ill. The tone of voice the adult uses becomes the child's emotional inheritance, and part of their embodied make up. This is reflected in the sounds they make when speaking.







## **Do Sounds Behind Words Express the Unconscious?**

The bridge between infancy and adulthood is massive. The sounds acquired in this time reflect countless experiences. Our verbal development is loaded with the sounds communicated to us behind words. These sounds reflect a meaning locked away in personal histories. In fact, what body language is to movement, these sounds are to voices. These sounds cannot always be explained, though they are intuited from time to time.

This is my theory: the sounds behind words mainly express the unconscious parts of ourselves and our memories. Which is why, for the most part, they remain unknown or unclear to us.

### **What Happens When the Tone of Voice is Used to Effect the Outcome?**

'Paralinguistic' is a newly introduced buzzword which is now applied to business presentation. It is our communication behind words themselves, e.g., volume, speed, intonation, gesture, and other non-verbal cues. (Para - 'alongside of' and linguistic - 'human speech'.)

Jonah Berger and Alex B. Van Zant (2019) recently conducted four experiments on tone of voice and how it affects persuasion. They found listeners are persuaded by the speakers' attempts to modulate not just what they say, but *how* they say it.

When communicators spoke louder and varied their volume they were perceived as being confident. This confidence connected to their power of persuasion, proving this link.

### **The Reflection Behind the Mirror**

Elizabeth is a successful educator. For years she has taught classes in a variety of schools and universities, from poor to posh. Due to constant vocal strain, she recently took a series of one-on-one voice coaching sessions with me.

My initial observations showed Elizabeth had excess muscular tension in her face and jaw. On top of that, she had shallow breathing, vocal fry (a grating low sound) and very quick delivery.



Elizabeth is a pleasant articulate person, yet she conveyed such obvious tension by her 'sound' that she was difficult to listen to. These marked tensions have the effect of making one's listener tense. (A tense speaker/ performer/ actor/ musician, will also make their audience tense.)

In one session, we were exploring continuous air flow, first linking it to continuous sound and then varying the volume and pitch of certain sounds.

Her habitual vocal repertoire was a mix of sounds best described as:

breathless  
pinched,  
hidden,  
locked up,  
quick,  
soft,  
staccato.

The new sounds she was exploring were not part of this habitual repertoire.

Elizabeth suddenly stopped speaking. She looked shocked.

What had happened was a clash between her habitual sounds and the exploration of these new sounds. They had triggered a strong memory.

Elizabeth then told me about her repressive upbringing, which included both physical and emotional violence: "Speak when you're spoken to!" and "Obey your father or else!"

The moment she had stopped the exercise, she understood the cause of her tensions. What blocked her ability to speak with ease throughout her whole adult life, originated in early childhood:

the closed mouth (“Don’t be seen!”)  
the forced smile (‘I’ll be good.’)  
the fast delivery (“Say it quickly so you won’t be noticed.”)  
the breathlessness (her embodied fear)  
the staccato sounds (“I don’t want to be in trouble.”)

All this tension was locked into vocal identity that was and is challenging to break free from.

### **Vocal Tensions Effect Vocal Functioning**

Elizabeth is now able to speak with much more ease. Even when habitual vocal tensions return, she understands they are only temporary, not all consuming. These vocal tensions reflect the person she was. Consciously releasing these tensions make her sound like the person she is now.

We all copy the sounds of our upbringing. Elizabeth’s example shows us that tensions that lie in our early childhood affect the way we sound. Muscles tend to fixate these experiences. Any undue muscular tension affects the free functioning of our vocal instrument. This in turn affects the myriad of sounds behind the words we use.

If we were to take away words; if we were to focus on the actual sounds a person makes, what then? It then becomes a different game—a game we can begin to be more conscious of, should we so choose. But until we do, can we really understand the art of communication and the essence of presentation skill?

Is it worth bothering about these raw sounds behind words? Is it such a big deal as far as practical communication is concerned?

Ask a theatre actor. Ask a public speaking coach. Ask a business communications coach. Ask the people who are now able to persuade listeners more effectively. And ask the people like Elizabeth, who are now able to speak their truth and sound truthful when they do.

Walt Whitman said, “Every soul has its own individual voice.”

Yes. It’s just a matter of finding it!



John A Baron began his professional life as an actor in England playing leading roles in professional theatre, film and TV. He went on to become a business owner, corporate trainer, senior teacher and teacher trainer of The Alexander Technique and Voice Coach.

Along the way John developed special workshops, and training programs for such diverse organizations as Fireman's Fund Insurance, Google Inc. (two-year project), San Francisco Ballet (twenty-five-year project), San Francisco Opera, Weg Der Mitte (Berlin), Cal State Hayward University, The Sundance Institute, and The Esalen Institute.

He currently practices in Sausalito, California.

