

The Healing Journey

Spiritual Practices for the Hero Journey of Healing



By Richard Whelan

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Introduction

I'm a herbalist, not a priest, but if you spent a day in my clinic rooms you might wonder about that. No one who has any kind of chronic health problem can be unaffected by it in how they feel on the inside. There are a lot of big feelings that get expressed - people who suffer for too long get afraid, and frustrated, and exhausted, and lonely in their suffering. They are not a condition, or a set of symptoms, they are a complex, feeling human being who needs to be seen and heard by the person that they have come to for help.

I do my utmost best to see and hear them. Then I give them the herbs that I think could most help their innate intelligence to break through whatever is blocking their healing process, and I recommend some do-able 'work' in their diet, or some other key area, to hopefully help treat the cause of why things became out of balance in the first place. These days, in nearly every case, I just say to call and come back if things have not greatly improved in a reasonable amount of time.

It wasn't always like this. I've been in practice for nearly four decades at the time of writing this, and for the first 30 years or so I had room in my diary to schedule follow up visits ahead. Paul Bergner, a dear friend and colleague, and the senior tutor of the school I run, says *'it's all theory until the follow up'*, and he's right. You have to know how people respond, you have to learn what works and what doesn't, or it's all just theory, unproven, maybe just wishful thinking.

Nowadays, for free follow-up check ups over the phone or, if needed, for coaching, counselling, fine-tuning, or deeper hands-on healing work in person, I mostly refer my patients to my daughter Danielle, now an experienced and excellent herbalist, who works with me in our clinic at 100 Holly Rd.

I am grateful to still be busy with new patients, almost all of whom have been recommended by someone they know, and from whom I am always learning. I am also grateful to be busy with my school of herbal medicine, where I am supporting the growth of new herbalists for the urgent need for holistic health care that exists in our communities. However, there are always times, in the course of a typical week, that I meet someone who is expressing some *big* feelings, someone who is ready to take responsibility for their health and is clearly ready for going deep into their healing journey. I often wish that I could walk alongside such a person much longer, and see them again soon to talk with them some more. There are sections of my website, and parts of my book on the constitutions that I can send them to, but there is also a lot more I would love to be able to share with them if I had more time. This is the main reason I have written what follows.

Such a person is in what I think of as a 'hero journey', where they journey with whatever their health problems have brought them to have to face. They are dealing with the big stuff of their lives and are past the point of wanting someone to just fix them and take away whatever is bothering them. Whatever their age might be, they have the maturity and the

wisdom to know that they are the ones who are responsible for how they feel, and for what is happening in their health, and they are ready to take whatever steps are necessary to get well.

I deeply respect that, and I want to help and support someone like that a lot more than the constraints on my time allow me to, so if you are such a person, then I have especially written this for you, and I dearly hope you will get a great deal of benefit from what follows.

If I have not met you in person but you have come to these writings from some other route then, without knowing you, I have to imagine that you still have the best of all reasons to not only read what follows but also to work through the different practices that I have shared. The best of all reasons is that you need these practices, because you also know that you need to go on a hero journey of healing to get well. I am so much writing this for you too.

Fiction, novels, made up stories are, as far as I can tell, the very best medicine for the mind. Stories take us on a holiday from ourselves, they give us a break, they engage us in a way that a screen can never quite replace and I am a huge advocate for their ability to help all kinds of troubles of the soul and the mind. Some people think of novels as a rather frivolous waste of time but they could not be more wrong. *'If you want to know what's going on in the world, read the news, if you want to understand the world, read novels'*

That said, this book is not a novel, it is a manual, a workbook, a set of suggestions for some practices that may actually work, so long as they are practiced, because many of them will not come easy right away. What I want to say here is that, so long as what follows engages you, and it makes sense, and you can feel it actually starting to work, then by all means keep going with it, but don't rush.

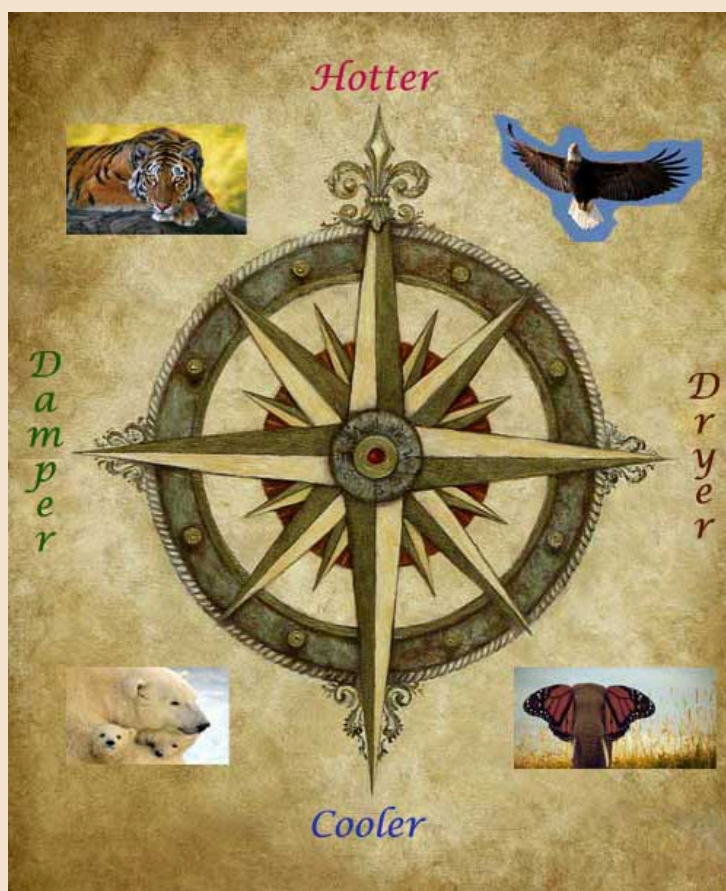
This is not a novel with a storyline that reaches a conclusion and the sooner you can get to the end the sooner you will see what the point of it all was. What I am presenting to you here is much more like a spiral than a line from a beginning to an end. We will come back to the key themes several times over, with some different steps and in some different ways to be sure, but the spiritual practices are all about getting an understanding that is experiential rather than academic. Therefore, there are times that I will be asking you to pause to meditate, or reflect, in order to open the possibility to gain some of that learning through experience.

Again, however much you will be giving some of your most precious time to listen to what I have to share here, please do not rush to get through it. This is not a textbook to extract knowledge from, it is a manual for meditation and, because I would dearly love for it to be of some service to you, I am quite certain that you must come to it in the speed and the way that best works for you.

Do you know which constitution you are?

If you have not met me in person, but have had the time and interest to read some of my other work, then you may be unsure about which one of the four constitutions you are. What happens for many people who get into this subject is that they get increasingly good at working out the constitutions of their family and friends, and people they work with or see often, but they often have some doubts about themselves.

I think the main reason for this is that they can see and feel their own complexity better than anyone. How they have both hot and cool tendencies, how they can run dry in certain ways and damp in others. Hence the doubt.



The truth is that we all have all four elements of heat, coolness, dryness and dampness. The reason we can see them all within us is that they are there to be seen! So does everyone have just one constitution or can you be a mixture? Everyone, without exception, is always at least a little hotter or cooler overall and, at the same time, always at least a little dryer or damper overall, so yes therefore everyone does have a constitution, a homebase, that they belong to.

Does it matter to work out which of the four constitutions you belong to? Well, it doesn't matter too much if you don't know, but it can help a lot if you do. What I can tell you is, if you stay open to it, that the answer always becomes clear eventually, and when it does become clear it seems to always come with useful insights, often quite important ones too.

For now though, if you don't know for sure, or even if you haven't even begun to look into it, please relax about this, it will not impair your ability to learn and benefit from what follows, not at all.

If you want to look into it further, and aren't sure where to start, I have an article on the introductory page to constitutional medicine on my website called '*which one are you?*' with a number of pointers to help work it out. I also have a free eBook, linked on the same page, called '*constitutional complexity*' that goes much further into this intriguing subject too. If you have already seen that book then you will know that, from time to time, I am keen for

you to do meditations, or 'thought experiments'. This is so that you can feel things for yourself and thereby understand them at a much deeper level than only the intellectual.

The intention of the first thought experiment, outlined in the next section, is for you to think about, and perhaps even experience in some way, how you contain the seemingly opposing qualities of both dampness and dryness. The goal here is not to work out your constitutional dominance, rather it is to feel how you contain both of these, seemingly opposing, constitutional elements to at least some extent.

This is complexity, it is what makes people so interesting and, in just the same way that you, like everyone, will have some aspects of your physical being that point to dampness and some that point to dryness, so I would love you to think about, and maybe feel for a moment, how you also contain the energetic qualities of both dampness and dryness, and how they coexist within you at the same time.



Connection vs Freedom

This first thought experiment starts with asking you to think about two matters in your life that will surely be important to you. They can be called connection and freedom. In this context, 'connection' relates to dampness which, like water, joins to everything it touches and 'freedom' is related to dryness which, like air, moves freely and easily in any direction.

You, like everyone, will have an innate constitutional dominance to be either mostly damper or mostly dryer overall, no one sits exactly in the middle, but even if you are strongly to the dryer side, you will still have at least some of the energetic quality of dampness in you, you must do. One of the ways the energetic quality of dampness manifests in our lives is in the closeness of our relationships, our connections, to others.

Likewise, even if your constitutional nature is to be clearly over to the damper side of the spectrum, you must have at least some of the energetic quality of dryness in you. One of the ways the energetic quality of dryness manifests in our lives is the need to have a sense of freedom. Free time, free space, freedom to go where we wish and do what we want.

Freedom and connection, air and water, I'm sure you can see how both of these matter to us and I am sure you can also see how, at least intellectually, freedom and connection don't always go together. You may be able to have both but not necessarily at the same time!

However much this duality may or may not be an issue for you personally, and however much it might play out in your own life, in a short while, let's take a small step to do a thought experiment to take this from the level of a concept into what could be a deeper understanding, at an experiential level.

Throughout this work, in different ways, with different kinds of thought experiments or meditations, I am going to invite you to try to feel something that we have been talking about for yourself, at an experiential level, because once you feel it, you will own it, and then you can use it however and whenever you wish.

It is likely that some of the thought experiments or meditations will seem strange and unfamiliar, especially at first, but do not be too quick to think that you might not be good at any of this. None of what follows requires any kind of advanced training to master any kind of tricky techniques. Every thought experiment or meditation is one that you could be able to do fully and completely the first time you tried it. However, most people will usually need to practice something to become good at it, and the first time you try something is when it will be the hardest!

This first exercise is about freedom and connection, it is a very simple meditation followed by a short thought experiment, and you should not worry in the least if you don't have any kind of deeper experience when you do it. If anything, this first one is just more of a training process to get used to this kind of learning.

Later on, I will ask you to go a lot deeper in, with some meditations that take the form of spiritual practices that could be very powerful, and actually very healing too, but again, do not fear that you will possibly be lacking anything essential to be able to do any of the practices that follow. However much, or little, you experience the first time you do any of the experiments or meditations is just whatever it will be, but what can be promised is that, if you come back around to do any of the practices again, that you will get better at them.

So shortly, I am going to invite you to take a few moments to close your eyes, take a deep breath or two to bring your attention inwards, then centre yourself, and then allow yourself to feel your own, deeply human, need for both connection and freedom.

If you were to start to actually think about any of this, and so to intellectually ponder these seemingly opposing forces of how you need both connection and freedom, I can imagine that you could run up a hundred different branches of thought and memory that could spring out from either side, including how these two needs have conflicted with each other from time to time in your own life story. That's ok, and if you want to do that then why not, it could be interesting! However, what I am hoping here is, by going a little deeper than the thoughts of your conscious mind, that you may be able to sense or feel how you contain these seemingly opposing forces of the need for both connection and freedom, and how they exist simultaneously within you.

The method of the meditation, or the thought experiment, is to close your eyes and then firstly to focus on your breathing and then secondly to bring your awareness into your centre, which is not so much in your head as it is in your heart and belly. You can still experience your consciousness when you centre yourself in your heart and your belly, but it won't be as much in the form of thoughts and words as it will be in the form of feelings.

Please do not feel that you are going to have to strain or try to make this happen. Straining and trying will not help us here! This is not a complicated or difficult thing to do. You simply take the first step of bringing your attention to breathing in and out a couple of times and then you take a second step to centre your awareness into your chest and belly, anywhere around or between your heart or belly-button will do completely fine.



This is a pairing of awareness. You start with the first step to notice your breath and then you take the second step to bring your awareness somewhere around your heart or belly.

Then you take a third step, which in a moment will be the subject of this first thought experiment but please be aware that, by the time you are ready to take a third step you don't need to keep your first foothold where it was! In other words it is to be expected that you won't be able to keep your attention on your breath at the same time as your belly and the new thoughts.

Most of the time, most of us can really only hold our primary awareness on one subject. We can be immersed in a thought, or a feeling, or something from the outside world but, as soon as we split our primary awareness into two places at once, everything changes. We can use this in a positive way here, and the name for what we are going to be doing is called 'pairing'. I am going to be talking about pairing a lot here so I hope you are getting a good hold of this idea right away!

To a certain extent, being complex creatures with remarkably complicated nervous systems, we can actually be aware of three things, and four things and many things at once, in a peripheral vision, extended awareness kind of a way, but in terms of our primary awareness, where we bring our conscious focus, it is a more than adequate challenge to focus our awareness into just two places, or feelings, at the same time.

So, in this first experiment, we are starting with pairing an awareness of our breath to the physical sense of being centred somewhere in our chest or belly. When we do this, metaphorically, we have just put two feet on the ground of our internal journey. When it is time to take the next step, a third step, we need to be able to easily take one foot off from where it was before.

You certainly could leave a 'foot' on your breathing, and take it off your belly/chest centring and then take the third step of adding the thought, but here I am encouraging you to drop the first step of the breath awareness but to keep your second step of the centring, because I want you to get some familiarity right away with the beautiful, timeless and healing practice of thinking with your body and feeling with your mind.

Shall we have a go? The first two steps are really very simple, the third step is a bit of a leap into the unknown but, so long as you know you aren't expecting to have any great realisations, and that we are mainly just practicing a method to get used to it, then just take a step forwards anyway without needing to have any worry about getting anywhere with it.

First step, feel your breath, hear it, notice it, be with it. Nothing could be simpler, and if you want to go to the second step after a single breath then that's totally fine, or go slower if you wish.

Second step, bring your awareness, your centre, into your heart and belly. You are still noticing your breathing at the same time as doing this. Don't just switch from one to the other. Stay with them both. Pairing is very powerful, it will arrest the otherwise incessant

flow of thought. You are now meditating, because your mind will be quiet and relatively empty and you will be in a feeling, conscious, aware space.

Meditation truly can be that simple and easy and truthfully and honestly, you could stop reading any further right here, and just keep using this most delightfully easy method of meditation for as much as you ever want to enjoy the blissful peace of just being.

I'm not kidding, if you do not need to go on a hero journey of healing then I would actually be inclined to encourage you to stop here. We are going deep into the shadow-lands of the subconscious in what follows. Nothing I am going to teach or share will do you harm but it can and will stir things up most intensely and you will not be the same person at the end of this journey as you were starting out. I do not call it the hero journey of healing lightly. It is a hero journey because it requires immense courage to face and work with your shadows. You should only even start such a journey if you really need to do it, and want to do it, with all your heart and soul.



Are you still here? Remember that you can stop any time and that you are in charge of how fast and how deep you go into any of this. If you are still with me then let's go back to those two first steps, and you can stay with them for as little or as long as you want but eventually, whilst holding one part of your awareness in your centre, keeping one foot on your internal ground, you take the next step, the third step.

The third step is to make an attempt to feel within yourself how you need both connection and freedom. I know that these words, connection and freedom, are just symbols. The word freedom is not what freedom is, the word connection is not what relationships are. But within you is an awareness, based on the many experiences you have already had in your life, of what they mean to you. Freedom and connection are both important, you need them

both, but they can get in the way of each other. They even have a somewhat opposing nature, as do the dryness and dampness that they relate to and represent.

It may seem like a strange thing to invite you to do, within a meditation, to feel something that is opposing within yourself, but it is certainly harmless and could be interesting to at least try! Anyway, please don't worry if it is not clear what you are supposed to do or feel. To do this initial practice, all you need to do is to give yourself a moment to firstly breathe, and then be in your heart or your belly and then, at the same time as staying centred in your heart or belly, to allow these two words, freedom and connection, and what they stand for, to occupy your awareness.

If you feel a sense of any of this then I imagine it would be subtle, not easily named or defined, but I hope that you may be able to feel even a trace of how within you there is a raw energy, a force of life, that has a remarkably complex nature where one part of it can take the ascendancy while the other submits but then, in as little time as a heart-beat, it can swing to the other side, like the breath itself, rising and falling, expanding and contracting. Or indeed the movement of our very hearts, taking in blood, then pushing it out again.

The reaching out to take a third step in the thought experiment could be for just a moment, a few heartbeats, or however long you wish but, once you have put your foot out for the third step to see if it can find any kind of solid ground, whatever happens or doesn't happen, come back to the first two steps to finish. Then it will be so nice, and peaceful, to simply notice your breathing whilst at the same time pairing your centre of awareness to your heart or belly.

Please have a go now, or whenever you are ready.



The most important decision of your life

What I want to talk about next might seem somewhat tangential to health and healing but bear with me, you will soon see where I am heading with this.

Many people, especially men, think that what they are going to do for a living is the most important decision of their lives, but it's really not, at most it would be the second most important. The most important decision of our lives is who we partner up with, hopefully, possibly, until the end of our lives.

So now here is a different kind of thought experiment I want to share with you, starting with a most improbable idea. What if we had to make the most important decision of our lives, but we were only able to ask our prospective life partner just one question to find out if we were going to make the right choice to be with them, or the wrong choice?

One question we could ask is for them to tell us the story of their life, and let's imagine that they could really do that. For example, they had kept a journal since they were small and could tell you everything that had ever happened to them, in great detail. You could know their past, and that would tell you an enormous amount about them, but would it be the best guarantee that the two of you could have a future together?

Another option is that you could ask them to tell you, with complete honesty and openness, who they are now. What kind of man or woman are they? What is their true character, their beliefs and perspectives, their strengths and weaknesses. This would tell you an enormous amount about them too but again, would that knowledge be the best guarantee that the two of you were meant to be together, live together, and to travel forwards together until the end of your days?

I think that what could tell you what you most need to know if you should partner up for life with just one other person is this question: what do you want? What shapes our future journey more than where we have come from, or what kind of person we have become, is what we truly want. What are our innermost, most heartfelt desires?

Everyone understands that life is a journey, it starts in the maternity ward, or other place of birth, and finishes in the cemetery, or the crematorium, but between the beginning and the end there are a great many steps along the way. Where do we want to go in this great journey? What do we truly want?

I've used the example of the primary relationship, the life-partner, to illustrate and exaggerate my point, but I think that knowing what someone really wants is the most important thing to find out about anyone you might be having future dealings with. If you know what someone wants then you know what path they are on and whether their path aligns with yours.

In any case, whether you agree that knowing what someone wants is the single most important thing you can find out about them, at least as much as you can agree that it

clearly makes an enormous difference to whatever path they take, don't you think it is most strange and peculiar that the great majority of people have very little idea of what it is that they actually, deep down want?

Oh, of course people can tell you about what their desires are. To have children, lose some weight, have a better job, go somewhere nice, have a better car, a better house, all of that... this desire for things to just generally improve that drives a great deal of what happens from one day to the next. But, if you follow this through, even to the point of imagining that you could have everything you desire, then now what? Is that what we think happiness will be, when we finally get everything we desire? I don't know what you see but it certainly doesn't look like that from my point of view. There are people who have everything they could desire but are still clearly deeply unhappy!

I think that always chasing the next thing, the next desire, drives people crazy, but what is most mad of all is that, even though we are clearly driven by our desires, most people honestly do not know what their heart truly wants, and needs.

Here is what I think. For all that we are, each and every one of us, marvelously unique, for all that we are clearly different from one another, in all kinds of ways, I believe we all want, and need, the same things. Most of all, behind and above and beyond everything else, we want to feel at peace and we want to feel in love. Not just one or the other either, we want both peace and love.

Another way I can say this is that people just want to be happy. No one would disagree with that, but then we need to ask the question 'what is happiness?' Because happiness is not just being high and up all the time, that's mania. It's not winning all the time, that's just ambition and competition. It's not satisfying every hunger, every appetite for sensory experiences, for more and more than we could ever need, surely we can all see the sorry state that people who are driven by greed end up in. True happiness is not a passing and momentary fulfilment. True happiness is contentment and, I contend, we cannot be content, or happy, unless we have peace and love in our lives.

Of course the details are vastly more complicated than that, and of course we can all see that many people are looking for their happiness, their peace and love, in some very strange ways and in some very strange places, but that doesn't mean that each and every person isn't wanting it, and needing it, just as much as anyone else. Truly, in our heart of hearts, we all want to be happy, meaning we want to be at peace and, at the same time, to be in love.

To unpack this just a little, I want to briefly come back to the earlier thoughts about our need for freedom, and connection, and how both must matter to us. In this context, we could relate the feeling of 'freedom' as being something that is contained in the feeling of peace. Peace is how we feel when there is an absence of worry or insecurity, it is an absence of feeling that we have to do something we don't want to do, or be somewhere we don't want

to be. Peace includes the feeling of freedom to be able to be in the moment of the here and now, without needing to be any different or do anything else.

Likewise we can relate the feeling of connection as being something that is contained in the feeling of love. Where we are not alone, not disconnected, not apart, but rather in time and in tune with another, or with more than one other because love can be a family feeling just as much as it can be an intimate one-to-one experience and likewise love can be divine, a sense of oneness with something universal, something that is beyond human relationships. In any form it takes, there is a connection in love that, like water, joins to whatever it touches.

Here is an idea that I want you to contemplate and take the measure of for yourself, and by that I mean to test it with your own experience of the world to see if it holds true.

That freedom without connection, or peace without love, eventually becomes too dry and lifeless and that connection without freedom, or love without peace, eventually becomes like losing yourself, but not in a good way.

There are people in the world, especially men, and older men in particular, who have peace but not love. They have freedom but they don't have connection. They are independent, they can take care of themselves. They have a kind of security, they are safe in their castle, they have achieved a kind of peace and freedom, but they don't really have love and meaningful connection in their lives and something terribly important feels like it is missing. Do you know anyone like that?

Likewise, especially in women and especially in mothers, there are people who have love but not peace. They are constantly connected, there is plenty of love and there is certainly no loneliness, no separation. There really is no time or space to feel lonely, but there is also no peace, no freedom to be just themselves, without having to do anything for anyone. Surely you will know someone like that.

I contend that we need both peace and love to have any kind of lasting happiness in this life, and that even having one without the other will not give us what we most need, what we most truly want.

If you can look within yourself, and also look around you, and see that there is truth in this and, after all, many others say the same thing too, in various ways, then surely the right question to ask is "*what is in the way?*" What is stopping us from getting what we truly need and want?

Right there, in that question, is a big part of the hero journey of healing. If we know what we want, or perhaps I am better to say, if we know how we want to feel, which is both free and connected, both at peace and in love, then what do we have to do to feel that way?

I imagine each of us as having our own mountain to climb. The mountain is within us, no one can see it or feel it but ourselves. There are many paths up the mountain and, strangely,

sometimes wonderfully, sometimes maddeningly, it seems that we need to travel many of those paths to get to where we are headed, the summit. The summit is happiness, it is being one with what is, it is being in the light and not the shadows, it is being at peace and in love.

I have been a visitor there but I do not live at the summit of my own mountain. My only qualifications to be a mountain guide, to share any of this with you, is that I am a long practiced journeyman who is still, to this day, walking his talk.

In these writings I wish to share the best of what I have found can help to make the ascent from the different paths that it seems we are called to walk on if we will face our shadows and seek the great treasures of inner peace and love.

no one can take a single step for you, it will always be your journey, and it must be like that. Much of what I will be sharing is in the form of suggesting a few steps, just to get started in a certain direction, and then you find your own next step forward from there. There is a lot of what can feel like starting from the beginning that happens here. You take two steps forwards and then a third, then a fourth, and then it feels like you were back where you started. Please don't be discouraged by this experience. For sure it will seem that you haven't got anywhere at times but the truth is that, the more you practice something, the better you will get at it, that is a law, and all of this most certainly gets easier with practice.

I expect that there will be some steps and methods that will resonate with you right away and others less so. That's ok and to be expected but whichever method or practice we try together, the goal will always be the same, it is for healing and it is to move closer to finding our peace and our love.



Heart Centred Meditation

I am shortly going to invite you to do a simple, easy, and timeless meditation where you start by pairing your attention to your breathing along with the beat of your heart. I presented the same process in my book on constitutional complexity and want to do it again now, with the variation that, after the first two steps, meaning once you have caught the sensation of your heart beat on the wave of your breath, that you take a third step to allow an awareness, or even a feeling, for your heart's innermost desire for peace and love.

It can be very powerful to get in touch with our hearts and align ourselves with what it is that we truly want. Our deepest, most heartfelt desire for peace and love is a strong force of Nature. It is good to be with it, to welcome it, to allow it to be a guiding light for our journey.

The third step, the sensing of that inner purpose, the feeling of that force, may be fleeting or elusive, and it may only come to you later, the next day, or some time after you have done the meditation, but the first two steps in the process of getting into the heart-centred space are very simple and lovely to practice and there is every likelihood that you will be able to take them the first time you try.

In a few moments I will ask you to stop reading, close your eyes and bring your attention to your breath and then, as you focus on your breathing, it is highly likely that you will soon be able to feel your own pulse coming through the wave of your breath.

You are bringing your awareness to both your breath and your heart at the same time because, when you listen very closely, you will be able to feel how there is a ripple that moves through your breath, and your whole body, every time your heart beats.

The process is very simple, very easy. You listen to and feel the wave of your breath and then you also feel the subtle beat of your heart, in your breath and in your body. You catch your heartbeat on the wave of your breath and you go into it, you feel it, for a few moments.

What usually happens is that you will lose track of your heartbeat again, typically because your breath has changed to be an inhalation or an exhalation, or because of some thought or external signal that distracts you. You should expect to lose the beat, but then you can just as quickly catch it again on the next in or out breath.

From showing this method to many others I feel confident to tell you that this meditation technique quickly gets easy with practice and that, soon enough, you will be able to catch and feel your heartbeat with only a single breath to guide you into it.

Let me go over those first two steps again. The first step is to simply listen to your breath, follow it closely, the movement, the sensation, the sound. The second step, which you can take almost immediately after the first one if you wish, is to catch the pulse of your heart on your breath. It is a subtle ripple that you can actually feel anywhere in your body, but once you do feel it, try to follow it into the centre, into your heart itself. Even if it comes and goes

as your breath changes, you can catch it and hold it again, very easily and gently, because it is always there, always.

When you have felt these two first steps, even if just for a moment, try to take the third step but remember you should not be trying to still hold on to either the first or the second step at that point. In other words, you could still be aware of either your breathing, or of your heartbeat, but it is expected that to take a third step you will need to allow one of them to slip away. The next step, the third step, is to try to bring in an awareness, a consciousness within your body, of your heartfelt need for both peace and love.

Don't feel that you are supposed to think about that need, not for this practice. You aren't trying to use your mind to grasp what is lying deep within your being. Stay in your body, with one 'foot' either on your breathing or on your heartbeat, and allow yourself to feel your need for peace and love at a far deeper level than that of thought alone.

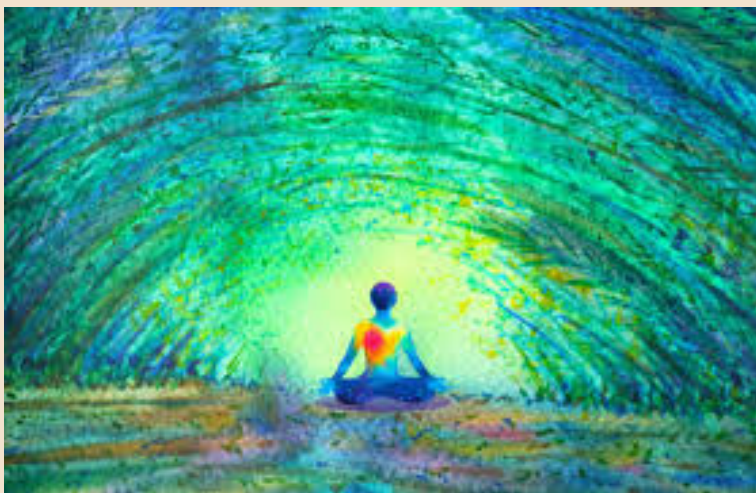
Our need for peace and love is much more than mere words or concepts. There is a living force of Nature within us that seeks peace, freedom, harmony, love and connection. This force calls out within us, it moves us, it gives our life meaning and purpose. You don't have to create this force, or imagine it in any way, it is already there. Acknowledging this force, recognising it, and owning it, is a powerful, healing medicine for our innermost being.

Of course, I don't want to put you off giving this a really good try, at least once if not more, but I should mention that it is perfectly possible that, when you go to do this meditation, and especially when you reach out for this third, rather mysterious step into the unknown, that you will feel more of an ache than anything else. If that is the case for you then please remember that the ache is not to be ignored and nor is it to be feared.

Our innermost desire for peace and love is a real force within us. It is not imaginary, it is not a construction of our minds, it is in our very being. You may find that, as you catch the beat of your heart on your breath and so as you are being literally centred in your heart, and as you open yourself up to feeling what it is that you most need and want, that you will feel a subtle or strong tension, perhaps some kind of discomfort, or perhaps even an ache. If this happens then please do not be afraid of what you are feeling. There is nothing that is trying to hurt you, you are not doing anything wrong, you are feeling your spirit, the most essential part of you, you are feeling your life force.

Our life force is extraordinarily intelligent, it basically runs everything that is happening in our bodies to keep us alive at all times, and it mostly communicates with us through feelings. Our inner being, our life force, knows exactly where we are at and, if we are too far from our peace, or our love, it can communicate this to us in the form of a literal ache. We do not need to fear such a feeling. It is simply showing us how much we need to heal and how much we truly do need peace and love.

Something else that is quite likely to occur is, when you reach within to feel some sense of your heart's innermost desire, that there is no palpable sense of anything and you find there is nowhere to put your metaphorical 'foot'. That's totally ok, and by all means just come back to noticing your heartbeat on the wave of your breath and that's it, you've done it. However, I will put it to you that, if you genuinely ask the question, '*What does my heart wish for more than anything, what do I truly want?*' that you will definitely feel the answer coming back to you eventually in the form of a feeling, a knowing, an intuition. Perhaps the answer will not appear at the moment when you are reaching for it, but it will assuredly come. Our hearts know exactly what they want. This meditation can open a door to connecting to your heart's desire and what is there to be felt will soon come through it, even if not right away.



Stay as little or as long as you wish in the awareness of your breath, your heart and your heart's desire. This whole process could be done in the time it takes to breathe in and out 10 times, or even less. Or you could want to stay in any of it for much longer, for many timeless beats of the heart and minutes of the clock. Don't force it, go with your own flow,

I want you to experience these meditations as easily and as naturally as possible and the only point I want to make about that is to encourage you not to get caught on one foot!

What I am saying is that I suggest you do not stay overlong with just being aware of your breathing alone, or your heartbeat alone, or your inner desires alone. For this journeywork that we are beginning to practice, I want to encourage you towards having two feet, not just one, on the terrain of your inner being. Don't stop in one place on one foot too long. Rather I suggest that you practice pairing which, in this meditation, for this practice, means firstly pairing your breath and your heart, and then pairing one of them with a sense of your innermost heart's desire.

These are just the first three steps, you certainly do not have to stop there either. You have a life force within you that may very well want to move you forwards into a further step. Don't resist that if it calls you forwards, rather follow where it leads and by all means take another step, and another one. The inner quest to feel our innermost desires for peace and love is one that could take you in all kinds of interesting directions if you will allow it, and why not? You will not come to harm by tuning into and listening to your breath, your heart, your inner voice, your spirit.

When you are ready to finish it is very gentle, and rather comforting, to come back to where you started, to simply be with your breath at the same time as pairing your awareness to the soft, rhythmic and timeless beat of your heart.

Don't worry about how long it took to go on your journey, I suggest you don't even look at the time unless you have to. Something very strange and mysterious about that mountain I was mentioning earlier is that sometimes it will feel like it could not be further away and at other times you can be right at the summit in just a few steps, a few heartbeats. In any case, do have a go at this meditation now, or whenever you are ready.



Identity

Have you ever thought about how much your experience of your life is controlled by your sense of identity? Your age, your race, your gender, your culture, how you look, what you do, everything that makes up the 'who' that you appear to be.

Have you ever had an identity crisis, where you question everything about who you are? Knowing someone who has gone through one is not the same as having one yourself. Many teenagers go through an identity crisis. They can be tumultuous for everyone involved and it is usually only much afterwards that it can be seen how they just didn't know another way to break out of the identity conditioning of their childhood in order to start finding their own path as a young man or woman.

Some people have an identity crisis later in life, perhaps after they have devoted themselves to raising a family and their children have left home, or perhaps when they have achieved other kinds of goals, such as becoming successful in their career path or some other area that they have devoted themselves to. The common ground is climbing a different kind of mountain and, upon reaching the top, having a crisis of identity because, who am I if I don't know what I am supposed to do now?

Identity crises are not fun, they are traumatic, bewildering, painful. I speak from experience when I say, I would not wish one on anyone, but that doesn't mean I can't see how necessary they can be and how things could otherwise never have shifted and changed without that storming energy of a crisis to drive it forwards.

Our identity can seem so solid, so fixed, that it can feel like it is the very earth under our feet. It gives the shape to how we move in the world, to how we interact with everyone, to what we do from the moment we get up until we let go for the day. It can feel as solid as the earth but of course it can radically change if a person enters a new relationship, or moves to a different part of the world, or starts a new path in some other way.

The nature of identity to actually be rather changeable is especially poignant when a person becomes unwell and stays unwell for some time. For some people, when this happens, their identity can start to revolve around their illness, with the unwanted consequence that it can become much harder to find their way back to how they used to be when they were well.

A strong sense of identity is not an enemy of health, nor must it be an obstacle to finding peace or love, but there is a likelihood that, the more we identify ourselves in one or another way, the less we will be open to feeling what it would be like to be very different to that. If we identify as very manly, very *Yang*, or very womanly, very *Yin*, we are less likely to fully experience the seemingly opposing Yin or Yang aspects of our own nature.

Back to some earlier ideas, if we strongly identify as being a very loyal person who puts their connections and relationships above everything else, then we will be much less likely to

consider our own needs for time and space and the freedom to be our truest selves, and of course vice versa.

Aside from it being interesting, the reason I bring this up is to share that one of my greatest joys in delving deep into understanding myself and others through the lens of the constitution is how liberating it has been to open up understanding as opposed to judgement. And whilst yes, each and every person does eventually fit into one of the four different constitutions, far from this somehow limiting their identity it seems to have the opposite effect. You can see that each and every person has all four of the key elements within them, they have both Yin and Yang, both cooler and hotter, and they have all the polar qualities that come with their dry to damp spectrum as well. All people have all four elements, but because they have a home ground, a tendency to be more dominant on each side of the two spectrums, they have a constitution that they belong to and this then opens up a wonderful gateway to a deeper understanding of their Nature.

This is a tricky subject, it has its own complexity. Another way I might be able to convey what I am trying to say here is that, if I look at a person as male or female, younger or older, this or that culture, then I can feel myself boxing them into a certain identity and, even if it is without any criticism or negativity, it still contains a kind of judgement. However, when I look at someone through the constitutional lens something very different occurs, something that I find rather marvelous. Instead of it limiting my view of them, of fixing them in one or another 'identity' I find that it gives me insights, and often very useful insights, into their nature. I can better understand them as the complex and multi-faceted human beings that they are.

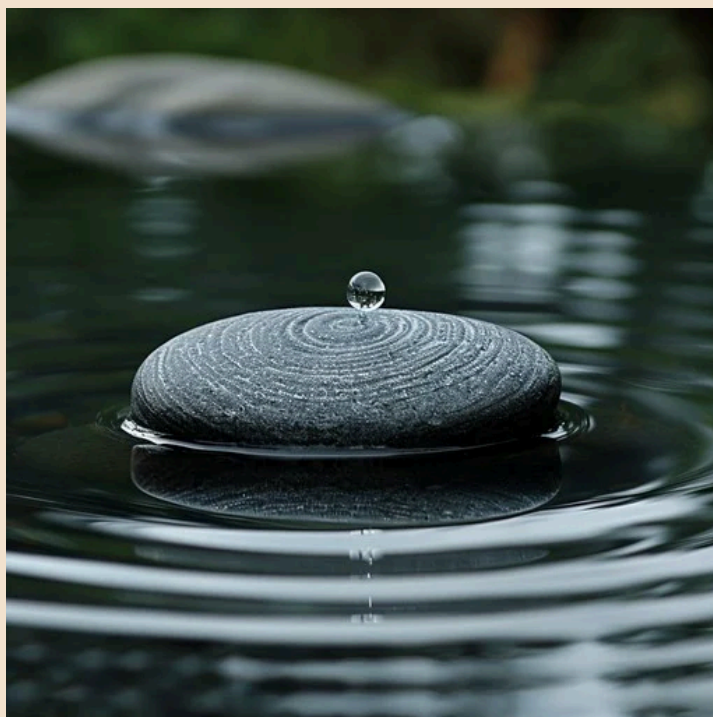
The understanding that comes without judgement, brings with it the gift of acceptance, and even if I may dare to say this, it often brings with it a sense of compassion.



Drops

You certainly don't need to look at blood under a microscope to be a good herbalist, very few do that or need to do it, but microscopy is something I picked up early in my work and I have stuck with it, mostly to look at the shining and shimmering white blood cells to see what kind of vitality they have, because they stay alive for quite some time, and will keep moving around, searching for trouble, trying to keep us safe even when they are no longer in circulation. Each white blood cell contains a nucleus that contains our entire genetic blueprint, our DNA. And each drop of blood is completely identical to every other drop of blood in the body, so you can see the whole through the drop.

I propose that we all fundamentally want and need the same thing, to be both at peace and in love. I also propose that we all contain all the elements of life and that, even though we become very strongly identified as being a certain way and that we don't or can't really perceive it any other way, that it is more accurate to think of ourselves as being like just one drop of water in an ocean of life wherein our tiny droplet contains all the elements of the ocean, just as much as that ocean clearly contains our singular drop.



