

# Developmental Task of Becoming an Adult



Releasing old patterns to let our Self, our Essence...  
shine through unimpeded



## IN THE SUMMER OF 1988, YELLOWSTONE NATIONAL PARK HAD A HUGE FOREST FIRE

That summer, the US National Park Service officials did something controversial that they hadn't done before—they let the fires burn.

Businesses in the park complained that letting the fires burn would disfigure and blacken the park and ruin tourism.

It did not. Yellowstone received more visitors in 1989 than in any other year that decade.

*“Fire is destructive, yes. It’s also historic and regenerative. Scientists said the Yellowstone ecosystem needed periodic fires to remain healthy. Burned pine bark proved nutritious for elk. Grizzlies prospered. Aspen seedlings appeared everywhere. And over the next eight years, white bark pine seedlings appeared in all 275 study plots monitored by the NPS.” (Heacox, 2015, p. 299).*

This is the same process yoga advocates: Be with what is.

Instead of putting out the fire, or finding strategies to avoid it, let the inner fire burn away that which isn't you, clearing the perceptual lens for consciousness (Singer, 2007).

The question, of course, is how to do this?

How do you know what to do?

How do you listen to your body, when you're racked with conflicting signals?

The theory is relatively easy to understand: being in the transformational fire burns away the stuck patterns of life.

Putting that into action is what we all resist.

No matter how skilled we are at being in the fire of transformation, **resistance is inevitable**, until we get close to the root (or get near the root) of the pattern.

There always is turbulence moving close. In yogic terms, the beehive of vrttis lets loose thunderous sensations, feelings, and thoughts.

Tossed into the tumult, we always struggle, not wanting to go near “it.”

To enter the fire of any transformation—and healing trauma is most definitely a transformational journey—we need navigational tools.

All the skills I teach bring us to the point of knowing, expecting, anticipating, and surfing this turbulence.

Ultimately learning to shift, from suffering, being alone with the pain...to having a measure of freedom, is the hardest transformation.

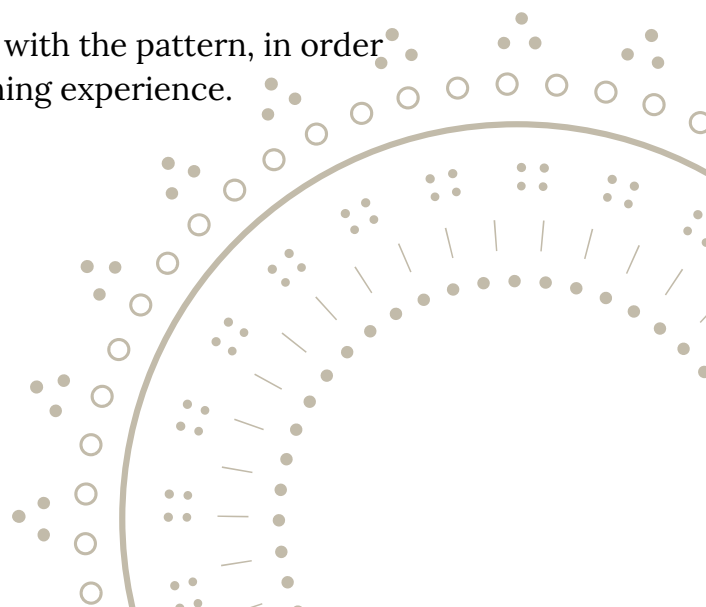
Navigating the fiery cauldron of suffering burns away that which isn't one's true nature, so that the essence of who is there, which can never die, can emerge.


This is the vital key—finding and knowing we are more than just our suffering, so that we can enter that felt experience.

Encountering turbulence in any form, making contact with the pattern, in order to re-pattern from within, and pivot to a more nourishing experience.