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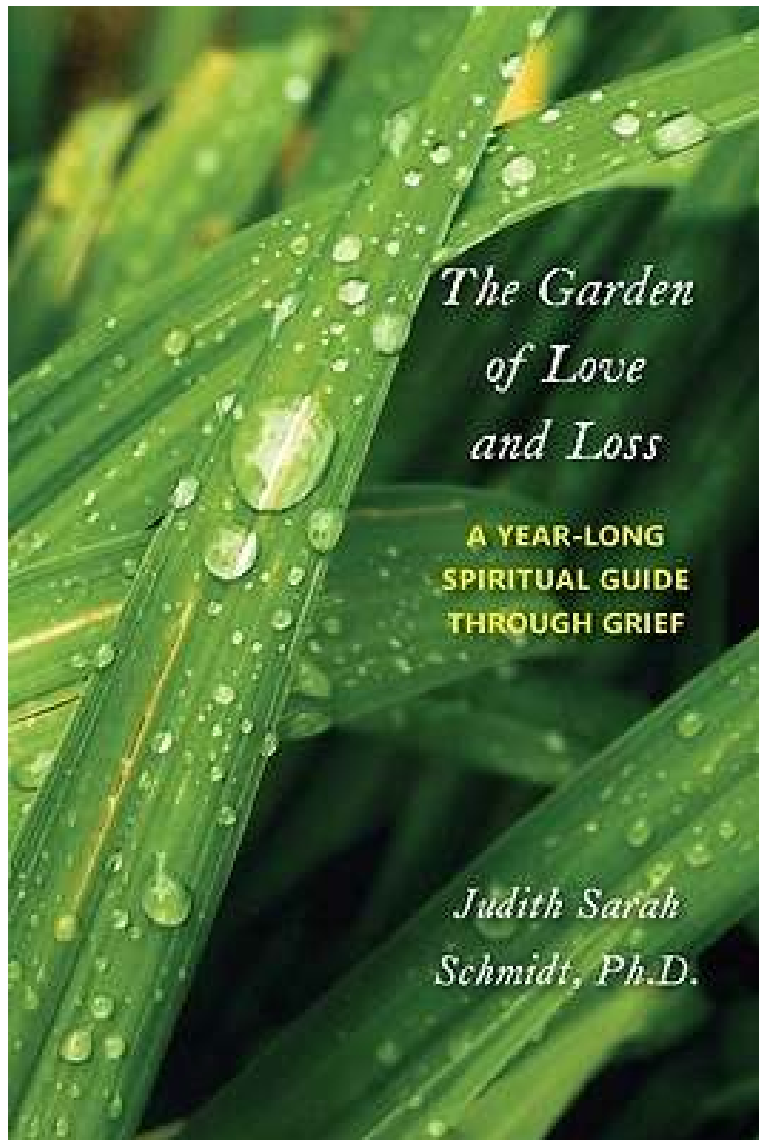
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The Garden of Love and Loss: A Year Long Spiritual Guide Through Grief

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Books come to me at the moment I need them. It may sound strange that a book magically appears bringing a message I need to hear in that time and space and yet it is my reality, my truth.

Dr. Judith Sarah Schmidt reached out to me in 2017. She was looking for developmental editing assistance with her manuscript. I was in the midst of my mother's recurrent cancer eruptions and not skilled to comprehend and negotiate her potential death—I did not my mom to die, and I sure did not

know how to deal with the grief that arose even considering it. I still had unresolved feelings about my fiancé's death when I was not yet 20 years old. Facing my mom's potential death was overwhelming.

Reading Judith's manuscript, I learned how she lived through and with her daughter's death and eventually her 94-year-old mother's death, and how she was now helping others to move through the grieving process when a loved one has departed.

She writes:

*"With hearts cracked wide open, we mutter our light and dark to one another, sing songs of grief for who and what we have lost, and offer praise for the force of life that pulses all around and within us.*

*"Although your journey through the Land of Grief is one of broken heartedness, may you come to know your heart will also be touched and opened in unimaginable ways. May you be visited not only by darkness but touched by a most poignant light. May you know not only the deadness of stone but also a profound awakening to the sacredness of life.*

*"It is my deep hope that, through this book's journey, you take something with you to light your way, to help you see in the dark, something to carry and to pass on to others" (pg. iv-v).*

The book is intended to be used in myriad situations: during the dying process; when someone you loved has recently died; for a young adult who lost a parent or sibling; for people part of a bereavement group; for someone dealing with ongoing grief from a loss many years ago; and for readers who have not experienced the loss of a loved one but know it is coming.

In this pandemic year of loss, I know many people who have lost a loved one in the most excruciating circumstances; many were unable to be with their loved one as they died. I count my blessings that I was able to sit with my beloved Aunt Irma several years ago now in the ICU room. Day-to-day we shared special moments—she loved her hands and feet massaged and her face gently washed. When the time came and hospice began the morphine drip, I was able to hold her hand, meet her gaze, share my love and memories, and hear her raspy voice as she struggled to vocalize her love and memories of me. I am thankful that I had the knowledge gained by reading Judith's manuscript years before to be present and open, to let compassion and love be my guide in those shared moments together.