Assuming there is truth in any of this, which we can't know unless we really test it out then, aside from it might be somewhat interesting in a philosophical kind of a way, is there really any actual benefit from going into any of this? Why would you want to?

Well, I also propose that there can be an immense amount of benefit from going within to feel these forces of Nature for yourself. To get in touch with and experience for what it actually is, the heartfelt need, the longing, that can cause our very cells to ache for love and peace. Finding our way to love and peace is so necessary to our wellbeing that you could call it as ultimately essential to our spirit, our inner being, as our need for water, or air is to our body.

What I have observed in my own life and work, is the same as what I have read and heard others have observed as well, which is that the person who truly knows themselves is the one who achieves wisdom. But this is a knowing that goes much deeper than matters of

identity, it goes into elements that are hard to grasp and impossible to truly name, but that we can get closer to if we open up to our inner energy. That inner energy is a life force that flows around us, moving with our blood, healing us when we are sick, helping us to find balance and always, always, always striving for harmony.

You can see it and understand this life force in someone else only as much as you can see it and understand it in yourself first. This is not the kind of understanding that you can get by listening to me talk about it. I can hopefully point the way for you to take a useful step, but I cannot take a single step for you. What follows are some ways and methods that I have found useful for myself, and some people I have worked with. I hope you will find it interesting to explore these subjects with me, and I certainly hope you will find it useful in your own, precious journey of life.



The Practice of Compassion

I wonder how much you have felt your own need for peace and love. Not just in the meditation, which might have opened something, but in your own reflections on your own journey till now, for example in what gives you the greatest happiness, and what causes you the most suffering. Even if there are other things that matter too, I hope you can agree that we, all of us, dearly need and want to be at peace and in love.

So what if I said to you that you, and I, and anyone, could take great strides towards both peace and love, irrespective of anything external to ourselves, if we were to practice compassion. Starting with extending the practice of compassion to ourselves, and then it goes from there.

If this could be true, then it would surely be most worthwhile to try it out, to see if it works. I say that it will work, but I also think that nearly all of us are not naturally good at being compassionate, at least not towards ourselves, and that it needs practice to get better at compassion, and it can need a lot of practice to get good at it.

Do you agree that anything worth getting good at needs practice? Our world is so full of inequality and unfairness but there is one great rule that goes some way to create fairness. The rule is that whatever we practice we will get better at. There is a nice follow up to this rule, which might not always be the case, but usually is, which is that whatever we keep getting better at, we eventually get good at.

It's not that people are automatically bad at compassion for others, not at all. Most people are naturally compassionate towards their close people and their animal companions, perhaps even towards the plants they grow. Most of us have strong bonds of love with the lives we are closely connected to and so, when things are going badly for the ones we love, we naturally want to extend our compassion. We can easily feel care and concern, mercy and sympathy, when someone we love is hurting. What comes naturally doesn't need to be practiced.

The practice of compassion that I want to talk about here is on a much more personal level. It doesn't start with someone or something else that we care for, it is about the compassion in how we relate to, and care for ourselves. The practice of compassion that goes deeply within, to our inner being, is about helping us to meet our own needs for peace and for love, without having to change anything or get something from anyone else first.

In using words to communicate about all this, I am acutely aware that the word compassion is not what it actually is, any more than the words peace, or love, are actually what they are. These words, however meaningful they may be, can only ever be symbols to describe something much deeper and so, in a little while, I will ask you to join me in a third meditation to try to bring these words, and thoughts, into the real, the experiential.

However, first some more talk because, for all their limitations, words can still be the best way we have to understand each other! There are three words that I will use to try to give the sense of what I mean when I talk about this practice of compassion that starts within ourselves.

The three words are *soft*, *centred*, and *now*.

A little later on, when I invite you to do a meditation to practice compassion, I will ask you to remember these three words; soft, centred and now, because I believe that they can act as good and reliable guides for your most important, and sacred, journey of healing.

Soft

The first word 'soft' is a very beautiful one in the context of going within to open up to compassion. Think about how soft water is, how it yields to everything, and how it goes to the lowest places without any resistance. The softness within compassion is like that too, it is the complete opposite to that which is hard and unyielding. You do not have to change anything, or fix anything, or in fact do anything, to feel compassion.

This understanding that compassion is not something that you can make happen, or will into being, makes it very difficult for our minds to grasp what they are supposed to do, so let me repeat this. You do not have to do or change anything to feel compassion, quite the reverse, you need to be as soft as water and actually stop trying to change or do anything!

Compassion is soft and yielding, it is without effort, without strain, it is not hard. In this sense of its yielding, non-doing, great softness, we could think about compassion as being a form of acceptance, and yes, compassion does include acceptance, most certainly, but there is also mercy in it. Mercy means that our acceptance has no limits. Compassion with mercy includes an acceptance of those things that we don't want, and don't like, and actually don't want to accept.

I understand if this does not seem very practical, or even understandable, but stay with me here. We're just going through the process of trying to talk about something that can't really be understood by our minds but can most certainly be felt within our bodies, which we could also call our subconscious, which is the place where we feel our feelings and also store everything that ever happens to us.

So the first idea about compassion is that it is not hard, it is not something that you do, or try, to feel, but rather that there is a great softness in it, and that with that softness, and not doing or trying, can come an experience of mercy and acceptance.

Centred

The word and the feeling of '*soft*' is completely Yin and yielding. Energetically it is like water; damp and connected. Conversely, the word and feeling of '*centred*' is very Yang, it is defined and pointed, but the point, the centre of awareness, is always moving, always reaching

forwards in a sense. Energetically it is the opposite to the damp, yielding nature of water, it is much more like air - moving and free.

What I am going to encourage you to do, when you choose to practice compassion, is to allow these words and feelings of 'soft' and 'centred' to enter your awareness. The sense of softness will engage that part of your life force that is like water, and by yielding to it, allowing it to be, it will help you to go into the deep places easily, without effort.

The sense of being centred will happen just as naturally, if you will allow it, and it will help you to feel the remarkably alive, ever-moving, potent part of you that is free, like the air. By allowing yourself to let it take you wherever it leads, you will be 'centring' your energy. This is not the same thing as concentrating your focus on one part of your body, or focusing on your breathing, or concentrating on a word or a thought. The 'centring' is not something that you try to control, so, if you have learned or practiced some different forms of meditation or mindfulness where you were the one who created the centre, so to speak, please put those methods aside when you experiment with this. This method, this practice of compassion is both soft and centred. You allow it to happen, you follow rather than lead, you go between being like both water and air.

The practice of compassion needs to be, and can be, as natural, as instinctive, as breathing. You don't need to search for it, or do anything to make it happen, it will simply occur. If you practice this, you will feel how your centre of energy, or attention, moves and changes all the time. Like air, and freedom, it cannot be fixed. In one moment your 'centre' will be in your head, then your chest, then your limbs, then your spine. Then it may focus, and gather energy into itself, you may feel its potency growing as it rises within, like a tide and then, so long as you don't try to hold it, or do anything, or change anything, there will be a release. You will go back to the Yin, the water, the soft, flowing and uncentred state.

Only to return to your centre a moment later. 'Soft' and 'centred' meet each other, and balance each other. By allowing them to exist, side by side, next to each other, or even simultaneously, they naturally, easily, spontaneously, bring the sense of compassion because you are feeling your inner essence without judgement, without resistance, without trying to change anything. You are feeling your life force and so feeling the movement of energy within yourself, its rising and falling, its nature to be soft, Yin, yielding, and its nature to be centred, Yang, defining. Feeling this life force, and just being with it, just accepting its nature, brings compassion, because it is in its nature to feel great peace, and love.

Again, I recognise that these are tricky things to understand through the mind because they are beyond our mind's comprehension, they must be felt and experienced to be understood. A great philosopher who lived last century, called by people close to him as 'K', alongside his vast body of work, books and lectures, summed up his message for inner peace, freedom, and love in just two tiny phrases. The first was '*be with what is*', the second was '*choiceless awareness*'.

What I am asking you to practice here is something that is simultaneously absurdly simple and, at the same time, fiendishly difficult!

Absurdly simple because you don't have to do anything, no training or special preparation is required, no effort is required, you are literally doing nothing. Fiendishly difficult because of the nature of our minds which, in the way we think, is to always not be in the here and now and to be in some way resisting what is happening in this very moment.

Being with what is, is exactly that. You just be with whatever you feel, with whatever is happening, and with whatever thoughts arise. You don't try to change any of it. Choiceless awareness means you aren't trying to control your awareness, you aren't trying to raise your consciousness in some way, to be better, to be more centred, to be more or less of anything. You are not choosing to be aware, you just are aware, because you can't help being aware. You are alive, and awake, and so you must experience something, but you aren't trying to choose what that something is, rather you are just going with the flow, being with what is.

I say again, this truly is absurdly simple but, at the same time, it can be fiendishly difficult. I'm sorry if my saying this is putting you off, but I don't want you to underestimate the challenge of choiceless awareness, because it is the nature of our mind to constantly judge and analyse and reject and resist what is. Because we are our own fiercest critics. Because so much that is in our culture, our conditioning, our early childhood and our education takes us in the opposite direction of this non-doing, accepting, merciful compassion.

Now

The practice of compassion can be especially difficult, fiendishly difficult, because of our minds, which by their own nature, are not able to be in the present moment but are always looking backwards, or forwards, but there is no experience of peace, or love, or compassion in the past or the future, the only time that peace, and love, and compassion can exist, and be real, is in this eternal moment of now.

To help guide the practice of compassion, the third word, after soft, and centred, is *now*. Again, it is vital to know from the beginning, from before the beginning, that the feeling of 'now' is not something you can force yourself to feel. And again, as hard to grasp as it can seem, what it is that we need to 'do' here is to practice not-doing.

You cannot do anything to be in the present moment, you are already here, but as soon as we go into our thoughts into the past, over what happened, who said what, who did what, what you said, what you did, anything and everything that was ever before, we are out of the moment of now.

Equally, as soon as we project forwards into the future, into all the '*what ifs*' of what could be, of all of what we are looking forward to with dread or delight or indifference, of everything that lies ahead, even to the very end of our lives, we are out of the moment of now.

If you are standing on a bridge looking at the river, which side do you like to go, do you prefer to look at the water flowing away from you, or towards you? Some people prefer to go back into the past more and some people prefer to go forwards into the future more, and some people go back and forth about the same but all of us, without exception, go backwards and forwards in our minds. We do it all the time. This is just the nature of our minds, you can't change that nature and you shouldn't try to change it.

So, then what do you do to be in the moment of now? Truly, you do absolutely nothing, there is nothing to do. The understanding, the recognition that our minds will always want to go forwards or backwards can be enough to release us from that pendulum and to come into the stillness of the present moment. The moment of now is a very extraordinary moment, it is where all the peace in the world exists, and all the love too, and it never stops! Now is now, it is the ever-present moment in which all of us, and in fact the entire Universe, exists.

All this said, the mind is not the enemy, it does not need to be disciplined or controlled to practice compassion and it's great that we have a mind that gives us a past and a future to look at. The past is where all our stories come from. Think how dull life would be without stories! We all have our stories, we share them, we learn from them, and we have an insatiable appetite for them that lasts our whole lives.

Equally, the future is not the enemy. The future is where we have our hopes and dreams, the future is where we find our passion and our purpose. Even when our own personal future is reaching its limit and our time is short, we turn our minds to who will be carrying on without us, because there is no end point to life, it moves forwards always and forever, with or without us.

However much the past and future are not the enemy, they are also not the now. The past is a place where, when we go there in our minds and stay there too long, we eventually fall into darkness, the shadow-lands of loss. Maybe the loss will be sweet and nostalgic, or maybe the loss will be bitter and regretful, but there is an implacable fact that we can do absolutely nothing about, and that is that everything, absolutely everything, that ever happened, can never be changed or altered or taken back. The past is gone, it is truly lost and can never be returned, not for one second.

Likewise the future, when we go there in our minds and stay there too long, we also eventually fall into darkness, in this case the shadow-lands of fear. Maybe the raw, primal energy of that great force, that 'dark friend' as I call it, will be the kind of agitation that is tinged with excitement, as positive anticipation is, as the young get high on all the time, or maybe it will be imbued with anxiety, because we have weathered too many storms of disappointments and dashed hopes and so our thoughts looking forwards fill with doubts and worries about the future. Whichever way we look at it, there is a simple and unchangeable fact about the future that we can do absolutely nothing about, and that is

that it is unknown. Everything that is still to come is uncertain. The only constant, the only thing we can be sure of, is that everything changes all the time, and the reality is that we really don't have that much control over how it changes too, however much we might prefer it, or even believe it, to be otherwise. The future is a shadow-land.

There is no experience of peace, or love, in the past or the future. We do not exist in the past or the future. The only time we can feel anything is in this moment of now. If we will feel the bliss of peace and the joy of love, we must be able to be, and feel, and exist, in this moment of now.

When seeking to practice compassion, it can be of great help to remember this word '*now*'. When we wander off, into the past or the future, which we always will, it takes only the briefest of moments to come back to being in the now. And if you know, if you truly know, that there is absolutely nothing you can do to change anything that has ever happened, and that the future is a dream, that it is not real, and that all you need to do right now is to be right here, in this moment, then you can return to being soft, and centred and here, now.



Preparing to Practice

Let's give this a go, let's do some practice and see what happens. To do this, to take the step from the theory into the real there is one more matter that needs to be understood, as clearly as possible, because in some ways it is the most important part of all of this. The words '*soft, centred, and now*' are, I believe, excellent guides, they can help us to remember what it is we are supposed to do, and to not do, but they will mean nothing unless we have the clear and strong intention to bring the energy of compassion itself into what we trying to practice.

Compassion means mercy, care, and love. It means that, when you go within to '*be with what is*', that whatever comes up, whatever you feel, you have the intention to accept it with gentleness, and softness.

The great obstacle to the practice of compassion can be summed up in just one word; '*hardness*'. This may not be a problem for you in the beginning, and for a few, most fortunate, and I think most likely rather young people, it just may not be a problem at any time, but for the great majority of us it is a case of when, rather than if, we will feel ourselves harden against something that we are experiencing, which means we will be hardening against ourselves.

This 'hardening' takes different forms but mostly we do it with some form of resistance and, if we can be aware of how we are hardening, we will feel how there is judgement in it.

There is no compassion in judgement, there is only hardness and rejection. When you set the intention to practice compassion, you are making a conscious choice, that for the next few moments you will accept everything that you feel and everything that you experience without any hardening, or judgement, against it.

Remembering to allow yourself to be *soft*, and to follow the *centre* of your awareness, wherever it leads, and to stay in the moment of *now*, will enormously help in achieving the intention to accept everything that comes up, everything that is felt, without resistance, without judgement, without hardening.

The decision to set such an intention, and then to practise it, is one that you and only you can ever make. You also always have the option to reject anything that you experience. Nearly all of us have a great deal of conditioning to judge ourselves, to resist and reject what we feel, and to be hard against ourselves. Our practice to be hard, to resist, is so embedded that it's probably best to assume that we will have to reset the intention to bring compassion into the frame many times to change this deeply set pattern.

To begin the practice of compassion, to take a first step, I encourage you to use one of the methods we have already been practicing. For example, you could listen to your breath, or you could catch and follow your heartbeat, or you could simply bring your awareness somewhere around your belly or your chest. All that matters is that the step is not forced,

that you don't begin by straining or trying to do anything, but rather you very easily and naturally focus on your breathing, or tune into your heart, or bring the centre of your awareness into your body.

It may only need a moment to take the first step, just a breath or two, a few beats of your heart, a momentary sense of your body as containing you in its centre. Then, whilst keeping your awareness on that first step, on your first 'foot', the second step is to bring your conscious awareness forward. You are setting the intention to extend compassion to yourself, to whatever you feel and whatever comes up, and then you bring one or more of these simple, small, powerful words into your paired awareness '*soft, centred and now*'.

Perhaps you will pause on any one of the words, to feel it, to let it deepen your experience. The phrase that I especially like to describe what we are doing here is that you are '*thinking in your body and feeling in your mind*'.

The words are not only conceptual, they have a deeper meaning attached to them. You think the word 'soft' in your body, and you feel the word 'soft' in your mind. Thinking 'soft' in your body and feeling it in your mind helps you to release hardness, it helps you to go with the flow of where your intention is taking you. There is a remarkably powerful healing intelligence inside of you that you are helping by letting go, and not resisting against, when you think and feel to be 'soft'.

Likewise with 'centred'. You think 'centred' in your body by allowing wherever you feel anything the strongest to be where you move your centre of awareness. You feel centred in your mind by not being interested in making any judgements over what you feel, but by simply being with what is. Soft and centred, the feelings and the thoughts of them balance each other and blend into each other, they can help you to go within and take further steps into your practice of compassion and your journey of healing.

It is hard to think about 'now' in a conceptual way, but you can think it in your body by feeling its ever-present power. You can feel *now* in your mind and think *now* in your body. When you find yourself wandering off into thought, or if you feel stuck in some way, not soft and accepting but resisting and judging, first of all, don't worry, that's normal! It's all practice and it is totally to be expected to fall into old habits and patterns of hardness and resistance to being with what is. So, when it happens, just by thinking 'now' in your body, and feeling 'now' in your mind, you will very easily be able to come back to the practice without any force, without any hardening or resistance or judgement. You cannot change anything that has ever happened, you cannot control the future, you are only here and now, being soft and centred.

As well as the likelihood of falling in and out of the practice, it is also highly possible that, after taking a few steps into this, that you could be drawn in further in than you were expecting to go. It is entirely possible, even in the first time of trying this, that you will connect very deeply to the flow of healing energy that is within you at all times. If we can

only stop getting in its way, this energy can bring us to peace and to love in a moment, in a heartbeat. If you feel yourself being carried forwards, into the next step and the next, don't resist it, and don't fear the process. You can trust the intelligence of your body, it is your life force, it loves you and only wants you to be happy and well.

Whether this meditation on compassion is something you spend only a few moments exploring, to get a sense of the steps and of the inner terrain that we are looking to connect to, or whether you have the time and are drawn to go into it for much longer, when you are ready to come back into the world and whatever it is that you are called to do next, I encourage you to come back to these first two steps. To listen to your breath, or your heart, or to centre yourself in your body, and to remember these three lovely words, '*soft, centred and now*' in their compassion nutshell, so that you finish where you started.

I wish you a good journey into your own loving and compassionate heart and hope you will have a go at this now, or just as soon as you can.



Trust and fear

Our bodies, and minds, are remarkably good at healing themselves, the healing intelligence of Nature, what we call the *vis medicatrix naturae*, is the most extraordinary ally we have in our life journey. This great life force, this natural intelligence, knits us back up when we become unraveled and it heals us, especially when we sleep, or any other time when we just get out of its way. But, even with this great force at work, not all wounds can heal and all of us, without exception, if we keep living long enough, will accumulate unhealed hurts.

If you have pain anywhere in your physical or emotional body, if you are sick or suffering in any way, then you will already be only too aware of where it hurts.

If you go within, with the intention to practice compassion, to feel whatever there is to feel without judgement or resistance, to *'be with what is'*, then it is highly likely that your centre of awareness will come back, many times, to wherever there is a block in the flow of healing energy, to where there is any kind of pain, or to where there are any kind of unhealed hurts.

Consequently, if and when this happens, I think the hardest part is to not straight away go into fear and resistance, and 'hardening'. When there is any kind of pain, or hurt, it can be extremely challenging to stay soft, centred, and in the present moment.

The number one reason for it being so challenging is this: when we allow ourselves to feel what is really going on, it will typically intensify the experience of 'what is', at least at first.

When we allow ourselves to be in a place of unresisting, choiceless awareness, the dark experiences, the unhealed hurts, the blocks, can initially rise up and feel even stronger, at least at first. This experience can very quickly, almost instantly, lead to a fear reaction that causes us to harden, and want to resist against 'being with what is'. One way that this feeling could be expressed in thought could be something like this: *'...if I do not stop this then it will keep getting worse and then it will never stop!'*

It takes a lot of courage to face such a fear and to trust that the practice of compassion will not make things worse, and that the initial increase in intensity will not keep going, and that it will end.

It takes a lot of courage to trust that it will get better, even if we don't try to stop it, or get away from it, or do any of the many things that we do to avoid feeling bad.

There is no masochism in any of this. No one in their right mind wants to make their own suffering worse, it would be both anti-life and anti-nature to wish for any such a thing. So how can you know, how can you truly know, that not resisting the hurt, not trying to stop it or do anything to make it go away, will truly help and will not harm?

Perhaps the most important point to remember, in facing this fear, is that what you are feeling is your own life force and that it is always, 100% entirely committed to your wellbeing. The life force that lives within us, and all living beings, is totally and

unconditionally for us. It wants us to live, to live long, and to be happy. Not one cell in your body wants to do anything to hurt you, in any way. Many people experience and describe the life force as that which holds the essence of unconditional love. When things go wrong it is not because the life force has decided it no longer loves you or wants to serve you. There are only a tiny number of things in this life that can unequivocally prove the existence of unconditional love, our life force is one of them.

You can trust that, if you go within and practice compassion towards yourself, and so allow yourself to feel more of that inner energy that is your life force, that it will not harm you in any way. However, what we also need to understand is that, in doing this, you are likely to more strongly feel where the healing intelligence of your life force is blocked, or out of balance and harmony. This increase in awareness of where the blocks are can be uncomfortable and confronting. It is not harmful, but nor is it nothing. As much as you can see how the practice of compassion encompasses an enormous amount of passive, non-resisting, non-doing, softness and acceptance, having an increased awareness of your life force and where it is being blocked will have deep and lasting effects.

Things will change, they will shift, they will not stay the same. You don't have to do anything to create healing within your mind and body, the healing can happen by itself, but sometimes we have to get out of its way. Dropping resistance, practicing acceptance and compassion is a most powerful healing medicine towards doing that.

Another reason we can be sure that being more aware, and so feeling more of our dark energy, our shadow side, will not be harmful is that we are following old ways of healing here. They have been around a very long time and a great many people have found them to work. This whole historical, 'tested by time' aspect may or may not be important to you but however much stock we put into what has worked for others, surely the only way we can ultimately prove anything to be true or false, beneficial or harmful, is to try and see for ourselves.

I say to set the bar as high as you can go and as many times as you need, to know for sure that this will always be true. This method of practicing compassion with 'choiceless awareness' must work each and every time we do it. By 'work' I mean that it must be at least somewhat healing, and it must never be harmful.

In the context of what we have been talking about here, it means that however much the wave of increased intensity may rise and however scary that might be, that so long as we don't harden against it, or run from it, it will carry us to where we need to go and there will be a shift, there will be a release, and we will feel better.

Whatever the pain, or ache, or unhealed hurt, this practice of compassion must always bring us to a place where there is a release, great or small, but at least some release of at least some of the tension and pain and suffering that was associated with the wave of intensity that rose up.

I trust this method because I have tested it many, many times, on myself first and foremost, but also through observing others, and I see that it helps, and that it works. I trust it because, in whatever language that might be used to describe it, what we are essentially talking about is love. Practicing compassion for ourselves is a literal, practical method of extending love, especially to where it hurts and, because love is the great healer, the greatest healer, this practice genuinely, truly, and always helps.

I hope that you will try to practice compassion many times, because I know that if you do, you will definitely get better at it, and if you keep getting better at it then you will eventually become good at it! Which will be amazing, and not just for you either, the ripples that flow out from your tiny drop, and my tiny drop, and then the many tiny drops of us, will go out into the world and when enough of us choose love, and peace, and make our journey towards that love and that peace then, oh my goodness, what could happen then? Could you even imagine a world that was filled with peace and love, where unnecessary suffering, loneliness and injustice were banished, could it ever really be like that?



The Bridge

This next part is not about the practice of compassion, but some more thoughts on compassion that I would like to share with you. Starting with a terribly dark question, namely, what is your absolute worst feeling? Putting it another way, what feeling, that you have experienced at least once in the past, would you most want to never experience ever again?

It's obviously a very dark question but not necessarily a bad one, and I imagine that if I could ask you this in person that you might have a compelling story attached to your answer!

For me, my absolute worst feeling is one that has happened when I have been in my consulting rooms, with a patient, and then I suddenly just know, when it is already too late, that I am too unwell to be there and that I shouldn't be there. It is such a terrible feeling, the worst I have ever felt, and so of course it's made me really think about why that is!

The feeling wasn't mainly coming from whatever was so disturbing my health. Obviously whatever that was would have been awful, but it wasn't that. The worst, most horrible feeling I have ever had is what comes with the realisation that, right at that moment, I am too caught up in how I feel to be able to forget about myself and give my full attention to the person who has come to me for some help.

At that moment, I am too unwell to care about what is happening to them, to want to help them, to be there for them. Suddenly I feel like the worst imposter, that I have no right to be there, that I am breaking some fundamental law and that terrible things will happen if I don't stop!

I have come to understand that, in that moment, I have lost my compassion, and I know, in my heart of hearts and in every cell of my body and being, that I should not, and cannot do this work without compassion.

I wanted to share this story with you because of something I mentioned earlier, that I come to speak about compassion with a sense of great trepidation, because this is not something I believe I have any mastery in, and that I am only a journeyman who is trying to walk his talk. Further to that, I want to say that I have always felt that there are many people in the world who are far more naturally compassionate than I. Especially many of the women that I have come to know through my life and work, but a good number of men as well. Their abundant compassion is visible in how they care for others, and worry about them, and devote themselves to their wellbeing.

For myself, I think that I am, in this matter, at best, about average, but I can still see how essential my average amount is, precisely because of what happens when I lose what compassion I do have! Even though I know I am not a highly compassionate person by nature, I still see its great value, and so I work on it, and practice compassion, starting with my own journey within, and then it goes from there.

All this said, I also understand that many people in conventional medicine appear to be able to do their jobs perfectly well without compassion. In fact, it has long been the culture to encourage the medical student and new doctor to distance, detach and desensitise themselves from the suffering of others. I have met people who feel quite bruised, and sometimes even traumatised, by the lack of compassion they have experienced in the conventional system, and fair enough too, but it is thought that you do not need to be able to engage with a patient's spirit in order to be a good technician for their body. If the goal is to diagnose what the condition is, and to know what drugs or other interventions may treat the symptoms of that condition, then they feel there is no need to connect with and know much about the kind of person they are treating.

This is not, and cannot be, the case for the practice of holistic medicine. We must connect with and try to understand the person who has the condition, or we will fail in one or more of our three fundamental laws: firstly, to not do harm, secondly, to treat the cause and thirdly, to work with the healing intelligence of Nature. Understanding and compassion are two sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other, the more you have one the more you can have the other.

I have come to see that there is a kind of invisible 'bridge' that forms between one person and another when they decide that they will enter into a therapeutic relationship. The coming into being of that bridge might happen rather quickly or it might take some getting to know each other, but there is a point, and you can often feel exactly when it happens, when the patient decides, quite subconsciously I think, that they are going to trust the person they have come to see. There is a softening, there is a kind of shield that gets put down. I think it happens when, without it being a conscious decision, they are choosing to trust you. They have decided to trust that the person they have come to see could actually help them and will not harm them. With that trust, the faint or strong hope that brought them to the meeting in the first place suddenly becomes ever so much more real, and alive. That hope, coming into its potent form, is like lighting a candle, it can bring a great light into the dark place that sickness and hopelessness takes us.

It is a great honour to receive such a trust from another human being, and a great responsibility too, because if you have understanding and compassion for someone then you can no longer not care what happens to them, and so of course you want to be of some genuine service that sees them move forwards, and succeed, in their journey of healing.

Like all relationships, the 'bridge' goes two ways and, unlike in conventional medicine where it is possible to be a good technician for the body without needing to connect to the being of the person whose body you are treating, in holistic medicine the practitioner needs to be able to relate to their patient in order to understand them and so be able to walk alongside them for a time. In fact, I don't think it is possible for a practitioner to be able to relate to their patient in a humane way without at least some compassion.

To relate, to understand, to have compassion. How does it all happen? In the therapeutic relationship I think it evolves in ways that are obvious and ways that are quite subtle.

To understand and learn more about a person we can ask them to share their story. What is happening, what happened, what are their thoughts and feelings about what is going on. Everyone has a story, most people are willing to share it, especially if they feel they are being listened to. Listening to and understanding a person's story usually leads to compassion, well at least it ought to... there is a dark side to this that I should touch on too.

Which is, that everyone who works in any health field for long enough becomes aware of the danger of 'compassion fatigue'. Which is what happens when you work too hard or try to help too many people and find yourself in some level of that awful feeling I described earlier, where you find you are not caring and don't want to be bothered by anyone anymore.

It may be tempting to blame the patient for this but it usually turns out that it is not their fault, however many of them there are, but rather that the practitioner has not had compassion and enough care for themselves first. They are trying to draw water from an empty well and need to rest, and heal, and look after themselves for a time and then all the wellbeing and compassion in the world can come trickling, or flooding, back in.

Spending time with a person and listening to their story with understanding is surely one of the greatest gifts one person can give to another, and it will usually surely lead to the connection of compassion. However, there are other ways that we can connect with and understand each other too. For example, as a practitioner, if you learn to recognise a person's constitution it can greatly help to feel their nature and their spirit very quickly, even before needing to know a lot about their symptoms and their history.

The patient builds their side of the bridge in the therapeutic relationship when they decide that they can trust you. I think that the practitioner builds their side when they feel compassion for the patient, and this can certainly come from listening to them talking, but it can also come from a different kind of connection. Something subtle and hard to grasp, but most interesting to explore.

For my own students, in the context of learning how to sit with a patient whilst feeling their pulse at their wrist I talk a lot about '*empty mind, open heart*' and, in the learning how, I encourage the student to do as I do, which is hopefully quite early in the appointment process, to look at their tongue and then feel the pulse of the person you are with without any need to analyse or judge what you are feeling but rather with an empty mind and an open heart.

It can be quite extraordinary what you can pick up when you do this, messages and insights about their constitution for one thing, but often much more than that, if you just quieten your mind and really listen with an open heart. Later in the appointment there might be another opportunity to practice this technique again, but then this time with introducing a

drop or two of some selected herbs, preferably held in little sample bottles that can be shuffled and turned away from both the practitioner and the patient so no one knows what is being tested. The student learns how to hold the pulse before, during and after putting a drop of each herb into the patient's mouth and how the heart 'talks' and responds to the herb. What the heart can 'say' through the pulse has been a matter of no small wonder to many students of this method now, because of how much the heart really can talk and because of how remarkably well it works in showing that if you can just listen to the heart, it actually will tell you what it doesn't want, and what it does want.

Nowadays, lately, I sometimes say to a student in person that the core of my teaching can be summed up in just those four little words – *empty mind, open heart*.

None of them have said so yet, but they could, of course, say that if they are supposed to have an empty mind then why are they spending years of their lives learning so much to become a herbalist, including an enormous amount of knowledge on no less than one hundred medicinal herbs.



I use the analogy of a toolkit. All the knowledge about herbs and health gives you all kinds of different tools that you could use, and some of them are likely to be the right tools too, but it would be a mistake to get them out on your desk before you know what you are dealing with. It is far better to keep the tools in their kit, out of sight and out of mind until you know something of what you might need them for.

This is where the practice of compassion comes in. Because if you can meet a person where they are at, without judgement, without straight away thinking about what you are supposed to say or do, rather just meet them with an empty mind and an open heart, then I believe you are already building your bridge of compassion, and understanding. I think that the other person can feel that too, at some subtle level of their instinctive being, and so they can more easily build their own bridge too, the bridge of trust, and everything can flow from there.

Compassion is much more than a state of mind, it is an energy, a living thing. It creates a connection that allows for deep, intuitive, heartfelt understanding, it is actually healing in itself.

If you are a naturally compassionate person, and are not someone who would really need to practice compassion, then that's wonderful and I just have two hopes for you: one is that you have a life-path that gives you the opportunities to extend that love and compassion out into the world because, there can be no doubt that we sorely need it; the second hope is that you also practice extending compassion to yourself as well because, whoever you are, you will need it too.

However, if you are in any way like me and most other people, which is just somewhere around average in this matter, you really do need to practice compassion with others, as well as with yourself - welcome to the world of needing to practice!

Have you ever watched a baby learning how to walk? That is how I feel in this matter, like a baby, like a beginner. I take a step, and then I fall over, and then I get up and try again. You don't have to be naturally good at this and you don't have to attain some kind of mastery in it, but if you keep practicing anyway, then a very different journey will unfold by itself.

In the spirit of practice, and in the knowledge that anything really worth learning needs to be heard more than once, I will come back to some of these key themes again. In the meanwhile, at whatever speed or intensity is right for you, and whoever you are, you can be certain that you will get better at whatever you practice and, if you keep practicing, you will eventually get good at whatever you practice. This is a great truth, and it is true for everything, including compassion!



The Practice of Surrender

Once you learn about, and have a go at, the practice of surrender, some of it will seem similar to what you were doing in the practice of compassion. These practices are deeply alike, they complement each other and work together.

Weave them together, allow one to naturally flow into the other. The practice of compassion can be thought of as a way to extend love to yourself, and from there that love can surely better come out into the world. Similarly, the practice of surrender can be thought of as a way to bring yourself to inner peace, and from there that peace can surely better come into the world too.

I said earlier that we cannot meet our heart's greatest needs if we only have love without peace, or peace without love, but it can also be said that if we find our way to love, that peace can much more easily follow, and likewise if we find our way to peace, then the love can flow better too.

It may be that, as you try practicing both compassion and surrender, that you find there is one way that is more open to you than the other. If that is the case then you may well find that leaning into the one that comes more naturally will also help you to find the other, so that your compassion, your love, helps lead you to peace, or your surrender, your peace, helps lead you to love.

The three words to help guide the practice of compassion were soft, centred and now. The three words to guide the practice of surrender, which is just such a huge subject in itself, truly without limit, are just about the tiniest little words in the English language. All three of them together make only five letters, and yet there is an ocean contained in this smallest of drops. They are '*as I am*'

There is a great power in these words, and what they stand for, that I hope you will take in, and use, and so come to own for yourself. We're going further and deeper into something new here, but also building on what we've already been talking about. '*As I am*', is only ever in this moment of now, '*as I am*' is centred in the reality of the being of you and whatever it is that you are feeling, '*as I am*' is soft, yielding, without resistance, it is like water.

What is most different about this practice is contained within this most interesting, and mysterious, concept of 'surrender'. What does it mean to surrender? Who or what are we surrendering to? What are we expecting to happen when we surrender?

I will love to share my thoughts with you on the deep and beautiful subject of surrender but it will take us a minute, and we will have to take some steps together along the way to understanding. Surrender is not something we normally talk about, let alone try to do.

Plus, it sounds bad, surrender sounds like you lost, defeat, game over! As a culture, individually and collectively, we don't want to surrender to anything, we want to try harder and do better, we want to win!

Have you read any books or watched some videos on some of the different ways to improve yourself, they're everywhere right? My field, the natural health world, is full of methods on how to improve yourself. Other fields do it too, the cosmetic and fashion industries, the fitness and weight-loss industries, business and marketing get right into it. Getting ahead, getting somewhere, it's everywhere really, the human race racing forwards.

None of this is the enemy, it's in our nature to want to improve things, but still all of it is the complete opposite of what we are talking about with surrender. '*As I am*' has got zero to do with '*as I want to be*'. Surrender has got nothing to do with overcoming your weaknesses and becoming a better person, it really isn't anything like that, and the part of you that is not ok with who you are, that judges you, that rejects you, that finds you inadequate and not good enough, could actually really hate this whole idea of surrender, maybe even hate it with a passion!

Or maybe nothing so strong as that, but there could at least be a resistance, a discomfort in coming towards it. Please don't underestimate the power of our conditioning, our programming, especially from early childhood when we are like little sponges, taking everything in, believing everything we are told.

In any case, if we are going to make some headway here, let's choose our steps rather carefully, and in this instance, for the very first step, I am going to ask you to think about how you feel when you are going to sleep! I'm not kidding, bear with me here, this will be very important to what we are doing.

If you take just a moment to think about this, I am sure you will know exactly what I mean by that certain state you go into, and the feeling that comes with it, when every day, without fail, you let go into sleep. This process, the feeling, this state that happens as you are going to sleep is one that you are intimately familiar with. This is exactly what surrender is. You already know it very well.

Falling asleep is the ultimate surrender of consciousness. The most powerful and dangerous chemical drugs in the world are the ones that cause people to lose their consciousness, and yet we are made to be able to fall asleep without any kind of chemical assistance. In fact, before we are even born, we are experts in falling asleep. Before we are born, and for a long time afterwards, nearly all babies fall asleep naturally and easily, multiple times a day. Young or old, all people fall asleep. This is surrender, it is the ultimate letting go. We let go so deeply, so fully, that we aren't even awake any more.

So you already know how to surrender to sleep, you've practiced it thousands upon thousands of times and you are actually already really, really good at it. To take the first step

towards what we are talking about here in the practice of surrender, come to this in exactly the same way.

In a moment, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and then allow yourself to totally let go in just the same way as you do when you are starting to drift off into sleep. Then the second step will be that I want you to insert those three tiny words '*as I am*' into the frame of your consciousness, to allow them, and what they represent, to exist.

The first step is just exactly as you would do if you were going to sleep. The second step is to think '*as I am*' in your body and feel '*as I am*' in your mind.

As you relax, in exactly the same way as you do every time you go to fall asleep, you are allowing yourself to be, just be, exactly as you are, in this moment of now. Without any judgement, softly, gently, and compassionately. You are not trying to hold on to even the tiniest speck of resistance. Tell yourself '*as I am*'. So you are really just being you, as you are, and you are letting go, in exactly the same way as if you were going to go to sleep.

Of course, depending on where you are in your day and how comfortable you are right now, you could actually go to sleep by doing this! I can't imagine that would be a bad thing and, if it happens, then it probably needed to happen and I encourage you to try again another time, when you might not fall asleep, but still be able to relax in as deeply a way as if you could.

Perhaps you will be someone who can go to sleep very easily and quickly, and so this practice might come very naturally to you and it will only take a moment to take the first step, of remembering and being in the feeling of letting go to sleep, and then the second step, to think in your body and feel in your mind this most lovely practice of surrender, to be '*as I am*'.

However, perhaps you are more like most people where the process of winding down and letting go is slower, itself a step by step journey, in which case again, if you can, don't time this or worry about how long it takes but rather just set the intention to let go very deeply with these two, timeless, easy and natural steps. Please try it now if you can, or just as soon as you get the next right moment.