**RESISTANCE IS INEVITABLE.**

**IT'S DESIGNED TO REPATTERN  
FROM WITHIN.**





## *Developmental Task of Becoming a SELF*

*Every child longs to be seen, to have their inherent worth be cherished, for no other reason than that they are there.*

Trauma creates a milieu where it's easy to get lost, and it's hard to trust there's inner guidance.

Every child longs to be seen, to have their inherent worth be cherished, for no other reason than that they are there.

Not getting this, the heart is plunged into darkness, and the sure "knowledge" of being unwanted and worthless becomes excruciating.

The child's developmental task is to get this value, a worth and a sense of self, from the outside, from caring others who should help to instill it.

When that doesn't happen, a different developmental task emerges for an adult: that of listening to the needs, wants, and longings we all have, and responding in such a way that they somehow get met.

Living life from the inside out establishes a sense of Self able to tolerate the natural arising of needs and wants, while finding appropriate ways to explore beyond what's comfortable, soothing and reassuring. whenever tension and distress arises from inside.

The developmental task of an adult is to learn to live from the inside out, while being mutually and collaboratively related to others, and to life situations.

The key to changing course is held in the protest, which when heard, reassured, and valued, eases and calms the whole system.

**From an attachment perspective, resistance is the expression of a protest, "It shouldn't be like this!" "It should be different!" "This isn't fair!" "I don't like this!"**

We've all have those moments.

As therapists, our clients come to us when they feel stuck in them, unable to pry themselves out.

When we're in it, we believe that's all we are.

Over time, the connection to the original, free, native expression of being fully ourselves, is lost. For most of us, when protest arises, we clamp down out of fear of disappointment, or we immediately recite the evidence of the multiple times when those needs weren't met.

*Yoga and attachment theory train us to experience protest differently.*

The power of the protest is in pointing us toward the direction of getting those needs met, of listening to our inner guidance urging us down a different path.

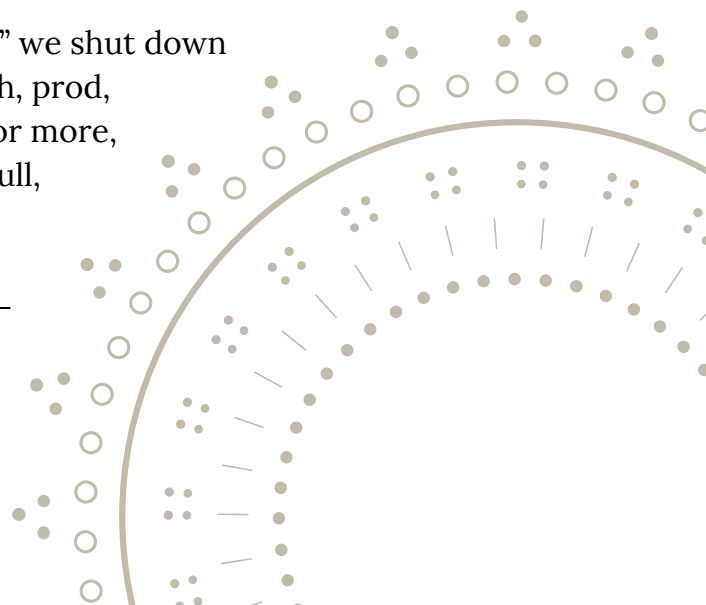
If we shut down, we miss the signpost that our heart is pushing us to see.

By this I mean that our longing...to be known, seen, understood, cared about...comes through as an unmet need .

In essence, our “neediness” links up with where we want to go.

If we shut down our needs, shut down that “neediness,” we shut down our inner compass, the guidance that continues to push, prod, and urge, that compels us to go toward, and to reach for more, in order to become more fully ourselves, to become a full, uninhibited expression of our true nature.

In yoga, we call this drive to return to ourselves prana—it's the life force, the energy that animates everything.



## *Different ways of responding*

We all have different ways of shutting down, when we don't get the response we need or want from others.

Each of us has different strategies to deal with the disappointment, the loss, the distress.