To be restricted from this intimate moment, person-to-person, touch-to-touch as she transitioned as many people had to be during this past year because of COVID-19 feels simply appalling. I believe that Judith's book came to light this year at just the right moment when many are facing their losses (some more than one) and wondering how to navigate their way from life to death and back to life.

### **Inside the Book**

Judith offers 52 reflections (one per week for the first year of this process), guided meditations, and journal writing suggestions to help readers use the book to their best advantage. As she notes, there is no right or wrong way to be with this process. It comes from her grief journey as well as from years sitting with others as they worked through their losses. Her intention is for others to find their way with support.

Setting the stage, she offers readers guidelines such as creating a sacred silent space, free of clutter or perhaps with some treasured objects. A place where you can sit, reflect, meditate, write, draw in your journal. A place to come inside and feel safe in silence, to be with whatever arises (tears, fears, anger, hope, regrets, memories), a place that can become a refuge, a haven for you and your grief.





The guided meditations include work with your breath, somatic awareness of your body, drawing, and movement, and journaling. On journaling, she notes: “I have found the greatest pain in my life comes from feelings I would not let myself feel, from words I would not let myself say, from tears I would not let myself cry. What I could not share with another, what I could barely share with myself, I shared with my journal” (pg. xiii).

A journal can stand in as a witness for your experience. You are alone with your inner selves and can have conversations that no one else is meant to hear, not meant to be part of—you and your feelings, thoughts, desires, fears, can come together and be released.

She addresses situations/topics that are common during the grieving process such as feeling numb and letting go of a loved one’s belongings. I slept with my fiancé’s shirt for months after his tragic death, longing for his scent and the softness of the flannel as if snuggled in his arms. She encourages readers to allow grief to move physically through the body, to listen to the voice of aloneness, to live through the long nights, and be with the emptiness one feels.

Her reflections, meditations, and journal prompts support and guide readers through the initial stages of loss and through a growth process where one does eventually allow new loved ones to gradually enter their lives. To move from a sheltered focus to viewing all humanity as one's family, to focus on global connections, and to face the reality that one day we will all die.

### **Coming to a Close**

She closes by offering the words that she hears in the stillness of her heart that help her to continue on the path of love and loss:

*"Dear Breath of life,*

*Please hold my hope, hold my deep desire to love and serve life.*

*Please let this book give healing to even one person on their path of grief.*

*Please hold my darkness, tattered remnants of my grief.*

*Please place a star within my heart to guide my way when I become lost.*

*Help me know my fullness. Forgive me my emptiness.*

*May my living shine forth the essence of my departed loved ones who are ever with me.*

*Help me carry gently the places within still wrapped in frozen grief.*

*Help me remember the unbreakable circle of love and life.*

*Help me to have compassion for all that is broken and a sense of wide-eyed wonder for all that is whole.*

*And, when it is my time to die, may my memory be a blessing, for that will mean I had lived and touched others in some good way" (pg. 290).*

She then invites readers to write their own prayer for going on and, if it feels right, to share it with someone close.

At this point in my life, having lost two significant loved ones and facing the impending loss of my parents (age 92 and 93), I am grateful to have the published book in hand. Life continues and death will come. I know I will work through this journey again and again. Judith's reflections and meditations will not "wear out" after one use. They will withstand the test of time, forever pertinent when one is grieving.





[Judith Sarah Schmidt, Ph.D.](#) After earning her doctorate in clinical psychology, she did post-doctoral studies in Object relations and studied Waking Dream Therapy with Collette Muscat in Jerusalem. As an imagery, dream and trauma therapist, her work is inspired by Winnicott, Jung, and Buddhist and Jewish spirituality. She integrates depth and imaginal psychotherapy and the restorative language of the body, and she cherishes those sacred moments that arise like surprises from the creative core of wholeness and bring healing.

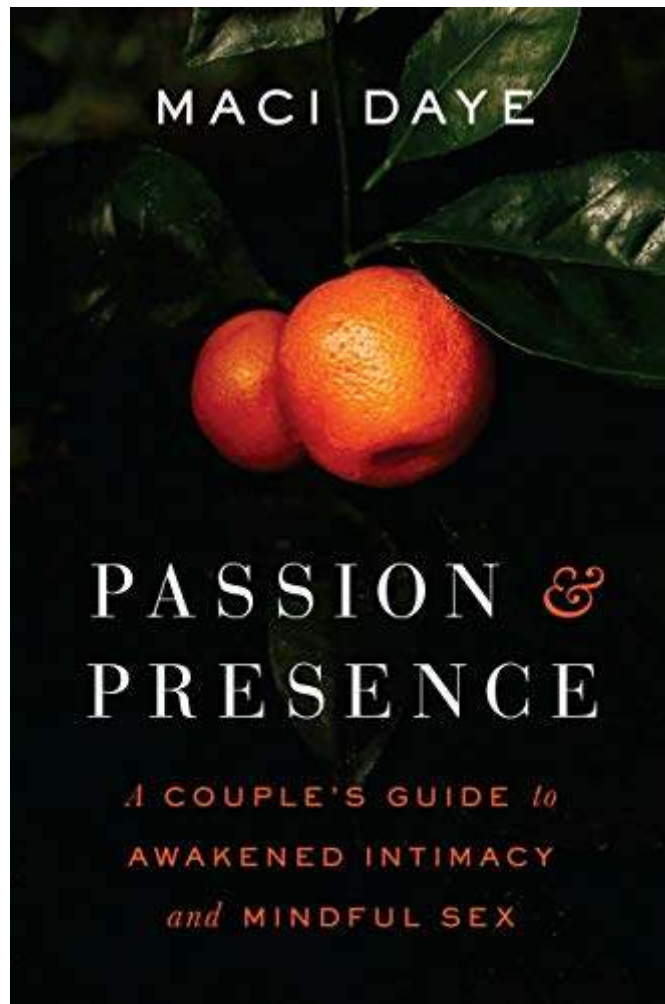
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Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