Thoughts about Sleep

The energy, the phenomenon, of sleep is an astonishingly powerful force of nature and, before we go to the next step, the third step, let's talk about it a little more. I see that our thoughts and feelings about sleep mainly come from how we experience it ourselves and that each of us has our own personal relationship with our sleep. For example, we may simply love it and so sometimes miss not having it enough, or we may struggle with it and resent it for not being more available, or we may simply look forward to being with it again and feel like it is one of our most trusted companions in our long journey. Usually, if you look into it, there is a mixture of feelings about our relationship with sleep.



Whatever your relationship with sleep, I want you to consider the nature, the phenomenon, of sleep in a way that goes beyond your own personal relationship with it. Sleep is a true force of Nature. Every living thing, plant, animal, human, everything that has ever lived needs to fall asleep or it falls apart. All living things have their circadian rhythms, trees droop their branches at night, humans, animals, birds and insects sleep in the day or the night.

If you cast your mind out into the world and think about sleep as a kind of a universal force, can you get a

sense of how it exists in the world in a way that is beyond our individual selves? Of course, the energy of sleep exists for us personally, and it is just as real to us as the force that makes us need to eat to live, but there is a force in it which also exists independently from us. That force, which comes in the form of sleep, and the need for sleep, permeates all of life. It is so powerful, and universal, that everything that lives must accept its presence, again and again.

I am asking you to think of sleep as a force, or a power, that is not only limited to you, but is a part of all Nature, because later on I am going to encourage you to take a further step, a fourth step, into this great practice of surrender. Whatever your personal spiritual beliefs may be, I hope that you will agree that the force of Nature, that which gives us life and sustains our life, is something we simply must trust as being for our greater good. I want you to see how we have to surrender to the force of this Nature that comes in the form of sleep. We all have to surrender to this, at least eventually, if we are to even stay alive, let alone keep our sanity!

Planet Earth is not a great spherical rock that has been accidentally infested with life forms that came from outer space. Earth has grown us, we are a part of its Nature, which is one that very much wants to support life, including our own! When you are surrendering to sleep, you are trusting that Nature will heal you, and repair you, and knit you back up again, and then bring you back to life for the next day.

Surrender is not defeat, or losing, or failing. Surrender is trust, and peace, and the wisdom to know that you must let go, and that we all must let go, or that is how we will truly fail.



The Loaded Word

I wanted to start with sleep to describe this force of nature because it is largely user-friendly and I know how the subject of surrender can be highly counter-intuitive, and difficult to understand. Staying with the same concepts, I'm now bringing in the next word for the third step but I am only too aware of how quickly we could lose each other here so, stay with me while I try to convince you not to run for the hills! The word is *tiredness*, and it is surely one of the most loaded words in our language!

People hate feeling tired! Tiredness feels like defeat, like losing. Tiredness is a tense, troubled, edgy, and deeply uncomfortable way to feel. And now I am about to try to convince you to make friends with it, actually more than that, to love it, and actually even more than that, to surrender to it, unconditional surrender! Can you imagine such a thing? Do you think that, if you completely surrendered to your tiredness, you would never get up again, and that you would just go down and just stay down? Do you think that if you truly accepted how tired you were, and allowed yourself to feel it fully and unconditionally, you'd be just about dead?

I'm not exaggerating, this is how much many people hate their tiredness. I meet with this experience all the time in my clinic. Tiredness is the most universal of all the symptoms of ill-health that people have. People lose their vitality and their spark goes out, and they just

can't stand it. Whatever other symptoms might be happening, it can be the tiredness that affects them the most, and so they hate it more than anything.

How could anyone possibly become friends with such a feeling? Before we even put a toe onto this next step, come back with me to revisit that first step for a moment. I want you to remember again that feeling that you have, just before you fall asleep, when you are about to surrender yourself to the ultimate letting go of sleep.

Maybe you would like to notice how this feels when you go to sleep tonight, or maybe you can remember it well enough right now, but my question for you is this: do you like that feeling of falling asleep and how much do you like it?

I have asked a lot of people that question, and the reason I ask them is that I know, every time, without fail, if the person remembers how it feels when they are dropping off to sleep, then they will remember how good it feels. In fact, most people will say that they love it. The feeling of letting go and falling asleep is actually very lovely, and surrendering to it is blissful, because it brings us to peace.

It is not the tiredness that is the enemy, and it is not the tiredness that is making us feel bad. It is the resistance to the tiredness that makes us feel so completely awful. When we stop resisting it, when we relax, when we even let it take us down to sleep, it doesn't hurt at all. Quite the contrary, our tiredness shows us the way to our inner peace. In fact, it is the absolute best guide we have and will ever have to show us the way to peace. Isn't that an extraordinary thing to consider, what an incredible ally, what an amazing friend!

I don't know if you already know how much you deeply need and desire peace but I can guarantee that if you stay alive and keep living long enough then you will come to know it. Eventually, everyone does, probably because we have suffered enough from what it feels like to not have peace. The absence of peace is poverty, hardship, suffering. Peace is the great treasure of life. Peace is worth more than anything you can buy or have.

Tiredness is truly not the enemy, but we feel as if it was and treat it as if it was. It will take time to heal our relationship with tiredness, and not only time, but a certain very special kind of practice, the practice of surrender.

You know that you know how to fall asleep, and you know, or at least I trust you know, that you love the feeling of falling asleep so, as long as we feel we are on solid ground with that as the first step, and you will remember that we are going to use that nutshell of '*as I am*' to get our mind and body aligned in the right direction to take a second step, now let's talk about the third step.

This third step is to allow yourself to feel where you are most tired and then to simply surrender to that experience. No conditions, no ifs, no buts, no nothing but unconditional surrender. You don't judge it, you don't resist it, you don't do anything but firstly observe its presence and then allow your energy to centre on the place that you feel most tired.

When you come to this next step and begin practicing surrendering to your tiredness you must not think that you can somehow trick yourself into taking control of the situation and changing this force of Nature to suit yourself. In other words if you 'try' to relax, you will only make yourself more tense. In the same way, you don't do anything to make yourself fall asleep, it just happens. In fact, the worst thing a person with insomnia can ever do is to try to make themselves fall asleep. The more they try to sleep the worse they make it. You aren't doing anything to let go, you are stopping trying, stopping doing, just like when you fall asleep.

Be aware that, for most people, no sooner do they allow their energy to centre on where they feel most tired, it moves somewhere else, or the sensation of it changes from what it was. So you may just be playing 'follow the leader' for a time. That's ok, in fact it's very good, you are feeling the intelligence of your own life force and how it roams around your body, showing you that it knows where you hurt, or are fatigued, and bringing its healing presence to where it needs to go.

You should also be aware that, especially if you are running a sleep deficit and you're exhausted, that you may fall asleep when you surrender to your tiredness. If you have a love-hate relationship with your sleep, as many people do, then you may be a bit upset about falling asleep every time you go to practice relaxation, or surrender.

If this is the case, then be assured of two things. One is that you clearly need to sleep, and that not getting the sleep you need will lead to sickness and unhappiness, so it is good if it happens as much as it needs to. The second is that this will have a limit. If you keep allowing yourself to sleep as much as you need then there will definitely come a time when you can relax, and let go, and you won't fall asleep, or at least not right away, and then the peace can come and you can heal your mind and body in other ways in which you are more conscious. The ways in which you are awake are not necessarily better, but they are different, and it can be very nice to be more aware of what is happening.

In a few moments, I'm going to ask you to practice surrendering to the presence of tiredness that is in your body and your mind. What if you don't feel tired right now, will it still work? Yes, we always have the presence of tiredness in us, at least at some level. That might sound like a very negative thing to say but that's only because the word tiredness is so loaded.

Perhaps, as I explain this just a little more, I could use the word heaviness instead of tiredness. Tiredness always has a heaviness in it. Even when we are very wound up, very energised, very up, there is still a heaviness that is inside us, perhaps under the surface and invisible in the moment of our being up and about, but it is always there. That heaviness is like our centre of gravity. It is what draws us back to the earth, what grounds us, what keeps us from being too up, and on, and out there, so that we could become unstable and unwell.

Nothing damages the nervous system more than not sleeping for too long. A huge number of people walk around in a constant state of being 'wired and tired'. They appear anything

but tired to those around them, and perhaps even to themselves as well at times, but the heaviness, the tiredness is right there, just under the surface.

Tiredness, heaviness, is not the enemy, it is there to show us the way back to our peace, which is our great treasure, but we must learn to accept it, and stop fighting it, and surrender to it.

The next time you are able to practice this again, which I hope will be very soon, you start by allowing yourself to feel the way you do when you are going to fall asleep, completely letting go, and then you bring in the second step to think in your body and feel in your mind the great words of surrender '*as I am*', and then you take a next step, a third step, where you allow yourself to go to wherever you are most tired, or heavy, in your body.

I must warn you again that there is every likelihood that doing this will, at least at first, intensify the experience. I know I talked about this earlier but I need to remind you of it again, as many people, consciously or unconsciously, shy away from this increase of intensity because they fear that it will just keep making them worse, and that they will never stop feeling it if they don't keep resisting it.

There is an element of trust here which, to deserve, I again encourage you to put to such a test that it must work for you without fail, each and every time you do it. The increase in intensity may not happen, or it may not happen every time, but in any case, it is better to expect it so if it does happen you know to keep going, to stay with the process, on trust at first, and then you will feel for yourself how not-resisting, not-judging; just accepting and surrendering, allows the hard feelings of tiredness and the heavy feelings of fatigue, to ease and soften and soon enough turn into the bliss of peace.

Remember not to get caught on one foot here! The wave of intensity will always pass in any case but, especially if it is very strong, remember to keep two feet under you as you journey within. Pairing your awareness will stop you from getting stuck. You will not be alone if you go into this and feel like you have a mountain of fatigue and heaviness inside, that's ok, it will not hurt you to feel that way, but it will be most helpful to pair your awareness of the great fatigue and heaviness to either of the first steps. So you remember how easy and natural it is to fall asleep and the feeling that comes to you when you are letting go and no longer resisting our beautiful friend, our fatigue. Or you hold your other foot on those three tiny words '*as I am*', with the ocean of depth and meaning that they have in them, to guide you and to remind you of what not to do. Do not resist, do not fight, just surrender.

Whatever you feel, wherever you feel it, whatever comes up, you aren't trying to change, or fix, or alter anything, you are just surrendering to what is, in this moment of now.

Talking about all this can help up to a point, it can get us heading in the right direction, but the only way to really understand and own any of this is by practice. Please take a few moments now to take these simple steps in the great practice of surrender.

Let yourself go to the place that you always go to when you are going to fall asleep, let yourself go to the place where you have the most tiredness, or heaviness, and just completely surrender to it, totally and unconditionally, '*as I am*', with the trust that, not only will this surrendering not harm you, but that it can heal you, safely, gently, easily.

Please have a go now, or whenever you can.



Final step

How I wish I could ask you in person, how did you get on? What did you feel, did you have any obstacles, do you have any questions, will you try it again?

Depending on how you would answer is how I would respond. Maybe I would want to go back to the first step with you, just to talk some more about sleep and going to sleep! Some people might think sleep is not such an exciting subject but I think it is one of the best things in the world to think and talk about, because it is our surest gateway to peace. Going to sleep is our universally most trusted method of finding peace and, I cannot say this too much, we truly, all of us, want and need that peace. Peace and love are our innermost heart's desires!

Maybe, if we could talk in person, we would want to stay more on the ideas around this last step, the one about going into where you feel most tired and heavy and letting that be your meditation guide. This whole subject can need a lot of thought, deep thought too. I don't think I can overemphasise how counter-intuitive it can seem, to our minds, to allow ourselves to do anything that can lead to us feeling more bad, however temporary it might be. We are programmed to avoid pain and seek pleasure, it's in our wiring. Allowing ourselves to feel our tiredness, or in fact any kind of negative experience, is confronting, it can feel unnatural and wrong, at least at first.

I look around at the multitude of methods in my world to feel more energy, to get up, to banish any bad feelings and I wonder who am I to be offering such a dark path to anyone. No one wants to surrender to their fatigue, or any other bad feeling. People just want to feel good all the time. These old ways, these dark paths through the shadow-lands of the body, the subconscious, are not what they want...

I say it is a dark path because, as well as being largely untravelled, if you yourself will walk along it, then you must meet with your dark friends. Which include loneliness, and fear, and anger, to give some of their names, and most certainly which includes fatigue. Tiredness and fatigue seem like enemies, like weaknesses to be overcome, but they only seem that way because we look at them so darkly.

I contend that we cannot know love unless we know loneliness, that we cannot know courage unless we know fear, that we cannot change anything unless we know fire and that we cannot know peace unless we know, and understand, and learn how to accept our tiredness.

I don't know, and cannot know, unless I could see you and hear you, if this is striking a chord with you, and if you will therefore try to further practice surrender, or compassion for that matter. If you do, then surely you will soon do it in your own way, and it must be like that. This talk from me, some ideas and some nutshells to remember for a guide, are just first

steps. If you take those steps and find that they are leading you towards where you want to go, then you will change them and add to them in your own way, and it should be like that.

I only hope that, knowing how deep is our programming to resist such feelings as our tiredness, and knowing how very difficult so many people find it to relax, that you will not forget that it really can be as easy as falling asleep. So that you don't think you have to struggle, or try to relax, or that it is hard to let go! These first three steps that we've been discussing are more than enough to begin with and get going on. If you take them, and they work, and they help you to relax and find your peace, then that is wonderful and there may be nothing more that needs to be said or done.

However, in this subject around the practice of surrender, there is still one fourth and final suggestion for a step from me that I would like to share with you. Maybe you will find it interesting and relevant, maybe not, and maybe you will like to have a go at this in practice too, but also maybe not. I am more than happy if what follows is nothing more than sowing a seed that may or may not ever grow in your inner world.

To talk about this I have to make a couple of sweeping references to all the religions and spiritual traditions of the world. There are so many faiths in our world, so many systems of belief. Religion and spirituality is a rich world, well populated and well established and so, not being able to see you, to ask you the simplest question to start, such as '*do you have a faith?*' I cannot try to meet you where you are at, which is my singular preference in such matters, so that I may be respectful, and find a common language between us right away. We cannot do that here so I will have to talk very generally, and do my best to find the words that anyone could understand and accept.

Which is to firstly say this: all religions, all spiritual traditions, if you go deeply enough into them, come to this subject of surrender. Once you get past whatever are the systems and structures, the methods and the practices, you get to something that sounds remarkably similar from whichever background it comes from. There is an understanding, and it seems to be universal, that if you want to go deeper in, and find whatever it is that you are seeking with your faith, that you must in some way surrender yourself. All faiths and all teachings seem to eventually come to this same point, expressed in different ways but saying the same thing, which is that without surrender you will always be separate from the Divine.

Before I go on to the second point, I should make a quick disclosure about any 'conflict of interest' which is to say that I do not personally belong to any religious groups or identify with any one particular spiritual tradition. I have loved to study the old ways of healing and it is that study, along with a keen interest and observation of what actually works for the people I care for in my work, which is a large part of what I draw from to write here. The other part is my own personal journey with all of this and, as mentioned earlier, and what can certainly bear some repetition, is that I am not a master in any of this, I am not talking to you from somewhere above you. My only qualification, my only right, to discuss these

matters is that I am a journeyman who walks his talk and practices exactly that which I am inviting you to explore too.

I especially wanted to clarify the above because of what I need to say next, the second big generalisation, which is that as well as there may be a kind of 'end-point' of surrender that is common to all faiths, there is also a universal theme that we must strive to be better people than we are. Don't get me wrong, trying to be a better person has a lot of good points. No one who spends any amount of time on Earth in their right mind, and with their eyes open, would think that we're fine just as we are. There is a great benefit, at least in theory, from the moral codes that religious and spiritual traditions can bring into our societies. But putting aside the subject of what might be best for the greater good, there can clearly be a conflict for the individual here, between surrender and striving, and if you yourself have had some religious upbringing that makes you believe you cannot be accepted as you are, and that you must always strive and could never surrender, then we may need to look at this in order to be able to go further into it.

Because how can you let go, surrender, be 'as I am' and come to a place of peace, if you cannot accept yourself as you are in this moment? My point in bringing this up is to say, please be aware that the main obstacle to any of this, to the practice of surrender, and likewise the practice of compassion, is our own internal resistance, our hardness, our judgement on ourselves and, if some small or larger part of that obstacle has been seeded and grown by your religious faith then you may need to reconcile that to move forwards.

You do not need to abandon or change any aspect of your faith whatsoever in order to practice surrender and you do not have to make one final choice between striving and surrender but, when you come to practice surrender, you do need to completely let go of striving. You can want to strive to be better, to seek to improve your life in all kinds of ways but then, if you will practice surrender, if you will even take the first steps to practice surrender, then you need to make a very conscious choice that now, just now, for this moment and this moment alone, you are going to stop trying, stop striving, and just be, as you are.



I want to go on to something else now but, if any of what I have just been saying could apply to you, would you please take a moment to think about it? I cannot ask you this in person so you must be the one to ask. Ask yourself, do you need to bring the light of your awareness to this matter? Whatever you do, if you know you truly want and need peace, do not be in denial about this, or I think it could be very hard for you to move forwards and take that most essential step of thinking in your body and feeling in your mind, *'as I am'*.



Whatever your upbringing, whatever your faith or philosophy, can we agree on one thing? Which is that, without having to name it or to agree on a name, that there is clearly a great force that has brought the Universe into being and life into existence. This energy, this force, existed long before we did and it will continue on long, long after we have gone. Furthermore this force, this energy is here, right now, both in us and around us.

If you can accept me using these rather non-descriptive but hopefully widely acceptable words such as force and energy then let's move towards talking about what the fourth and final step that I have to show you is. In a nutshell it is this. After taking some steps to go within and to let go, to accept, to be in the space of *'as I am'*, you encourage yourself, or let's say you allow yourself, to take things to an entirely deeper level of surrender by letting your *'drop'* your point of consciousness, your identity, your *'I'*, your separate self, to be completely *'as I am'* within the Ocean of life, and of energy, that surrounds you, and is in you, and is you.

Let's come back to this in just a few moments, to practice it in the simplest and gentlest of ways with no special preparation or technique and again, with the understanding that it can be just as natural and easy as falling asleep. It can be that easy, but I know that for the vast majority of us it really isn't easy to surrender at all and I want to go around what I believe will be the main, or one of the main obstacles to this, before we give it a go. This one I'm going to call the *'strain to ascend'*.

For many of us, if we think about a greater force, or a higher power, we feel that we need to lift ourselves into a higher state in order to be in touch with it. We *strain to ascend*, we strive to perceive and somehow connect to that which our minds can barely comprehend. But here's the thing, no matter how hard we might try, we just won't ever be able to comprehend it by straining, in fact quite the reverse! We cannot grasp the unlimited, or

infinity, or eternity, or any of the really cool things that permeate the mystery of the Universe, our minds are incapable of it, too limited, too simple, too much in the dark to do anything more than dimly sense the light. Even if we deep down know this, it can be seen that, throughout the many forms of faith or spirituality, there is a theme that nonetheless reoccurs, which is that if we just strain to ascend long enough and hard enough, we'll eventually be able to break through!

Honestly, straining won't help, it only gets in the way. There is no trick to any of this, no technique or training is required, but I would have to say that there is a kind of trust that is necessary. The trust is that if we truly let go of our tiny drop that the Ocean will still carry us. That releasing our ego will not lose us our minds. That we don't have to do anything, or be anyone, or change anything, to find our peace.

You have to give trust to have trust. A leap of faith is needed to have faith. The feeling of peace that, along with love, is what we most need and want is right there, all the time, but we really are remarkably good at getting in the way of it with all our striving and straining that we do instead of just letting go, and trusting.

If you are willing to give this a go, now or later, I encourage you to once again start with the first step, then the second, then the third, and only then the fourth. Firstly, just remember how it feels when you are completely letting go before you go to sleep. There is no need to learn how to relax or to think you have to rewire your brain to be good at relaxing, you're already really good at it, but you usually just don't let yourself do it aside from that one point of the day before you go to sleep!

With practicing surrender, I suggest to always start there, because then you will be on solid ground with the very first step. The second step can come just as naturally, where you allow yourself to think in your body and feel in your mind 'as I am'. Just that, not having to strive or strain to be any different, or better, or higher, just as I am, as you are. The the third step is to feel where you are most tired, where you are most heavy, but when you do this you keep one foot on the feeling of letting go into sleep, or the awareness of 'as I am' so you don't get stuck on one foot in the midst of a deep cavern of aching fatigue! This first foot is very important to help keep you in the mindset of acceptance, so that you don't resist the fatigue or the tiredness, especially if and when it initially increases once you allow yourself to feel it more fully.

The centre of gravity, where you are most tired, or heavy, will commonly shift, and change and come and go as you relax into it, without resistance, without fighting. These first three steps can be, and should be, so easy that it takes as little time as just breathing in and out to come into the centre of where you are most tired and so to be already standing at the gateway to your inner peace.

Then and there, so long as you don't fight the tiredness, or harden yourself against it, or resist it in any way, there will come a release, which can be very sweet, even blissful. Then

you may wish to take the fourth step, which is hard to talk about, and even hard to think about, but is certainly a profoundly deep spiritual practice.

To take this fourth step there is a recognition, an understanding, that we are a child of the Universe, a drop of an ocean. There is a quiet experience, that often comes gently, like a dawn, and then grows, there is a force, an energy, that is in us, and around us, and that this force, this energy, was here before us and will be here after us. It is us, we are it and we are in it, but it is also something far greater, far more vast and Universal than we can comprehend or understand, but it is there, always there nonetheless, and that if we surrender our being into it, again without any strain to be anything other than what we are, that it will hold us, and protect us, and bring us to the great treasure of Peace.

Ok, it sounds nice right? So how exactly do you take that fourth step? I am so sorry, I truly have no idea. I can tell you that if I try to do it then I just stand on my own feet and trip myself up. I can tell you that I know I cannot go to the great peace, because it must come to me. I can tell you what stops me taking this step, my striving, my straining, my resistance to being with what is and being as I am, but I cannot tell you how to take this step, because this is the step into the unknown.

In fact, I imagine that there are many possible fourth, fifth and sixth steps that you, or I, or anyone could take once they started along the path of surrender and that these would be just as difficult to outline and explain, because we would be going places that are not of the mind, not of language, but of something much deeper, and wordless.

Ok, so I know that I am going to have to be woolly in attempting to describe something that is completely beyond words but I will make the attempt nonetheless and, coming to this particular matter now, for the first time, I want to introduce two phrases that I especially like, and which you also might like too, especially to use for yourself come the time you are ready for fourth, fifth and sixth steps into the unknown.

The first phrase is '*merging into oneness*'. It describes an experience where there is no longer a sense of separation between me and everything else. I am one with what is, I am '*soft, centred and now*', I am '*as I am*', no borders, no resistance, no hardening, no thing between me and every thing.

The second phrase is '*pairing into infinity*'. This follows on from the practices we have been sharing where you pair your awareness within yourself. For example, by pairing your breathing with your heartbeat, or pairing a certain phrase at the same time as feeling within your body. Pairing is very powerful, it can pause the incessant flow of thought, it stops us getting stuck, it helps us to move forwards in the direction we are seeking to go.

Pairing into infinity is something that you can seek, or at least be open to, especially when you already have something of a sense of the *merging into oneness*. You are still being, you

are breathing, existing and feeling, you have not disappeared and in fact you are probably more conscious and aware of being in the here and now than ever.

To at least some extent, maybe in a subtle way, maybe in an encompassing way, you can feel the whole of you as one being, all the pairs within you have come together, your mind and body, breath and heart, belly and spine, thoughts and identity. When all the pairs are joined within you at one time you can feel how you are merging into oneness, and then you reach out, or are touched by, the presence of the other. The infinite, the eternal, that which cannot be named or even really described, is also there, just as much as you are, and you can pair with it, and be with it. So the oneness stretches to include you but is also far beyond you. You are merging into oneness and pairing into infinity.

All that said, unless it is your clear calling, unless you almost feel like you have no choice but to want to go there, please don't worry for one microsecond about fourth steps, and merging into oneness and pairing into infinity. You can get so much peace, so much healing, from those first three steps and I am sure that, if you start practicing with them, that you will soon feel for yourself how their own variations are also rather infinite. The way you can move with any of these steps, how deep you can go, and how much they can help you to let go and feel good, are endlessly useful, and wonderful to explore.

In any case, however far you want to go with any of this, and however often you choose to practice surrender, it is my heartfelt hope that you will have positive experiences with this very early on, even from the beginning, and that you continue to have good experiences, good journeys, each and every time you come to it. This is my heartfelt hope because I imagine that, if you do have good experiences, even very good, then of course you will want to come back to it, many many times, and here's the thing, here's my hope, because if you yourself start to gather and then own the greatest treasure of your own inner peace, then you will have that peace to share with others and, oh my goodness, how much do we need that peace on Earth!



The Practice of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is so fundamental and so essential to true healing that there were many times, in the thinking about, and then the writing of this work, that I felt I should start here, with the practice of forgiveness, which could just as well be called the practice of healing, because in many ways healing begins with forgiveness.

I chose to start talking about compassion, and then surrender, because I hoped you might firstly feel the coolness, the softness, of those practices, and how easy they can be, how gentle and unforced.

Forgiveness can be really difficult, it's impossible to overestimate how difficult it can be, so I wanted you to start easy, to experience any amount of the peace and love that can come with the soft practices, because even the tiniest fraction would be a compelling proof of the method of allowing yourself to be with what is, to accept whatever comes up, to be '*as I am*', and to feel how something of how you can be *soft, centred* and in the *now* in the midst of all this business of being human.

I also wanted you to experience making friends with your tiredness, as much as you were willing and able to do that just at this point in your life. I hoped that you would be able to feel where you are most tired and heavy, and to trust that releasing and relaxing into that tiredness would not take you anywhere bad, but only to peace, or sleep, whichever came first!

I thought that this process of accepting, and not resisting, the feeling of heaviness, or tiredness could also be important for what follows, because if you know that it is a safe and healing method, and that it works for what blocks us from letting go into surrender, then it could be easier to trust that a similar process might work for what blocks us from forgiveness.

Having said that, please don't worry if you feel you have barely scratched the surface and only just begun with the first two practices of compassion and surrender. If, at this moment, you feel like a beginner then, firstly welcome to my world and I can tell you that you can get used to this feeling, and secondly be assured that this will not in any way prevent you from picking up and using what I am about to share with you.

I should also mention that, further on, particularly with ways of bringing them deeper into the body, the subconscious, we are going to be coming back around to all these practices several times further so again, don't worry if you feel you need more practice, that would be a very healthy way to feel right now.

The process of approaching forgiveness is similar to what we've been discussing in the sense of there being some defined steps that can be taken to practice it, but it is also very different in other ways. Compassion and surrender are the two Yin spiritual practices. They are soft

and yielding. The obstacles to them, hardening and resistance, need the healing touch of the Yin, cooler and accepting.

The two practices that are still to be introduced, forgiveness and gratitude, are the Yang spiritual practices. The obstacles to them both remain to be talked about, but these practices do not ask us to only just 'be with what is', they need us to do something, they need more thoughts, they have hot Yang energy in them, and they can be very transformative of the 'what is'.

Almost everything I have to share here on the practice of forgiveness is about the inner work but, before we go there, let me be very clear that this practice of forgiveness will be by you and for you. How practicing forgiveness can help you, and heal you, and how that then spreads into the world is another matter, but what I need you to know is that your getting started with this practice, and your ability to succeed with this practice, is not going to depend on anyone else doing or changing anything.

I need to clear this up first because I know that, for many people, the subject of forgiveness is loaded with the burden of one or more unhealed hurts that they have received at the hands of another, and which they have not been able to forgive or forget at this point in time.

This has come up a lot in my work, and I understand that many people struggle with not being able to resolve, or make peace, with an injury or injustice that they have received, nearly always from someone that they were close to.

There is a tremendous amount of cruelty and injustice in our world. Children can be terribly cruel to each other. Adults, parents, teachers, friends, co-workers, neighbours, people and partners, for just about any excuse, have the most extraordinary ability to be cruel, unkind and unfair to one another. It all causes damage. It all causes hurt, and often that hurt is not able to be healed.

When the damage is recent or when it has gone especially deep, it can cause a lot of heat, a lot of bitterness and resentment, towards the person who has done them wrong. Sometimes when the fire, the hurt and anger have cooled down, that bitterness can be put aside and forgotten but, even then, the damage may have gone too deep to be healed by time and where once there was trust, now there is only hurt and sadness left in its place.

The person might say that they would like to move on, but that they can't. They sometimes say that they think they should forgive the person, and perhaps they are saying that because of their personal beliefs, or because they have been advised to do so, or because it was in something that they read, but they cannot, in all honesty, bring themselves to forgive or forget. Sometimes people say that they fear their health is being damaged by the unhealed hurt, and so they bring it up and talk about it.

Ok, so here is some of what I think about that. If someone has brought some harm into the world, great or small, and they are not sorry about it, then I do not think they ought to be forgiven. The word 'sorry' should be, and can be, a truly sacred word. Sacred is a very powerful medicine, one that has to be used carefully, and consciously, one that can do harm when misused but that can achieve great healing when used wisely.

If a person says sorry, and truly means that they are sorry, then it means that they accept they have made a mistake and that they are acknowledging that they have done wrong. When they say sorry, they are saying they will not make that mistake, and do that harm or wrong again. Or at least it means that they are saying that they will try their best, that they will do everything in their power, to not make that mistake, or do that harm or wrong again.

If someone is truly sorry then I believe that they can be forgiven, not that they should be forgiven, but that they can be forgiven. Forgiveness is not a guarantee, it is not a right, you can ask for forgiveness, but that doesn't mean you will automatically receive forgiveness. It is up to the person who has been hurt to decide if they are willing to forgive.

If you who are reading this have received a hurt that has not healed and continues to cause you harm then you most definitely need to work with that injury and you most definitely need to include the practice of forgiveness, but not in the way people usually think about this. You will need to work on yourself, certainly, but you do not need to do anything or change anything in your relationship to the person who has harmed you. You do not need to forgive them in order to heal the hurt that they have caused to you. For you to be able to trust that person again, and so for you to be able to have a healthy relationship with them, you would have to forgive them but for that to happen you would need to know that they were truly sorry, meaning that you knew they were taking responsibility for their wrongdoing, and that they would be doing their best not to do it again!

It is not impossible for people to take responsibility for themselves and to be sorry to those that they have harmed but I do not encourage you to wait for anyone or ask anyone else to do that for you. Your practice of forgiveness starts with you and ends with you and what anyone else does is up to them.



Let's begin. I want to start by teaching you four phrases, each one containing just three words. I am sure that you will soon be able to memorise them, they are very memorable! After talking about each of them a little, I am going to invite you to use them as a very conscious meditation. Meaning I want you to try to just revolve the four phrases around your awareness, in any order, any number of times. Does it sound simple? I hope so, these beginning steps are simple in theory, it is the potential obstacles to the practice that can make forgiveness so difficult.

These are the four nutshells, the four three word phrases

I own me
I love you
I'm so sorry
Please forgive me

I Own Me

'I own me' is a tiny nutshell. In just six letters it is almost as small as the last nutshell we used for surrender 'as I am'. These words are so tiny, so insignificant by themselves, and yet if they are understood, and taken to heart, they can lead to a huge leap of consciousness.

'I own me' means this. Everything that I feel belongs to me. My body, my thoughts, my experiences are mine and mine alone. No one else owns me or is responsible for me. I am who chooses how I react to each and every situation I find myself in. I am who chooses how to nourish and cleanse myself, how to activate and rest myself. I am the one who is responsible for my health and my wellbeing. Everything that I feel belongs to me, I own me.

Does it sound simple, does it seem obvious? Or does it bother you somehow? This idea always used to bother me, not enough to make me really think about it, just enough to push it aside. I didn't agree with it, without knowing why I didn't agree. '*No man is an island*', I might have thought, as if to say, okay, we can be responsible for some parts of our lives but surely we are enormously influenced by the family, the country, and the culture we are born into, we are profoundly affected by the people we live with and work with, and then add in all the other outside factors; the weather, the economy, the moon, the insect buzzing against the window pane, and it is everything, everything that makes the soup in which we swim. I do think that is true, by the way, that we are a part of a far greater whole, and that everything, of course, does have an enormous influence, but none of that doesn't make it any less true that, where it really matters, '*I own me*'.

The concept of 'I own me' was put to me in different ways, but I didn't like it and I wasn't ready for it for a long time. Of course, like anyone, I didn't have any problem owning the parts of me that I liked, the challenge was in taking ownership of the parts I didn't like. For

all the parts I didn't want to accept, there was such a strong temptation to be the victim. It was really hard to take responsibility for myself, compared to blaming external circumstances, and other people, for how I was.

I understand now that a big part of my not wanting to take ownership of myself is that I wanted to be like a child in this matter. I didn't want to take on that much responsibility. I had experienced enough hurts to know that being alive can hurt in ways that keep hurting, but I still wanted to be the innocent victim, like a child. That way felt far more comforting because then I wouldn't really need to do anything, and someone or something would eventually come along and make it better.

Except that they didn't and so, slowly, painfully, with too much resistance to even begin to recount, I have learned that there is no way around this, no other reality that works in any way to my greater good. It must be, it needs to be, and it is, that I own me.

Now, from my own journey, and from being a part of many other's journeys, I can see how, so often, it is this taking ownership of ourselves that has to be the first step in a true healing journey, and it is the first step in what we are talking about here - the practice of forgiveness.

You don't have to think about all that when you go to do this meditation. All you need to do is to let these three words permeate into your awareness. To think the words 'I own me' in your body and to feel the words 'I own me' in your mind can be very powerful, and actually very liberating. The more you think about it without resistance, without putting it aside, the more you accept the actual truth of it, the more powerful and liberating it becomes.

I Love You

I said just now about how not wanting to take all that responsibility was part of the reason I pushed against taking true ownership over myself for so long. The other big part of the reason for my struggle with it was from the lack of love, from myself, that I felt through the whole idea. When I looked at the experiences and the parts of me that I didn't like, and didn't want to accept, I went into judgement and blame, negativity and criticism, but I do not think it is possible to take ownership in a way of healing without there being love in it. In fact, without love, I think it is impossible to forgive, or to truly heal.

In a short while, when you come to try the first meditation on forgiveness, I encourage you to insert the words 'I love you' many times as you go around the other phrases as well. It is ok if you are not feeling the love when you start doing this, but nonetheless still bring in the thought of love from the beginning, from the very first step. 'I own me' and 'I love you' work together, they go together, they belong together. Do not make my mistake, for years and years and years, of thinking that the love would come at the summit of the mountain, when I had done enough, and grown and healed enough to reach it, to deserve it. The love is there at the first step, in fact you really cannot take the first step without it.

Who is loving who? When you are saying 'I love you', to yourself, who is loving who? It is a beautiful question. I cannot truthfully say that I love the unhealed hurt, or the ache, or the dark thought or feeling. I do not love my pain but I can love that which is trying to heal my pain, and is showing me how to best do that. I cannot truthfully say that I love my mind with its restlessness and egoic dances but I can love the creative spirit that gave me a mind with which to explore and understand the world. When I say 'I love you' I am speaking to a part of myself that owns me just as much, if not more, than I own it. I love the ocean that is in my drop and I want to be able to release everything that is in the way of my feeling its love for me back.

Especially if you are struggling with your health or your life at this time and so you could be worried that you may not be able to feel 'I love you' at this moment in time, and that it could only remain a thought and not become anything felt, or real, or sincere, then I encourage you to remember and use that other nutshell for compassion and so roll those other three words 'soft, centred and now' around your awareness.

Compassion and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin, they lead to each other, they weave together and they help each other. Every time you practice thinking in your body, and feeling in your mind, the 'soft, centred and now' of compassion, you move away from hardness and judgement and you open the door to 'I love you'

Again, you don't have to think about all that when you think the words 'I love you' in your body and you try to feel the words 'I love you' in your mind. Just say them to yourself as many times as you wish, for example just before or after you think 'I own me', or just before or after you think 'I'm so sorry'.



I'm So Sorry

I mentioned earlier how 'sorry' can be a sacred word, and how it contains the power to heal. Unfortunately, it is also widely misused, it is not said when it needs to be said or it is said without sincerity, without being heartfelt. This is why I ask you, when you come to do this prayer, this meditation, to not forget the 'so' in 'I'm so sorry'. I encourage you to throw yourself at this, to not hold back, to go all in! Go around the phrases, 'I own me', 'I love you' and 'I'm so sorry' many times, let them permeate into your body, your subconscious, meditate on them.

What you are sorry for is anything and everything that is not your being at peace and in love. You can be so sorry for all the hurt and ache that you have ever felt or are feeling right now. You can be so sorry for every harm that you have ever caused to another and you can be so sorry for every harm that has ever been caused to you. When you say, and think, and feel, 'I own me' you are owning all the pain, loneliness, sadness, rejection, fear, anxiety, fatigue, failure, anger, resentment, guilt and shame and every other dark thought and dark feeling that you have ever experienced. Does it sound like a lot to own? It is! Does it sound like a lot to be sorry for? It most definitely is.

I touched on this just briefly earlier. How the meaning of sorry includes both an acknowledgement of having done harm, but also the heartfelt wish to not repeat the harm, to stop doing whatever it is or was that you are sorry for. When you do this forgiveness practice, if something specific comes up that you know you are sorry for, even if this is not new to you, even if this is something that you have tried and failed, possibly many times, to correct in the past, do not shy away from being truly and deeply sorry for whatever it is. Stay with the ownership of it, come back around to 'I own me', stay with the love, keep thinking the thought and telling yourself 'I love you' and then allow yourself to feel as sorry as you can for whatever it is that is the harm and, in your 'I'm so sorry', let yourself feel the most heartfelt wish, that you will do anything you can to stop the harm, to not repeat it, because that is what being sorry means.

Who are you being so sorry towards? This is a most interesting question and subject. Who is the you that experiences everything that you feel? Of course a part of what you experience is tied in with your identity, the construction of your mind, but a much greater part of what you feel is actually in your body. Your body is where all your strong feelings get experienced but you probably wouldn't think that you would be so sorry to your body. It is the spirit that is within your flesh that is the feeling part of you. It lives in every part of you, in every cell. When you think the words 'I'm so sorry' you are speaking from your conscious mind to the part of you that suffers. You are expressing your sorry to your spirit, but then what is your spirit?

That is a beautiful mystery, and perhaps we can explore it further in what follows, but all that matters for this meditation is that you set the intention to be sincere, to try to think

these thoughts in your body and feel them in your mind and then, I put it to you, that when you say these most sacred words 'I'm so sorry' and you mean them, that there is a very aware, deeply sensitive part of you, a part that is connected to a much greater force than you alone, that hears you, and is ready to believe you.