The pain gets too much and we don't want to deal with it —so we shut it down.

It's hard to fathom that the root of our suffering can be integrated into something more wonderful, yet behind that protective barrier, behind the corrosive rust that seals our hearts shut, we continue to seek or yearn for a long, cherished wish to belong, to be loved, and to love freely, safely, and with total abandon.

The protest is both an upset with the existing external circumstances, and the way we rail against the constrictions in which we feel caught.

As the protest is both revealed and honored, gradually, over time, you come to know the equanimity that glows behind the protest. Something luminous, gentle, and radiating.

As Sharon wrote me, one day after a session, "I was happy to hear you say I did a good job today. Mostly because I could actually hear it without feeling the need to swear at you. And because I felt good about it as well. It amazes me that when I can tap into what I have come to know as truth about myself, I can speak with such clarity and an appreciation of what I've learned about myself, decisions I've made. There is no doubt, no second guessing. I speak from the truth of who I am. It's so hard to remember this when I'm in the struggle, pulled back into the past, as you say, flooded by all of the competing parts within me. So hard to remember when the days and weeks go by without having a glimpse of this wise and wonderful person that others see in me; when all I can focus on is the sad, scared, confused, shameful person, who spends her time either hypervigilant or completely shut off from the here and now. Tonight, I'm grateful for this view within; grateful that the shame isn't clouding my vision, trying to keep me from gathering up these bits of truth. And I'm grateful for your assurance that you won't let go of the pieces that are waiting to be seen—because of course that's their biggest fear, right? That finally they are coming out into the light and they'll be pushed back into the darkness. (I didn't realize that until I heard you say it today, and I right away knew it was exactly what they needed to hear) Anyway, I've got to get to bed. Just wanted to share where I am, and to take one more step toward making it real."

# OUR HEART KNOWS AND REMINDS US OF WHY WE SHUT DOWN TO BEGIN WITH.

Our inner conflict, sensing the longing, and pushing the longing away, can literally bring us to our knees.

We either cave, and revert to our old strategies, bottling up the longing once again, closing off, and rejecting our needs and wants, or finally give in to the longing to know our Self, and what we long for.

Hopefully (and this might sound odd) but at some point, crippled in we-know-not-what, we can't hold on anymore, can't keep the longing down that we had tried to let go of.

We surrender the strategies, the protection.

We open the door to transforming our inner world.

The protest wants more, different, better.

Within the protest, is a longing encapsulated, protected from being felt, even as we know at some point that the protection itself no longer serves us.

**Caught in this conflict, we still know we want more, yearn for more.**

**Long desperately for more.**

**All while we cut off that longing out of the fear of not surviving.**

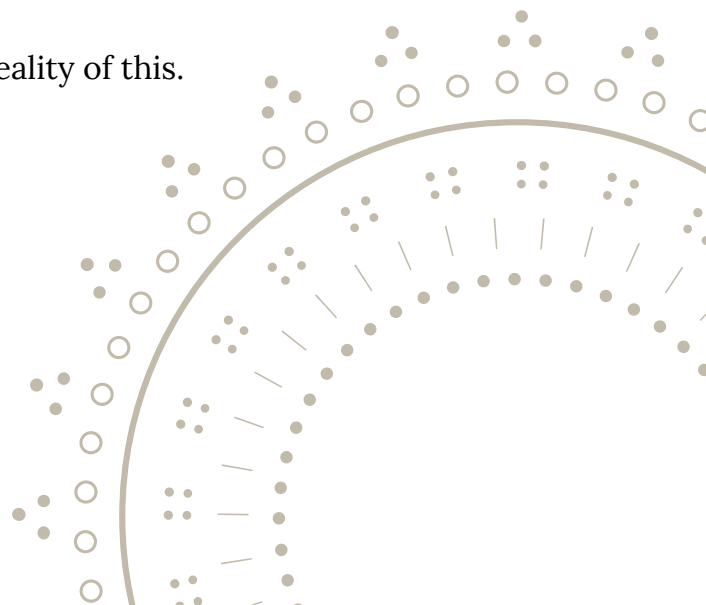
So, before we do anything, we need to deal with the reality of this.