One simple sentence says it all: "Great sex is a mind-set, not a skill-set."

Maci Daye embodies the essence of her new book, *Passion & Presence: A Couple's Guide to Awakened Intimacy and Mindful Sex*, in this short statement. Yes, readers receive exercises to practice concepts presented throughout the book, but the crux of success resides in mindfulness including presence, curiosity, and authenticity, and a commitment to one's self, one's partner, and the relationship.

Daye offers a detailed experiential guide for readers wanting to increase their passion and deepen or restore their erotic connection. She shares engaging case studies and activities/exercises designed to help readers find and heal their inner obstacles to sex. She has created a clear and doable process, what she calls the 'naked path', a path of 'being' rather than 'doing'. She nudges readers stuck in a state of resignation and stagnation to turn toward intimacy and joy and pleasure.

"Passion and Presence is relational, embodied and goal-free."



Aside from the Introduction, each chapter (7 in total) adheres to a similar structure: an opening vignette/case study highlighting aspects of a couple's sexual relationship that many, if not all, readers will relate to; then cycles and steps, charts and graphics, and more to educate readers about what she calls our Pure Erotic Potential (PEP), its six barriers, and ways to move beyond. Readers learn they can access their Pure Erotic Potential by becoming present, curious and exploratory rather than goal oriented—she encourages readers to "look inward and to allow, instead of forcing anything or striving to reach a goal" (pg. 5).

The six barriers include: Automaticity; Trances; Fear of Vulnerability/ Protective Strategies; Hidden Factors; Erotic Wounds and Trauma; and Shame. She also shares ways to create a safe container for exploration. Each chapter ends with "Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections". The exercises/activities are do-able. Daye writes in a way that both explains what to do and offers support as readers enter new ways of seeing, hearing, touching, being, and revealing.

Daye is clear that while it may seem easier, maybe preferable to distance from one's sexual partner and avoid feelings (including shame, anxiety, fear, vulnerability, or even joy and sensuality), but in the end, avoiding one's feelings and avoiding sexual interactions creates barriers between ourselves and our pain, and we remain stuck. Daye notes that when we mindfully approach our feelings, our hidden factors, our wounds, our protectors, and protected parts, and so forth, alone and as a team we can find a portal to healing and transformation.

Daye offers readers emotional support and validation while encouraging them to reach out and try something new. Readers who are already versed in mindfulness practices, who can tune into their body and listen and feel what is happening beyond their thought patterns, and who are committed to work on themselves and together with their partner have the upper hand in this process. But the concepts are also presented such that beginners can learn if they want.

At one point, Daye teaches what she calls the Stop, Study and Share process. Readers are called to stop in the moment of a sexual interaction as needed. To turn within and check what is happening: is it a feeling, a thought, a something? She asks them to linger with these sensations in an open, curious way and then share the experience with their partner, who must be able to listen and be compassionate and supportive. Daye notes, *"These exchanges are delicate, which is why it is essential to talk about yourself rather than about your partner. You want to share discoveries about your inner emotional life, even if your reaction was triggered by something your partner said or did. When we share our experience without blaming our partner, in turn is partner is likely to provide a caring response"* (page 110). This process relies on readers having a high level of emotional maturity and healthy/effective communication skills.

"The process of befriending, exploring, and ultimately transforming blocks to erotic expression requires a deep and abiding couple alliance" (pg. 7).

The depth Daye offers comes from years facilitating Passion and Presence workshops as well as exploring life with her husband Halko Weiss. She shares their struggle with age-related changes, bewildering stressors, and overfamiliarity. They too have felt the painful effects of personal early experiences and sex-negative imprints from their past. The tools she shares come from a range of sources including: Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy, neuroscience, sex therapy, trauma therapy, and systems therapy.

Each chapter is brimming with insights and exercises—there is enough to keep a couple exploring beyond the veneer of their current relationship and go within to touch the deeper recesses of their being to discover more about



## **A Glimpse into the Treasures Contained within Each Chapter**

### **Chapter 1: Awakened Intimacy**

In this first chapter, besides learning about one's pure erotic potential, readers are introduced to Daye's stages of love and sex.

**Stage 1** begins with the overwhelming sensations that come when we first fall in love: an oxytocin overload as hormones surge; we cannot get enough of one another.