Please Forgive Me

Who you are saying sorry to, and who or what you are asking forgiveness from is a beautiful mystery, and an unfathomable one. I cannot hope to explain what I do not understand but even without explanations, or understanding, it is still possible to be in touch with the mystery, to be aware of it and even to feel it to at least some extent.

Again, how I wish I could talk with you in person at this moment. For example, to ask you if you had any of your own feelings or ideas about a higher power, or I might ask if you have ever had an experience that showed you there was a mystery in the universe that could not be explained in any logical way no matter how anyone might try. Or even if you had ever been in a truly tight spot, a moment where you felt your life was in danger, or for some other reason you were at your absolute limit with a sense of nowhere to turn. Have you heard the saying '*there are no atheists in foxholes*', meaning when a person fears for their very life itself, they will reach out to what is beyond them then, even if never otherwise.

I would so much prefer to get in tune with you and follow your lead rather than me having to be the one to go first. Most people have very private thoughts and tender feelings on these subjects. I can tell you that I don't belong to any religious groups, and that I do not have fixed ideas about what I am calling a mystery, and you can believe me, but it is still only a matter of a moment, one wrong word, one conflicting idea, and the chance to engage with each other in a truly open way in this, the greatest of all subjects, can be lost.

This whole subject around the practice of forgiveness, how it can even happen, and who or what we could be asking, is of the deepest interest to me, and even without my preference for you to go first, I will still share with you some of my thoughts, in the hope that we can explore it together. Let's come back to that soon but firstly, now or whenever you next can, let's do some practice with all four of these thoughts, including whatever it might mean to think in your body and feel in your mind the words 'please forgive me' along with the other three. I think it is reasonable to assume that you are diving into all this with me because it is important to you for the best of reasons so please just give all this a try in the most sincere way you can.

Okay, so this first exercise for the practice of forgiveness is very simple, very straightforward. For as little or as long as you wish, all you have to do is to allow the three words in each of the four phrases to go as deeply into your awareness as you can let them.

'I own me - I love you - I'm so sorry - please forgive me'

As you go around these four phrases, please do not worry if you don't have any big experiences, all I hope for you is that you will be able to at least somewhat feel them in your mind as you think them in your body.

I want you to try turning these four thoughts around in your consciousness, memorising them as you go, lingering on any of them as long as you wish and then circling back around to any of them as often as you wish too. You can say them in any order, and you can go back and forth between just two or three of them.

However you most naturally want to come to this initial practice for forgiveness, let the phrases encircle you and be with them for a while. You are practicing something, getting used to it, these first steps are important, take as little or as long as you need to memorise them and become familiar and easy with having them in your awareness.

Have a go at this now or whenever you are ready.



Unhealed Hurts

In a little while, I want us to return to doing this practice again, with the same four phrases, but the next time we do it I want you to add another step, to make a pairing between your mind and body. Whilst you think one or more of the four phrases, whilst you circle them in your conscious awareness, I want you to bring forwards a place within your body, or an experience within your subconscious, where you have unhealed hurt.

What is unhealed hurt, how do you know you have it, and how do you access it?

We have the most extraordinary power of nature living inside us. It gives us life, it is intelligent, and it knows how to heal us. How many times have you hurt yourself in your life? How many times have you stayed up too late, eaten the wrong food, drunk too much, done too much, done something dumb, and caused yourself some harm? And how many times has your body and mind got over it and got better? The healing intelligence within us, that which knits back up our cuts, sores, breaks and breakdowns holds no grudges, it makes no judgements. Whatever we do to get hurt or to hurt ourselves, it simply does its best, constantly and unstoppably, to heal us.

It seems to me, and many others, that there is a great force of love inside this healing force. It seems to love us constantly and unconditionally, whatever we do and, like the love that we feel in other ways, for each other, and sometimes for ourselves, it seems both full of power, light and hope and, at the same time, it seems incredibly vulnerable and so delicate, so ephemeral, that it can disappear just like that (snaps fingers). Love is like a candle flame, it can bring light into the darkest places and it can also just blow out and seem gone for good, until and unless it returns.

As potent, as powerful, as this loving and intelligent force of nature is, it cannot heal all wounds, and nor does time heal all wounds either. There are clearly a great many wounds, and scars, and unhealed hurts that live inside of us, we ordinary people, that have not been able to be healed by that force. It is not because the force lacks power, it truly does have great power, but there are obstacles that come in its way that it cannot just brush aside. It is a vulnerable power, it is delicate, and it can be stopped in its flow in a great many ways.

Unhealed hurt is everything that stops us being at peace and in love. Unhealed hurts are all the aches that we have in our body from the wear and tear that has not been able to be fully repaired. Unhealed hurts are all the aches that we have in our hearts, our spirits, from the trouble and strife that has not been able to be fully processed and let go.

How you know you have unhealed hurts is that you have ache. I could equally say that how you know you have unhealed hurt is that you have pain, and that is also true, but pain is a frightening word. It is very difficult to live with pain and not just look for the nearest or quickest exit. It is not impossible but it is very difficult to live with pain and be of such good heart, to have such courage, as to undergo a healing journey. Ache is softer. Ache hurts but it

doesn't hurt so much that we couldn't live with it whilst we were seeking to find the way of true healing for ourselves and our ache.

As always, the only true enemy is denial. If you do not have any ache, or any pain for that matter, then this may all still be interesting, and even useful to learn about, but you won't really need to practice it. However please do not underestimate the human being's ability to adapt and survive. A great many people live with a great deal of ache, but keep themselves too busy and distracted to notice. Or use other methods to dull it away.

If, when you look within and feel yourself, your being, your body, breath and heart, and you feel ache then you have unhealed hurt. Honestly, I think it is pretty much universal. Even babies hurt horrendously at times, and let the whole world know about it when they do. We get very good at covering it up, but if there is ache then it is always there, wanting to be healed, and our healing intelligence wants to heal it with every fibre of its being, but it remains unhealed, because of what is in the way.

How you access the unhealed hurt is a big subject. Just as much as denial is the enemy, so is seeking for the truth the great friend. This is not a light-switch, on or off, kind of matter. It is a journey, step by step, opening up understanding and awareness as we go. If you are willing to be with what is, to feel what there is to feel, then what needs to be seen will most definitely reveal itself to you.

Now, before we try a meditation to pair the ache with the four phrases for forgiveness, I want to go around those four steps again, this time talking with you about what I mean to be pairing them with our unhealed hurt.

I Own Me, and My Hurt

When you go to do the meditation, the practice for forgiveness, I am going to invite you to go within yourself to feel if you ache anywhere and, if you do and if there is more than one place, or way in which you ache, then bring your awareness to wherever you ache the most. You don't have to invent anything here, your body, your subconscious will always show you where you ache so long as you are willing to see and feel it. Please remember that it will be ok and normal if there is an initial increase in intensity, or if it moves from one place to another. If either the initial increase in intensity or the moving around of the ache happen spontaneously then they are not bad signs at all, it only means you are on a healing journey.

Whenever and wherever you feel any kind of ache whilst you are doing this practice, bring as clear and strong an awareness of 'I own me' as you possibly can to whatever it is that you are feeling. Be crystal clear with yourself on this, no ifs or buts, no conditions, no wanting to blame anything or anyone for what you feel. 'I own me' is a statement of a fact, it isn't asking for a counter-argument about who else could be responsible. Even if your mind wants to replay the old stories of who has done what to you to cause the harm that seems to be behind the ache, the truth is that no one else can feel your ache, whatever may have caused

it, your ache, like all your feelings, belongs to you fully. Even if opening up to feeling the ache along with thinking 'I own me' brings on the shadow side of how you feel more strongly at first, which it often will, don't try to run from it, or fix it, or send it away. Allow yourself to feel it and, at the same time, say the words to think them in your body and feel them in your mind, 'I own me' and 'I own this ache, it belongs to me 100%'.

I Love You, and My Ache

In the very next moment, the next heartbeat, the next breath, give everything you have to thinking in your body and feeling in your mind this most powerful phrase 'I love you', while you include the feeling of the ache in the love. Including and especially if it has risen up in its intensity and is on the wave of expressing its existence more fully to your awareness.

'I love you' is unconditional. It is not saying I will love you so long as you now leave me alone, that would not be love. Of course I, and anyone would understand, that it is extremely unlikely, right at the moment of feeling the ache in its fullness, that this is something that you would like. This is not about liking, this is about loving. However much you truly don't like it, and actually don't want to accept it, give everything you can to say 'I love you' to the ache that you are feeling and that you are owning as sincerely as you can. However much resistance there may be to this, especially at first, the love can grow when you give it a chance. Keep coming back to it as you do this practice, pairing your awareness of your ache at the same time as thinking 'I love you' in your body, and trying to feel 'I love you' in your mind.

This is the love that comes with compassion. Compassion is merciful, it accepts the parts of us, and others, that we do not like. When you think in your body and feel in your mind 'I love you' towards the ache, and at the same time you are owning it as belonging to you 100%, you are giving the most powerful medicine to yourself. The hardening that lives within the scar tissue of our unhealed hurts is softened by your love. The rejection and resistance that we want to use to push away our hurts, to not even allow them to exist, is remedied by your loving attention and courageous ownership.



I'm So Sorry, for the Hurt

This part of the meditation is crucially important for unhealed hurts, and it should actually feel very natural and spontaneous. If you ache, and if you allow yourself to feel that ache, then you can very naturally be sorry to your whole being for the existence of that ache. Feeling sorry for the ache will be the most natural thing in the world if you will allow yourself to feel the ache and, at the same time, pair the conscious thought 'I'm so sorry' to what you are feeling. The ache is already the punishment enough, you don't need to feel any worse than you do already. You can be sorry for it, with all your heart and soul, you can sincerely mean it when you think, and feel, that you will do anything in your power not to bring any further hurt or harm on top of what is already there.

The feeling of being truly sorry is necessary before we can ask for forgiveness. The experience of the ache, the unhealed hurt, is necessary before we can feel truly sorry. The willingness to take ownership is necessary before we can experience our ache without trying to reject it, or blame it on someone or something else. When you are pairing the ache that you feel and the true, heartfelt feeling of being so sorry for that hurt, then you can sincerely ask for what we so achingly need, which is forgiveness.

Please Forgive Me, and My Hurt

You must do this in your own way, because your healing journey, with all its steps, belongs to you and you alone, but nonetheless I encourage you, to go far and deep with your practice of forgiveness, to give your body, mind and soul to those three first steps first, and only then take the leap of faith into the unknown that resonates with the phrase 'please forgive me'.

As you pair your ache, your unhealed hurt, with the powerful thoughts of 'I own me', 'I love you' and 'I'm so sorry' you are setting up a potent frequency for healing in your whole being. You are opening up something which can otherwise always be somewhat shut down. There are blocks within us that our healing intelligence, for all its remarkable power, has not been able to heal, those blocks are very real, they are what you are feeling when you experience your ache.

When you open up to feeling your ache, even if it makes it stronger at first, and when you don't reject it, or spin one of the old stories around it to make it someone else's fault, so therefore when you really own it, with love, and when you are sorry for the ache, meaning you want it to heal and you want to do whatever you can to stop causing any further harm, then all these thoughts and feelings set the stage for you to sincerely ask for forgiveness.

I use 'please' here, because it can be a strong enough word. Many traditions say that we should pray for forgiveness, or even beg for forgiveness. There is an old, instinctual knowing that forgiveness is not a guarantee, it is not a right, we can ask for it but that does not mean we will receive it, or even that we deserve it.

I said earlier that I would share some of my thoughts about what it is that we are pleading for forgiveness from. Even before I begin I feel like begging your personal forgiveness for my inability to put this at all well, but I have some experiences that are most precious to me that guide me to at least try.

I understand that to make errors is human and that to forgive is divine. I know that there is an extraordinary force in this extraordinary universe that permeates all that is with a oneness that is utterly simple and silent and like nothing else that exists or has ever come into being. It is nothing in every sense of what we mean by the word nothing, and it contains everything at the same time. It is like an ocean, although it is more vast than any ocean we



could imagine, but it is useful to think of an ocean for what it is because then we can perceive that we, each one of us, is just one tiny drop of that great ocean. So tiny, so insignificant, so unimportant, and yet a very real part of that ocean is in our drop. We can resonate with it, we can connect to it. We can blur the boundary, the edge, between our separate selves and the great oneness that surrounds us. There are different ways to merge into oneness, to pair into infinity with it. The practice of surrender, of letting go completely, as we do when we go to sleep or when we die, is one way. The practice of compassion and forgiveness, which sit with each other and belong to each other, can also bring us to that place of great peace, love and healing.

When we pray, or beg, or simply say 'please forgive me' we are saying 'please heal me'. In feeling the ache, in pairing the ache, as deeply as we possibly can, to the heartfelt call for healing, and forgiveness, we are opening a gateway to love, and peace, and healing. Perhaps we can only open that gateway a tiny fraction, and so perhaps only the smallest amount of grace, or healing, or forgiveness can come through to us. But all of this is always about practice. The more you practice something the better you will get at it. It is not that the great ocean of love is any different from one moment, one millennia, to the next. It is still, unchanging, timeless, beyond what it is that comes into being and has a beginning and an end. It is not the ocean of peace and love that changes, it is our ability, our capacity to connect to it, to be with it, that starts or stops, rises or falls.

It has been thought by many people, and I entertain the idea too (at least sometimes), that there is great meaning in our healing journeys in the way they can show us, better and faster than anything we could ever read or work out by ourselves, how we can best release our resistance to merging into peace and love with our spirit. It's kind of a dangerous thought to share, especially when someone's suffering is just too much and the absolute last thing they should be hearing is that their sickness could be sacred, that their ache could be the best guide they could possibly have for what it is that they most need and want... I wonder if you have ever wondered about that too.

In any case, back to the practice that we are about to have another go at. However you begin, whatever first steps or however you can most sincerely say, from your heart 'please forgive me' is the way for you to find for yourself, and whichever way you try and however much time and energy you give to this, don't think of it as a one time deal!

You may need to come back to it many times, each time in its own way different but the core principles are the same. Take ownership first, there is no other way to take these steps truly, everything that puts you into victimhood only takes away your freedom and your power to heal.

Bring in the love, always back to the love, it is not a given, it is not to be assumed, we need to work at it, to remind ourselves to stay in the love, because those shadows are just as real, and they do block the light, and the healing.

It is not so bad to feel sorry, it is not a failure. Yet, our egoic selves don't like it very much, we want to defend ourselves and be in the right, not the wrong, but that is just pride, which always goes before the fall. If you have had enough ache, if you are sick of being sick, then you can be sorry to the part of you that hurts without any conditions and without holding back. Then you just pour your heart into asking for healing 'please forgive me'. You call it out from the very depths of your being. You cannot demand it, or expect it, but you can ask for it. In your own way, in your own time, please have another go at the practice of forgiveness, this time pairing your ache with these thoughts 'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me (please heal me)' to guide some steps along the way.



Merging Practices

I hope that you were able to take some steps into the practice of forgiveness and that you will want to spend more time with it soon, or whenever you can. Which brings up an important question - if you are working through all these meditations, and learning the different steps and methods, how are you supposed to know which practices to focus on, or are you supposed to do all of them?

Even without being able to talk with you in person, I feel quite sure that you will have certain areas that come easier to you than others and that also you will have certain obstacles that get in your way more than others. I want to show you the very best of what I know to go within for peace and love and, at the same time, some ways to meet the obstacles and travel safely in the shadow-lands that are always a huge part of any journey of healing.

Which of these methods most resonates with you, which helps you and which you are drawn back to practice more deeply is something only you will be able to know. All I encourage you to do is to give everything a chance to get easier and better with some practice. Not to judge a method of going within or facing an obstacle too quickly if it doesn't 'work' right away. I will talk about this some more in the section on the constitutions a lot further on, but for sure the areas that are the most challenging for you will actually be the ones that you will end up getting the most out of, because you need them the most!

So no, you are not supposed to do all of them all the time, only some of them some of the time, but I don't want you to worry about working out which ones to come back to because I believe your inner intelligence, your subconscious, your body, will soon show you where you need to go.

I wonder if you have had any thoughts or experiences around the subject of surrender since we were talking about it, and seeking to practice some steps into it earlier. Especially if at some point since going into it you have noticed how blissfully easy it is for you to release all your tension and tiredness when you go to sleep and whether you have then tried to bring that same ease and grace of letting go into a waking state. I mentioned earlier that I hoped you would have some kind of experience like that before we went into the much harder matter of being with unhealed hurts in the practice of forgiveness. It is very hard to be with the heavy, dragging feeling of tiredness when we resist it but, as I have to believe you already know extremely well, as soon as we surrender to it there is no problem, it melts away as we release the burden of our consciousness into sleep.

In exactly the same way, I understand that it is extremely difficult to be with our unhealed hurts when we do anything to fight with them. To channel them into resentment against others or ourselves. To hate their presence in our body or our lives. I'm not sure if it is necessarily always harder to be with hurt than it is to be with fatigue. I suppose whichever is

the stronger, whichever makes us suffer more, is the hardest of the two, but there is a principle of taking a conscious choice to be at peace with the fatigue, and a conscious decision to choose love to be with the hurt that lies underneath the practices of both surrender and forgiveness. Peace and love are different, they need a different way to meet their obstacles and walk up their mountains but there are core ideas that are very much the same for them both and by practicing, and getting better with one, you can most definitely get better with the other.



Before we move on to the first introduction to the fourth and last practice of gratitude, I would like to share some more thoughts in relation to the practice of forgiveness. Some of it relates to what I have been talking about already and, in different ways, there will be more of that in what lies ahead, because everything about 'practice' is to do with going back over the things that matter to us. That, and my heart is calling me to say more about all the steps, especially the first step, this tiny phrase 'I own me', and what it represents.

Everyone who works in any area of holistic healthcare eventually comes to the same realisation. We all come to see that, however much we trust in the tools of our trade: our words, hands, herbs, diets, whatever our ways and methods, none of it makes any great or lasting difference if the person who has come to see us is not ready to take responsibility for their health.

Of course, I understand that the mainstream medical system, which is where the great majority of our population gets their healthcare, has a completely different approach! The patient is given drugs to manage their symptoms so that they can basically go on with their lives exactly as they did before they got sick. So long as they can keep working, then the system can keep going.

It is not wrong, or even mean spirited to say that most Doctors in the mainstream system are doing a poor job at educating their patients about why they are sick but, let's be realistic here, the vast majority of patients don't want to change their lives. They want to go on as they were without having to do anything more than take as many pills as are needed for as many ills as they have.

This is just how it is, most people are not ready to take ownership of their health, their feelings, and their lives. You can't make them and there is a strong case to be made for not even trying to change anyone else. The only person we need to worry about in this regard is ourselves and, forgive me for wanting and needing to go around this again, but I don't feel that I can overemphasise how we much come to this tiny thought 'I own me' with the greatest love, right from the very first step.

Don't start with staring yourself in the face with your mind's eye, to glower at your failings, with your inner judge handing down the sentence of 'this is all your fault'.

Instead, start with softness, with a willingness to accept what is, and to be with what is, just now, just in this one eternal moment of now right now, and then think the thought 'I own me' gently. A tiny thought, a gentle step, to take ownership of your being, to not be a victim in any way, shape or form, to step from the thought into the feeling of 'I own me' with warmth, and love.

When you take those first two steps in a gentle way, to think and feel 'I own me' and 'I love you' I encourage you to be very open to feeling truly sorry for all the ache that you feel. Not blaming anyone else for it, not rehearsing the reasons for it, none of that, just a true sense of sorry, unconditionally. When we were talking about compassion earlier I used the word mercy a few times. This is that. But I want you to go all in on this matter. Not half-way, not half-hearted, I mean the kind of sorry where there is no possible question whether you mean it or not.

And this is one of the things I wanted to come back to talk about some more because yes, I am asking you to feel sorry for yourself and to yourself. Absolutely 100% that. Which we are not supposed to do right? It is condemned. Many of us have conditioning that forbids it. If we get caught feeling sorry for ourselves, we are taught to practice contempt, not compassion. Girls get this too, from all sides, and boys get it so strongly programmed that they lose the ability to cry, even alone, and so cannot even show their hurt or sorrow to themselves.

For most of us, this is a touchy subject, to be proceeded into with caution. Let's come around to this again with the question: what exactly are you feeling sorry for? For yourself, yes, but which part, all of you? No, the only part of you that you need to feel sorry for, is the part that hurts. But it only works if we can take responsibility. As soon as we want to blame someone else or something else, then we can't do it. Love and compassion can turn into hurt and resentment in a heartbeat as soon as we blame someone else for how we feel. 'I

own me' can be very difficult. It is easy for what we like, that's no trouble, it's the part that aches, where there are unhealed hurts, that is hard to own, but that is the part that we need to own, and then be sorry to.

The next question is, who is the one being sorry, and who is the one receiving the sorry? Who are you sorry to? This is complicated. We are complicated, that's what makes us human, and interesting. Surely you see these complications already, how you have many aspects, many parts within you. The child, the friend, the parent, the role you play to do your work. The person you are when you meet one friend is very different to the person you are when you meet another. It is like that within us as well. The part of you that feels the ache, the hurt, the pain of not having your peace, or your love, is real, it lives, and it feels. And the part of you that can say 'I own me' can speak to that part, relate to it, and be connected to it very intimately. You own you and you are being sorry to you.

The next question is, where does it hurt? I would like to imagine that some people don't have any hurt, and are so young, or carefree, or untroubled, that they have no unhealed ache within. Sadly, tragically really, I know this is just not the case. Even children as young as toddlers have unhealed hurt, and it just layers up from there. I would like to think that babies are exempt from storing it up though I'm not sure about that. At least it surely can't be as bad as what happens when we get older because what we can all see is that when babies are in pain they express it ferociously, unstopably, until they are taken care of so that they feel better, and they feel their pain no longer. But we can't keep doing that for very long, because we have to grow up.

The hurts, the aches, exist just wherever it hurts, in the spirit, or the flesh, which are just different parts of the same whole being, which is us. For most of us, we become very skilful at keeping our aches under the surface. In fact, many of us become adept at keeping our hurts hidden, even from ourselves, until they explode forth, in any of the ways that the storms come.

Everyone has unhealed hurts, everyone aches at some level, consciously or subconsciously. It's kind of comforting to know that, and that we are all in this together, but then again, absolutely no one can feel your hurt, except for you. We are the only ones who can feel what we feel, ever, because we own ourselves.

Most of us will go through life accumulating one trauma after another until we eventually get so bruised and broken, scarred and wounded, that we just die. Then, people want to know, what did they die from? And the story goes, that it was their heart, or cancer, or some other awful disease that gets the blame, so even then, when it's really too late to take responsibility, and do some healing of what would have, by the time they were near the end, been ancient wounds, it's the disease that gets the blame, and the departed were the victim of being alive.

I know that not many people are ready to go on the hero journey of healing. It takes such an awful lot of courage for one thing, you have to face every fear, overcome every obstacle, it's like something out of a fairy tale, a great battle of good vs evil, where all the many forms of denial are constantly beckoning you back towards the ignorance that supposedly brings you to bliss.

In any case, however few may be those who want to truly know themselves, and face their shadows and, more than face them, make friends with them, for sure, the practice of forgiveness will be essential to move forwards on the way.

And for us, and our own unhealed hurts, it is no different to the process that happens when someone else truly is to blame for some awful crime or conscious hurt, and that there is no way they can be forgiven, or should be forgiven, unless they own their wrongdoing, and are sincerely sorry for it, and will do their utmost to never do it again. So it is with us.

Our aches and our hurts belong to us and no one else. We have to own them, not part own them, own them unconditionally, wholly and fully, and we actually need to be deeply and truly sorry, towards ourselves, towards our higher self, our inner self, however we call it, it's us, and with that sorry, there must be a genuine sense of not wanting to do anything to ever cause the same hurt, ever again. That's what sorry means. It's not a free pass to just clear the slate and repeat the same mistakes over again. That's ridiculous, and it's a great corruption of the power and principle of forgiveness too.

The feeling sorry towards oneself comes with a heartfelt wish to heal the damage and not let it ever happen again. If we possibly could achieve such a thing, which of course is most unlikely, but that is not the point, the point is that we truly would if we could, not do harm.

This is the first rule of medicine and, in many ways, it is the most important rule - *primum non nocere* - firstly, do no harm. If we can get just that part right then most things will simply heal by themselves. But it is very difficult to not do harm, and so this process, and the practice of forgiveness, may need to be practiced many, many times.

Think for a moment how you feel, or how you have seen someone else react, when you or they have been accused of some wrongdoing. It feels terrible, the most common reaction is to get defensive, usually immediately. We feel under attack, we feel unjustly accused, we can probably see how the person, who is having a go at us, has a great deal of responsibility for what is going on, and that part is not going to even enter the picture unless we are the ones who bring it up. It is not our normal or instinctive response to take responsibility and to feel sorry. That might come later, if it comes at all.

Similarly, setting an intention to go within and take the full responsibility for how we feel has every opportunity to feel like an accusation, and an attack. We feel our ache, we see our failings and, in taking ownership of it all, we condemn ourselves before we can even take a step towards healing, or forgiveness. If we will come to this practice from a place of

judgement, then we will be doomed before we begin. This is why I had to talk about compassion before I could come to this. There has to be a softness, a willingness to accept what is, before we can change what is. I know that there is every possibility that you, dear reader, at this moment in your life journey, could have some considerable challenge in sincerely saying 'I love you' to yourself. It is ok if you don't feel 'I love you' as a deep down truth, at least not right away, these words still have a great power to them anyway; perhaps they are the most important words we can ever say to anyone, including ourselves.

We are seeking peace, we are seeking love, we don't want to fight with ourselves, or hurt ourselves, but there can be many steps that are needed for the healing journey and not all of them are easy to take at first. 'I'm so sorry' is anything but combative too. If we come to our ache, and to owning our ache, with compassion, then we can go into this, and stay with it, for the process that is so greatly needed. Nothing new, or good, will come from chastising ourselves for hurting, or failing to be perfect. The Yang heat of this forgiveness practice is where we cut out blaming anyone, or anything else, for how we feel. We take responsibility for it, we own it, and then right there and right away, we open ourselves up to the healing process that starts with these magical words, 'I'm so sorry'.

It is hard to the point of being impossible to feel, and to say, an unconditional 'I'm so sorry', when we feel under attack and therefore feel defensive. If we will do this work for ourselves, then we cannot go in on the attack for who we are and how we feel. Forgiveness and compassion are two sides of the same coin. They both need a willingness to *'be with what is'*, not to harden against it, not to fight it, or try to change it. The difference with forgiveness, is that we are making a conscious choice to firstly own the experience, fully and unconditionally, to be in the space of 'I own me'.

If we do this with sincerity, I could say, if we do it with a pure heart, then it can follow very naturally to feel sorry towards the hurt and the ache that we have within. In the feeling of sorry there is a deep and instinctive desire to not want to repeat any harm, or do any further harm, and from this place, the place of owning our stuff, of being sorry for any harm we have caused others or ourselves, and of wanting to not do any future harm if we possibly can avoid it, then, and there, we can ask for forgiveness.

I say again, the healing intelligence within us, that which knits back our cuts, sores, breaks and breakdowns, is an utterly extraordinary energy of forgiveness. It holds no grudges, it makes no judgements. Whatever we do to hurt ourselves, it simply does its best, constantly and unstoppably, to heal us.

You may already have a concept of a higher power, in which case I imagine you would already see this healing intelligence as a manifestation of that power, but if you didn't know who, or what, you were asking for forgiveness, then you could not go wrong with appealing to the life force that clearly exists within yourself. It wants to forgive you, and it already does.

So then why would you need to ask it, you could ask! Because it is a very powerful matter to know what it is that you need, and want, and then to sincerely ask for it. Things that were stuck begin to move when we do this. Also, because of what you have done to be ready to ask. The process of taking responsibility, of moving from the immature, victim mind-set into the grown up version of ourselves, empowers us in ways that help us to see where we are doing harm, in a way that allows us to change the patterns, and stop the harm.

Honestly, I don't think it matters too much how you perceive that which you are asking for forgiveness. If you have enough wisdom and humility to know that there is a healing energy inside all living things, including yourself, and that you don't control or direct the power of this energy, but that you are utterly dependent on it to even exist, then you can ask.

I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me.

The practice is simple in theory, but it can be very hard in practice, for most of us anyway. I am not, personally, in any way exceptional here, if you are then good for you but, if you are anything like me, and like most of us, you will have to work on this, step by step.

The greatest obstacle to it is the hurt itself. It is so hard to take responsibility for our hurt. We want it to be gone, we want to blame others for it. We think, perhaps without being conscious that we are thinking it, that if we accept the hurt as our own then it will never leave us and it will only get worse. We are afraid of our hurt, and our fear makes us want to run away from it or to fight it, anything but accept it. So it is hard to own our hurt. Can anyone be blamed for that? Would we blame a child for not wanting to hurt and for wanting someone to take it away? No, never. So why should we blame ourselves for wanting to be free of it, by yesterday, and to want to do anything we could to turn away from it, rather than have to face it further.

It takes an enormous amount of courage to face our fears and I don't think that we are born into courage. We start out in life with just two fears, the fear of loud noises and the fear of falling. Babies are born with them both, but they have no other fears to begin with. All the others come later and they all come from being hurt in some way. So we become afraid of hunger and loneliness, we become afraid of physical pain, we become afraid of fatigue, of being shamed, of being hurt.

Whatever the accumulation of aches that lie within, under the surface, invisible to everyone but you, I do not know anything that can truly help other than to go on a hero journey of healing. Not to get rid of all the ache, perhaps we will always have at least some ache for as long as we live. But to live with them without fear, and to release any blame, or resentment, or hardening that they carry. I urge you to practice forgiveness for this, which means to take the steps, all of them. They lead to each other, and merge with each other, and help each other to bring the great energy of healing to where it most needs to go. I own what I feel, I love you, and I'm so sorry for all the hurt, tumble into each other, and then you just pray, beg, beseech or just do whatever comes naturally, to ask for forgiveness.

Somehow, in ways that I don't begin to understand, the healing intelligence that is within us is a part of a much greater intelligence that permeates the Universe. We are a drop in an ocean, and the ocean is alive, aware, and extremely potent. When we release the hardening around our drop, when we allow ourselves to be a part of something greater than our dot, our speck, there is a life force that flows into us more freely, that would already and easily have performed the everyday miracle of bringing back our energy and healing our wear and tear, but can go deeper, if we wish it, and are ready for it, to heal the deeper hurts, the ones we have been holding on to, maybe from when we were too tiny to remember anything about it, maybe even from our ancestors, and I think that is a very real possibility too, as our ancestors do in a very real way live on inside us, in our DNA, in our still being alive. But that there is such a possibility as forgiveness, and that healing can actually happen, is a wonder and a delight, and how lucky we are to receive it.

Forgiveness, and what it represents, is a vast, beautiful and sprawling subject and, all this said so far, I wouldn't blame you in the least if you were slightly or majorly mystified about what, actually, I have been asking you to try to do here all this time so far!

Coming back to the beginning, even if you intuitively agree with '*I own me*' and aren't bothered by it in the least, it is still devilishly difficult not to want to blame someone or something for our aches and pains, for our hurt. Most people, if they stub their toe, will contemplate, for a millisecond, kicking whatever it was that seemed to have kicked them first. We glower at whatever we hit our heads on, as if to say, what right do you have to be there? Young or old, our first reaction to being hurt is to want to hit back. Plenty of people never stop hitting back. I imagine you have met your fair share of people in your own life who have nothing good to say about anyone or anything, they are miserable, and the whole world is to blame for it.

If we come towards '*I own me*' with anything but compassion, if there is even a smidgen of the hardness of judgement in our inner gaze, then we just hurt ourselves more, and only succeed in making ourselves madder! A big part of our difficulty here is that what we are actually talking about is love. Real love, true love, deep love, and it is not easy to talk about, and really understand, love. We have ideas about it from the romantic side of things, as well as perhaps some ideals around brotherhood, or motherhood or fatherhood, but when it comes to our own personal relationship and experience of love, it can be rather hit and miss. Because how can we lastingly love others, or even openly receive love from others, if we cannot love ourselves?

Compassion and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin and the currency of that coin is that of love, nothing less, nothing more. Compassion, which surely has to be practiced for ourselves, however naturally we may be able to extend it to others, is an unconditional acceptance of how we are at this precise moment of time. Compassion, as practiced for ourselves, asks us to be soft and centred, not trying to be anyone else or anywhere else. It is

a spiritual practice that invites us to let hardness and judgement be laid aside for a moment, so that we can open our hearts to love.

Forgiveness is also asking us to engage in a spiritual practice to bring the healing power of love into our lives. But it isn't something we are naturally good at, so if we don't practice it we've got no chance, but before we can do anything, before we can take even a single step, we have to be able to acknowledge that there is something to practice forgiveness on! If we don't accept our hurts as our own, if we consciously or subconsciously believe that those hurts belong to someone else, because someone else caused them, then how can we begin to practice forgiveness? Our being able to forgive could only depend on whoever did us harm coming to us, practically on their knees, acknowledging their wrongdoing, and begging us for forgiveness, and how often does something like that ever happen?

'I own me' is the grown up version of ourselves, ready and willing to take responsibility for our experiences, not wanting to give our power away by needing to blame others for how we feel. But most of us are not easily able to fully make that transition because we are still holding on to too much unhealed hurt, and the obstacle to forgiveness is unhealed hurt. How to break the cycle? How to move on and truly let go? How to heal what is broken or, in other words, how to forgive?

These are some steps that can help to get started. If you will take them, and practice taking them, then you will get better at them, plus you will be heading in the direction your steps are taking you, and will soon find your own next steps, and your own way towards where your heart most wishes you to be. You don't have to be naturally good at forgiveness, or love, or compassion, or any of this, you just have to practice.

The practice I encourage you to try is to feel your ache, own your ache and, at the same time as you feel whatever there is to be felt, pair your awareness with these four powerful thoughts for healing; *'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me'*.



The Practice of Gratitude

I've been wondering if gratitude is the easiest or the hardest of the four practices, and I think it is both. It can be easy because of how instinctive it is to feel grateful when we are happy. The happier we are, the more thankful we feel, spontaneously, without trying. Equally, it can be hard, incredibly hard, to feel grateful when things are not going well and we are unhappy. The worse we feel, the less thankful we feel, and that's natural too.

So we could be setting ourselves up for a terrific challenge here, but it's not called a hero journey for nothing, and I think it would be a great pity if we could only access the energy of gratitude when we were already up and happy. The practice of forgiveness can heal the deepest hurts, the practice of surrender can bring us to peace, the practice of compassion can bring us to love, and the practice of gratitude is like a super power that has the ability to lift us out of the darkest storms, at least for a while, enough to catch our breath and get our bearings, and so not remain fallen into endless despair.

Can you relate, in your own way, to what I mean when I say that people have a kind of frequency, or vibration, that is higher or lower according to their mood and their energy levels? Surely we all feel this, at least to some extent, about ourselves and about each other. We go up and down according to all the hundreds of factors that make up our external world and, at the same time, we are just as deeply, if not more so, affected by our inner world, our hormones, our circadian rhythms, our thinking and our processing. If we were carrots then sometimes we would be crispy, and sometimes we would be wilted, and it is normal to cycle between being up and down, crispy and wilted, and everything in between. What becomes problematic is when we get stuck, and stop cycling, and that's when our health breaks down.

Whatever other measures might help, the spiritual practice that can remedy being too up, too on, and too wired, is surrender, which can quickly bring us to solid ground, to rest, to come to the treasure of peace. Likewise, whatever other measures might help, the spiritual practice that can remedy being too down, too low, too exhausted, is gratitude. The practice of gratitude can give us wings, it can give us the power to fly up into the light of happiness and joy. Gratitude has great fire energy in it. It is transformative, quick to shift things from one state to another. It is very light, very Yang, very lifting up and away, and off the ground.

Being thankful is a very high energy, or frequency, of consciousness. Some people believe it is the highest state of consciousness, and perhaps they are right, but what I want to convey here is that we can use it, intentionally, deliberately, by practice, to lift up our state of being and that there will inevitably be times, along the way of our healing journey, our hero journey, that we need to do that, never more so than when we are at our lowest!

So here is the great challenge right away, because I doubt I need to say much to convince you that when people feel very low, the last thing they will feel like doing is practicing gratitude! If we will access this superpower when we need its remarkable ability to lift our energy the most, then we need to find a way to practice it when we are on the ground, not

when we are already up. But before we can even begin to think about that, we need to identify what will be our primary obstacle.

The main obstacle to gratitude is resentment which, like gratitude itself, has fire energy in it, but the destructive kind, rather than the energy-giving form that fire can take. Resentment has a similar energy to resistance, in that it is a pushing against and a rejection of what is, but whereas resistance manifests as a kind of stuck tension, resentment has a more active, smouldering kind of heat in it.

When we harbour resentment against ourselves, it is like a toxin that, once it gets inside us, drags us down and does us damage. It can sit inside us indefinitely, poisonous and destructive, sucking the oxygen out of our life force, blocking our creative energy. When we harbour resentment against another person, brooding and thinking dark thoughts about them, it is like drinking poison and thinking that they are the ones who will get sick from it.

No one should underestimate how powerful, and destructive, the force of resentment can be and how hard it can be to deal with. Equally, no one should underestimate how powerful the force of gratitude can be to remedy resentment. So long as we can start by acknowledging the resentment that is there in the first place because, just as much as the main obstacle to gratitude is resentment, so the greatest obstacle to curing resentment is denial.

In fact, all the obstacles to all the spiritual practices, hardening against compassion, resistance against surrender, hurt against forgiveness and now this one, resentment against gratitude, have one overriding overlord, which is denial.

Denial is the enemy

Denial is the greatest enemy to the healing journey because, if we are in it, then it stops us being able to take a single step in the direction we need to go for our health, which we could call our true peace, love and happiness.

If we can not be in denial, if we can just at least see that we are in a place of resistance or hardening, in a place of hurt or resentment, then we can at least prepare to take the medicine that we need to get better. The medicines are the practices of compassion,



surrender, forgiveness and gratitude. They all flow into each other, and weave together, and support each other and depend on each other. Eventually, if you practice with them and spend time with them, they will all start to feel like parts of the same whole, because indeed they are.

It is the same with the obstacles; hardening, resistance, hurt and resentment; they look different, they sound different, but they likewise flow into each other, and weave together, and support and depend on each other too. So much so that, if you are able to erode and weaken one, then they can all start to loosen their grip.

If we have the fire of resentment smouldering inside us then we are a long way from our health, peace and love, but we will never be a hopeless case unless we are in denial about it. If we know that we are holding on to unhealed hurts and that we are the one who is suffering from them, then we can take the first step of owning our state of being, 'I own me', and everything can start to shift from there.