We didn't get what we wanted back then.

That's absolutely true.

You wouldn't have this scar on your heart if you had been met in exactly the way you "needed" back then.

But you weren't met in that way.





You didn't receive what you needed.

So what you did back then was exactly right, you developed stunningly perfect strategies to keep going, to manage, to survive.

You safely packaged up the pain.

As a child you did that, to get through, perhaps never to return.

*Your heart has a different need. It needs for you to return to it, to not leave it, to not abandon it.*

*Your heart is the pulse point of your life; it needs you.*

*And prana, the life-force, urges you to listen, to not forget. To return.*

For many people, despair is real, healing uncertain, even as hope still fires their longing to trust Joseph Campbell's iconic words, "Follow your bliss."

Protector parts urge us not to trust in this possibility, as compelling as it is, advocating that good things are really meant only for other people.

The past keeps intruding, erecting hurdles, making it hard to see the path forward, a way around the mountains.

If you're a helping professional you know...people come into our offices, needing a guide, a midwife, or in Diana Fosha's words, a Transformational Other (2011, 2000).

This is, in fact, the purpose of the books and practices I advocate --helping people to access their own inner wisdom, and trust it in action.

On a very concrete level, learning to be with sensation instead of getting caught in the storyline releases the person into the present moment.



# IT'S HARD TO TRUST THAT THE HURRICANE WHIPPING INSIDE CAN EVER EASE.

When the winds of turbulence are raging inside a nervous system, it's hard to trust that, as with everything in life, everything rises, crests, and ultimately falls.

It's hard to trust that the hurricane whipping inside can ever ease.

The inclination is to do whatever is possible to stop it, divert it, avoid it. In order to trust, there has to be a foundation of organizing a disorganized inner world, of practicing easing control, of releasing the attachment wounds of clinging or a determination to be alone, of learning how to be with one's inner world.

**Yoga reassures us that, in learning to trust one's own inner wisdom, we will be guided into deeper connection.**

**That maybe everything so far is foundational to trust.**

Learning to trust, to be reassured, to have a felt sense of comfort, that all will be well.

That is one of the essential components of attachment theory, of providing a secure base to return to, in times of stress and distress.

It's like the good parent who reassures the child who wakes scared from a nightmare, "It's okay, sweetheart. It's just a dream. I'm right here."

Now as adults, we can do what Kristen Neff and Chris Germer suggest: practice offering self-compassion in the midst of our suffering.

YOGIC PHILOSOPHY OPENS THE DOOR FOR THE BODY/MIND/HEART TO YIELD INTO WHAT IS...

INSTEAD OF RAILING AGAINST IT.



## WE KNOW THIS FROM WATCHING INFANTS, WHOSE BODIES START OUT IN THE PRIMARY POSITION OF YIELDING.

I'm sure you have the experience of holding an infant, or small child. Their bodies offer no resistance, their muscles yielding, and allowing your hand in.

They haven't learned to be tight, armored, defended.

This is the first developmental "movement" we start life with; yielding.

Without muscle strength and movement articulation, the infant can only yield and wiggle on their back. They then learn to push, to reach, to grab, to pull (Aposhyan, 2014, 2015; Bainbridge-Cohen, 1994; Gundersen, 2013).

If we look at the developmental movements of a child, we watch the cycle of yielding, reaching, pushing, grasping, pulling.

These organized movements or patterns are preceded by and follow a developmental progression that allows a gradual integration into purposeful, pleasurable, and communicative movement (Aposhyan, 2014, 2015; Bainbridge-Cohen, 1994; Gundersen, 2013; Polatin, 2014).