**Stage 2** drops into disenchantment. The endless 'To Do' list takes over. Sex isn't as hot and heavy. People often fall into the 'novelty trap'—they focus on new thrills, techniques, and positions to liven things up.

**Stage 3** is the heart of this book: Erotic Re-enchantment. Daye explains that a mindful approach can re-ignite a couple's erotic flame.

Erotic Re-enchantment is achieved by accessing/realizing one's pure erotic potential. The process involves letting go of goals, expectations, and inner models. What sparks awakened intimacy she writes is a mindful approach: It works with your consciousness, not your behavior.

Daye offers a short accounting of the six barriers and which chapters they are explored in, in more depth. She also explains that they are 'checkpoints', not necessarily sequential, nor a one-time deal. "Individually and as a couple, you may go through one or several on your journey" (pg. 26).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections invite readers to notice their reactions to having goal free sex.

## **Chapter 2: Erotic Presence**

This chapter involves the PEP barriers of Automaticity and Trances (induced blindness, no longer noticing who the person is). Like coming home with a new haircut and your spouse doesn't notice, or when you have this sense of, I know this person, there's nothing new for me to see. You see what have always seen, an image in your mind rather than the person in the present tense. In this trance state, mindless repetition becomes habit driven sex.

Daye notes that our state of mind determines how we show up for sex and what experience we have when we have it. Here she invites readers to cultivate an internal observer to notice habits of the mind in real time.

“Mindfulness helps us gently wake up from distorted perceptions and beliefs that have become automated and can lead to trance like states” (49).

She offers Five Features of mindful sex (page 43)

- Eliminating goals and reference points
- Embracing both the joys and challenges bundled with sex
- Accepting the impermanence that runs through our erotic life
- Cultivating a state of novelty
- Becoming present and embodied

Mindful sex is not slow nor is lusty or rough, she writes. Any kind of sex can be mindful. It is the quality of presence that we bring to whatever type of sex we are having right now that matters. This presence is curious and allowing. We feel ourselves emotionally, energetically, and physically. “The inner observer has open eyes enabling us to notice our thoughts, habits, and impulse throughout the experience” (page 43).

There is also what she calls wakeful sex that comes when we wake up from habits and trances. “Waking up is an act of love, not a whack on the head” (49).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve seeing fresh and mindful touch.

### **Chapter 3: Erotic Cooperation**

The PEP barriers are: Fear, Vulnerability, and Protective Strategies.

In this chapter Daye helps readers to discern their stubborn interactional patterns, what causes an impasse between partners. She discusses what she calls a reciprocal interaction loop (70-71) and how partners can move from ‘Stale Mate to Soul Mate’ (72).

Partners, she writes, must work within themselves to interrupt viscous cycles that keep them looping out of connection and out of control. Each person must “take the high road to being reflective and aware, rather than reactive under stress” (75).

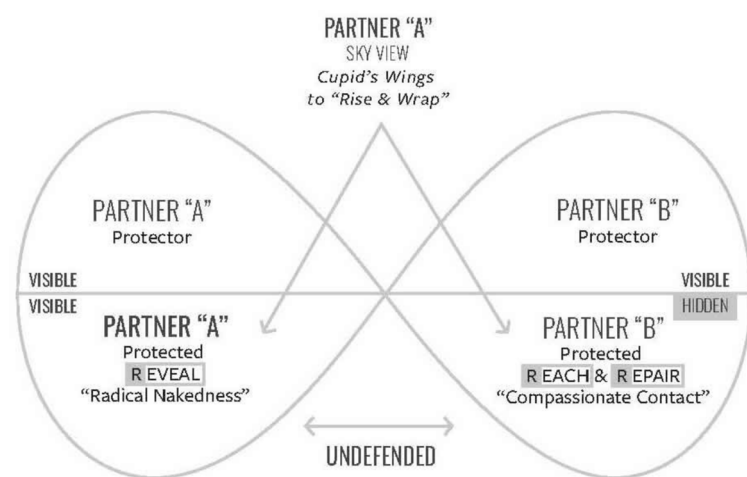
She introduces the PREP process to help readers stop and become self-reflective:

- ◆ Pause
- ◆ Regulate

- ◆ Explore
- ◆ Peaceful presence

And she offers her CARE Cycle to create a loving container and learn how to love actively, to invest in the relationship. This involves three Rs: Reveal (reveal your vulnerability) Reach (choose intimacy over protection) and Repair (connect with your partner).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Getting to know your protector and protected parts.



The Care Cycle consists of the three Rs, which are how we love actively. Here partner A is initiating the cycle by revealing their discoveries from mindful self-study to partner B. Partner A can also reach into partner B's "underneath" and compassionately guess B's hidden pain. Partner A may initiate a process to repair the hurt they may have caused partner B when partner A was acting from their protector.

## Chapter 4: Erotic Transformation

The PEP barriers are: Hidden Factors, Erotic Wounding, and Trauma.