Mostly what I want to share here, on the practice of gratitude, is about how we could possibly come to it when we are feeling down, because that is when we surely need it the most. Firstly, however, I want to lightly touch on the easy side of practicing gratitude.

Starting at the easy side means just picking a moment when you are feeling pretty good, for whatever reason that may be, or just because you have cycles of ups and downs in your day to day like most other people. Pick a time when you are at least a little up and then remember to do some gratitude practice. It's super easy and is highly likely something you've done plenty of times before. All cultures have languages and phrases to encourage our children and our people to 'count their blessings', 'recognise their good fortune', 'thank their lucky stars' etc.

I quite often do this practice when I'm out walking, and so I am already feeling at least a little bit up and about. I might pick a number, lower means I have to focus on the big ones, higher means anything goes, and I literally count off just a few, or sometimes even all the way up to two handfuls of fingers, on some things I am thankful for. As I do it, even if I wasn't in a low mood before I started, I can feel my whole energy and spirits lifting up. It is a beautiful, timeless, gorgeous medicine that I implicitly trust to work, so long as I actually remember to take it!

It doesn't matter if they are the same things, the same people, or if some new thoughts come in. It certainly doesn't matter if what I am grateful for is something great or small. All that matters is that I can be sincere. It can be a quiet sincerity, I don't think practicing gratitude needs to be triumphant or even celebratory to work, although of course it can be, but what matters is that there is genuine heart in it. Being thankful when we are already at least a little bit up is a light practice, very easy and very lovely.

And there may be many many times that you would like to use it in such a way, and be easily able to, and happy to focus on the things that you feel grateful for. There is really no question about whether this is a worthwhile practice for anyone to do no matter who they are, how old they are, and what are the circumstances of their lives. People who cultivate gratitude are happier than people who don't. Practicing gratitude is tremendously healthy for our mental and physical health.



Okay, that's it for easy, now let's go to the dark side and, even if you aren't very low at the moment, and I sincerely hope that is the case, you may have been very low in the past, or know people close to you who have been, and so you may know that you may come to it yourself again, or find yourself there for the first time one day, and that is when I would want you to remember something from what you read from what follows.

Let's go to the back of the cave, where everything is dank, dark and miserable. No light, no joy, nothing to look forward to and, so it would certainly seem then, absolutely nothing to be thankful for. Again, even if you are not there now, and I hope not, I still want you to imagine that we are at the dark end of the light spectrum here, where it is the hardest thing in the world to be thankful, and anyone in such a space who was still in their right mind would want to give a good kick to a person who came along to cheerfully remind them to 'count their blessings'.

Bear with me here, this is going to take a minute to explain but it could be vitally important to your own healing journey one day, or even now, so I want to take it step by step, starting with the first one, which contains another three word nutshell to learn and remember to bring to this practice.

The nutshell is something to hold to remember when you come to do the practice. Compassion has 'soft, open and centred', surrender has 'as I am', forgiveness begins with 'I own me'. Gratitude, being the odd one out for other reasons too, has three words from Latin, and so they won't be so easy to hold or remember at first, but I still ask you to learn them because of the power that they contain.

The words are '*vis medicatrix naturae*'.

There are different ways to translate this phrase, *vis* means force, or power, or strength, *medicatrix* means healer or healing and *naturae* can simply mean 'of Nature' but can also be opened out to the Universe and all that is. Most people translate it in English to say the 'healing force of Nature', but you could equally say the 'healing intelligence of the Universe', or the 'power of healing from Nature'. I encourage you to adopt whichever meaning most resonates with you, but to still learn the Latin words anyway, and then say them any way you like when you come to do the meditation practice. Latin is an old language of which the energy and meaning of the words are still very much alive, they have a frequency that reaches somewhere potent within us.

The Healing Intelligence

This force, this healing intelligence, is extraordinarily powerful. Even when we become really old it still occupies every cell of our bodies. When we are sick, it concentrates its energy into trying to resolve what is wrong, as quickly and as surely as it can. Most, nearly all, of the symptoms of any illness that we suffer, are the result of this life force fighting against the disease. If you have ever been to the really back, back of the cave, or the bottom, bottom of the pit, or however you called it, and have experienced lasting despair, and so have not wanted to live anymore, then you will know something about the implacable nature of this life force. It really doesn't matter how much a person wants to die, they basically can't because of how strongly the life force wants them to live. It keeps us going, and breathing, and trying to make us better, right up until our last moments.

On this topic, as an aside, but also closely related to this subject of the practice that we most need when we are most down, here is a truly terrible fact, we could even call it a rule, about the nature of despair. It doesn't matter who you are, where you come from, how clever, how rich, how talented, how popular, how good you are at anything, if you get low enough for long enough then you will start thinking about death and how preferable it would be to living.

Both of the conditions have to be met for the rule to work. If you go terribly low, as low as you can go, but not for very long, then you probably won't get there, at least not all the way. If you are just somewhat low for a very long time, but you don't go all the way down, then you probably won't get there either. But if any person, no matter how strong and stable and

healthy they were beforehand, gets low enough for long enough, we all come to the same place; which is despair, meaning we lose all hope. This is why people take their lives or become obsessed with thinking about suicide; they simply lose all hope that they will ever feel better again, because they have been too low for too long.

The worst fear that comes with any really bad feeling is that it will never leave. When the feeling is despair, the fear becomes so severe that we will do things that are absolutely insane to escape it. Young people especially, but anyone who is in the depths of despair, need to hear the message over and over that '*this will pass*'. It can be the one lifeline that they can hold on to because part of them, the sane part, the part that is aligned with the healing force of nature, knows that all storms pass eventually and that, no matter how deep is the despair, that it will eventually get better. That is a lot to be asked to trust when you are at the back of the cave but it's true, so it can be believable.



Back to the practice of gratitude when we are feeling really down, and so the complete opposite to feeling thanks about anything. The first step in this practice is to get in touch with the *vis medicatrix naturae*, to feel its unstoppable energy by doing nothing but allowing ourselves to be aware of it.

This force, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, emphatically wants us to live and to be healthy. You can't do anything to stop it, you can't control it, you can't change it, but you can witness it and, even more than that, you can get in tune with it. No matter how low a person feels, no matter how far away from flying, and how plastered to the floor they feel, what you are doing here is opening a window to allow the breeze to come in. This method can be a first step to coming up for air.

Please have a go at this in just a moment, to feel it for yourself, to own the idea in an experiential way. We've done something similar earlier on in the other practices. The process of 'being with what is' or of 'choiceless awareness' in compassion was similar, as was just allowing yourself to be 'as I am' in surrender, as was taking ownership of your experience to feel 'I own me' with forgiveness.

All the practices are similar, they flow into each other and weave together, but their differences are important too, even if we are attempting to journey up the same mountain we are coming at the ascent from different angles with different intentions and practices.

In this case, to begin with, we are setting the intention to feel the *vis medicatrix naturae* within us. That force is definitely there, it will be there for the entirety of your life whether you want to have it or not, and it is there to be felt.

I mentioned earlier that resentment is the obstacle to gratitude, and gave the example of holding a grudge against someone as being like drinking poison and thinking it will make them sick, but what I didn't say then is that by far the greatest portion of our resentment is the one that we reserve for ourselves. Every disappointment and disapproval we hold on to about ourselves can carry the energy of resentment. Any unhealed hurt that has made us angry at our lives, our situation, and our fate can simmer inside us with the energy of resentment. It is the thief of our peace and the cause of an enormous number of our health issues, where it can feed the fire that makes what could have been resolved in a matter of days continue to torment us for years.

If, when you go within to feel your *vis medicatrix naturae*, you don't feel a light and buoyant energy but rather feel your pain, or inflammation, or tension, or any difficult or uncomfortable feeling, you must understand that what you are feeling is what is blocking the life force, not what is the energy of that force itself. By allowing yourself to feel the block you can come to the energy that is trying to heal or release what is blocking it.

There is nothing you need to do to add to the power of the healing force of Nature. If the *vis medicatrix naturae* can heal us then it will, and any drugs or remedies that we take, or methods we use, to stop feeling bad are just temporary measures to get through the day. Everything has its place but I'm afraid far too many things end up doing more harm than good.

What we can do to genuinely help the healing intelligence is to just stop getting in its way. That means we have to come out of denial and be willing to face the truth. If we are holding resentment, or resistance, or judgement, or hurt, or hardening, or any of what stops us letting go and being with what is, then we have to be able to see it. Seeing it stops it. Or at least it starts to stop it.

Let's take a small first step, just for a few moments, and then talk about the second step that could soon follow the first. There is no special technique or preparation required, you are

just following the leader of your own energy. Wherever you feel the most life force in your body is the place to start. This is exactly like the centring process we did earlier. What is added here is the awareness that this is my life force and that it is alive, and intelligent, and trying to heal that which is broken, or at least that which needs attention.

I encourage you to allow these three ancient words, the '*vis medicatrix naturae*' to permeate your consciousness when you go within. They have a power all of their own that will help you to feel that which gives you life, and energy, and hope, because the life force is profoundly hopeful, it cannot be otherwise.

Please don't strain to do this, however light or up your mood may be right now, I want you to imagine that you could do this when you were at your lowest of low points, feeling hopeless and as far from gratitude, about anything, as you could be. Imagine you were in despair, had no energy, and hardly the will to live. In that empty state, at the rock bottom or the back of the cave, you will still be able to feel how your life force exists within you, regardless of your mood and state of mind, and that it searches out and shows you every obstacle to your health and happiness, whether you want it to or not. It is an implacable, awesome and even somewhat frightening force in how truly unstoppable and powerful it is. It is you, it is also something much greater than you, and it is, most definitely, palpably and perceivably within you. Have a feel of it yourself.



One of two things will happen if and when you do this. One is that your own energy will pick you up, like a wave, and carry you into a lighter place, where it would be possible, naturally, with nothing forced, to feel genuinely thankful to be alive, and more. I will talk about this one a little later.

Because firstly, what can happen, especially if you are in a really bad way, for example your mood is very low, or you are in pain, and you are not hopeful, then you may only be able to

more clearly feel how your life force is pushing against the blocks in your energy. This initial increase in intensity can be scary if you aren't expecting it and don't understand it. You aren't making the feeling worse, but you are becoming more aware of it, and so it can feel like you are making it worse.

There is always a leap of faith, of courage, that is required here and, so long as you hold steady and stay with it, each and every time you don't run from it, or resist it, or harden against it, or judge it, but just be with it, and accept it, the increase in intensity that came from your increase in awareness will soften, and release, and the energy will shift.

Maybe not right away, it can take a moment, but there will eventually be a shift and it will have a quality of healing in it that you will be able to feel for yourself. You will come closer to your peace, or your love, as you connect to the life force within you that is seeking only your greater good and knows full well what it is that is blocking you from your light and your joy, and so brings you to the block so that you can perceive it too, and hopefully more than perceive it, to help to release what is holding back the life force from healing that block.

Especially if you were in a very low place in your health this first step alone could be enough to practice. You don't have to try to lift your mood, or to feel thankful for anything, for this step to work perfectly well. Connecting with your *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing intelligence of your own nature, is a powerful medicine. You can do just that, and stop there, and return to it whenever you wish too.

For a person who was in the very depths of despair, and who therefore only wanted to end their life, I can say with 100% certainty, this is an entirely safe and healing practice. They are already only too well aware of how the life force within them is forcing the issue of their continued existence. They want to stop breathing, they want their heart to stop beating, they want to stop feeling and being and existing, but they can't. They are at war with their life energy, it feels like the enemy and they have the worst thoughts, the most violent thoughts, for what they would have to do to defeat it, to end things. If they are still alive then that force is within them and they sense it only too keenly and painfully, however they might describe it if they were to try to find the language to talk about what they felt.

Allowing yourself to feel that force, if you were ever in such a state, is not a combative act. You are not trying to pick a side between your *mortido* (the death force) and your *libido* (your life force), you are allowing them both to exist together. However bad or low we feel, there is a peace that comes when we just stop fighting and '*be with what is*'. Anyone who has been through the darkest depression and survived it will say to someone else, who is in the depths of their own despair, to hold on, because they know that they can promise them that things will get better. The person who has come through it, even if they once truly believed they would never get well, has experienced for themselves how their will to live, their life force, eventually led them out of the darkness. Holding on to the thread of the thought that '*this will pass*' and holding on to the thread of the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the

living, moving, energy that exists within, are the lifelines that can be trusted. I want you to know all this, because you may need it one day, for yourself, or for someone you love and care for.

What, of course, is much more likely for most people, most of the time, is that we are not nearly so far back in the cave and it is not despair that we feel when we go within to feel our life force, but what still blocks us from our joy are our aches and pains, our discomforts and disappointments, and our fears and worries.

Again, it is healthy and healing to simply allow these experiences to co-exist. Both the sense of the life energy within, and the sense of what is blocking or obstructing it. You don't have to fix anything, or change anything, or do anything. If all that happens when you do this is that you feel an initial increase in intensity, but you stay with the meditation, with the practice of tuning in to your inner force of nature, and so the feelings eventually ease, or change, or shift, then that's enough. Come back to it again and see what happens next time. You can never step foot in the same river twice and it is the same with these old ways of connecting to our energy. It is a river, a current, that flows through you. If you connect to it, and practice letting go into it, it will carry you to where you need to go.

What is highly likely to happen, maybe the first time but certainly soon enough if you come back to this practice regularly, is that the river, the wave of energy that flows through you, will pick you up and lift your mood and energy into a place that you can actually naturally feel light, and grateful. This can happen very quickly too, in just a heartbeat.

Not if, but when it happens, I encourage you to just allow it to unfold naturally. Nothing forced, nothing contrived, let it happen very spontaneously, very easily. It is exactly like catching a wave, or letting yourself float on a river, it will carry you and then put you down somewhere different from where you started.

The healing force is always moving, in the old cultures it was said to follow the blood, and no doubt it does, but it can move just as quickly as the electricity of the nerves as well. When you feel it, if you are ready to let go and trust it, then you can catch it and ride it, and then you can allow its energy, its nature, to diffuse into how you feel, and allow yourself to begin to be lifted by it. The nature of the life force is to be deeply positive and life-affirming. It has the fire energy, the light energy of gratitude woven into its very nature.

I mentioned earlier how compassion and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin, and that the currency of that coin is love. In just the same way, gratitude and surrender are two sides of another coin, of which the currency is peace. Both gratitude and surrender are deeply alike in how they ask us to be with what is and they both lead to the lightness, and freedom, of peace.

I think that, once you try this practice, and do it a few times, then you will find your own way with it, which is surely the best way to find it. My job here, if I will do it even a little well, is

to share some experience as a long term traveller in these lands so that you might better find your own steps along your own way. In that regard, I can offer two ways that can help you catch that wave of the *vis medicatrix naturae* and lift your energy into the light; I think of them as the quiet way and the active way.

The quiet way is just to start with the first step of feeling the presence of the life force within and then, with the mindset that *I am seeking to find my way to the lightness of gratitude*, let it carry me where I need to go and allow myself the possibility of hope that this force knows what is best for me and that I can trust it with my life, which it gives me in every moment of my existence.

I'm not really thinking anything, so it is hard to put this into words which, after all, are merely forms of thought themselves, but the feeling in the quiet practice of gratitude is one of hope and trust that I can let go and it will take me to where I need to go. I want to feel thankful, but I am not trying to feel thankful. I want to feel light but I am not trying to feel light. I am not trying to control or change my mood or my state, I am practicing 'choiceless awareness' in just the same way as if I were engaging with one of the other practices, but in this instance I am hoping that I will come to a feeling of deep gratitude, to life, the universe and everything. It very often works. It is possible to simply be thankful to be alive. Looking around in Nature, it does seem to be that way for most of the creatures most of the time.

You aren't trying to change anything or do anything to be thankful to be in tune with the life force. It will take you there by itself, if you allow it, and in the allowing give yourself permission to release all resentment, and any and all holding back, for any reason, the willingness to be thankful to be alive, just in this moment.



Talking to Your Heart

The active method involves thinking thoughts, which of course no one can hear except for you, but they do create a kind of a sound within. If you are drawn to this way, perhaps because you are a little more up when you come to it, or just because it suits your nature or your mood better, then I suggest to start with your heart, although some of the inner child practice that we touched on earlier could be an excellent point of focus for your practice of gratitude in conscious thought too.

The method is very simple and, I hope, you will find it very attractive and interesting to try. To be sure that you are aligned with the healing force of Nature when you do it, don't forget to take the first step first, to feel your life force, your *vis medicatrix naturae* within you, even if only for a moment, and then you talk to your heart, or your inner child, or any part of you that you want to connect with, with the utmost love and gratitude. Literally, with thoughts, with words, you say anything along the following kinds of lines:

"Oh my dear heart, (or my inner child, or my anything) my beloved companion, my faithful friend, I am so thankful that you are with me. Thank you so much for being here. I love you. I feel you, I hear you. am with you. I will be with you 'til the very end of us, the very end. I will always be with you. Thank you so much for keeping me alive, thank you for constantly helping me, for being with me through every moment of every day and night of my life. Thank you, thank you, thank you"



There are hundreds of different ways you can do this and, when you will try it, I urge you to find the way that feels most sincere to you. The key point is that you are thanking a part of yourself that you have every reason to be thankful to. I don't see why you couldn't do the exact same exercise with your liver, or your eyes, or even your brain for that matter, I just never have so I wouldn't want to suggest you ought to.

You can mix them together, allow a single thought of gratitude to bubble forth and then be in the quietness of just being and feeling the light and love of life, and then another bubble

might pop up, spontaneously and delightfully. I say again, gratitude really is a superpower, it can give us the ability to fly, if we will practice it.

Most of us however, me included, come to this matter more like penguins than birds of the air. We might flap our wings and occasionally remember to be thankful about something but we hardly consider the sky might belong to us and assume it's just the waters that we're made for. That's ok, but it's not fixed either. We can go on a healing journey and all kinds of things can become transformed because of this one rule: anything we practice we will get better at, and anything we keep getting better at we eventually get good at, that's the rule.

I wonder if, now or soon, you might like to have a practice at talking to your heart with love?



I have one final step that I want to share in the practice of gratitude from the ground floor, from Antarctica, from wherever we are up to wherever we might fly. This one is a prayer, or a mantra, or whatever you would like to call it. Like the first step, where I've asked you to learn some Latin, now I am giving you a phrase to memorise, which you will or you won't according to your wishes. But I do suggest you take the time to get it word for word, because the phrasing is powerful, and gets us very deep into the mystery and the magic of healing.

This is the phrase

*'Thank you for everything
I don't want to change anything'*

I don't suggest you start with this at the very beginning, especially if you are in any way feeling any kind of resentment, or resistance for how you are and how your life is at this moment. Don't start there but you could try coming to this after taking one or two first steps as we have been talking about.

These words *'Thank you for everything, I don't want to change anything'* are very powerful. They are also rather unconditional, meaning it is something that you would want to commit yourself to if you are going to allow them to enter into your consciousness. Thank you for everything really means everything. We aren't picking and choosing some parts over any others. I'm not going to get into who we are thanking. Again, that part is a mystery to me. I don't know and, it seems I don't need to know to feel truly thankful.



Everything means everything. It's unconditional, it's all in. And, it leads to the second part which is a remarkably big thought to entertain. It says, right now, in this moment, I accept everything, I don't want to change anything.

It is ok if you know, deep down, that there are things in your life that need to change. Hopefully you are in the process of working

on those things in your own way and hopefully you already know which battles to choose because I am sure I don't have to tell you that there are a great many things that should change in our world, and that need to change, but that we don't have any power to make change, at least not right now. This is not about that, this is about bringing us to a state of mind where there is zero resentment, zero resistance, only acceptance, only gratitude.

'Thank you for everything, I don't want to change anything' is a powerful medicine, which I encourage you to take and to try, whenever you are ready, as often as you wish. I wonder if you might like to try it now? Even just to memorise the words, to own them for yourself.

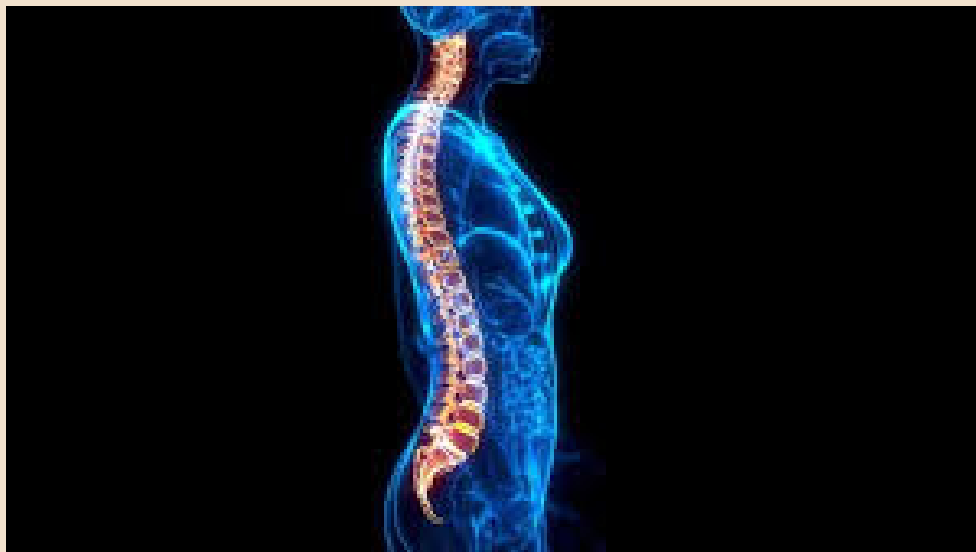
All you have to do is to take that first step first to connect to your life force, which understands these matters better than our minds ever could, and then try running it around your thoughts a time or two. If you do, when you do, I think you may find that the meaning and the power of these words, this medicine, this prayer, could grow on you, like wings.

The Hills and the Valleys

The next part of what I would like to talk with you about in the practices for the hero journey of healing, brings us into the hills and valleys of the spine.

We all have two hills and two valleys in our spine. It is like a wave with two peaks and two troughs. The usual language is to say that we have two areas in the spine that are convex and two that are concave, but I think 'hills and valleys' is more relatable. The most palpable way to feel them is actually by seeing or touching them on someone else's spine, but you can tune into your spine and feel them there for yourself too.

One of the hills is in your mid-back, your thoracic spine, where your ribs meet up to make a cage to protect your heart and lungs. The other hill is right down at the bottom of your spine, where your sacrum and coccyx form what is usually called your tail-bone. One of your valleys is in the lumbar spine, between the hill of your tailbone, and the hill of your mid back, the other is at the top of your spine where your neck also curves in like a valley.



It may be, as you have been trying out and experimenting with the practices, that you have already felt different parts of your spine come to your attention. It may also be that you are one of the great many people who have some back problems, in which case you will already be all too familiar with what it is to feel your energy, and your ache, in your spine.

However you also may be a person who feels things more in other parts of their body, for example your heart and belly, or even your feet or hands. Alternatively, your awareness and consciousness may be less physically centred and more in the realm of your mind and your thoughts. It is not better or worse to be one way or the other, it's just different.

In any case, whether or not you are already naturally drawn to feeling things in your spine, what follows is a continuation of what we have been talking about with a series of experiments and meditations to bring the practices into what lies beneath, in the hills and valleys of your back and, I feel a responsibility to begin this section with a warning, because this kind of practice will bring into existence a very powerful medicine and it will be highly likely to create a healing reaction if you start using these practices more than just once or twice.

Healing reactions are something we often need to deal with in our clinic, especially when we give any kind of herbal medicine treatment that has a cleansing or a relaxing action. My daughter Danielle, also a herbalist, spends a lot of time coaching and supporting our patients who we advise to call or come in if they have any concerns. It quite often happens, a few days or a week or so into their treatment, that they suddenly start getting all kinds of new symptoms and experiences that they are not used to, and not what they were expecting!

Drugs are very good at suppressing the symptoms of illness, that is why they are given and why people take them. There are natural substances and herbs that can do that too but the great majority of the herbal medicines that we use do not suppress symptoms at all, but rather they work by helping support the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing intelligence of the body, of nature, to overcome what was blocking it from becoming well.

When people do things, and take things, that increase the strength of their life force, the intelligence of the body starts to use that increased vitality to work harder on the imbalances and the unhealed hurts. The new symptoms or changes in how they are feeling are usually positive signs that they are entering a healing process, and we can tell them to expect that things should soon improve or ease up, but it is not always a comfortable experience and reassurance can definitely be required!

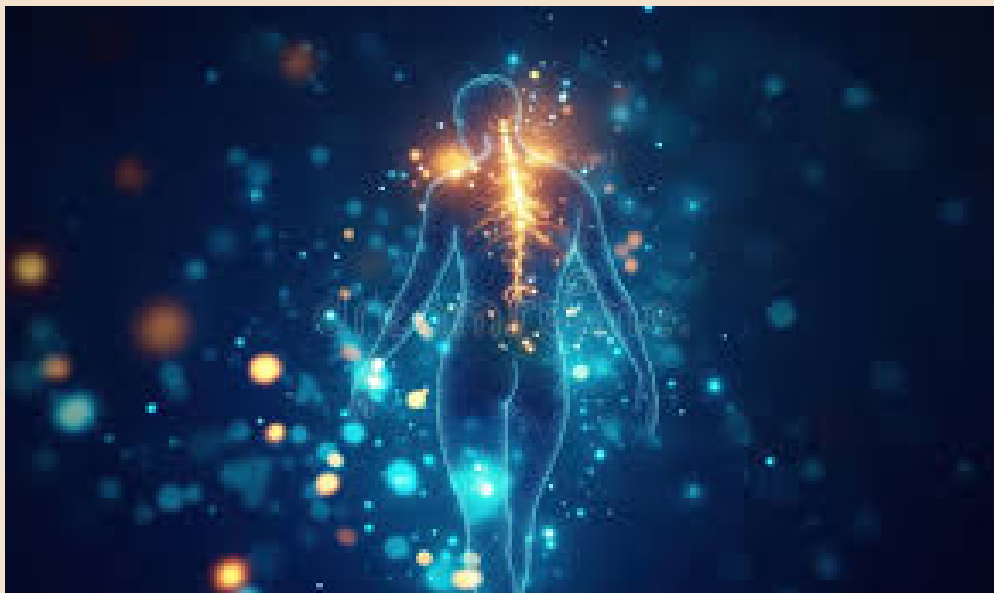
The old saying was '*you have to get worse before you get better*' but we don't advertise that, not only because it would put people off starting, but also because we don't want to create a negative expectation, especially when there are also a great many cases that nothing difficult has to be traversed at the beginning. The old books, and my old recorded lectures for my students, talk about a healing crisis but, in later years I started calling it a 'healing reaction', just because the word 'crisis' is so loaded.

We have to take great care that what the patient is experiencing is not actually an adverse reaction, and a repeat check-in may sometimes be needed, but in the great majority of cases what they are experiencing is a clear sign that a healing process is strongly underway and many good things are seen to soon follow.

However we frame it, and whether we should or shouldn't anticipate it being challenging or in any way difficult, I know that big shifts happen when you take steps to release the blocks to the *vis medicatrix naturae*. When they are used effectively, herbs are powerful medicines

to help release those blocks, but they are not more powerful than the spiritual practices that we have been talking about. What we are about to explore is strong medicine, if you start using it and especially if you start using it often, because everything about any reaction to any kind of medicine is all about the dose, then it is reasonable to expect that things will happen that will have a deep and potent effect on you.

Please be reassured that this is not something to be frightened of and that these practices are in no way unsafe or dangerous. So why do I even mention it? The reason is because if you get a healing reaction, and you didn't expect it and didn't understand it, then you could become afraid and stop using the medicine of the practices, at any dose, and that would be a great shame, because we truly need the healing journey. I say 'we' because we as a species deeply and even desperately need healing, we need it collectively, but it can only ever start with the individual, which right now, just means you, and me!



The Hills

In a few moments I am going to ask you to get comfortable, shut your eyes, maybe take a few breaths to help centre your energy and quieten your mind, and then go within your spine to take two steps, one to the small hill at the base of your spine, the other to the long hill in the middle.

I don't mind if this sounds silly, or far-fetched to you, but we are searching for love on these hills. Not the love that depends on someone or something else, but the love that can come when we release the blocks of hurt and hardening and practice forgiveness and compassion.

We can talk about love in an abstract way, as a concept, as an idea, but love is not an abstract idea, it is a feeling, an experience, a state of being. Even if we need our heads to

interpret, and understand, and communicate what we feel, the place that we actually feel love, or any emotion for that matter, is in our bodies.

The hill over the heart is an obvious place to think of as a centre for love, even if we might usually think of the love that we feel in our chest as something that comes up and forwards from our heart rather than sitting in the back.

The base of the spine, the small hill of the tail-bone, is a place that a person might naturally associate to the love that comes with the energy of reproduction, because this area is certainly a centre of sexual energy, but it is more than that too. In the basement, the root of the spine, lies such a cauldron of hot damp energy that it is where much of the primal essence of our life force makes its home.

Just to be clear on what I am going to be asking you to do. In this approach, I am going to encourage you to combine the practices of both forgiveness and compassion and to do this by focusing your awareness in the way of pairing, backwards and forwards, between the two hills of your spine at the same time as you bring the key words from the practices of forgiveness and compassion, the nutshells, and what associates to them and follows along from them, to enter your consciousness. If you will practice with this, and open up to it, you can help to open a real, physical gateway to experiencing the unconditional love that comes from both forgiveness and compassion.

In other areas of life there are rules that we need to follow to keep ourselves safe and not do harm, but there are no rules about how you should do these practices. There are no rules about how often you should try any of this, or for how long, or for which hill to climb first before you move your awareness to the other one.

For what we are about to try, as with all the other practices, it will be you who is the one who takes every step along the way. So, for this practice, you could start by climbing up either hill to begin with, to see how it feels and what you might find. I don't think it is better or worse to start at either side, but it is different, and although I am going to start talking about the one at the bottom I think that, if your body were to pull you to one hill more than the other, you should just go with it.

I will start at the root, the base of the spine, because I think it is an excellent place, in fact I think it is the best place to associate with the practice of forgiveness and so take the first step of 'I own me', and what follows on from that, in a tangible, physical way.

One way, not the only way, but one way you could do this is to centre your awareness all the way down to the base of your spine and then take that first clear conscious step to say to yourself '*I own me*'. You choose to, and do, own yourself right there, literally, not metaphorically. When you have centred your awareness into the base of your spine you are as far away from your brain as you can go in your central nervous system. When you think, and feel, '*I own me*' right there, you are not just owning this part, but you are owning every

part of the experience that lies between you, the observer in your mind, and this, the primal base of your spine.

When you come to it, and take the step of ownership, remember to right away bring in the thought and the energy of love. Say to yourself, with as much sincerity as you can, meaning you want to try to feel it in your mind as you think it in your body these most potent and important words *'I love you'*.

I encourage you to linger there, in the base of your spine, with these thoughts of *'I own me'* and *'I love you'* as long as you wish, to think about it, and to feel what comes up. If there is ache, if there are hurts, then I encourage you to go straight away to the third step of allowing yourself to feel truly sorry for any and all hurt, sorry in the sense of compassion, of mercy, and also of not wanting to allow that hurt to happen any more, if you possibly could. All of that is what it means when you say to yourself, thinking in your body and feeling in your mind *'I'm so sorry'*.

You could then, if you wished to, ask for healing, and for forgiveness. Call out for it, ask for it in whatever way feels most real, most heartfelt *'please forgive me'*, or just as much as you can say *'please heal me'*. Remember, always, this is all about practice. None of this is a one time deal, if it helps, if you can feel it working, then you can come to it many many times.

Whether you start at the base or prefer to begin around your heart, once you climb one hill, as soon as you wish, but at some point, I encourage you to cross the energetic bridge to the other hill and allow your awareness to centre there too.

I'm sure you know the phrase *'connecting the dots'*. I would like you to imagine that there is a tiny *'i'*, a part of the whole of *'you'*, that lives in the centre of your chest and another tiny *'i'* that lives in the base of your spine. You are going to connect the dots of your *'i's'*, with this practice. These dots are both parts of you that are equally important, but they are also different, with a different energy that can lend itself in unique ways to these deep spiritual practices.

When you come to the hill over your heart, I want you to remember the key words for the practice of compassion, *'soft, centred, and now'*. There is nothing to strain or strive for in this practice, allow it to be very easy, very natural. There is a powerful cage of protective bones around this most precious part of your body to keep you safe. You can relax here and just be yourself. Allow yourself to think of the word *'soft'* and to feel it too. The word *'centred'* lends itself very instinctively to coming into the dot of our *'i'* that lives in our chest, full of life, and blood, and air, and love too, if we can release the blocks to it. And also remember to tell yourself this most powerful word *'now'*, to bring your awareness into the eternal present, which is the only moment where love, and peace, can exist.

I have a little more to say about the hero's journey of searching for love on the hills of the spine but let's have a go at this first, just to take at least some of what we've been discussing

from the abstract into the experiential. Remember, start at either hill but go to the other soon enough, and then back to where you started, and then cross over again, at least a couple of times to either side, to connect the dots, to bring the energy of the practices together as a pair.

As you pair your awareness between the two hills of your spine I believe that you will have moments of easily entering a deep, quiet meditative state where you are just being, just feeling. You are in your body, your subconscious, and no thoughts are necessary. There is love in these hills, true love, the love of acceptance and compassion and forgiveness.

When your mind springs back into action, which is what it always will do, you can very gently and effectively guide yourself back to the inner journey for another moment, another step, by remembering to use any of the words from the two nutshells to help refocus your intention in the practices '*I own me*' and '*I love you*' to couple to the base of your spine, '*soft, centred and now*' to pair with the hill over your heart.

Don't worry in the least if you only find you take a step or two, and then suddenly get distracted, or caught in a thought about what you are doing, or any of the things that can happen when we bring our awareness inwards. It's all practice, the only person who will judge you and be hard on you is yourself and you are setting the intention to release that burden of hardness and judgement from your consciousness when you enter into this.

You can trust that your body, and your spine, contain the life force of nature, and this force knows how to help you and how to heal you. Have a go at this now, or as soon as you are ready, bringing your awareness down into the hills of your spine. Use the nutshells as much as you want to, and simply connect with these great centres of energy that lie within you.



Ever Changing Energy

What I hope will happen when you do this practice, is that you will increasingly feel, through your body, a connection and a merging together of these powerful energies of forgiveness and compassion. They are two sides of the same coin and they support and strengthen each other. As you connect the dots and join your inner forces together, you can bring the energy of compassion from your heart into your low spine and the energy of forgiveness from your lower spine into your heart.

I hope you will feel a shift, a letting go of hurt and hardening, and a coming in of healing and softness in its place. I hope that you will feel the energy and presence of love in your body, and your whole being, and that the energy and presence of love grows and becomes more palpable and present as you come back to practicing opening the gateways to it, and so get more and more used to inviting it in to flow within you.

Those are my hopes, and I think they are reasonable, because whatever you practice you will get better at, and if you practice forgiveness and compassion then you will bring a great deal more love into your life, and many things can heal and change from there.

I have high hopes for good reason, and I also have a lot of experience with people going through healing journeys, and I know how challenging they can be. Without being able to meet with you in person, I can't know what your personal obstacles to any of this might be, but I can talk with you about one of the main ones that come up for most of us, and there might be something here that connects to your own journey. After I've said something about that possible obstacle, at the end of this section on the hills, I'm going to invite you to have another practice at going within to be on your 'hills' and to perhaps feel some of this for yourself, and so make it yours.

One of the greatest obstacles to healing, and forgiveness, and compassion, is of course unhealed hurts. Sadly, tragically really, everyone has them. We're born whole, and then we get hurt, broken and fragmented.

If you have any kind of hurt, or ache, in your spine then going within to feel things in your back will, of course, bring that right up to the surface. I know I have said this a few times in other contexts but I do not think I can overemphasise how vital it is that you can trust this process, even if the intensity of feeling something, that was already there, increases when you initially give it your attention. You truly can trust that this initial increase in intensity is a healing process, not a damaging one.

If you do have pain in your back, then I could only encourage you more to go into the hills and valleys of your spine and feel how the energy gathers and moves between these centres. Such a practice will, in time, help your back to get better, not worse.

Of course, many of our deepest hurts are not in our backs or any other part of our physical body, they are in our life not being what we hoped it would be, or our love not being

returned, or our hopes not being realised. Or perhaps the unhealed hurts are in our memories, in past experiences of, for example, losing a loved one, or any kind of betrayal or cruelty from someone close to us. Our hurts can be invisible to any kind of test or scan, or they can be entirely physical and measurable, concrete. Honestly, I don't think it matters if the hurt is more physical or emotional, if it hurts then it's a hurt.

This is important too, it is completely pointless to compare your hurts with anyone else's, you cannot feel their hurt any more than they can feel yours. What they have, belongs to them, what you have, belongs to you. Lesser or greater, physically or emotionally, we've all got hurts and our hurts belong to us and us alone.

Our hurts are not more likely to be concentrated in the base of our spine than they are anywhere else but the reason I give the base of the spine, the tailbone, as the place to gather the awareness of forgiveness is that this is the centre, the homebase, of a great primal force within us. I mentioned it earlier as being like a hot, damp cauldron of energy and, if we can get in touch with, and in tune with, this centre, then we can step through it, like going through a portal or a doorway, right into the basement of our subconscious being, where all the unhealed hurts are held in one form or another.



The root of our spine is where the energy of survival is most concentrated, and so it is also the home base of the great dark friend of fear. I say 'friend' because our fear is not our enemy, it can feel like it is and we can react against it as if it was, but it is never trying to deliberately hurt us. Quite the contrary, it is trying to keep us safe, and alive, and well enough that we can continue the life force on beyond ourselves!

One of the most powerful manifestations of the life force can be seen in how every form of life devotes an enormous amount of its energy towards reproduction. All forms of life, from the simplest to the most complex, are intrinsically aware of their own mortality, and so the survival force, which sometimes manifests as fear, not only seeks to protect and prolong the individuals life as long as possible, but it commits itself to finding the way to pass on the light of life to the next generation.

It is an extraordinary fact to contemplate how thousands upon thousands of generations of our own ancestors were able to successfully overcome every obstacle to keep the thread of life going long enough, and well enough, for us personally to exist. Especially because we are not the form of life that makes this easy for ourselves. Given how incredibly long it takes to

raise a human being to the point where they can be independent, and successfully have children of their own, you could say that no other form of life devotes more of its time and energy to successful reproduction than we do.