Yielding, as Susan Aposhyan so profoundly teaches, is different than collapsing (2014, 2015).

*Yielding is about staying within oneself while also releasing into another person or object; this is the natural state of an infant before developing the strength to reach, push, grab, or pull.*

*The developmental shift into earning secure selfhood as an adult comes from being able to yield once again.*

*It means letting go of willfully pushing one's way through life, avoiding whatever is disturbing and emotionally distressing.*

Instead, we learn to soften and yield into what arises, despite how painful it is.

Maybe everything up to this point is to guide us, to teach us to remember how to trust, to follow instinct, to be able to receive from inside, and from outside.

We can map this onto attachment theory.

*Yielding is about allowing in, letting others affect us.*

Pushing teaches us to leave something behind to move toward.

It also pushes away things we don't want, away, develops protective boundaries, provides appropriate separation when needed.

Reaching is about exploring, moving toward, asking, wanting, needing.

To grasp is to draw toward, or to cling to when scared.

Pulling brings others to us, providing connection in a physical, emotional way.

*Yielding requires trust.*

Without fundamental trust we have to re-teach our hearts and bodies to yield, to remember how to trust this present moment, this life and the others that are part of our life.

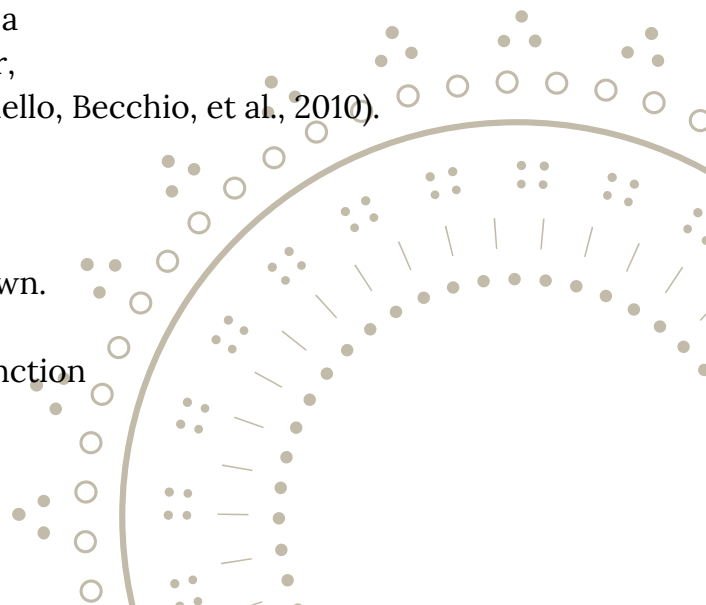
To yield, we interact with something, making contact, and then release into it.

When twin fetuses move within the womb, there is a slight slowing down, as they encounter one another, a consciousness of there being another there (Castiello, Becchio, et al., 2010).

This is different when we touch ourselves.

We don't have that momentary delay or slowing down.

Perhaps this indicates a primordial self/other distinction that we are instinctively aware of, a boundary between "me" and "you."



# *Self / Other Boundary*

But it also speaks to contact and connection.

In knowing that someone else is proximate, there is an intuitive respect in making contact, and understanding of the Self/Other boundary.

Yielding, as an adult, Susan Aposhyan informs us, is the experience of being present in ourselves, and letting go, trusting that the other (the pillow, or another person, or our lap) will receive us and not cause harm.

In one of my Trauma, Attachment & Yoga training groups we explored the difference between yielding and collapsing. Almost everyone agreed that they found it hard to just let go and “relax.” The group described a predominant body experience of clenching and being tight. I suggested that we inquire if maybe the goal isn’t to relax?