To start healing, Daye writes, we need to be able to recognize the five main features of what she calls our hidden factors, then she describes each of the hidden factors. From here she teaches readers how to heal and grow through sex via somatic self-attunement ("Using your interoceptive or 'felt sense' to determine whether to go toward or decline a sexual activity" pg. 224).

She defines the Defend cycle versus the Befriend cycle (pg. 104) and offers six steps to detach Now from Then (pg. 116). Stop, Study, and Share extends to include Select and Savor, thus becoming a five-step path/practice to work with hidden factors.

“The essence of sexual response agility is mindful co-investigation and mindful self-study,” she writes.

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Mindful self-study and planting a heart.



## **Chapter 5: Erotic Expression**

The PEP barriers in this chapter look at Shame and Trances.

“Shame is a lie that someone told you about yourself” (131).

This chapter offers insights into Parts Play, the Passion Pyramid, and the Four Flavors of EROS.

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve experiencing the creative potential of parts play.

## Chapter 6: Erotic Attunement

The PEP barriers including: The Performance Trance, Automaticity, and Hidden Factors.

“There is nothing that kills desire faster than the pursuit of what works, relentlessly” (162).

To recover full bodied PEP, Daye offers that we need to recover the sense that there are infinite paths we might take each time we make love (163). Feelings of shame and living in a trance trigger hidden factors that disconnect us from our EROS energy. Barriers lock us into outdated sexual scripts and what Daye calls outside-in pathways to pleasure. “The dance of sex becomes no longer an improvisation but more a polished routine” (163).

She offers an amazing exercise on page 163 to help readers sense their body and trust their felt sense and internal guide. When readers learn how to sense and respond to their eros energy in an organic improvisational way and be present in the moment, they can enliven their passion and pleasure.

“Good lovers do best when they do less thinking and planning about sex, and let their bodies move in response to the energy unfolding between them” (166).

“Erotic attunement connects us to ourselves and to eros energy in the pursuit of sexual pleasure” (165).

Daye dives into her ‘Plane of Possibility’ (169) and teaches us that to transform ourselves through sex we need to wake up something vast, untamed, and authentic within ourselves (169). “A mindful approach to sex is about sensing, feeling and responding to the elemental wild spirit of eros in a free-flowing dance” (171). Sex is thus a “creative collaboration, an interplay of eros energy filtered through our shifting states and moods” (171).

People who tend to be goal oriented are invited to empty out their thoughts, expectations, and previous ways of being and assume an ‘anything is possible’ state of mind before having sex. Daye offers a replacement process: Start with a few minutes of mindfulness and set an intention to embrace uncertainty, then find a way to imaginatively put away what you have known so you can follow your curiosity. The issue is, when we are preoccupied with our thoughts, be it about performance or trying to achieve a different outcome, we become disconnected from the present moment and our partner.

This is where the EROS CYCLE comes into play:

- E** embody and attune
- R** relax goals and relate
- O** open to impulses
- S** savor pleasure

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Moving mindfully through the EROS cycle.



## **Chapter 7: Erotic Sustenance**

The golden years

While we cannot go back in time and recapture what was, we can step out of numbing routines every day. This chapter helps readers understand that





sex, like life, is a daily practice, and we can become “mindfully and sensually embodied no matter our ages or years together” (190). Readers learn to tap into the transformational aspects of their visions and to stay awake to the ever-changing now.

### **In Conclusion**

I honestly have not read many books about improving one’s sex life, so my insights are personally guided. I was blessed to study with Stella Resnick, PhD, a clinical psychologist who specializes in couple’s sex therapy, during my graduate program at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. I also enrolled in several of her seminars at Esalen Institute, one with my partner at that time. No one had ever taught me about a healthy sex life, nor had I explored experientials with a partner in such an open and affirming way.

Daye’s book gathers a wide scope of concepts and experientials and funnels them into a step-by-step, user-friendly process that couples can do on their own.

Though I think that mindfulness beginners might find it useful to work with someone who can help them create a safe container to delve into their more vulnerable states, someone to talk with and process their experiences. Not all couples have the emotional maturity to do this type of work on their own. Perhaps attending one of Maci's Passion and Presence workshops, then bringing the experience and the book home will help couples grow forward.

### **A Note About Transparency:**

Other than receiving a reviewer's copy of the books I read, I do not receive any compensation for my reviews or for any books that sell. I write what I feel when I read a book; my intention is simply to share what I consider quality literature with colleagues. I do appreciate readers who share their response to my writing, Nancy@nanceyehorn.com