In any case this primal, and most potent force of survival, of fear, and of reproduction, has the centre of its energy in a tangible and palpable form in the base of our spine. This centre is a direct gateway to the healing intelligence that lives within us, that only ever wants us to be well, and happy, but is often blocked in its purpose by our hurts.

When you go into this part of our body with the awareness of *'I own me'* we are connecting to a very deep and core part of our being. The other three-word phrases to unlock the door here could be *'I am this'*, or *'this is me'*. We are stepping towards a deeper identification with our inner nature, our inner intelligence, and moving away from what has happened to me and who I am in the world, in other words my *'story'*. This step into a deeper identification with our inner essence is not to devalue the importance of any of our story, but it is to help release the stranglehold that the unhealed hurts, especially at the hands of others, can put upon us. We do not need to wait for anyone to do anything in order to practice forgiveness and start to heal our hurts but we do need to own them, fully and unconditionally, before anything much can happen.

When we connect with the living, feeling, and sometimes hurting being within ourselves, and take full responsibility for everything that we feel *'I own me, I am this'*, then we can open up to compassion, to mercy, to being able to feel in our mind and think in our body *'I love you'*.

I talked earlier about allowing yourself to feel so sorry towards yourself, and I know that this can be a sensitive matter for people, and I also know that long held conditioning from early childhood is not just swept aside by a few sentences on a page. I won't go back over all of that now, but I want you to understand that this matter is of the greatest importance to these first and often most essential steps on the healing journey. You cannot come to this with the hardness of judgement, you must come to it with the softness of compassion.

Whether you are going to find it natural, and helpful, to bring your awareness into your body in this kind of way, for example through feeling things in your spine, remains to be seen by what happens after practicing it a few times, but it must be approached with the softness of compassion to have a chance to work.

Whether you feel that your own hurt is more physical, emotional or spiritual, and whether the hurt has been given the name of a disease or a condition or just simply exists there in the form of the feelings that come with the hurt, I urge you to approach your own hero journey of healing with the softness of compassion for any of this to have a chance to work.

Soften your heart, stay in the centre of whatever it is and wherever it feels strongest, stay in the now of it, of this moment and only this moment, and allow yourself to feel sorry for

yourself and to yourself. *'I am so sorry that you (meaning this part of me that hurts) is hurting. I don't want you to hurt, I want you to feel better, I don't want to do anything that will ever hurt you ever again. I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I love you, I love you, I love you'.*

You can think in your body, our gut and our spine are full of nerves that can carry the energy of our thoughts just as much as they naturally carry the energy of our feelings. These practices do involve thoughts, they have to, but they must be brought into the realm of feelings to be real, and to work. This is why we are now evolving the practices to come into the body.



Perhaps it will feel more natural, more instinctive to you, to start with the practice of compassion and to connect it to the hill over your heart. It is very easy to take a few breaths and then to catch the wave of your heartbeat on the inhale or the exhale. With just a little practice I'm sure that you could find yourself listening to your own heart beat. Then all you have to do is remember to think, and so allow yourself to feel, *'soft, centred and now'* to be moving into the energy of compassion and away from the burden of hurt and hardening.

Of course, without doubt, our heart is another tremendous centre of energy, abundantly equal to the primal force of survival in the root of the spine, but also very different. The energy of the heart is not concentrated and coiled like it is at the base of the spine, it is expansive and moving, reaching, searching. It has been said that the longest and most difficult journey for any of us is to travel from our heads to our hearts. You could think of that hill over the heart as like a great mountain that we need to climb for our hero journey. The unhealed hurts that block us from forgiveness and healing are the same hurts that block us from being able to be in our heart and live from our hearts. So we must practice forgiveness in order to achieve compassion and we must practice compassion in order to achieve forgiveness.

When you can feel the mercy, the sense of being sorry, the compassion for your own hurt, then you can genuinely, sincerely and in a most heartfelt way, ask for, or even beg for, healing, which we could also call forgiveness. Again, it is a mystery who or what it is that we are asking. You can certainly think of it as yourself, perhaps your higher self, or your own healing intelligence from Nature, or you can think of it as something that is beyond yourself.

I don't think it matters who or what we perceive we are asking but I think it does matter that we ask. The asking, or perhaps begging, especially if it really hurts, aligns our energy, it focuses our intention, it allows things that were stuck to shift and change.

Hurts do heal, but not if we deny them or ignore them. Bring them out into the open by allowing yourself to feel them, own them fully, don't blame, don't play the old and tiresome game of being the victim because, however comforting it may seem, it is utterly disempowering. Be done with it, be bored of it, and instead step into the power of *'I own me'*, with compassion, with mercy, with the humility and the wisdom to know that I do not have the foggiest idea of how to heal myself, no more than by my own willpower I could stop myself bleeding, but that there is a force that does know how to heal me, and I can align myself with that force, get out of its way, and let it make me well.

In a short while, before we move on to the next section on the valleys of the spine, please have one more go at climbing the hills of your spine and combining the practices of compassion and forgiveness. Remember, you are not trying to follow a recipe here, where you have to get everything correct and in the right order or it will be a disaster. This is nothing like that. If you pick up any of these practices then you will soon be doing them in your own way, and it must be that way, because no one can take a single step on your hero journey of healing other than you.

I want to share some of my own experience with you here, which is to say that when I do these kinds of practices it helps me to feel the complexity, the reality of the shifting, ever-moving energy that flows within me. I can sense how this energy cannot be pinned down to being just one form or shape but that it is ever changing, that it is always and only ever in the moment of now, that it is alive, and aware, and intelligent in a way that my conscious mind can only very partially understand.

Sometimes I feel this inner being in a way that I could describe like this, that I am a very tiny, extremely insignificant, but still very alive drop in a vast ocean of energy. My drop is me, all of me, in all the ways I feel and perceive my separate self, but the ocean is all around me, all the time, and there are waves from that ocean that move me and carry me. For a moment, as I give myself to the ocean, and its waves, without needing to change or do anything, I can release my egoic mind's need to be at the centre of things and I can be in a place of deep love, of compassion for all that is and, at the same time, be in a place of deep peace, of surrender to all that is.

In just a moment, I want to encourage you to again bring your awareness to the hills of your spine. I want you to feel them coming together, connecting with each other and helping each other to release the blocks to your flow of healing and compassion. You may be able to very quickly just be in the thoughtless, timeless place of being and feeling as you pair your awareness between the hills of your spine. But to help get there, and also if your mind wants

to be active, to wander off, and to have distracting thoughts then I encourage you to remember the three words phrases once or more times.

When you are in the hill over your heart and then for the hill over your heart the meditation of *'soft, centred and now'* and when you are in the hill at the base of your spine the meditation of *'I own me'*, or *'this is me'* or *'I am this'* along with, however sincerely you can think it and say it to yourself, the eternally healing thought, *'I love you'*, Remember that, if you feel any ache coming up with any of this to stay in the ownership, stay in the love, and also bring to your being the powerful medicine of the healing thoughts *'I'm so sorry and please forgive me'*,

If you feel your energy shifting, really I should say *when* you feel your energy shifting, because I know these practices will work if you use them, then you may come to feel a surge of your life force within you that is profoundly hopeful, and even joyful, and in the upward surging wave of that energetic shift you may very well want to fling yourself open to the great mystery of the universe, or however you think of that which is the Mother and Father of us all, to be healed, to be at peace and to be in the love.

If, or I could even say, when you feel this way, there is no need to be frightened of whatever you are feeling, let yourself open as much as you can, don't harden, remain soft, and centred, and now, and just let the life force carry you to wherever you need to go. Nothing bad will happen, the energy of the intelligence in the Universe is very ancient, very deep, very healing. It is you, you belong to it, come to it now, for peace and love and healing, to try to get better in touch with it through your body, your subconscious.



The Valleys

Whenever you are ready, whenever it is right for you, in a few moments I am going to ask you to again get comfortable, shut your eyes, maybe take a few breaths to help centre your energy and quieten your mind, and then go within your spine to take two steps, this time one is to the valley in your lumbar spine and the other to the valley of your neck.

And again, I still don't mind in the least if this sounds silly or far-fetched to you, but just as we were searching for love on the hills, now we are seeking peace in the valleys. Not the peace that depends on anyone doing anything differently, not the peace that requires you or anyone else to change anything, but the peace that can come when we release the blocks of resistance and resentment and practice surrender and gratitude.

You are, of course, entirely in charge of if you ever do this, let alone how often you might try but, however great the obstacles may be, I urge you to set out on this journey with great certainty about the value of what it is you are seeking, because what a treasure is peace! No amount of searching or striving in the world for any kind of favour, riches, or accomplishments can compare to the wealth of inner peace, it is the great prize of life!

And again, we can talk about peace in an abstract way, as an idea, but peace is not an abstract idea, it is a feeling, an experience, a state of being. The only time we can ever



experience peace is in the moment of now, the only place that we can actually feel peace is within our bodies and, whilst we may notice how much more our minds are calm and quiet when we are in our peace, the root of our peace, like all of our strong feelings, is in our bodies. Wonderfully, fascinatingly, it is especially accessible in the two valleys of our spines.

The bottom valley is in our lumbar spine, it is sometimes called the 'small of the back'. The base of it starts where the hill of the buttocks begins to rise and the top of it ends just under the lowest rib, where the hill of the mid-back begins to rise. The top valley is the long sloping curve of the neck.

Before I go on, I want to share an interesting phenomenon about the valleys of the spine, which is that they don't have the same nature to reach an apex, a point, as what we find with the hills. I don't think you will feel the same sense of a centred 'i' in the valleys as you might have been able to in the hills. Our energy is different in how it moves in the valleys, it doesn't gather into a focal point like it can in the hills, but rather it wants to spread, to be diffuse, to move up and down and around. Think of a literal valley and how the rivers run

through it, with abundant life following the flow of the water. It is like that in the valleys of the spine too.

The bottom valley, the lumbar spine, is perhaps the best of all places in the spine to feel the energetic 'fire' of the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing intelligence of Nature. You do not have to concentrate on finding its centre, as I mentioned, the energy tends to spread rather than focus in the valleys, you only need to bring your awareness to this area with an openness to be in touch with your life force here and it will do the work for you, of lifting the frequency of your state of energy. This is why this area is most strongly associated with the practice of gratitude. Of course you can beneficially bring thoughts of thankfulness to your mind when you come into this part of your body but, even without any conscious practice of gratitude, by bringing your awareness to your lumbar valley you can feel yourself being filled up, and lifted up. It is quite uncanny how easily it does it too, just so long as we don't get in the way!

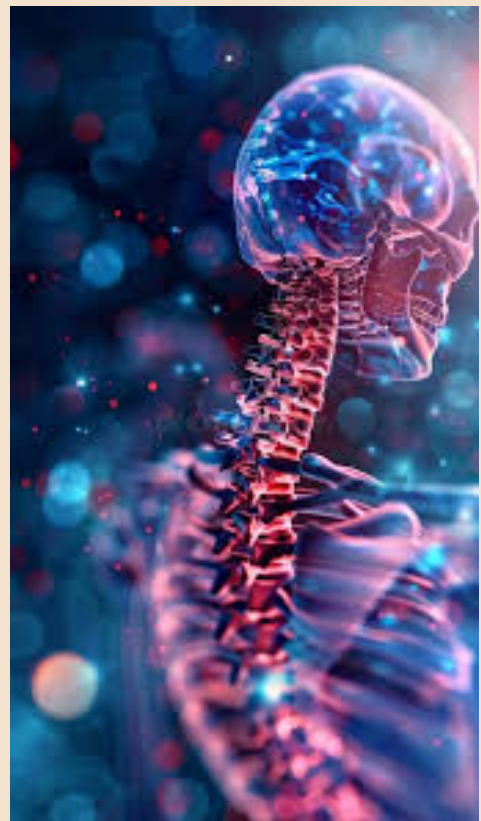
The upper valley, the neck, is surely the best of all places in the body to practice with the great mystery of surrender. Especially because this is where we can most keenly feel most, if not all, of our obstacles to letting go!

I hope that no one or nothing is a literal 'pain in your neck' at this time in your life, or that for any reason you have any kind of ache in this most sensitive and tender 'bridge' between our head and our body.

In any case, even if you are not aware of any trouble here, I can assure you that you will have a lot going on in your neck, everyone does. All the tension and tiredness that we all at least sometimes feel in our heads spills over into our necks to at least some extent. All the trouble and strife we feel in our bodies has to send its signals through our neck to be registered and responded to by our brain. Everything that we eat, drink, and breathe comes down through our necks, and everything we experience that we need to express comes up with our air to be given voice through the larynx of our necks. It is a bridge that has an enormous amount of two way traffic coming across it.

The warning I gave earlier, at the beginning of this section about the hills and valleys of the spine and how bringing these practices into your body is a powerful medicine, and that you need to be prepared for healing reactions when you use them, is so true of the neck.

For most of us, there is a great deal of unhealed hurt and unfinished business in our necks. Bringing awareness to it, even with heartfelt intention to just be 'as I am' and to let go, to



surrender, can bring things up that don't drop out easily. I want you to be conscious, as you go into the valley of your neck, to soon enough drop into the valley at the small of your back, under the lowest of your ribs. This is not something you need to feel to understand, although you might find it interesting to go into in your own way, but energetically, the valley of the neck is the most cool and damp part of the spine. This is why it needs to be as soft and flexible as water, this is also why the many things that block the flow in our neck cause all kinds of mischief in our minds and bodies. In contrast to this, the valley of the lumbar spine is where we have the strongest presence of our fire energy, hot and dry. This area, and what it connects to, is like a furnace in the body where things are activated and transformed.

The water balances the fire and the fire balances the water. Moving between the two valleys helps us not to get stuck in one side or the other. The peace comes when we are in balance. Surrendering and letting go but not abandoning the fire in our core. Raising the spirit of our energy with the wings of gratitude but not losing our humility, and softness, that surrender brings.

In just a moment now, I am going to encourage you to combine the practices of both surrender and gratitude and to do this by focusing your awareness, back and forwards, between the two valleys of your spine. As you do this, it may help you to bring the key words from the practices of surrender and gratitude, the nutshells, and what associates to them and follows along from them, to enter your consciousness.

I don't think it matters which valley you start with, perhaps just go wherever you are drawn first, but don't linger there too long. Come to the other valley soon, and then go back again soon too. Joining the forces, the different energy, of the valleys will help you to release the blocks and obstacles that I will talk about some more after we give this a first go.

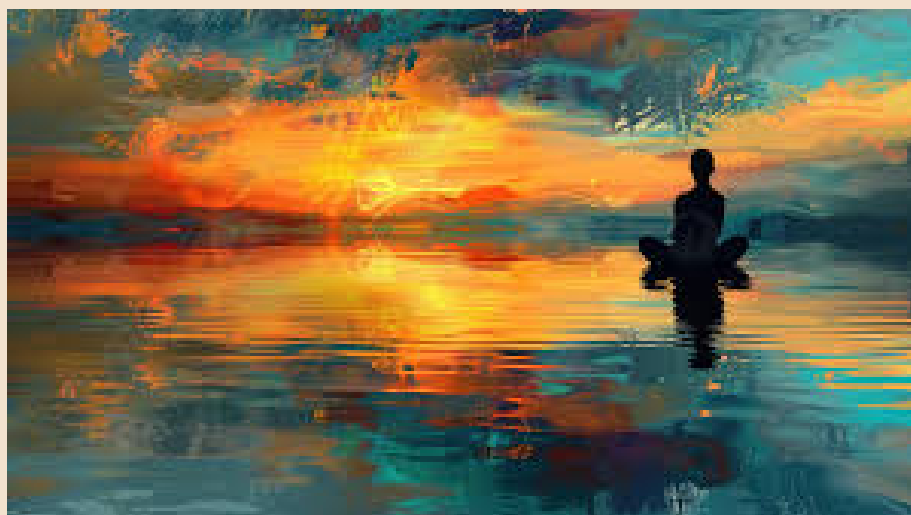
When you are feeling within your neck, let the words '*as I am*' enter your consciousness. You are not trying to do anything or to change anything. The past and the future do not exist in this moment, you are only here and now, feeling and being.

'*As I am*' allows you to let go completely. You do know how to relax, you do know how to let go, you might like to remember the feeling of just allowing yourself to drop off to sleep. Zero resistance, completely trusting that you will be ok if you just let go.

When you are feeling into your lumbar spine, I am still encouraging you to learn and remember to think of these beautiful old words, the '*vis medicatrix naturae*' but this is not so much a place for thinking, or needing to do anything, to conjure up the fire energy that lives here. Your belly rises and falls as you breathe, it moves like a bellows, constantly giving fuel to the life force of the lumbar valley that exists like a riverbed under your belly. You don't need to think or remember anything to breathe and you don't need to think or remember anything to feel the energy of this ever moving life force within you.

If you aren't quite sure how to access this part of you, and going into the valleys of the spine really is very different to going into the hills, then you might like to try catching the rise and fall of your belly as you breathe, then bring your awareness to your navel, then go behind your navel to what lies beneath it because then you will right in the centre of the lumbar valley of your spine, and it truly is full of the vital force of life.

Whichever valley you start with, go back and forth, easily and smoothly, between the two valleys of your lumbar spine and your neck, back and forth, back and forth, until there is a oneness, a merging between these parts of you. The energies of surrender and gratitude give ease and grace and wings and freedom to each other, and by doing this simple, beautiful practice, you are opening the gateways to the treasure of your inner peace, please have a go now or as soon as you are ready.



Resistance

A little later on, at the end of this section, I'm going to invite you to have another go at accessing your inner peace by connecting and merging together these great and mysterious forces of surrender and gratitude within the valleys of your spine. Firstly though, I need to talk with you about what I think will be the primary obstacle to this practice, because it is a formidable one!

If you are anything like me, or the people I have met and listened to, then your number one obstacle to doing these practices and finding your inner peace, can be put into one little word - resistance.

Resistance, the tension of it, the pushing back of it, the presence of it, can be so woven into the fabric of our being that we don't even notice it is there. Or at least we may not notice it

is there until we do something like go into the valleys of our spine to practice surrender and gratitude! Resistance is everything that stops us from letting go and it is everything that stops us being able to genuinely feel, *'Thank you for everything, I don't want to change anything'*.

Maybe you have had the misfortune yourself to experience a relationship with endless conflict. Or you've seen people caught in that loop, in your family or friends, or even in fiction, in books and on the screen. Whoever it is, whatever are the endless variations on the ingredients to the mix, if both sides want to fight, if neither side is willing to give up, you know that there will never be an end to it.

It's exactly the same with resistance, which is the fight that we have with ourselves. Everything that is not willing to accept me *'as I am'*, which might sometimes seem like it is just about everything.

Another single word that could be used to describe the heart of the obstacle to inner peace is *'becoming'*. All the programming that we have, from early childhood and everything that follows, is about getting better, getting ahead, getting somewhere. We are driven to be human becomings rather than human beings.

I don't mean to speak against the spirit of the life force that wants us to grow, and evolve, and yes, become what we are capable of being. Learning to walk, and talk, and take care of yourself so that you can one day take care of others is a beautiful journey of becoming what we can be. So *'resistance'* is the better nutshell here, but I still want to convey this idea that a large part of the root of the resistance is the feeling and the drive that we still need to become something more, even when we could just stop, and rest, and not retain a shred of the tension that always comes with striving to be better.

This is why, I think, gratitude is so vital to surrender. Thank you is what we say at the end of the dinner, or the outing, or the receiving of the gift. It is a full-stop, an end point. Something good has happened and we are acknowledging our thanks for it. If we can attune ourselves to the energy of gratitude then, maybe not a full stop, maybe just for a pause, but we can put a break on the becoming. We can take a rest, be ok enough, just in this moment of now, to think, and feel, and accept myself *'as I am'*.

Please do not underestimate the mighty force of resistance. Well, I probably don't need to worry if you do underestimate it, because if you know you are searching for your inner peace, and you are willing to journey towards it, then you will find out for yourself soon enough just how mighty, and implacable, and endless the power of resistance is!

Here, in this matter, given the strength of this obstacle, I feel I have no choice and no other option than to fully encourage you on to the fourth and final step in the practice of surrender. This is the matter of the mystery, of there being a greater power than us alone that we can connect to. I don't see any other way around this, all the alternatives I've seen

and heard and tried just end up tightening the stranglehold of our egoic minds, our becoming selves, and our resistance.

So let's talk about that but firstly just a quick reminder about the first three steps in this practice, which are:

- 1) So easily, so naturally, remembering the feeling of the ease and grace in which we allow ourselves to fall asleep. No effort, no trying, just letting go completely.
- 2) Letting these beautiful little tiny words permeate our awareness, thinking them in our body, feeling them in our mind '*...as I am*'.
- 3) Allowing ourselves to go to wherever we feel most tired, or perhaps sometimes more usefully to find the right spot, most heavy, in our bodies and just not fighting that feeling but allowing it to show us how to let go. The neck area will come up a lot when many people do this, but it moves and migrates because, just as soon as you give your attention to the block in the healing flow of your life energy, another area might call to your attention.

In the earlier section on the practice of surrender I talked about the fourth and final step, the full spiritual surrender we could call it, as being something optional, you could if you want but you certainly don't have to. That is still true, by the way, but now that we are taking this practice much deeper, into the body, the subconscious, and if you are a person who wants to go all the way with this, then I am afraid that if you didn't already know it you may soon feel for yourself just how tricky, how knotty, how ingrained is the resistance to true surrender and how we may actually need to go all in on this to really have a chance to get to where we most want to be, which is in our inner peace!

Now that we are approaching inner peace, the great quest of the hero journey, along with love, I have to say that I don't think that we probably can overcome our innate and implacable resistance to full spiritual surrender without some kind of a leap of faith into the mystery of the universe because, however we might perceive it, we need to be willing to trust it so deeply, so fully, that we could give our very lives to it!

For this final step into surrender, I encourage you to add another nutshell to the practice. Just as we were taking the second step with this deep thought of '*as I am*', so we can take the fourth and final step with this most profound thought '*I am yours*'.

Who is it, what is it, that we are giving ourselves to, surrendering ourselves to? Maybe you have some idea, in which case you will have more of an idea than me. I genuinely don't know, but I perceive there is something, and it is not nothing, although it might as well be, for how empty, and insubstantial, and impossible to name, or hold, or describe it is.

You could spend your own decades of years of practicing all the ways to not get this right, like I have, or you could just take it from me, that no amount of any kind of meditation or mindfulness or any of the hundreds of various methods is going to help you to overcome

your resistance. If you resist your resistance you will only make it stronger. This whole matter is really a great mystery, especially as it seems like it needn't be because, how do you surrender? Easy, you just stop resisting...

Hmmmm, if only it were that simple. When you take it on yourself to stop resisting, the 'you' that is making the effort to change your old pattern has just picked up the resistance in a different form, and is running with the new version now.

Anything that 'I' can do to overcome the sovereign strength of 'me' ultimately just serves to strengthen my sense of separation. In other words, it feeds my egoic mind. Which is kind of a monster when it comes to feeding time. There is seemingly no end to how much our egoic minds like to be at the centre of everything. Where it all revolves around the point of me. As if we were at the very centre of the universe, which is of course how it does appear to be.

Appearances can be deceiving. We really are not the centre of the universe, any more than one drop of the ocean is the centre of that ocean. So then, does it matter if we all perceive ourselves a certain way and should we even try to change such a thing that is so woven into the nature of our being? No, I don't think we should try to change it, you can't help seeing through your eyes, hearing through your ears, perceiving the world through your senses, there's nothing wrong with any of that and nothing that needs to be changed. The only reason any of this could matter is if we are aware that we do not have inner peace, and that we really and truly want it, pretty much more than anything, except perhaps for love.

I don't think it would make much sense to most young people to tell them that the great treasure, or even the great purpose of life, is to be at peace and in love. They might get the love part, at least in terms of how attracted they feel to each other and so associate love with sex and romance and the joyful honeymoon of losing yourself in the presence of someone you love. But the idea that being empty and serene, and free from wanting and desires, could be a point to life? Not likely. Most people need to suffer enough of all that is the opposite of peace to know what its value is. They need to have gone through conflict, and tension, and worry, and even pain, to know that peace is simply delightful. It is not just the absence of suffering, it is the presence of harmony. It is like the best music, and the best food, and the best feeling in the world but it has no end point, no destination other than itself.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I am quite sure that we cannot find peace without surrender, and that we cannot practice surrender without gratitude, and that we cannot experience true surrender or gratitude unless we can somehow connect to a much greater force than that which is contained in the dot of our 'I'.

As a person who has experienced profound disillusionment at the hands of organised religion, I will be able to relate to anyone reading this who is bothered by concepts of any kind of a higher power, however it is put forward, but there just isn't any other way around this. So, whether you are a blank slate, or there is already some, or even a great deal of

writing in your own book on this subject, I suggest you find the best way you can to take a deep breath and get ready to take, not just a leap, but a plunge of faith. Faith that there is something that started all of this, and sustains it, and that can be surrendered to with absolutely zero risk of anything bad happening as a consequence. We will just have to hope so, because I don't think there is any alternative to finding our peace than to go all in on this.

In a moment, or whenever you are ready, I invite you to return to the valleys of your spine. To join them together, to remember the nutshells as much as they may help to give your mind a focus and an occupation so it doesn't flail away at every other possible distraction that might stop it from being toppled from its perch.

You must trust your body, how can you not? It is where you live, it is what gives you life, it may not always be an easy or a comfortable place to live, but it is what you have, and you do have to accept it. I want you to trust that your body, and the intelligence of the life force that lives within your body, can show you the way to what it is that you most need and seek.

The valleys of your spine are an excellent place to do this practice. The lumbar spine with its fire energy to bring up the frequency of gratitude, the neck with its water energy to show the way to the mystery of surrender.

Take a step, or a few steps, as far in as you wish to go and, when you meet the point of resistance, and there will always be resistance, remember not to fight it, not to condemn it, not to resist it, but just accept it. You can use the words '*as I am*' to help, and don't try to stop the presence of the resistance, or the tension, or however you experience it, just let go, as if you were going to surrender to sleep and then I encourage you to allow yourself to feel in your mind, and think in your body '*I am yours*' and then, even if just for that one moment in all of eternity, to abandon all pretence at any further trying to control this wild ride called life. We really don't control it, and never have, and never will. Just let go completely, and peace will come, because you cannot go to peace, because it must come to you.



The Back of the Hero Journey

Just the possibility that an inner journey, a hero journey, of healing could bring us to what we seek is most extraordinary to me. That we don't have to wait for anyone else to do anything, that we don't have to wait for any of the trouble and strife in the world to be over to find, at least some, of our peace and love, how extraordinary that is, how truly wonderful.

What we do have to do is to overcome our own obstacles, and that is no small matter, as anyone who has made the attempt will attest! There is a phrase that I particularly like within these vast subjects, including peace, love and healing, which is that *'truth is a pathless land'*.

These practices, and some methods to bring them into the spine, the back of the hero journey, are to be experimented with and worked on; yet they are just some of a great many possible steps to move forwards on the healing journey. I know that they will not be 'everyone's cup of tea', and I also know that even if they do resonate with you, and so you start using them, that it will only be a moment before you are in your own pathless land, feeling what you need to feel, and finding your next steps in your own way. It should be like that. Certainly we can share with each other, and learn from each other, but I don't think we are supposed to follow someone else, or if we do then only for a few steps to get started, and then we must be in our own journey, on our own map, finding our own way to what it is we seek.

It is our obstacles, our challenges, that especially show us where we are at and what we need to work on. If these thoughts and ideas on the hills and valleys of the spine have been resonating with you, and if you will practice with them, then two things are likely already happening, or soon will. The first is that you will be getting a shift and release of energy in your spine and the second is that you will be starting to feel how that energy very quickly moves between the different areas and, what might have started out as a fairly focused exercise, soon morphs into going up the next hill, or down the nearest valley, in any kind of order!

The shift and release of energy can bring relief, and hope, and all good things, including the highest states of being, but it can also bring the kind of healing reactions that I warned about at the beginning of this section. I want to bring this up again here, near the end. Bringing any of these spiritual practices into the body, which is where our spirit lives, greatly increases their power so, if you have been doing the meditations as we have been going along then what might have been theoretical the first time you heard it (and so you could have easily skipped over it) might now already be in the reality of felt experience - and of course that changes everything.

If you have had, or even are having, a healing reaction to any of this, if some old issue resurfaces, or a new symptom suddenly appears, then it would only be natural to have some worries and doubts about if what you're doing is safe, or whether you should stop it, but healing reactions are actually a sign that we are on the right track. They happen because the

shift and release of energy allows the river of the life force to better flow into areas that it was not able to reach so well before.

As well as anything that might happen physically, it is also highly possible that thoughts and feelings will come up, or are already coming up, in order to be processed and let go. If this happens, or when this happens, I encourage you to not stop but rather to take the healing reaction as a positive sign to keep going. What you are doing is getting more in touch with your own life force. You can trust the intelligence and the healing nature of that force to show you what you need to see, and to take you where you need to go.

The moving and morphing between different parts of the spine is very normal and healthy too. In any case, it can hardly be helped and it will probably just happen whether you want it to or not! By bringing your intention, and your awareness, into different parts of your spine, you are activating a potent process that then tends to take on a life of its own.

Some of that process may be to do with what is right there in your spine now. As I've mentioned earlier, it may be that you have some physical ache or other kind of imbalance in your spine already and, if that is the case then, for sure, your attention will be drawn back there. Wherever that ache or imbalance may be, these practices are safe and they are healing. They will help you to at least shift, and even perhaps eventually release, those blocks to the healing in your spine that the intelligent force of nature within your body is always trying to bring about.



I also want to mention that, especially if you have had a chronic problem in one of the hills or valleys of your spine, to encourage you to explore what can happen when you shift your energy and attention to its corresponding partner. I think many of us have had the experience that, in doubling down to try to fix a problem, we've only ended up making it worse, and it wasn't until we walked away from it that the solution presented itself.

It is a most interesting phenomenon to observe how much can change and shift when we stop trying to fix the problem that wants to occupy our attention and instead turn our awareness to another area that might seem disconnected but does actually have a close relationship to it. I really do encourage you to experiment with this for yourself if you have

been tormented by a chronic back issue because it can be a remarkably effective way to help shift something that was otherwise defying every other attempt to remedy it. Pairing is a powerful medicine. It stops us going into resistance. It helps us to stay in the flow. It opens us up to the great healing force of Nature within us.

Another point to mention in relation to all this is that once you open up one gateway then it is highly likely, I feel like I should say it is inevitable, that the other gateways will start to loosen their locks as well, and they will want to draw you into their own centres of energy.

If this is happening already, or when it does happen, don't fight back! If you get practiced at going within in this way, I think that you will find you are frequently drawn back to the same hill or valley many times. Your healing intelligence is inviting you to go deeper, to release the blocks that are associated with this area. If this happens, when this happens, it is not something to try to control, and it is certainly not something to resist. All I want to reinforce to you here is that, especially if some kind of healing reaction starts to unfold, or if you feel in any way stuck, to remember the power of pairing.

Allow yourself to feel the gateway, or the centre of energy, or the emotions, or even the ache that is drawing you to itself, and then allow your awareness to pair to another area, it could be somewhere else in your body for sure, and we are soon going to explore the great energy centres of the front of the body, the hara, but you also may be drawn to pair that first centre of awareness in your spine with another hill or valley above or below it. Then things will move again, you will not stay stuck, and you will feel the next step, and the next one after that, calling you to itself without you having to think about, or do, anything.

I say a lot more about this in the maps of the body sections in my free Ebook on constitutional complexity but, just briefly here, it could be helpful to understand, and interesting to learn, that the base hill of the spine is where we are at our most hot and damp (constitutionally we call this the Tiger territory) and that the thoracic upper hill of the spine is where we are at our most cool and dry (Elephant-Butterfly terrain). Hot and damp vs cool and dry. Each of these is at the opposite end of a spectrum that, when we don't pick a side but rather seek to find balance and harmony between them, helps us to connect to the extraordinary energy of love.

In a similar way, the lower valley of the spine, the lumbar region, is where we are at our most hot and dry (Eagle territory) and the upper valley of the spine (the land of the Bear) is where we are at our most cool and damp. Hot and dry vs cool and damp. So again, two sides of a spectrum that, when we have it in balance and flow, can help bring us the great richness of peace. I hope you will, like me, find it within yourself to marvel that such a possibility could even exist, that we could find such a treasure without taking a single step out into the world, because it lay within us all along!

You also might find it interesting to think about, and even feel for yourself, how the two lower areas, the bottom hill and valley are hotter, whilst the two higher areas, the upper hill

and valley are cooler. I think of the Earth, how hot it is at its core, how molten lava lies underneath the surface and then how the upper part, the crust, is so much cooler that the land can support life and that even water can exist. Hot below and cool above.

Compassion and surrender, the first two practices we explored, the ones that relate in the spine to the thoracic hill over the heart, and the valley of the neck, are cool in nature, they are yielding and soft, they need gentleness and a high level of consciousness to be in tune with their energy.

Forgiveness and gratitude, relating to the bottom hill of the tail bone and the lower valley of the lumbar spine are hotter in nature, they are not so passive but need a step or two to engage the vital, moving, healing forces that they represent. By connecting a hotter lower area, a hill or valley, with a cooler higher area, another hill or valley, we keep a flow, a balance, so that we don't get too caught or stuck in one or another place, especially the ones where we have a block in our energy.

There is an aspect here that is a bit like a seesaw, where if you can just put a little weight, a little awareness over to the other side then, like what can happen with a lever, things can finally shift and move that would only have become more stuck if you had continued to spiral in on them.

Again, these are just some first steps to get familiar with the terrain, to make a start. You certainly don't have to keep that kind of dual awareness going, of the two hills or the two valleys, to move forwards with any of this. What is also likely to happen, especially as you go further into any of the hills or valleys of the spine, and the practices that they relate to, is that you will be especially drawn to one area in particular. If, or even when this happens, I encourage you to allow yourself to come back to this area in your spine, and what it relates to, many times. Not to ignore the other practices or gateways, they will certainly help you to release blocks and shift energy in other areas too. But there is a good chance that one in particular will call out to you the most and that you will want to practice, or at least consciously be there, more than the others.

If this happens with you, then there is something very important that you need to know about all these practices, and all these gateways, and that is that if you go into any of them deeply enough then they all lead to the same place. Likewise, if you do go back and forth, from one hill to another, and from one valley to another, and especially if you start to bring the practices together at the same time, to be thinking the thoughts of compassion and ownership and forgiveness, of surrender and gratitude, that soon enough it will all start to merge together. You will feel your spine and your being as a whole, you will be centred into a highly conscious and aware state of being and you will come, from whichever steps you may have taken to get there, to the same place.

What is that place? Again, I am not going to be anything better than woolly here, and for that I apologise and can only ask for your forgiveness for being nothing more than a

journeyman who is seeking to share his way rather than any kind of a master who could tell you what's at the end of it. I could say that the place I am talking about is where we are in love and at peace and I guess that is the gist of it, although those words peace, and love, are a most feeble echo of what it is they actually stand for. Equally nondescript would be to say that, going into the practices and through the gateways of the spine, we can come to oneness. I imagine you have heard people talk about oneness before too, and I wonder if you have ever thought what exactly it is supposed to even mean? I know I have, and here I am now talking about it to you too because yes, there is a sense of being one with everything, which is as blissful as it is indescribable.

What is perfectly clear is that no one can take a single step for you, towards any of this, but that it is a truly remarkable thing to consider that you can take steps yourself towards peace and love, and even towards that sense of oneness with the ocean of life.

I say steps, and I talk about a journey, but I have not come to any kind of end point with any of this and so, even after nearly 40 years of heartfelt practice to base all this on, it is still with the greatest trepidation that I share what I have to say, because I feel as if I am talking about how to dive into, and swim, in the ocean, but all I am really able to do is to point out some footprints in the sand. Some of those footprints are my own, they are steps that I have taken often enough to know that they can be sure footholds to at least make a good start. Others are ones that I have studied closely, and followed carefully, from some people whose footprints are most precious to me - Lao Tsu, Krishnamurti, Rumi, Jesus.

Allow me to both ask and answer a question. Why take such a journey if we have no certainty of its destination and are only traveling into the unknown? Well, speaking for myself, there are certainly moments of peace, and love, and even oneness that are extremely encouraging and, without those moments, those lights, I surely would have lost my way in the dark long ago. As well as that, I think a lot of it also just comes back to hope. Hope that there is a reason for our suffering and our struggles, that they are not just bad luck in an uncaring universe. Hope that sickness can be sacred, not always, obviously, but it can actually often be what creates a learning and healing journey that would never have happened otherwise.

I know that the vast majority of people don't want such a journey, not even to take a first step, and that's ok, but I also have great hopes for us as a species, that enough of us could be capable of rising above our shadows, our hurts, hardening and resentments for there to be a possibility of living in peace and harmony with one another. I can tell you that I have zero percent hope, or any kind of faith, that our species will ever find peace or harmony from some kind of new leadership or group of individuals taking over. Whoever wants power should be immediately disqualified from having it because power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, as we have all seen, just as much now as it always has been for all of history. If there ever could be the kind of revolution that could bring about peace on Earth it would start with individual, ordinary people, like you and me.

Coming back to the back. If all the practices and all four of the gateways all lead to the same place then why should we trouble ourselves with anything other than the one that's the easiest for us? Well, if you do seem to have a kind of 'home base' in one of the practices and one of the hills or valleys, then I would just encourage you not to push against that but rather just go with the flow of it as far as it can take you, and I only wish that this could be enough! Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on how you look at it and whether you would prefer this whole hero journey to be a lot simpler and less complex than it is, which I for one would not blame you for, or whether you don't mind so much, in the greater scheme of things, that it is all remarkably complex and multi-layered, the plain truth is that we just have to take care of everything, and there isn't one part of us that can be left out or left behind on the journey. What follows in the next section goes into this further.

For now, finishing with the hills and valleys of the spine, and how they can connect to the different spiritual practices, I just want to conclude by encouraging you to start with a first step, or a couple of steps and then allow things to morph and evolve and even start to show you your own way forwards from there. You truly do have a most remarkably intelligent force of Nature that lives within you, it is you and it is also something beyond you at the same time. Perhaps this is what you could sincerely say 'I am yours' to, but in that case you should know that, just as much, in every way that matters, it also belongs to you.

Without any shadow of a doubt, it is always trying to help you and it is 100% for you in every possible way. In many ways it could be called the force of love, which would be as good a word for it as any, but the point is that you can deeply trust the process of getting in touch with this healing force, take some steps into it, and then allow it to show you your way.

We are about to move on to some new and deeply interesting material in the next section but, before we go there, perhaps now or soon, you would like to come back just once more with me to go within, to the back of the hero journey.