*What if the intention is to have contact and yield around you.*

*I saw the quizzical look on everyone’s face.*

Perhaps

you have a similar question as you read this. Think of an ice cube melting in your hand—what happens? Your hand starts getting too cold, and you want to pull away, right? Whether you stay with the experience or put the ice away the ice continues to melt, moving, flowing, around the resistance. While the tendency to pull back is happening, the ice melts, and water flows around you. What if that’s all that it’s about? Moving, flowing around resistance, instead of reacting to it. Perhaps that’s the basic element of trust—of being with something. Moving, flowing without resistance or around any resistance.

*This is the power of trusting prana to guide us through the rocks, hurdles, and barriers of the samskaras of life.*

(Of course, I hope it goes without saying that there are situations and life circumstances where it is imperative to stop something, to not yield, but to instead protest vigorously, and push against.)

In the famous interview Bill Moyer had with Joseph Campbell, Moyer asks, “Do you ever have the sense of . . . being helped by hidden hands?” Campbell’s response informs us what is possible, “All the time. It is miraculous. I even have a superstition that has grown on me as a result of invisible hands coming all the time—namely, that if you do follow your bliss you put yourself on a kind of track that has been there all the while, waiting for you, and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living.

When you can see that, you begin to meet people who are in your field of bliss, and they open doors to you. I say, follow your bliss and don’t be afraid, and doors will open where you didn’t know they were going to be.” (Campbell, J. & Moyers, B., 1988, p. 150).

This is the promise of learning to be with one’s inner world, of being awake to sensations, and guided from within. Yet, as Campbell also tells us, this is a heroine’s journey, spiraling in and out of hidden pockets of our psyche.

Despite all we have learned as therapists, every therapist new to the inner chaos of trauma and attachment learns this side-by-side with every client who opens the door for us.

Arabelle is the client I cut my teeth with. No matter how much we know about trauma and dissociation, it isn’t until we meet that one client, who introduces us to the chaos, disorganization, and primitive overwhelm, that we put any theory into clinical knowledge.

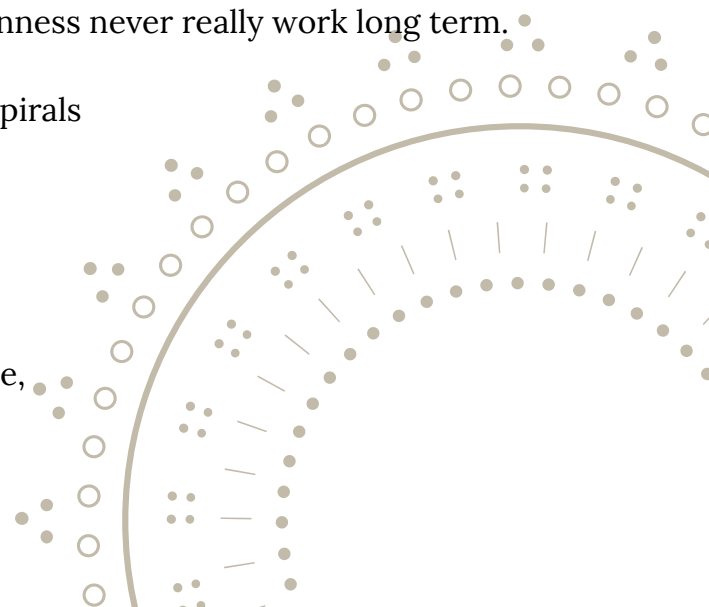
This is the journey that we begin to ease around: our “stuff” comes up (sometimes too fast to handle), rises, crests, and with practice and skill building, it then falls and integrates.

Our strategies to prematurely transcend our humanness never really work long term.

It’s in learning to be with this unending cycle that spirals through our life that we find our freedom.

Yoga reminds us that we are not separate, that we are not alone in our suffering.

Similar to Hansel and Gretel in the Grimm’s fairytale, we have to realize that we are lost, look for the breadcrumbs, and follow the often imperceptible trail home to our true nature.



# *This is the path of healing trauma*

First, not identifying with the traumatic events, recognizing the suffering inherent in what happened, while most of all orienting to the internal push inside, to remember who we are.