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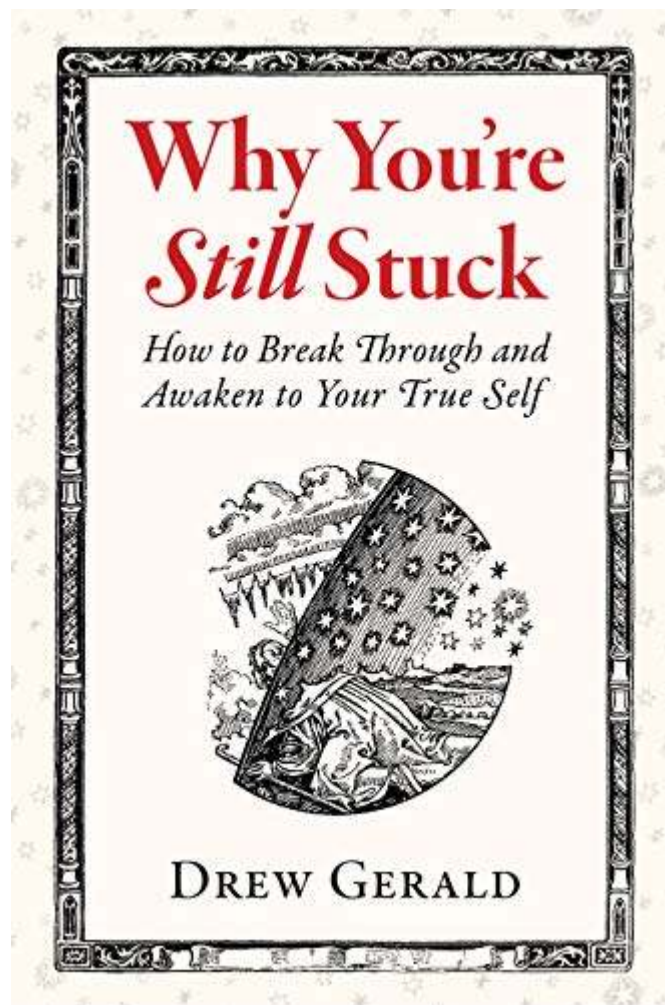
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Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

Drew Gerald kindly sent me a reviewer's copy of his book, *Why You're Still Stuck: How to Break Through and Awaken to Your True Self*, way too long ago. I started to read it and appreciated what he had to say but the depth of the detail was too much for me in my then current emotional state. I realize the content was designed for just such moments, but I didn't have the wherewithal to confront the internal intensity and take care of my mom's rapidly declining health.

Drew writes on the front jacket:

"If you're confused and frustrated despite all you know and achieved, or how much you've worked on yourself, this book offers 18 unconventional approaches that reveal how you got stuck, how to finally break through, and awaken to your True Self."

His words mirrored my experience of myself at that time. I did make my way through the book, slowly. Because I didn't do all of the exercises, I will speak to the presentation and materials available for readers. I can honestly say I recommend this book, and I don't take my recommendation lightly. If I don't think a book contributes to our literature, if I find the writing outlandish or boring, I simply say nothing. I truly appreciated Drew's book and his approach to helping people first look at themselves with an understanding of where they are and how they got there. And then the extensive tools offered to transform past patterns into healthier ways of being.

The book is divided into two sections: How You Got Here and Moving Forward. He focuses on the stories we tell ourselves starting with his own. He shares his vulnerabilities and his failed attempts to improve himself and his life. He draws parallels and connects his experiences to those readers might be having such as why we're here reading this book and how we might gain from his knowledge. He is clear that he isn't offering an easy fix, he sets the stage for challenges that will come and support he offers to move toward them and through them.

I appreciated his perspective and his request that readers progress through the text in sequence: chapter 1 to chapter 2 and so forth. He is creating an inner pathway with concepts building on one another. He also recommends taking time to absorb and reflect on the practices/exercises.

Being a writer and knowing how stories impact our lives, I resonated with his work. He talks about archetypal stories and the manifestations within our personal stories, the interpretations we make, and how we weave in specific details and memories to substantiate our beliefs.





He addresses what he means by “stuck”. He writes: “You’re stuck because you decided that’s what’s happening. Being stuck is only one perception. You are the one that defines it as ‘Stuck’. You labeled it, gave it a name, made it mean something.”

Adding in a Buddhist tone, he notes that “much of our suffering comes from our added meanings and projections that we superimpose upon what’s real” (pg. 15).

Stopping the stories doesn’t negate their existence, but it does examine what is real and what is not. It’s one step toward looking at what is fact, what is interpretation, what is assumption. Readers learn to see what is there without judgment, exaggeration, distortion, dramatization and more. Within our stories, our feelings arise from a bodily sense. Learning to leave one’s head (thoughts about feelings and projections) and sit with one’s bodily experience offers an avenue for change. It’s not simple, however, as sitting in one’s silence can be a trigger for people who are addicted to the ‘noise’ in their head: all the fantasies and inflated ideas that work us into a stupor. Basically, our stories exist because we keep telling them. When we keep the past alive, we can’t see what’s happening in the present moment.