I want you to come to it now in a very open, '*the truth is a pathless land*' kind of way. Set the intention to bring your awareness into your spine in a way that allows the first step to be



wherever you are most naturally drawn. Then just be there, feeling whatever there is to feel without trying to change anything, or do anything, and then allow the second step to unfold just as naturally. Pair your awareness between these two places, wherever they are, without any resistance, or hardening or judgement, and then, just as easily, just as naturally, allow the third step to show itself to you.

Feeling your spirit in your body in this way is very lovely, timeless, meditative. The mind quickly becomes quiet when we pair our awareness into two parts of our body at the same time, and the spine is an excellent place to practice this, because there is so much nerve sensation running through it at all times, though our inner being can be just as strongly felt anywhere else as well. We are one, and yet we contain so many parts. We are like an ocean ourselves, with each of our cells, our particles, being our drops.

If and when your mind wants to reassert its existence and come back to thinking then, if you find yourself in an area of your spine, it could be healing, perhaps even kind of fun, but certainly absorbing, to remember the practice and the nutshell of the words for the spiritual practices that associate to this area. If you are anything like me then it will take you many repetitions to lock in those three word phrases in the areas they most relate to but I think that need for going over something many times to learn it is perfectly normal and even quite healthy because, as always, it is only in the practicing that we can become in any way fluent.

Now, or whenever you are ready to go back to the back of the great hero journey, seeking your most precious peace, and love, I wish you an excellent practice!



The Front of the Hero Journey

There is more to share on bringing these spiritual practices into the realm of the real, in our physical body, but now we are heading around to the front. It may turn out what follows will resonate with you more naturally or easily than where we've been in the hills and valleys of the spine, in which case I might have introduced you to this 'back to front' but what I think is most likely to happen eventually, after some practice with the process of learning the steps, is that you will pick out pieces from the different meditations and will go back and forth between parts of them, using some steps that work especially well for you to get a sure foothold within, and then you will be able to work out your own next best steps from there.

We are into the realm of the heart and the hara now. The word 'hara' means the belly, it is a lovely old word from the Japanese tradition of Shiatsu, which is something I used to practice in my early years and have been deeply influenced by.

In this new terrain, I'm going to introduce some new ideas as well as revise some of the key themes around the spiritual practices we've already been talking about. Again, as much as you are already honouring me with your attention in reading what I have to say, I will continue to ask you to engage with this material with your own experience, through practice and experiments, so that it becomes yours to own and use however you wish.

The hara, the belly, is like a cauldron, a pot of soup with all the energetic ingredients blending into each other. Whilst we may be able to more easily divide the long S-bend of the spine into hills and valleys, there is just as much a clearly definable map of the belly that can help us to travel well on our sacred healing journey.

What is happening just under our noses and right under our hearts influences how we feel and what kind of day we have far more than we could consciously imagine, and it is a most worthwhile endeavour to consciously journey within to this rich terrain of life and energy.



Cleansing and Forgiveness

Let's start with the bottom right quadrant. If you draw an imaginary line across your navel to the top of your hips and then another line from your sternum (at the centre of the bottom of your ribs), down through your navel again, and all the way down to your pubis bone, then you have your belly, your hara, divided into four parts.

This bottom right area of the hara, the belly, has a profoundly powerful energy in it that is most helpful to get in touch with. This is the cleansing quarter, or quadrant. This is the meeting place of two great rivers of both nourishment and cleansing in the body - where the small intestine ends and the large intestine, the bowel, begins. This is the part of the hara that is most hot and damp, in constitutional medicine it is the terrain of the Tiger. This cleansing quadrant of the hara connects to, and relates to, the energy and the feelings that swirl around the base of the spine, the tail-bone, and it has many similar properties in terms of the primal force of survival.

If you can get in touch with it and in tune with it then, just like the hill at the base of the spine, it can release potent, healing energy into your body and being. This area of the hara, like the base of the spine, is one that people can feel instinctively anxious to approach, because even without consciously knowing anything about it, our subconscious intelligence knows that these are the areas where our survival force and shadow-land of our fear energy has its homebase.

Fear is so deeply misunderstood, and feared, but it is not our enemy. It is there to keep us safe and to help protect us against the myriad forms of harm that can come to us. If we can connect to these parts of our bodies without fear, then we can make friends with the energy that resides here in our subconscious being, and so become less fearful, and even become courageous. Courage is especially needed for hero journeys.

In a short while, I am going to ask you to do a meditation, an experiential learning, into feeling this cleansing quadrant in the lower right part of your belly. There will be nothing tricky or complicated about it, no special technique or preparation will be required, and it will be similar to what we have been doing already. This next step is to make our spiritual practice more powerful by bringing it more deeply into our body, our subconscious.

The lower right cleansing quadrant is the area where the spiritual practice of forgiveness can be most deeply practiced from within the core of our hara. Forgiveness is very closely related to cleansing. A great many of our treatment programmes, for all kinds of health problems, begin with some kind of cleansing and, whilst that work is often based more in the physical, it is a recurring theme that there is something that needs to be let go for the healing journey to really get started.

I'm going to do this in two stages, two meditations. The first is to get oriented into feeling within your hara and at the same time to connect the dots to what we have been doing

before. The second meditation will be to introduce a new step, in the form of a searching question. The question may be something that you only need to ask yourself once, or now and again, but it can also be a powerful step for healing.

Let's come to that later, for now, when we start this next practice shortly, I'm going to ask you to begin by bringing your focus back into the base of your spine, as we did before, but then this time I want you to also come forwards into the lower right quadrant of the belly, to pair your awareness into these two places at the same time, and then just allow what is already there to be experienced without trying to do anything or change anything.

This is exactly the same process you did when you sought to pair your awareness into both the hills or valleys of your spine at the same time, except now we are pairing the lower hill of your spine with the lower right side of your belly. Even though there are deep, primal forces in these two areas, and by pairing your awareness of them both at the same time you are opening the gateway to their energy much wider than we've done before, I am sure that the intelligence of your body will be gentle with you. You may become pleasantly aware of the damp heat in these areas but nothing scary or overwhelming will happen.

Even though these are the home bases of this extraordinary survival energy that we most usually associate to our fear response, the resting states of this part of us are not agitated at all. The survival energy that centres in the base of our spine and the lower right quadrant of our belly is powerful, watchful, ready, but it is resting here.

When fear comes up, it floods out into the body and we cannot possibly learn how to become friends with it when it is out and storming through us. We can only build the friendship when things are much safer and quieter, such as they will be when you come to these areas of your body in a conscious way, and most especially when you come with the intention of healing, and forgiveness.

Start by simply pairing your awareness into your lower spine and your lower right belly. There may be a lot to feel here once you go within. Whatever you experience, just be with it, go with it, don't feel you need to analyse anything, don't think you need to worry about or even process what it is that you can perceive, at least not right now.

So maybe not right away, because perhaps you will just want to notice what there is to feel for a start as you pair these centres for energy and healing within your body, your subconscious, but eventually, take a third step to remember some of the key words in their nutshells in your thoughts, to bring the energy of forgiveness further into your awareness.

Firstly, vitally, most importantly, *'I own me'*. Of course, you truly do own you, all of your experience, all of your being, but bringing this sense of ownership directly into these parts of your body will help pave the way to take ownership more fully. *'I own me'* and then think and feel the next nutshell *'I love you'* and allow yourself to feel as much mercy and

compassion towards yourself as you can. Stay soft and centred in this awareness, no judgement, no hardening, just being here, in the eternal moment of now.

Then especially if anything comes up, any ache, or hurt, or any kind of shadow within your being, take the next step, thinking in your body and feeling in your mind the great healing medicine of *'I'm so sorry'*. Allow yourself to feel truly sorry for any and all hurt that has been experienced, and that has caused any kind of damage to you, or from you for that matter, because if we hurt someone else then we just hurt ourselves. *'I'm so sorry'* means I don't want the hurt to happen again, I want it to stop, I want to heal.

Then, if you are ready for it, if you want to, you can ask for forgiveness, or for healing, because they are one and the same. Ask for forgiveness from yourself, ask for forgiveness from your own body, ask for forgiveness from the divine, ask for forgiveness from whatever you perceive as the force that gives you life, and allows you to get up and try again, no matter how many times you fall.

Let's give this a go, I don't want to build up any great expectations, it really is completely ok if you have nothing but a peaceful connecting of the dots, but neither do I want you to pull away if you do start to feel some powerful sensations. Once you experience anything, at any level, then it belongs to you, and you can take it further however you wish.

For now, for the first two steps, let's set the intention to feel the base of the spine and the lower right quadrant of the belly at the same time. Pair them together and be with however that feels and with whatever happens next. Then, as soon as you are ready, practice forgiveness, even if it just the first two steps of 'I own me' and 'I love you', for any amount of time, from as little as a few heartbeats or, especially if anything comes up, until you feel you have gone through the whole practice. Then finish by coming back to the paired awareness of the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly, and again just feel whatever there is to be felt here. This is you, you are this, it is safe to be with what is.

Please have a go now or as soon as you next can.



If we had done this together, in the same room, I would love to have been able to ask you some questions afterwards. What did you feel, were there any difficulties, do you have any questions about any of it?

In the absence of you being with me, just right now as I write this, I will imagine what you could, conceivably, ask me. Of course I know that none of the following questions might be what you would ever need to ask. In my imagination, I threw the net out to one person who was worried that they had felt too little and then another who was worried that they felt too much, and what they might then conceivably have said, and how I could have responded.

Q: I didn't really feel anything by going within, to these places, did I do something wrong?

A: No, God no. Not really feeling anything would be classed as a safe, gentle and easy first step into this practice, and it certainly does not mean you did anything wrong whatsoever. If there is an underlying worry, behind a question like this, that you might never feel anything, no matter how many times you were to try it, then you can put that concern aside too. Herbalists follow traditions that go back many thousands of years, we know that these potent centres of energy within the body always have a lot going on in them. If you can't feel anything, or anything much, when you begin, then just take it as a sign that the intelligence of your body is welcoming your awareness into its inner workings in a gentle way. Come back to the practice again and I believe that I can promise you that you will feel more and more as you relax into, and get familiar with, this practice. I never make a promise lightly and nor am I throwing this promise out without care either. You will feel more the more you relax into, and get familiar with, this practice.

I don't know if you have experienced this yourself at some time in your life, or you have witnessed it with someone close to you, but there are many people who are deeply disconnected from their feelings and, if you ask them how they feel, they may find it very difficult to answer. They are in their minds, and in their lives, but not in their bodies. They can talk about any number of topics, but not how they actually feel.

It isn't necessarily important to know why someone is not able to feel emotions or anything much in their body. There are all kinds of reasons this happens, and you can be sure that, if it's happening, then whatever those reasons were, they were good enough to make it happen. It's much more important to not be in denial about it as a problem, to not make it a badge of honour, because people can convince themselves that it is a virtue to be unfeeling and unaffected by emotion. It is not healthy to not feel, feeling is what makes us human, being able to feel is what separates us from the AI god-like intelligences that are already amongst us and are surely here to stay.

To the person who, for any reason, felt they couldn't feel, I would say that all these practices, in different ways, will help heal that. Because they can help us be with our feelings, to heal

the hurts of them and so help us find our way towards what we want to feel, which is happiness, which is contentment, which is peace and love.

Q: I did the forgiveness practice, thought 'I own me' and 'I love you' said 'I'm so sorry' like I meant it, and even asked to please be forgiven, but I didn't really feel like anything changed or happened, was I supposed to?

A: That's a great question, thanks for asking it, and I'm so glad you tried out the whole forgiveness practice with all the steps! (Well, I would say something like that in real life, you have to give people a lot of encouragement and support when you are giving them the challenge of learning something new, so I'm staying in character with this back and forth with an imaginary you!)

I think that, for most of us, the journey of healing is very gradual, step by step, and actually much slower than we imagine it probably ought to be. Practicing forgiveness, especially for yourself, is just never a one time deal. You have to come back to it many times and, each time you do, there may be something that will come up, but equally there may be nothing and that's ok too. If you don't feel anything much when you begin this then do not take that as a bad sign whatsoever. You are establishing a new pattern of thinking, and looking at something. First of all, even before you might notice anything happening or changing, you have to get used to a new way of thinking and viewing yourself in this regard.

'I own me' is a mountain of an idea. Our whole culture and way of thinking is really based on a lot of disempowerment, on all kinds of levels. Taking responsibility for yourself is a very different direction to be taking your thinking. Even if there is nothing there right now to sink your teeth into, and you just run over the thoughts and ideas around forgiveness within yourself, if you are really serious about your healing journey, then I suggest that you come back to the practice and be ready to observe that, as you become familiar with the thoughts, as what they represent starts to sink in deeper, how your feelings begin to change, but it could be subtle, you may not even notice it happening at first, until there will be a proof that you can rely on, something tangible, and then you will have something solid underneath you, because you will have earned trust.



Q: I experienced this [...] and it kind of frightened me a little bit. Should I stop this, did I do something wrong, is there something wrong with me that I don't know about?

A: Ok so I guess you could already predict what I would say to a question like this... I would say 'don't worry, it's safe, you won't come to any harm etc'. And I do say that, but please don't skip thinking about this one if it hasn't happened to you, and so maybe you might think it wouldn't bother you if it did.

I emphatically do not want to say anything to make you have any hesitation about picking up this practice, but I also know that we are getting in touch with really powerful energies within our bodies when we go into this kind of inner space. By combining the base of the spine, and the cleansing quadrant, and the thoughts around ownership and forgiveness we are opening a powerful gateway to healing. There really is a strong likelihood that, maybe not the first time, but that soon enough it is highly possible that you will have some strong experiences that could actually be a little bit frightening. All these things we have been talking about here are theories until they are proven. The proof comes in your own, undeniable, experience.

I don't want to speculate what 'this' could be, because that sets up an unnecessary expectation that goes into what you could feel or even what you should feel. I do want to say, as much as this might still be sounding like a kind of philosophical idea at this stage, that there is a survival energy, like a wild beast, that is located in the basement of the body, resting in its lair, that when you actually experience some of this for yourself you won't need any more convincing about how powerful these forces can be. It is a part of you, no doubt, but it is also something much greater than you, something that protects you at the same time as it drives you to keep the flame of life alive.

When you go on a hero journey of healing, every piece of unfinished business, every unhealed hurt and every shadow has to eventually come out into the light of understanding and integration. The inner darkness is not the enemy, it is only denial that is the enemy, our darkness, our shadows, show us the way to our light.

Q: I am doing the practice of forgiveness at the same time as centring into my cleansing quadrant and the base of my spine and some dark memories and unpleasant feelings are coming up. They are making me want to stop, what should I do?

A: Yes, this kind of thing happens a lot on the healing journey. It is what we call a healing reaction. Don't stop, but do pace yourself. You have to take it on board that healing is slow and that you won't get there any faster by pushing yourself harder. But do not fear, this is not a bad reaction or an adverse reaction, it is a sign that you are on the right track and that you are doing the right kind of practice (or we could say that you are taking the right kind of medicine).

Remember to bring compassion into your practice. Remind yourself, tell yourself, *'I love you'* and practice thinking in your body and feeling in your mind *'soft, centred, and now'*.

Compassion, mercy and love make it possible to do the deep work in the shadow-lands of the subconscious. Before the trust of positive experience can be earned, some faith may be required. The faith is that you will not come to harm by being with what is, even when 'what is' can be unpleasant. The faith is that there will always be a release, a healing process of letting go, when we don't fight against what we feel but accept it and allow it to be with us as fully as it needs to be, for as long as it needs to be. These are old ways, they have been proven by others. You can give them your faith to begin with and then they will earn your trust, and then they will be yours for life.



Fishing For an Answer

In a short while I would like you to have another go at the same practice we have just done, in all the same ways, but this next time I want you to introduce a new step, not one that you would then expect to keep taking, but to do it at least once, and then just whenever you might need it again. This next step is merely a thought, it is just a question, but it could be important.



Have you ever thought about how a question mark resembles a hook? Questions are hooks, if you are the one asking it then you are holding on to the point of the question, the dot at the bottom, and you are throwing out the top part, the hook, to see what you can catch with it. Sometimes we catch something good, worth keeping, and sometimes we miss, and sometimes we get something on our hook that would be better to just throw back again, and it's the same when we are the one being questioned.

When you come back to this practice, I invite you to try it again in much the same way. Although you can't step foot in the same river twice and it will be at least a little different however you might approach it, this time, after you have paired your awareness into the base of your spine and your lower right hara, and when you are doing the conscious forgiveness practice, I want you to insert a question in between 'I own me' and 'I love you' and before you might get to 'I'm so sorry'. You could put this question to yourself in all kinds of different ways but the gist of it is something like this. You go within and ask your body, the intelligence of your own inner nature, something along the lines of *'how am I hurting you?'* or *'how am I causing harm to myself?'*

I didn't want to start with this sooner, because I wanted you to get some practice and to get your head around the idea that you have to come to the subject of forgiveness with compassion. Also, it might not be a problem for you personally, but you should know that a lot of people really struggle to say the words 'I'm sorry', because their pride, or need to be right, or whatever other kind of dance of the self that their egoic mind is leading them on, means they would rather *'break the arm than bend the knee'*.

I wanted you to get familiar with the thoughts of taking responsibility for yourself while, at the same time, being open to feeling truly sorry for any hurt that you experience with a

sense of mercy and compassion rather than hardness and judgement. I mentioned earlier that forgiveness can be really hard, and that it is impossible to overestimate how hard it can be, so I really don't think we can move forwards without those steps in place. But if they are in place, if you have got the sense of them, and are ready and willing to take things further, then this can be a next step.

'How am I hurting myself?' When you come to do this, please ask it in a truly open way, with the intention to listen to the answer with an open heart. It's only a small question, a little hook, but you might get something big on the hook, something worth catching.

Who are you asking? And aren't you just opening up the Pandora's box of the judgemental mind to come forth with all the usual self-criticisms, shortcomings and personal failings?

This is why it is so terribly important to ask this question in a meditative state, within your body, anchored in the realm of your inner intelligence. You are asking yourself, of course, but you are not just asking your analytical mind. We could say that you are asking your gut, and at the same time the energy centre at the base of your spine. This is a very different process to that of thought alone. There is a bodily awareness that comes with this approach that goes much deeper than opinions and concepts about right and wrong. If you come to the question with compassion, with a softness and a tenderness that you truly, in your heart of hearts, do not want to cause harm to yourself, and that you are willing to be sorry for any and all hurt, then your inner intelligence can feel your intention, and will answer you very truthfully.

What comes back to your question may surprise you, and may be much deeper than what you might have expected. Your inner intelligence is likely to shine a light directly on what is causing you the most harm. It won't be so concerned about some minor bad habit, not at first, and certainly not if there is anything that is causing greater harm. You can trust, deeply and completely, that the healing intelligence of your own Nature knows exactly what is causing it harm. The information is already there, and really it is whether we are willing to look at it, or whether we would prefer to stay in denial, that is the only point of difference as to whether we can see it or not.

Unlike our critical and judgemental minds, the intelligent life force within us does not in any way love us less, or serve us less, when we do things to harm it. I guess I know this pretty well by now, at a theoretical level, but when I feel it for myself and witness it in others, this phenomenon never ceases to amaze me. In fact, as well as a sense of wonder, it truly gives me endless joy and delight. It is the proof of love. That our life force continues to try to help us be as well as we possibly can right up until our very last moments, no matter what we do to it.

This is the spirit of forgiveness. It is unconditional, it doesn't depend on us doing anything to deserve it whatsoever. Nonetheless, it is itself soft, and vulnerable, and anything but all-powerful. It can be damaged, it is damaged by the many ways we find to do ourselves

harm. We are mortal, none of us are getting out of this alive, but nearly all of us could be so much healthier, and happier, if we were to stop doing ourselves harm and just allow our self-healing intelligence to heal what's wrong and then keep us well. Keep us well for a long time too if we would let it!

Asking the question of your own inner life force *'how am I doing you harm?'* or whatever way you want to put it, can catch a response that can open up a gateway to healing. If you can perceive what it is that needs attention, and needs to change, then the first and most essential steps to this practice remain the same. Without any dissembling, without seeking to blame anyone or anything else, without being a victim, you take full responsibility for how you feel and who you are... *'I own me'*. You own all of it, the good, the bad and the ugly.

It is not pretty to see your shadow self, the part of you that does harm to yourself, and no doubt others along the way as well. But don't look away, look at it, open up to it, and allow yourself to feel love and compassion and truly sorry for all of it. They are just words, many people throw them out like they were nothing but hot air, but if you put your heart into them, and mean them, then when you say *'I'm so sorry'* you are saying that I really, really want to do my best to not continue to do the thing I'm so sorry about!

When you get to that point, then you can ask for help. You could call the help by any other name, call it grace, call it mercy, call it forgiveness, or call it healing, but it is ok to ask for it. Whether we get it or not is another matter, but at least if you know what it is that you need then you have a chance. If you don't know what you want and don't even know what to ask for, then you're lost, on some kind of journey for sure, but not a healing one.

'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me'

Ok, so this next step of this practice where we put a question in the middle, may take us somewhat deeper into what exactly we might need to be sorry about! When you come to it, please do the same process as we've just started with, where you bring your awareness into the base of your spine and the right lower cleansing quadrant of your belly at the same time. Pair them together and linger there again for a few moments. This will get easier with practice. You don't have to get it right the first time, and you can come back to it anytime.

By bringing your awareness into these parts of your body, at the same time as doing your practice of forgiveness, you are connecting your heart and your mind with the great power of your inner intelligence where it runs at its hottest and dampest.

The energy here is intense, primal, ever-moving. I encourage you to allow yourself to be drawn into it, many times over, because this is the kind of practice that deeply rewards repetition. When you are ready, drop in the thought, the question, and then like a fisher, just leave the hook there, and wait.

I mentioned earlier, in the section on the hills and valleys of the spine, how you can reach more of a point on the hills whereas the valleys are more diffuse. If this draws you, if you want to experiment with it, you may be able to feel how at the very tip of your tailbone there is already a hook right there, which can catch all kinds of interesting feelings and insights. Likewise at the confluence, the meeting point of the rivers of your small and large bowel, in the middle of the lower right quadrant, there is a place called the 'ileo-cecal valve' which has a very defined and potent point of energy, one that opens and closes according to the wisdom of your body which knows what to hold on to for nourishment, and what to begin to let go for cleansing. You don't have to be clever to connect to these points, you don't need any special training, just an interest to go within and explore, and to be open to feeling whatever there is to feel.

I am talking a lot, because I love these subjects and find them endlessly interesting myself, but now let me quickly summarise this meditation practice so you can easily remember what we are seeking to do for this next step:

- 1) Go within to take two steps to pair your awareness within your hot, damp Tiger terrain between the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly. Just be with whatever you feel here, go between these centres, back and forth, and then try to feel them as a whole, as one combined, potent, primal energy within you.
- 2) While trying to keep a part of your awareness here, in your body, in these primal centres, bring in the third step of the thoughts that come into the practice of forgiveness, starting with '*I own me*' and '*I love you*'. Try to feel them in your mind at the same time as thinking them in the centres of energy that you have first paired within your body.
- 3) Drop a hook of a question into your body, into your subconscious. Ask yourself openly, courageously, '*How am I hurting you?*' Don't wait for an answer if nothing comes back right away or if you can just tell that it is your mind talking back to you rather than your body. It is enough to ask the question with a sincere heart. Your body, your subconscious, the healing intelligence of nature that lives within you knows the exact answer of what most needs your attention and it will tell you or show you soon enough.
- 4) If you already have an awareness of what it is that you are doing to cause the greatest harm, or if any kind of ache or pain or shadow has already come into your awareness then move into the next step of the practice of forgiveness with the heartfelt medicine of '*I'm so sorry*', and then, when you can feel yourself ready to ask with a true heart, think, feel and say '*please forgive me, or please heal me*'.

For the great, necessary and divine practice of forgiveness, we need a willingness to take responsibility for ourselves, to see where we are going wrong and doing harm, and then we also need the wisdom to know that we will need help to change our

patterns and ways and that love is the great healer, and source of that help, and that we can ask for it to help us.

- 5) You can of course go back and forth from any of the steps, and can also always just follow wherever your heart takes you, but you also might like to finish the practice by coming back to the first two steps by again just pairing your awareness between the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly, to be there in peace, and without fear.

Please have a go now, or whenever it best suits you and you are ready to dive in, hook and all, for healing, cleansing and forgiveness.



Thoughts on Cleansing

All living things must cleanse to be healthy. Cleansing is so fundamental to the health of all forms of life that some kind of illness is certain if it can't be done well. Deadly illness is certain if it can't be done at all.

We must take in nourishment; for example air, water and food, and we have to clear out the waste products that inevitably form as we process that nourishment. Plus there are all the countless other metabolic and chemical actions and reactions that are happening in every moment of our existence, all of which produce some form of waste product that has to be processed and eliminated.

That's just the physical side of things. For us people, our feelings and emotions, our thoughts and experiences, equally have the capacity to leave a residue that can harm us if they are not able to be processed and let go. The saying '*it's better out than in*' could really be called a rule, one that applies to everything, both physically and spiritually.

Cleansing can be so integral to the success of a healing journey that, in many cases, it is where we need to start. The treatment in my clinic that I prescribe most often is a cleansing program. For three months, which is about the time it takes for the entire blood stream to be replenished, the patient takes a course of cleansing herbs and follows a cleansing diet. Perhaps they came in with a condition that someone might intuitively associate to a need for cleansing, such as having a chronic skin or digestive problem, but it's really not the condition that determines whether we should focus on cleansing but rather the terrain of the person's underlying health. This is constitutional medicine in a nutshell, you don't treat the condition, you treat the person who has the condition.

Learning how to read the tongue and the pulse helps a lot with working out the constitution as well as where we need to focus to help the person to heal their condition. In coming into the front of the hero journey, we've started talking about the hara. Another method that can help is getting practice with feeling over the belly over a layer of clothing, you can get a lot from that with practice. Another method to help work out where to focus that has been seen to be especially helpful for my students who are starting to take on cases and so, quite rightly, can have healthy doubts about which direction to take things, is the rather mystical, or I could even say rather magical art of pulse testing, where you give a drop of a herb, amongst others in a line up that you have randomised to not know what they are, to the patient's tongue whilst feeling their pulse before during and after. It's a method that has been seen to be remarkably accurate in helping to tell whether a cleansing, or other approach, might be the best one.

As mentioned in the beginning, in my own practice, because of how busy the clinic has become after all these years, most people are invited to only come back if their health issues have not resolved or greatly improved which means, in most cases, though they may come back to get repeats of their herbal medicines from our clinic, I don't usually see them again.

Nearly everyone that comes in has been recommended to us by someone that they already know and trust, a friend or family member. There are people in their lives who are important to them who also want them to have benefitted by coming here and I think it is fair to say that if that patient was not getting a good result that they would reach out to us again. The reason they don't come back is because they got what they came for. Why I am mentioning this here is that it seems such clear and incontrovertible proof for the power of cleansing, that so many serious and stuck health conditions were able to self-resolve once the person was simply running their systems more cleanly.

Even if cleansing is not the primary focus of the medicines, I will often add one or two cleansing herbs to a formula, to give the liver and the kidneys a tonic at the same time as whatever else we are doing. And even if we don't make a cleansing diet the focus, we might instead be doing a diet that removes carbohydrates, or one that takes out allergens, which is really just another form of cleansing by a different name and a different route.

Cleansing is the cornerstone of my work, it has great value in helping people move forward in their health, and yet I know there is still so much more to it than what I provide with herbs and diet alone. I am acutely conscious of how much there is also a spiritual, an energetic, side to cleansing, especially within the great subject of forgiveness, that can be just as powerful, and transformative, as anything in the realm of substance, but these are not easy or simple matters to get across in the time we have to cover everything else in an appointment, plus most people haven't come for that.

I am speaking again now to one of my core motivations in writing this book, because I imagine a person who actually might be open to doing cleansing on a much more spiritual level, who could pick this work up or put it down as they chose, and get into it if and when they wanted to, and I would love to still be able to support such a person when they were ready for the deeper work in their healing journey...

Another thought on cleansing I want to share is about what an almost complete blind spot conventional medicine has towards the whole subject of cleansing!

I am not philosophically against conventional medicine, that would be daft, anyone who wants to work with people to help relieve suffering is basically on the same team, and there are many marvellous modern interventions that save life and ease misery, especially in the realm of emergency medicine. However, the overall approach of only taking drugs to remove



the symptoms of disease whilst not doing anything to treat the cause of the problems does not empower or educate people to heal themselves and become healthier so they stop being so ill as to need drugs in the first place!

The first law of medicine is, 'First, do no harm' (*Primum non nocere*), the second law of holistic medicine is, 'Treat the cause' (*Tolle causum*), and the third law is to work with 'The healing intelligence of Nature' (*Vis medicatrix naturae*) which we were talking about earlier.

The first two laws come first for a reason. Of course you have to not do harm in anything you give or recommend, but treating the cause means you also have to stop doing the harm that was causing the imbalance and disease in the first place.

In a great many instances, that harm is coming from something that the person is doing to themselves, consciously or unconsciously, and that they need to stop, or let go, or at the very least reduce, for the self-healing to be able to happen. This is a lot of what cleansing is, it is helping the system to let go of the burden of wastes, in whatever form they exist, but it is also doing something to stop adding too much to the burden again!



Without needing to learn Latin and without needing to be told, I think that many people who have become unwell know this intuitively. Many times I have met with a patient who has told me, with a familiar look of disbelief on their faces, that the specialist who they asked if there was anything that they could be eating or doing that could be making them unwell, just brushed their question aside as if it were a foolish thing to ask. Doctors do not get trained in this area. They do not have therapeutic tools to help the body better cleanse itself. It is a blind spot and, unless their patient is a raging alcoholic, or a smoker, the subject of stopping doing themselves harm hardly comes up for discussion.

All that said, it would be incorrect to blame only one side of the therapeutic relationship for this state of affairs. The majority of our population do not want to do cleansing diets, or take herbs for any amount of time, or actually do anything to treat the cause of their illnesses! They want to carry on exactly as they were, with everything they want to eat and drink and everything else that they want to do and they are quite willing to take as many drugs as needed for as long as necessary, including for the rest of their lives, if that is what it will cost to suppress the symptoms without them having to do any other work.

Healing journeys are not for everyone, they take enormous courage, awareness and perseverance, that is why they are also called hero journeys.

What I also see is, for people who are suffering badly from one or the myriad ways we can have a health misfortune, there can be a place for drugs, especially in the acute stages when the suffering is too intense and the self-healing intelligence is overwhelmed and unable to rally its forces to begin to cure the condition. No one who hasn't walked a mile in someone else's shoes should make judgements on what they have to do to get through the day.

That said, nearly all the people that come to see someone like me have no wish to be taking drugs for the rest of their lives. If they are on prescription medicines then I tell them that we have a kind of rule in the clinic which is that they first have to be making clear, consistent and substantial health improvements before they stop or even reduce the drugs that they have been using. People quickly understand the sense and safety of this and, with this approach, there is usually a high success rate of getting drug free after a while, or at least off most of what they were taking.

I also encourage them to talk with their GP about what they are doing, hopefully to get their doctor's support, which happens more than you might expect, but also so that their doctor can assist with monitoring how things are going if needed. Further to that, I want them to have an open and honest therapeutic relationship with their doctor, especially in case that is a person in their lives that one day may need to activate the emergency safety net that the conventional system can be excellent at providing.

Nevertheless, however open minded their doctor might be, they're not going to talk with their patient about cleansing, let alone spiritual cleansing, however much a person might need it just about more than anything.



Do You Need Cleansing?

Reading the above, or from whatever it is that you have been dealing with in your life and health, may have brought you to wonder - *'do I need to do cleansing?'*

Maybe this hasn't come up for you, but if it has then it can be an important question, and not one to presuppose the answer to.

I've said something about how much of a difference it can make to give a cleansing program when it is needed but there is another aspect to this subject that I also need to tell you about, which is what happens when someone has been doing too much cleansing for too long.

This is typically a person who has given up a lot of foods from their diet and is rather restricted in what they can eat and who is also taking cleansing herbs or supplements for much longer than 3 months. They usually present as run down, perhaps underweight, but certainly undernourished, and most tellingly, not actually getting better from whatever spurred them to start cleansing in the first place. The typical pattern, if you take a careful history, is that they did get significant improvements in their health in the first few months but then went backwards and have deteriorated since that time. They are afraid to stop the treatment or to go back to eating the foods they gave up because they are afraid that they will get even worse if they do.

Energetically, cleansing relates to forgiveness and nourishment relates to compassion. Just as you must bring compassion, the thought and feeling of 'I love you' into the 'I own me' that begins a genuine process of forgiveness, in the same way you must eventually bring nourishment into the process of cleansing or everything goes increasingly out of balance.

You definitely should not do cleansing diets and programs for too long. I have noticed a pattern, when I meet those people who have been cleansing too hard and for too long, that they already sense this within themselves, and know that they have gone too far, but they just feel too afraid to stop, even though they instinctively know at a subconscious level that what they are doing is not actually good for them any more. It may be that, just by a conscious effort of will, they can break out of the trap of getting caught in cleansing and bring themselves to move back into nourishment but I think that practicing compassion would help such a shift to be much easier, and more likely to succeed.

Ok, with that in mind, coming back to the question, 'Do you need to do cleansing?', and without assuming a yes for the answer, I would give two responses.

Firstly, for the person who is not working through this book with me, who is not on any kind of personal healing journey, who just wants to get a good treatment for whatever is bothering them and has no great interest in exploring their inner selves and doing much or any of what we've been talking about, I think the best answer to whether they should do a cleansing program is to go to see a holistic health practitioner who has plenty of experience

in using cleansing herbs and diets and knows when to stop or slow down just as well as they know whether or not to start.

But for you, who is reading this and, I have to hope, going through the work as it comes up, I have a far better idea. Which is to trust the intelligence of your body to tell you if you need to do more, or even perhaps less, in this area. You can ask, and receive an answer by going into that question that we were talking about earlier. You bring yourself into a meditative state and drop a hook into your subconscious, your body, by asking yourself, however you might phrase it, *'Is there something I am doing that is causing me harm?'*



If you go within your body, and especially if you go into the cleansing quadrant of your belly and pair your awareness to the base of your spine, and then ask such a question, I believe you will eventually get a very clear answer. It could come straight away, but don't expect that or assume that it should, because it may very well permeate from your body, your subconscious, into your conscious awareness later on but if, for example, you are eating something, or taking something into your body that is not good for you then your body is keenly aware of this already, and it can and will tell you. In fact, it already will be telling you, in some form of feeling or symptom that's already there, but such things can be subtle, and easy to confuse with other matters that might also

be a part of what causes harm. The issue becomes much clearer when you shine the light of your awareness on it, and then all it takes is the willingness to be truthful and honest with yourself, in other words to not be in denial!

What comes up a lot, and I have seen this many times now, is that there is an instinctive sense that cleansing is needed, but instead of going into the heart of the matter and asking what, exactly, is it that needs to be let go, the instinct to cleanse is followed into the diet and the diet alone. So this is the person who typically has been following a cleansing program for far too long. They really don't need physical cleansing but what is giving them the sense that they do is in their emotional sphere and this doesn't let up no matter how much they try to cleanse on a physical level.

This is why forgiveness is so inextricably linked to cleansing. Many of our hurts have not come from a dietary injury but rather, for example, from some cruelty or mean-spiritedness

from someone close to us, or they might have come from our own harsh and critical thinking about ourselves, or a third example is that we are hurting just because we do not have what we most need and seek, which is our peace and love, and we are truly hungry for them. The hurt, the residue, from such kinds of harm are not physical toxins that need to be eliminated with herbs and diets, the cleansing process for such matters needs to go deep into our being, our feelings and thoughts, our spirit, and for that we need to practice forgiveness.

If you go within yourself and can feel that the core of the hurts, or the harm, that you have to let go is more spiritual than physical, then you can put some faith in the practice of forgiveness, so long as you do it. Don't forget that the only way to get good at something is by practice, so you don't put it up for a make or break from one or two goes, but rather give yourself time to get the hang of it, and even get good at it, and then it will earn your trust when it actually works to bring about true healing in your life.

Of course it is also entirely possible that you might instinctively feel that the cleansing you need to do is on a more physical basis. If that is the case then please be aware that your flesh is just as important as your spirit, not more so, but not less so either. Physical cleansing can be incredibly good for you when you need it! If you could see a good herbalist for help then that would be ideal but, if for any reason that is not so easy, I can still encourage you to follow the cleansing diet from my website and, for sure, use some herbs alongside at the same time.

In the conditions section of my website, the entry 'Cleansing Diet' has another article underneath it titled 'Cleansing Detoxification Info' which would give you a lot of practical knowledge around this important subject and, importantly, will talk to you about healing reactions and how to manage these, because they do happen a lot with cleansing programmes.

Diet by itself will help but not nearly as much as it could if you added some cleansing herbs. Cleansing is one of the strongest and most effective parts of herbal medicine and it would make a world of difference to your progress if you used herbs alongside diet. Dandelion root and Juniper berry would be my two starting points if, for any reason, you had to keep it very simple. How to use these two powerful and safe herbs for the liver and kidneys is also written up in detail on my website in the herbal A-Z.

If you want to go further with any of this then there are also two separate articles on both liver health and kidney health, likewise linked in the A-Z of conditions. These articles talk more about some other herbal allies that can be used safely and effectively with care and common sense.

Herbs are the people's medicine, they belong to us all and we ought to know how to use them for ourselves and our loved ones. Herbs can never be patented and controlled by greedy corporations, they will always legally be able to be purchased all over the world and,

especially in modern times with being able to buy things from the internet, it is not at all hard to get a hold of them.

If you do pick up a cleansing programme, remember not to do it overlong, I think 3 months is a safe maximum and, especially if you are practicing this advanced spiritual work on your personal healing journey, then I encourage you to regularly check in with the intelligence of your body to listen to whether this is still what it needs and wants, or whether it is time to take a break.

It sounds like a good idea, does it not, to check in with the intelligence of your body - but how could you do that in a way that is sincere, truthful, and not prone to self-deception? Let's imagine that you are doing anything that creates a healing reaction, for example taking cleansing herbs, or doing the kinds of spiritual practices that we have been learning, so how can you know whether what you are feeling is part of a necessary healing process and how can you know when you are overdoing it, or doing the wrong thing, and need to stop?