In yoga, as in psychotherapy, we discover that we are not the composite of our personality traits alone. That there is more.

*In the practice of yoga, we follow prana, acknowledging the pain, listening to the protest (the “it shouldn’t be like this”). To look wider than the pain, orienting to a nascent something else.*

Reaching for that new possibility, pulling the horizon of our lives into our present, we learn to ride the restless surf of sensation, releasing samskaras, relaxing around vrttis, to find ourselves reunited with who we are.

Joseph Campbell’s wisdom reminds us: “Now, I came to this idea of bliss because in Sanskrit, which is the great spiritual language of the world, there are three terms that represent the brink, the jumping-off place to the ocean of transcendence: sat-chitananda.

The word ‘Sat’ means being. ‘Chit’ means consciousness.

‘Ananda’ means bliss or rapture.

I thought, ‘I don’t know whether my consciousness is proper consciousness or not; I don’t know whether what I know of my being is my proper being or not; but I do know where my rapture is. So let me hang on to rapture, and that will bring me both my consciousness and my being.’ I think it worked.” (Campbell & Moyers, 1991, p. 149).

*Most of us rebel against letting go  
of what is known, even if it is painful.*

# OUR EVOLUTIONARY DRIVE IS FIRST TO BE SAFE, THEN TO EXPLORE.

It's in meeting life as it is, that we develop trust and cultivate this earned security.

Stress builds character, Ed Tronick (2007) writes, describing the interactive mismatches of being an infant. "These mismatches stress the infant by generating negative emotions, but the infant has coping behaviors for repairing them to turn a mismatch into a match and the negative emotions into positive emotions. Developmentally, the experience of repairing these mismatches has several positive benefits for the infant. First, the infant's sense of effectance or mastery is increased. Second, his coping capacities are elaborated. And third, following Spitz's formulation, with the reiteration and accumulation of the experience of successfully repairing mismatches in his daily interactions with his mother, the infant internalizes a pattern of interactive coping that he brings to interactions with other partners." (p. 156).

Integrating and shifting the order of the infant coping behaviors put forth by Tronick, Beebe, and others, we see a path forward for adults.

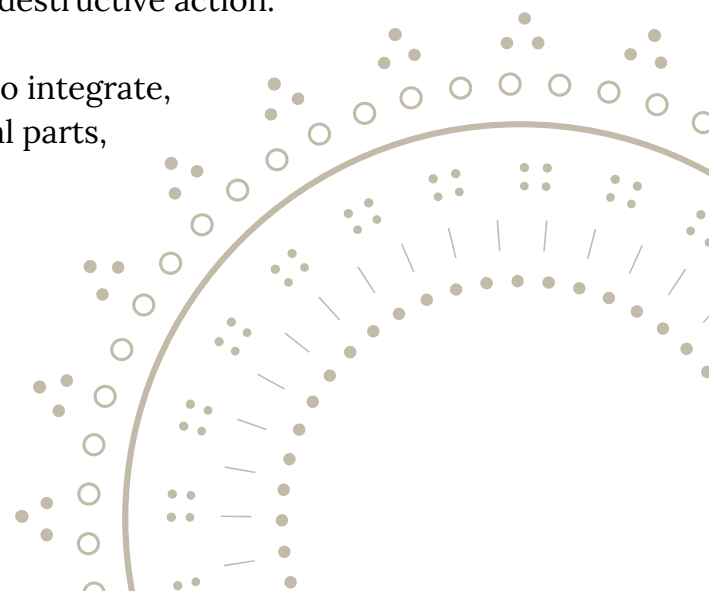
- Signals, sensations, feelings, and thoughts act as signals to draw our attention, asking us to modify something, to intervene in the pattern, not to become caught in the story of despair and worthlessness. As our clients learn to be in relationship with their thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, as signals rather than as indications that something terrible is happening, these signals become a call for energy and for emotional regulation.