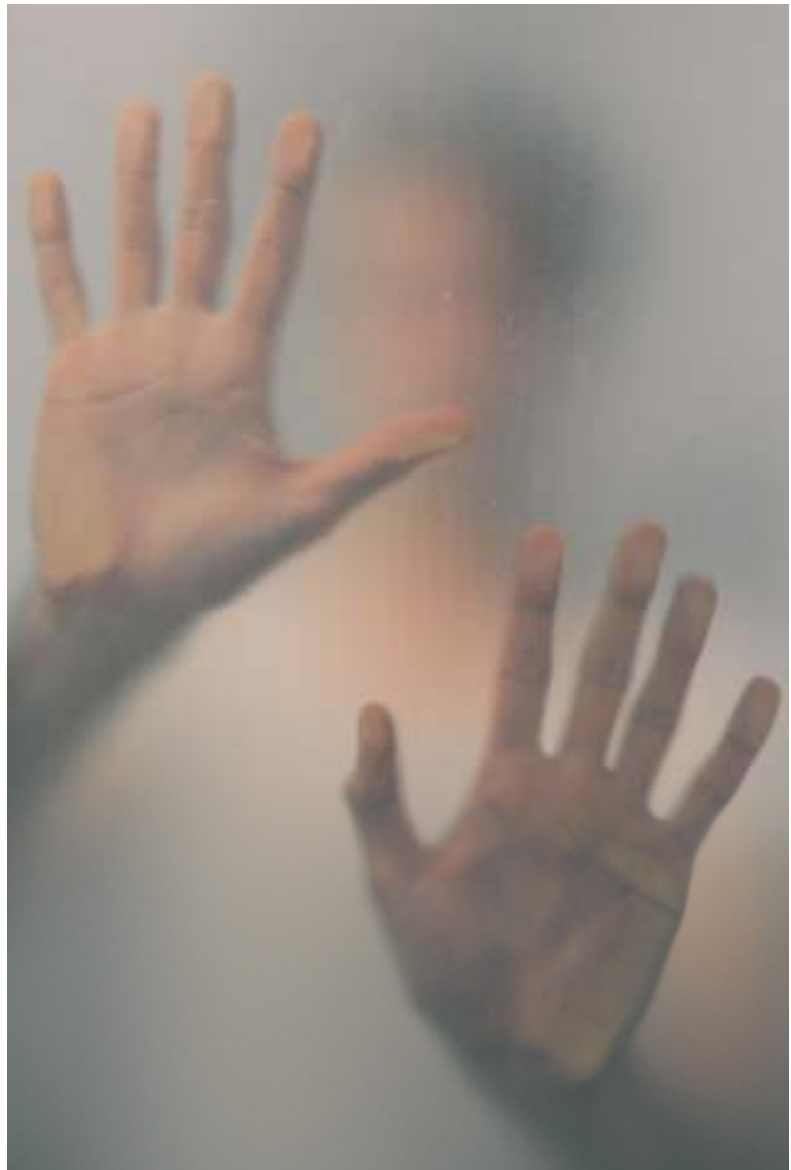
Early in the book, Drew offers a hierarchy of change (pg. 28):

1. Identity: Who I am
2. Feeling: How I feel
3. Belief: What is true
4. Attitude: Where I orient
5. Behavior: What I do

But he's clear that change isn't about seeking some alternative being or fixing something that is broken. Looking for a solution implies we have a problem and identifying with a problem becomes limiting in itself. He wants readers to feel their way rather than think their way to change. He even offers a new look at narcissism, helping readers to love their image and move from armoring and lacking to regain a relationship with their true self via a spiritual path.

Giving up, falling into a victim trap, blaming and so forth keeps our past stories alive. Drew is clear, "If you cannot accept that you are responsible for your life and what becomes of it, you will struggle" (pg. 114).

As you move through each chapter, I suggest taking time to journal your responses to the questions he poses and do the exercises. Once you have a sense of what has been, you can create a vision for





what you want in the here and now. Life can change simply by changing your story with awareness, self-compassion, and acceptance.

### **A Personal Aside**

My story was filled with an overarching tone of poor me. I mired myself in resentment and focused on all what was negative. I was stuck. Then I listened to a dear lifelong friend for three hours as she raged about her caretaking role with her elderly parents. I realized in those moments how fortunate, how richly blessed I was. While she lived with antagonism, anger, and attacks, I was surrounded with love, care, concern. Sure, it's not easy living with elderly parents with health concerns, with childhood stories rooted in the foundation of relationships that are not always happy, but the truth is that once I looked at my situation from a loving perspective my entire being shifted. My poor me dissipated and lucky me took over. Everything altered in that moment as if I were the Grinch and my heart swelled five times larger that day. The feeling remains. A new story started in that moment, and it is filled with all that is positive and fulfilling, with hope and faith, with patience and perseverance.



## In Conclusion

There is much to write about Drew's book. I offer this more general review to perhaps entice readers to check out his book for themselves. There's clearly material here for everyone to experience and explore.



**Drew Gerald** ([drewgerald.com](http://drewgerald.com)) is an entrepreneur, author, and director/founder at the Center for Cinesomatic Development ([cinesomatics.org](http://cinesomatics.org)), a healing technology leading the world in cinematic movement and diagnostics and graduate-level consciousness studies. He holds workshops internationally integrating embodiment, spirituality, video, shadow work, trauma therapy and feeling-based awareness.

In his early career, Drew coded a particle and physics engine by the age of

18, used by top Fortune 100 companies over the 7 years of his software business.

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