It's a call for action, though not necessarily toward destructive action.

Feelings can be signals to do something, to repair, to integrate, to listen, to pay attention, whether with our internal parts, or with other people.

This fosters learning about our own state, as well as that of others, respecting the whole relationship, horizontally and vertically.

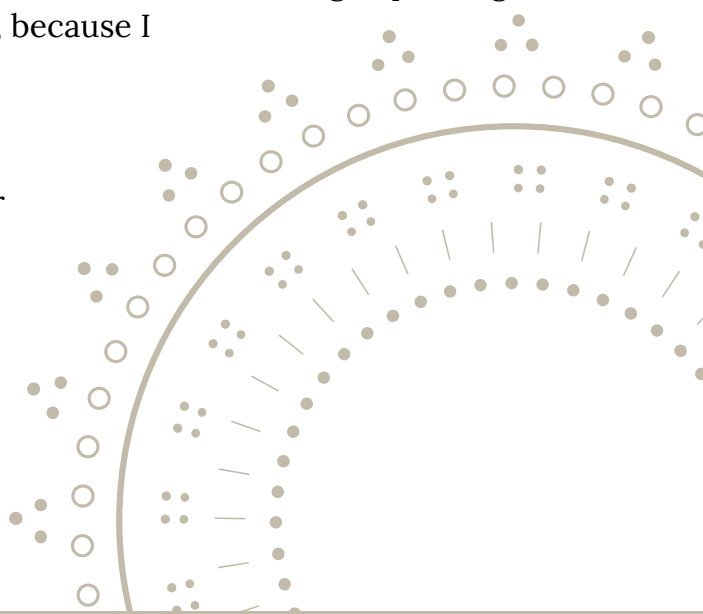
As Beebe, Jaffe, and Cohen (2002) write, "I change you as you unfold and you change me as I unfold."



- Withdrawal – The act of taking a break, slowing down, not engaging, withdrawing from external stimulation is akin to the yogic practice of pratyahara, withdrawing the senses from outside, in order to explore the inner world.
- Alternative focus, averting, and scanning – This consistent training to turn toward the Nourishing Opposite instead of fixating on what’s painful shifts our Internal Working Model into one of an internal secure base.
- Self-comfort – In a world full of stimulation and constant demands, we find the practices of self-compassion, simple mindfulness, and concentration are practices of exploring sounds, movements, words, and behaviors that provide ease.
- Escape – We learn to value times of solitude, filling up with this contact with the Self, reframing dissociation into other creative, positive forms.
- Avert/scan – Involves exploring the larger world beyond our comfort zone for ways to reinforce a positive path forward.

Filled with contentment, after a session where Jessie withdrew from old patterns, and found more Nourishing Opposites and qualities, she reflected, “This is the shift—remembering this moment, the awareness of that connection, showing up there with my son. At this point I feel, whatever arises in the relationship, the timing will be right. This is amazing—all stuff flowing in, moving through me.”

I acknowledged with her all the work that she has done in her life, that set her up to cherish this moment of grace and guidance. “I need to pay attention to that. The other day I realized I needed to keep slowing down. The more I feel better, the more I want to grasp, and get on top of things. All the things I haven’t been able to do, because I haven’t had the energy. Staying slow. Spend time sitting in the open guidance. Taking quiet time, more than usual, to allow the guidance. It’s really about trusting, and letting go of pushing or struggling. I want to learn more of how to be. I feel like I’m heard by you, understood, you get it. When you said this flow is “entering the divine stream” I had this felt experience, solid inside, knowing I’ll be okay. I can stay in that sense, being held, cared about, in a sort of global goodness that is also uniquely connected to me.”







Our relationship patterns are the perceptual lens through which we view the world. More fundamentally, our relationship patterns literally shape our world.

May this article and the practices I share support you in remapping your inner world, creating relationships that nourish you and bring you home to yourself.



*Sending goodness,  
Deirdre*