The best way, the safest way, to know whether you are in a beneficial healing reaction or whether you are on the wrong track is to tune in to your heart and your vitality. Your heart is your heart, vitality means your overall energy levels. Everyone has ups and downs in a typical day so, do not be too quick to judge everything and throw it out the window if you are just having a brief bad patch but, if your vitality, your energy, is for the most part rising up in the course of what you are doing then for sure you will be on the right track.

However, not just at a rough moment because of tiredness, or hunger, or some other perfectly reasonable reason, but if you are getting more tired overall, if your spirits are dropping rather than lifting, then you need to carefully consider if what you are doing is actually beneficial or if it could be causing you more harm than good.

In my own practice, and in what I teach, I put a great deal of emphasis on feeling the pulse with an *'empty mind and open heart'*. By practicing this, by learning how to gently place the fingertips at the wrist to feel the pulse and then just emptying the mind and opening the heart to whatever comes through anyone, no matter who they are and what their background is, can soon get a sense of a person's vital force as it comes through their pulse. They are, after all, listening to the heart, which is at the centre of the energy or spirit of the person.

As I teach our students, when you then include the practice of something like pulse testing, where you feel if the vital force increases or diminished when you put a drop of a herb, that you preferably have shuffled amongst others so you don't know what you are testing, then you soon learn to pick up the remarkably clear signals that the heart will give about what serves it and what weakens it.

The same principles apply on a wider scale, when a person is on the right general treatment, diet, program etc. then you can feel their life force lifting in their heart and you can literally

feel this at their pulse. If what they are doing is not truly serving them then you will feel their life force has diminished at their pulse.

If you are treating someone and they are somewhat in the storms but you aren't sure if they are in a positive healing reaction then you may need to meet them to feel their pulse to be able to tell for sure. That, and the reliable rule that healing reactions always pass away in a reasonable time frame, days not weeks, and the person gets clearly better afterwards, whereas adverse reactions just tend to get increasingly worse over time if you don't stop what you are doing.

Is it easier to tell if you are in a healing or adverse reaction for yourself or for others? I think it is much easier to tell for someone else than for yourself. It is hard for us to really see ourselves without our many distractions and uncertainties getting in the way but we can still practice listening to our own pulse, reading our own energy, tuning into our own inner being to get a true sense of whether we are on track in what we eat and what we do.

Whilst it is natural to firstly associate the whole subject of cleansing with things like diet, and even herbal medicines too, taking ownership of our health and life with *'I own me'* and being open to hearing the answer to such a searching question as, *'Am I doing anything to harm myself?'* is just as likely, if not more likely, to bring things up from the emotional more than the physical sphere.

So much of the harm that we do to ourselves is in our thinking and feelings. The judgements, the hardening, the dark thoughts that cause us the kind of harm that cannot be remedied by only taking a herb or removing a food. The first step, perhaps the hardest step, is to move out of denial to face the truth of whatever it is that is doing harm. Then the practice of forgiveness can take us exactly to where we need to go next.



Thinking with the Body - Feeling with the Mind

I've mentioned this phrase a few times, and want to say something more about it now.

When we bring them into the realm of the real, into felt experiences within our bodies, the spiritual practices clearly involve some intentional thought. I am especially asking you to remember certain keywords to help guide the process and focus your awareness in certain ways and perhaps you have already wondered, how many times are you meant to think thoughts such as *'soft centred and now'* or *'as I am'* or *'I own me'*? Is it just once or twice, or many times?

There are no rules about this. Maybe for you, just once or twice will be best, but maybe it would be better for you to use the keywords more times, even many times, to bring the practice deeper, to take it from thought and theory into feelings and experiences. Surely the only way to know which works best is to try and see with both less or more. In any case, don't worry about there being a right number of times to revolve the thoughts around.

That said, what does matter and what will matter is how you practice thinking in your body and feeling in your mind and, as you've read, this is one of the key themes that I keep reminding you to work on. I want you to literally bring the thoughts into your body and, at the same time, to feel them in your mind.

Perhaps how to do this was already obvious to you, and you have been doing it instinctively, but if you have, like most of us, always talked about and thought about your mind and body as if they were quite separate, then this idea might take a moment to get a hold of.

You don't think in your body in the same way as you normally follow a thread of thought in your mind. Thinking with your body is much slower and simpler than thinking with the mind, it is more quiet, it is probably also more circular, meaning that most of us would probably want to go around the thought a few times to bring it into our body, to be felt and experienced.

'I own me' for example, is a concept, yes, but it is also a way of feeling about yourself in the world that is very different from how we are typically programmed to think. To bring it home, to make it a part of the fabric of your consciousness, you need to bring it into your subconscious, which is really your body in a very practical sense of the word.



Thoughts are ephemeral, they change with the wind, they go here, there and everywhere. Sometimes, no doubt, they are insightful, and accurate, and helpful, but they are not always accurate and they are certainly not always helpful.

'Thinking with your body' means you bring the awareness of your consciousness into your actual physical body. Staying with this core thought of self-ownership it is as if the base of your spine comes forwards to be the centre of your being to strongly state a fact *'I own me, this is me. I am this'*. The words give space for, and help to bring forwards, the feelings. The words themselves are only symbols, they are describing something, they can help shape and focus our awareness, but it is the feelings underneath them that create the substance of what we experience.

'Feeling with your mind' means the rush and run of thoughts has slowed down, at least enough, for the feelings of the subconscious, the body, to be in the ascendancy of the experience. Instead of following a train of thought, or leaping from one thought to another, when you step into any of the spiritual practices you are giving your mind the role of the observer, the listener, the witness to the feelings, the experiences that are coming into both your mind and body at the same time.

Again, and always, it is all about practice. Once you have taken the first steps a few times, the process will start to take on a life of its own, it will become easier, and more natural, partly this will be because you are getting better at something you are practicing but also it will be because these are safe and healing places to bring your mind to.

Our minds can be so restless and peaceless, always looking into the future or taking apart the past. The only moment where peace exists is in this moment of now. Thinking with our body and feeling with our mind helps to bring us into a place of being, which is always in the here and now.



Healing the Hurt

In a little while, I am going to ask you to have a third attempt, a final go, at least with me nudging you along; into practicing forgiveness through thinking and feeling into the cleansing quadrant of your belly and the energy centre at the base of your spine.

I do feel a little worried that our first two attempts may not have been successful. Worried that I might not have explained the steps clearly enough and so you could be unsure about what you were supposed to be doing. Worried that you haven't tried the practice yet, or that you did give it a go but you haven't really felt anything, or that what you did feel has stirred you up without settling you back down. I don't think these are unhealthy doubts, I wish that I could ask you, how is it going, what are you stuck with, what is making sense, what's working, what's not?

I heard somewhere that at least 80% of what you learn in any job is on the job and that has always rang true to me for what I do. The great majority of what I have learned of lasting value has been from the people I have worked with, by listening to them, by seeing what worked and what didn't - '...it's all theory until the follow up'.

In feeling into my worry, and without being able to know how it's going for you personally, I changed my mind from what was going to be just two invitations to meditate on this subject, to add a third go. I imagined what I could say to a person who was unsure, or even confused, and how to do this forgiveness practice and how I would surely only get one more go if they had already given me two, and so what I would do if I only had one last chance.

So here it is. Firstly it is to forget, to begin with, about haras, and spines, and forgiveness, and I own me, and instead to start at the other end of what this is all about with a simple question - what hurts and where does it hurt?

Surely you have some hurt, some ache at some level? Don't you, doesn't everyone? I think we all have unhealed hurt, maybe we can get away with not feeling it a lot of the time, but it's there anyway, and it must affect us, because how could it not?

This most private and personal matter, of what hurts, of what aches, is really the point of the healing journey. The point is to heal whatever that ache is, wherever it is, whether it is on the surface, or deep inside, whether it is something in your body or your spirit, although surely most of our hurts are both physical and spiritual, because our mind and bodies are two parts of the same whole.

In a short while, what I am going to ask you to do is just to allow that hurt, that ache, to fully exist for a moment, no resistance, no trying to change anything, and then we start the forgiveness practice from that point and see how it goes from there.

Hurts can be slippery fish, moving from one place to another in our minds or bodies or both. So let's start by being ready for the hurt to be not easy to hold and focus on but rather to be moving and changeable. That's ok, so long as we can see the hurt, really see it, just for

everything that it is, without trying to change it, or analyse it, or do anything with it, but just allow it to be there for a moment.

If we can, even just for a moment, openly and honestly feel our hurt, our ache, then I think we will also be able to clearly see what comes up against that hurt, what it is that gets in the way of it getting better. Whatever other obstacles there might be, I am sure that wherever there is unhealed hurt there will also be some hardening and resistance to it. Really, how could there not be. How could we possibly be soft and accepting of something that hurts!

It is only natural to have hardening and resistance to our hurts; so we need compassion to soften the hardening and surrender to ease the resistance.

Plus we need forgiveness, and it seems that we often have to start there. However, the main obstacle to forgiveness is the hurt itself! So this is a tricky matter, not easy to resolve. The hero journey of healing, which must include forgiveness, needs practice, step by step, and it seems that the first step must be one of ownership rather than victimhood. This is no small thing to do, especially if the hurt, and suffering, is strong and present, but *'I own me'* is a most empowering thought. It opens up the possibility that I might not need anyone else to do anything for me to heal. That I can own my experience in a way that frees me from suffering rather than making more of it.

What I am going to ask you to do, in just a moment, becomes very similar to the earlier practices but the starting point is different. Later on, if and I hope when you come back to it, you should start however you like, but this time I want you to begin with being open to allowing yourself to feel your ache, your hurt.

Whatever it is, wherever it is, whatever caused it, however long it has been there, you must know that no one, not ever, can feel one tiny piece of your hurt except for you, they truly cannot. Your hurt belongs to you and you alone. Only you can feel what you feel. *'I own me'* is 100% inclusive of *'I own my hurt'*.

So you start there, it doesn't need to take more than a moment, because whatever is there to be felt is already there, you don't even really have to go looking for it, you just have to be willing to open the door to it. Which I suppose could be somewhat locked by fear, in which case the saying *'there is nothing to fear but fear itself'* would be very appropriate here, because we do need to face our hurts, and our fears, to become well.

So you firstly acknowledge, and allow yourself to feel the existence of your hurt, your ache, fully and unconditionally, and then you bring the next steps that we've been practicing into play within your mind and your body at the same time. I do still encourage you to continue this practice by anchoring your feelings and pairing your awareness into the hill at the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly. These are not only powerful places to process these feelings and shifts of consciousness, they are also safe places. The heat and

damp of them helps things to shift and morph and change their shape so they do not stay stuck but rather move, and process, and heal.

Bring your awareness to your hurt, own it fully and unconditionally, bring your compassion, your love into the practice, then centre your awareness into these low, primal, powerful and safe parts of your body, and allow yourself to be both sorry for the hurt and also open to hearing what the hurt is telling you. If there is something that you need to be sorry for, something you need to change, or stop, or just take ownership of deeper than you have already, then be open to it, don't hold back on any account!

No one but you can take a single step on your journey of healing. It is entirely up to you what happens every step of the way with all of this. You don't have to start, you don't have to continue but if you do then, when you are ready, when it is authentic, heartfelt, honest, real and raw with the feeling of compassion that comes when we are truly sorry to ourselves, to life, to whatever we perceive as the glue that holds this Universe together, you can complete the practice by asking for healing.

Forgiveness and healing are another two sides of the same coin. Maybe there is just one coin and we all pay for it with our lives. We are in fear on one side or we are in love on the other, and our pendulum swings from one side to the other and back again. Do we have a hand in how it swings, in whether it gets stuck in the fear or might find its way to the love longer, and deeper, and more lastingly the more we practice such things as compassion, and forgiveness, and ownership and acceptance? Well clearly a lot of people seem to think so, I hope so too.

So now I say to you, and invite you, from one traveller to another, because you must be on some kind of a healing journey to have been absorbed into this work to begin with, to now take another step on your own, hero journey of healing. One more step, starting from this most essential of beginning points as if we were learning to walk for the first time because, after all, isn't it the case that each time we come to this we are like a baby learning to take their first step? That is still how it seems, and feels to me, after close to 40 years of practice! So I invite you to be a baby too, empty of knowing, unsure of what they are supposed to do or how to do it, but wanting to walk anyway. I don't think anyone is any good at this kind of thing to start with, we're all beginners, just trying to practice to get better at something. You can't learn to walk without falling over so when you fall, rather than if you fall, don't worry about it! You're a baby, remember, it won't hurt that much and you can just get up and try again.

Even if you do not have a single religious bone in your body you don't have to imagine any kind of God-like figure to work out who to ask forgiveness from. You could consider the healing intelligence inside your own living flesh as more than proof enough that the Universe is filled with wonder, magic and miracles. You get hurt, you get wounded, and something within you heals you. If you needed an altar to pray to then that would fit the

description. The point is not who you ask but that you ask. *'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me'.*

You might be a person who needs to think more, or feel more, for these practices to work best for you. I hoped I got some of this across in the earlier section on thinking in the body and feeling in the mind. If you are a person who will naturally be more in your body than just thinking the words, even only once or twice, may be all you need to do, and then being in a paired awareness in your cleansing quadrant and the base of your spine, and then wherever else the healing spirit of your body takes you, you will naturally evolve your practice and your experience.

Equally, and it is certainly not better to be more one way or another on this, if you are a person who would naturally want to think more to be in this practice, then it could work better to revolve the thoughts around, to repeat them and evolve them so that they deepen and fill your mind and body at the same time. For instance, just as an example, you could embellish the nutshell in such a way as this:

'I ache, here is where I hurt, here is where I ache and here is where I am. I own this, I own all of this, I own me in every way. I am this. I love you, I love all of you, I even love this ache for how it is showing me how to heal, I am so sorry for the hurt, I am so sorry for all the ache, in any part of me, in every part of me. I don't want to do any harm to myself, or to anyone else. If I am doing harm let me see it and let me stop it. I am so sorry, truly sorry, for any hurt I feel and any hurt I have caused. Please forgive me, please heal me, forgive me, heal me, please.'

Have a go at this last practice for forgiveness in this section now, or as soon as you are ready.



Activation and Gratitude

I would be curious to ask you, if we could talk in person, about what you can feel when you bring your attention into your lower right 'cleansing' quadrant. I talked about primal energy, and it being hotter and damper here, and I know that those things are true, yet, also that the difference in our energy here can be very subtle, so I wouldn't blame you for a second if you hadn't felt anything palpable yet, especially when just getting used to going within and feeling things in this way.

Equally, it is also possible that you have already felt a lot, or will do soon if you keep practicing, and so then I wonder if you have noticed, or if you will notice, that along with a kind of heat and dampness in the lower right quadrant, that this warmth, or some other sensation related to it, sometimes wants to spontaneously rise up to the upper part of your belly on that right hand side.

I understand and feel that our hara, the belly, is like a cauldron, stirring and simmering with its unstoppable life force, absorbing and transforming energy and performing thousands of jobs a day to keep us alive and well. Even though we must continue to pour food and water into the top left side of the belly, where the stomach lives, there is a primal source of vitality that connects to the base of the spine and spirals through the opposite side, in the lower right quadrant, to bring heat and life to the cauldron, and to us. This is the Tiger territory, the hot, damp, primordial jungle, within our body. Within this area, and the base of our spine that it connects to, lies the root of our evolutionary survival force, and the centre of energy that gives rise to our courage, as well as its shadow side of fear. Just like the two rivers of nourishment and cleansing that meet in this quadrant, the energy here is ever moving, subtle, mysterious, under the surface, but always there; pulsing, flowing, being.

I wonder if you have already felt at least some of this spontaneously, and how wonderful it would be if you had. I also hope, the more you get in touch with it, and allow yourself to be present in this part of your body without any stress or strain, but rather quietly and contemplatively, that you will feel how the heat and damp of the cleansing quadrant also creates a kind of energetic steam that rises up to the top part of your belly on the right hand side, the activation quadrant, which is where your liver lives.

Just as the bottom hill and valley in the lower part of the spine are where the life force flows hotter, and the higher hill and valley of the upper part of the spine are where it flows cooler, in the same way the right hand side of the hara, the belly, runs hotter and the left hand side of the hara runs cooler. Equally importantly, and interestingly, at the same time, the lower half of the hara which lies under the navel, runs damper, whilst the upper half of the hara which lies above the navel, runs drier.

Don't worry if you aren't holding on to all this from only hearing it once or twice. There are a lot of moving parts here and surely anyone would need quite a lot of practice to get familiar with the maps of their body and the different ways the life force moves and balances itself

between our hills and valley of our spine, the quadrants of our hara, along with all the other complexities that lie within us and between our minds and bodies.

I am seeking to show you and share with you some practical, and I hope very doable first steps to move forwards in the great hero journey of healing that is your path and yours alone to take. I imagine, I hope, that some of this will resonate enough to become some foot-holds that are helpful enough, and sturdy enough, to begin earning your trust, because they work, because they help. Once you get started in a good direction then your own spirit, your own healing intelligence from Nature, can be the light that shows you the next steps on your way.

Where we've been, in the lower right quadrant of the hara, is the hot damp Tiger terrain. Where we are going now, in the upper right quadrant of the hara, is hot, dry Eagle territory. It is the area of 'activation' and in terms of the spiritual practices, this is where the frequency of gratitude can be most strongly felt and focused on. Equally, this is where the primary obstacle to the lightness and freedom of the peace that comes with gratitude can hold us in its clutches, because this can be where we most hold on to resentment. What is the obstacle to gratitude? It is resentment. What is the remedy for resentment? It is gratitude.



You may recall that I left the practice of gratitude till last in the first section, and that it is the odd one out in several ways, including the nutshell to remember it by, with its old Latin words, the '*vis medicatrix naturae*', the healing intelligence of Nature.

Some methods that we can use to access this area, and the practice that it connects to, are different too. A moment ago, in the previous section, we were attempting to take some first steps, like a baby. Now, all of a sudden, we are about to attempt to fly, so let's take a moment to get oriented and spread our wings before we try to take off!

In just a moment I am going to ask you to have not one, but two first goes at getting into your activation zone, your Eagle territory. I want to help guide you to connect some dots, and perhaps to feel something too, which would really make it belong to you fast.

I'm sure there will be ways to access this energy that I haven't even heard of, let alone tried, but there are two methods in particular that I know and trust and those are the two I want to show you. One is through the territory we've just been in, the other is through the navel.

Let's start where we left off. Hopefully this one will be nice and easy, because we have already had some practice at bringing the attention into the base of the spine and the lower right quadrant. So, to start you are simply retracing an earlier step, but this time you are allowing, or perhaps you will be inviting, the energy to rise into the valley of your lumbar spine and the upper right quadrant of your belly. There will be a subtle shift in how the energy feels when you do this because you are moving from the area that is most hot and damp into the areas that are most hot and dry. There may also perhaps be a sense of space and opening. There is power here too, great power, but these are not easy things to explain and we don't need to either. I encourage you to not try to analyse it, but rather just feel whatever you can feel, as if you were witnessing something, or observing something, that you had no control over, and didn't need to control. It is, of course, your energy, it is you in every meaningful way of what 'you' is, but it is also something beyond your ability or need to control.

I encourage you to have a quick go at this now, starting at the base of the spine and in your lower right belly, at the beginning and ends of the rivers, and then just allow the energy to naturally rise up into the lumbar spine and the upper right quadrant of your belly, it wants to move this way already, and you may have even already felt this happen quite spontaneously. There is no special technique or effort required to this, it's simply giving your awareness to a natural flow of energy that is already happening inside you all the time.

Please have a go at this now or whenever you are ready.



Through the Navel

A second way I know and trust to take a step into the hot and dry Eagle territory, the land of the liver, the zone of activation, is through our navel. In just a moment, I will ask you to try this one too. Compared to what we did before, which is kind of like catching the flow of a river and letting it carry you to where it naturally wants to go, this method should feel quite different, maybe more sudden in a way, perhaps even like stepping out of the nest and into the air.

Coming through the navel is a potent practice but also a very safe one, because it is just you and your energy that you are feeling. You are already in the cauldron of your belly just as 'you' are already in every other part of you, there is really nowhere else you can be! It is safe to explore the rooms of your home, including the basement, including the attic. Even our primary shadow selves, the parts of us that seem to cause us endless amounts of trouble, are not our enemies at all, they are our 'dark friends' who ultimately seek to show us the way to what we most need and seek.

There isn't any special trick or technique to bring awareness to your navel. It is a very instinctive, very lovely, very easy part of yourself to feel. That said, in the dysmorphic dystopia that we have collectively created, if you are uncomfortably self-conscious about your weight and have some shame around the shape and size of your belly then do not be concerned that any of that will be more than a momentary obstacle to overcome. As soon as you connect to your navel, and then on into the valley of your belly and your lumbar spine, any surface agitation and self-consciousness will quickly subside, because you will be in a much more natural state of connection with yourself. In other words you are feeling yourself through your body rather than through your mind, which can actually be very healing in this regard.

There are many ways to make that first connect to your navel, through your breath, through following the rise and fall of your belly, through simply focusing and grounding your consciousness into where it is. However it is that you most naturally want to go there is the best way to begin.

It is you, you are it, so, however you prefer to begin, simply bring your 'self' to your dear little belly button, and then I think you will rather easily soon be able to feel how your whole belly, your hara, swirls around it, very alive, moving, breathing and being.

The energy that you can feel there will just as easily turn to the upper right quadrant as any other quarter, so in this case you are ever so slightly nudging your awareness to move from the centre, the navel, over to the top right quadrant. As you feel this quadrant, and at the same time feel how your breath is moving in and out of this area, allow yourself to also feel the broad and open energy that always exists in the valley of your lumbar spine beneath your navel. So we are practicing a kind of dual awareness again, pairing your awareness, or at least going back and forth, between these two areas in your back and belly.

The lumbar area of your back is the hottest and driest area of your spine, likewise the quadrant of your upper right belly is the hottest and driest area of your hara. By bringing your awareness, your consciousness, into these two areas you are tuning into a part of yourself that is hotter and lighter, like the air.

These are the easiest and best places to centre and strengthen the practice of gratitude in the body, the subconscious, and if you naturally feel your spirit lifting when you bring your awareness here then, by all means, let that warm wind fill any wings of thankfulness that naturally arise. But I don't want you to expect that to happen, or to feel that you are supposed to try to bring gratitude into these first steps in becoming acquainted with your activation zones. It will be more than enough if you are able to perceive even some of the natural intensity of your '*vis medicatrix naturae*' because it does flow especially strongly in these areas and just witnessing it, being with it, is very healing.

So now, or whenever you are ready, please try to connect firstly to your navel and then, from there to the dual, or paired awareness, of both the valley of your lumbar spine and the upper right quadrant of your belly, going back and forth between them and then bringing them together with a paired awareness. Try and see, you might quite like it!



Pairs, Triplets and Quartets

I wonder how you got on with your first forays into Eagle territory... and wish I knew! I also wonder if you have naturally been noticing more dots connecting together than the ones I have been talking about. I already mentioned how when focusing in the cleansing quadrant you might spontaneously feel that hot and damp river of energy wanting to flow upwards into your activation zone.

Another one from earlier on that might have spontaneously arrived is when you have brought your attention to the base of your spine, intending to couple the awareness to your belly, if the hill over your heart might have pinged you, reminded you of its existence, made you feel things differently.

If this has happened, then I believe that will have been the innate wisdom of your heart, wanting to help you in your practice. It is so vital to bring compassion into the process of healing hurts and forgiveness. Without compassion we end up just judging ourselves as being wrong and broken and not even capable of getting well. The intelligence of Nature, which lives within your body as much as it exists anywhere in the Universe, knows this and, because it loves you unconditionally, it wants to guide you to be so healthy, and happy.

Moving into these new practices under activation, I can imagine that, when you bring your awareness into the lumbar valley of your spine, this time seeking to pair to the energy of your upper right belly, you might spontaneously feel the call of your neck and/or your lower left quadrant of your hara. Either or even both of them reaching out to you to say *'hey, I'm over here'*. Because your body, it's intelligence, knows that to find your peace in the hot, dry fire-lands, the lumbar spine and the activation quadrant, we will also need the cool, damp, yielding, Yin areas of the body, which centre in the neck and lower left quadrant - the places in our bodies we can most potently practice acceptance, and surrender.

The healing power of these spiritual practices, and how once you get started with one foothold, the life force naturally moves around to seek the next step in the map of the body, is like making a herbal formula to shift a stuck pattern of illness. In herbal medicine, we might very occasionally use a single herb, which we then call a 'simple', but far more often we start with a pair and that becomes the basis for anything else we do from there.

Herbs are especially potent in pairs, they are like what happens when two people form a partnership that actually works. You can see that what they can achieve as a couple is so much more than what they would ever have been able to do by themselves.

Certain herbs pair especially well with certain other herbs, and learning those pairs, and how to use them safely and effectively, is the foundation of successful prescribing. So we often start with a pair, but then could add a third herb, and then maybe a fourth, and so on. There aren't any hard rules about what is the right number to use but I encourage the student starting out as a herbalist to keep it simple and just aim for an excellent pair to start with

because, once that is working well, the next herbs, or the next steps, are so much easier to find and get right.

As you have seen, and as you will continue to see, I am always encouraging you to bring your awareness into a pair. We started with the two hills and the two valleys of the spine, now we are moving into pairing an area of your back with an area of your hara. If it hasn't already happened then soon enough, I believe, you will feel your body wanting you to step towards a third, a fourth, a fifth point of awareness. Not if, but when this happens, don't fight it, go with it, allow the healing intelligence of your body to show you where it wants to focus its energy.

I know that our nervous systems and our senses are taking in multiple points of information all the time, but as for where we can hold our actual focus, our core awareness (and, you may be different in this regard) but speaking for myself and I believe most others, I don't think I could hold a quartet, that is, four points of full awareness at one time if it was to save my own life. Maybe it seems like I can somewhat hold on to a triplet, three points of awareness at one time but what I think is more likely happening there is that I'm just shifting my focus between two of them fast enough to make it seem to myself like I'm holding the three.

A pair I can do, but only just, and only with all my awareness. It actually takes a lot of deep focus to pair your awareness into two parts of your body at the same time, or equally to focus your awareness into pairing a thought with a physical sensation in your body at the same time, giving them equal attention through thinking in your body, feeling in your mind.

Pairing is very powerful, it brings about a deep meditative state where the normally very active and often mischievous mind stops jumping around so that you can actually feel things much more deeply than you could otherwise.

However, because we are not trying to hold on to where we put our metaphorical 'feet', but rather we are very open to consciously choosing a next step ourselves, or for the next step to call us forwards by itself, we can soon enough be in a quite different pair of points of awareness from the two we started in and, as mentioned earlier, there can also come a point where we can merge into a sense of oneness through any of the spiritual practices we are practicing here, and then there is the possibility to pair into infinity...

My main point here is that, if you are journeying within, feeling what there is to be felt, processing your stuff, as we say, I don't think you need to try to hold on to where you were before you took the previous step before the last one and I also don't think you need to try to control where the healing intelligence of your body takes you next. I only want you to be careful of getting stuck in one place and so then not following the call to take the next step. So here is where I want to emphasise something really important, which is that you need to know it is awfully easy to get stuck in one place!

Getting stuck happens especially, for example, where we have a high level of resistance to whatever it is that we are feeling. So we push against it, we harden ourselves to it, we fight it, which of course just makes it worse and, even if we might think we're winning the battle, we're not. If you fight with yourself you will lose, maybe it won't seem that way for a moment, but it will be.

Another really common cause to get stuck in one place is that we have a symptom or a feeling that has been named, as a 'condition' for example. Names are really powerful, they stick like superglue to our consciousness. If you have carried a name for something that you feel for a long time then it can seem like you are always going to feel this way, and that you could not possibly feel any different, and heal what is wrong, and so it could seem hopeless to even try.

If either of these common reasons for getting stuck is the case for you, or it's something else, then in any case I urge you to use these practices wisely in the way of learning the maps and using the pairs! Wherever the area is that the trouble lies, there will be at least two corresponding areas in the maps of your belly or your spine that will help you to get unstuck through the power of pairing.

If this is the case for you, then the intelligence of your body already knows this, and will have been trying to get you to go there, to the healing pair, but you may have been resisting it without consciously realising it. Pairs are powerful, in herbs, in relationships, and also most definitely to help us get our feet on the ground and then get moving forwards in the hero journey of healing, use the pairs!



The Activation Zones

I'm going to come back to some thought experiment/meditation practices a little later because here in the upper right side of the belly and the lumbar valley of the spine we are in the activation zones of the body and I want to talk some more about that whole subject, because it's interesting, and because it will help us to better know the obstacles we are up against in the healing journey.

Did you know that the liver is the hottest organ in your body? If you haven't already, you will soon be able to feel this as you get practiced at tuning into the activation zone in your upper right quadrant. What you can feel with your hand, just under your ribs on the right hand side, is the bottom edge of your liver, there is a lot more to the liver above the area that you can touch, but it is protected by the ribs. In any case, you will definitely be able to feel its remarkable heat, and energy, with just a little practice.

Your brain and your heart, constantly active, provide the second main sources of heat but did you know that most of the heat that you feel in your body is generated by blood that has been warmed by your liver? A full quarter of all the blood that leaves your heart once it has been oxygenated goes straight to your liver, through what is called the hepatic artery, but even more blood than that comes to the liver through what is called the portal vein. This is blood that comes straight from the digestive system, full of nutrients for the liver to process, filter and transform. At any one time, the liver contains over 600 mls of blood and, because the liver is such a furnace of activity, that blood is heated up before it heads back out through the body, enriched with nutrients, to give food to our cells and warmth to our body. Dense and bloody, the liver is not physically dry, rather its energy is hot and dry, or at least its energy ought to be hot and dry, because of the metabolic, transformative, life-giving fire that burns here.



Further to the back, our kidneys are in the top half of the region of our lumbar spine. The kidneys also are enormously rich in blood, more than a litre of blood passes through them every minute and they are able to filter and clean about half a cupful of that blood in that one short minute. Our kidneys don't warm our blood like the liver does but we are still enormously influenced by how activated and healthy they are, as we are by the adrenal glands that sit right on top of our kidneys pouring out hormones that regulate so much of how we are in fight and flight, rest and digest.

As mentioned, as a herbalist I use cleansing herbs and diets that work primarily by helping the liver and kidneys more than any other treatment strategy and, as also mentioned earlier, it seems that often this is all that needs to be done for there to be a positive result to whatever was the health condition that brought them to the clinic.

So here's what I think is especially interesting about that. The people who come to a herbalist are not a typical cross-section of society. On average, they are far more health conscious than people who only go to a GP when they get sick. Most of my patients actually eat rather well, few of them drink alcohol to excess, most are interested in their health, they take care of themselves, they exercise, they hydrate, they eat very little processed food.

How does it make sense that such people need to do cleansing? Some of the ones who need a cleansing program even live out of their own organic gardens for crying out loud! When they ask where the need for cleansing comes from, I have a stock answer about planet Earth being a goldfish bowl, where we are all breathing the same air, eating and drinking from the same overall environment etc. and I suppose that this is at least partly true, but what I think, even though I usually keep it to myself for reasons I will share shortly, is that, at least in a clean living person, the need for cleansing is coming from the emotional sphere more than anything else.

I suppose anyone would wonder how you could cleanse emotional toxins with physical remedies, I have certainly wondered about that myself, many times, but it turns out that it seems you can, at least to enough of an extent for the stuck inflammation, or fatigue, or whatever it was that was holding down their health, to get better.

So why don't I share my theory about the emotional wastes being what is weighing down the liver and the kidneys more than anything in the diet or lifestyle? Sometimes I do, and I guess that could be when I have picked up some hints that this is a person who has been delving deep into their mind-body connection and could be open to the idea, but you run a great risk when you suggest to the person who is not ready for it, that anything at all going on for them physically might have a root in their psyche or their emotional health.

If they are not ready to hear it then, however kindly or carefully you try to say what you mean, they will just hear you blaming them for making themselves sick and that you think it is all in their head. That is a very bad way for a patient to feel about your diagnosis on what you think is going on for them. It breaks the first rule of 'do no harm'. It makes them feel judged and defensive, and not at all inclined to go on any kind of a healing journey with you. So I avoid it, unless there are clear signs to give me the green light to not hold back.

What I would like to say, and what I can say here, is that, especially for the person who really is eating well, and drinking enough water, and looking after themselves well, I think a vast amount of what can burden our liver and our kidneys comes from our unhealed hurts and most especially from the emotional 'fires' that we hold within.

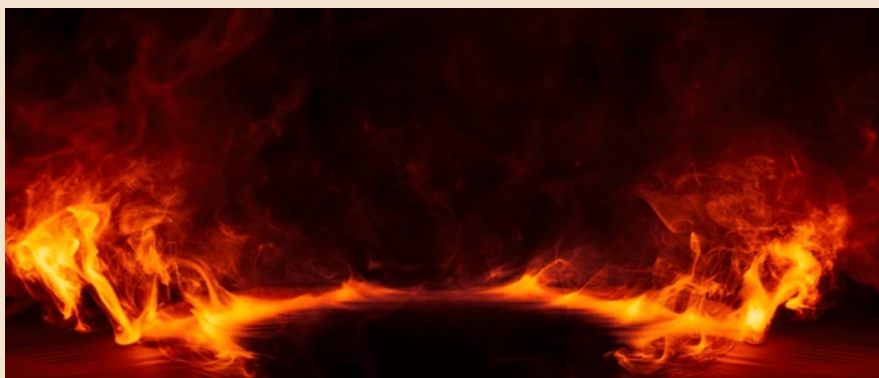
The activation zones of the body, the kidneys of the lumbar spine and the liver of the upper right quadrant of the hara, are the fire territories of the body. Their energy runs hot and dry and, in good health, these zones are full of the high frequency energy that comes with activation. They are like engine rooms for energy, when they are in good health they lift our vitality and keep our spirits light.

The number one reason that people present to a holistic health practitioner is simply that they are too tired and, assuming they are getting enough sleep, the number one reason they are tired is that these zones of activation are not running hot and dry but have become damp and congested. The fire of the life force in the belly is smouldering and sputtering rather than burning bright and clean.

Cleansing herbs are all drying in nature, and so they help to remove the excess dampness that doesn't belong there. This is why we take a break from the damp and heavy foods like dairy products and meat whilst we do the cleansing diet. Not because those foods are bad for people, they really aren't unless someone has an immune system intolerance to them, but because eating them too much will get in the way of removing the excess damp and getting the engines running clean and dry again.

As I say, even if there are causes that go beyond the physical, it is remarkable how much can be achieved with herbs and diet alone, but I know that there are people who are very interested in their personal journey to become the best version of themselves that they can. People relate to the idea of a hero journey of healing for what it is that we want, and truly need - which is to be at peace, and in love. These are people who have wised up enough to know that we have to look within, first and foremost, to obtain the treasures of peace and love.

To such a person, when I could safely say it, I would say beware especially the dark force of resentment! Of all the fires that burn within, this one is the most damaging, and dangerous. If we will start at the top of the list, at whatever is causing the most harm, then the emotional fire that is the worst of the worst is this one. It is the archenemy of gratitude, it is the thief of our peace, it forms a black cloud in our liver, it blocks the filter of our kidneys, and it is entirely treatable, if we can not be in denial about having it, and know the way to practice to become free from it.



The Toxic Fire

Resentment is the worst, by far, but there are other emotional fires that can run as hot as hell inside us when we are feeling them in their storming stages, and those fires can be extraordinarily hard to be with too. Anyone who has ever deeply cared for someone else knows what guilt feels like. Anyone who has ever found their courage to speak up and step out into the world knows what shame feels like. All of us who don't live completely cut off from the rest of humanity know what anger and frustration feel like. All these are different shadow sides of our inner fire, and all are highly worth working on, but there is just one fire that is truly toxic, and that is the fire of resentment.

So what is resentment exactly? It's hard to pin down and describe in a nutshell but, in its essence, resentment has a similar nature to that of resistance, except whilst resistance has a kind of cooler, passive, 'stuck in place' quality to it, resentment has a much hotter, active, intensity and agitation to it, one that seriously troubles our inner peace.

Resentment is stuck fire within. Resentment is the simmering fire that remains within us when we are angry or frustrated with someone or something, or we are in shame or guilt over someone or something, and we are not able to process those feelings in a way that allows them to be released. Resentment can cause a lot of congestion in the liver in particular but it also spreads out and causes much mischief in the form of inflammation in the body, and agitation in the mind.

Again, I am acutely conscious of how words to describe feelings can only go so far. Let's now approach this dark subject of what resentment is in an experiential way, not in a deep meditation, just in a thought experiment for a few moments, so you might look at it and feel it for yourself in a way that would be better than anything I could convey by talking about it.

Let's give this a try together but, before we give it a go, please do not underestimate how difficult it can be to acknowledge the existence of this energy inside us. Resentment can be an extremely difficult part of ourselves to accept, and most of us would far prefer to be in denial about it than to own that we have it.

The hardest place to see and own resentment is where we hold it against ourselves, I want to come to that next. Firstly, let's take a step to do a quick thought experiment to where resentment is easier to see, in all its ugly glory, and that is in our relationships to others.

Most of us, surely nearly all of us, have one or more people in our lives towards whom we feel at least some resentment. This is a person who we may have to tolerate in our family, our workplace or our neighbourhood who we do not love, who we do not feel glad to see, and for whom, if we will be completely and truthfully honest, we harbour some feelings that have some dark heat in them, some fire in them, in other words we feel some resentment towards them.

There can be no doubt that there will be good enough reasons to feel that way, and I realise that, whatever those reasons are, you may be completely ok with this but still, for most of us, these feelings are still not a nice thing to own and they are certainly most unpleasant to feel, or to be reminded of, but for the sake of what we are working on here, for our inner peace, don't turn away from this next step.

Without needing to turn it into a meditation, I want you to try to think of at least one person with whom you feel some resentment. Ideally it will be the number one person where the fire of resentment burns the hottest, because then you will be in touch with the feeling right away. Please give it a moment of thought now.

How did you get on? Were you able to think of someone and own your feelings about them? Maybe you really don't have anyone that you feel any lingering negativity towards, which would be amazing, and it will have also defeated my purpose in wanting to come to this from the outside in, but that's ok and if it truly is the case that you hold no resentment towards anyone then seriously, good for you!

What is more likely for most of us is that, if you have had a sincere look, then you will have been able to think of at least one person with whom you have some feelings of resentment, in which case thank you, and sorry, but now you have the sense of this most important subject better and clearer than I could ever put into words. You know exactly what resentment is, and we need to be able to own this feeling because, as ugly and unpleasant as it might seem when we see it in reflection to others, we have the exact same feeling towards our own selves and, if we truly want to find our inner peace, then we need to face our fire, and work with it.



The Inner Fires

I am putting resentment at the top of the list, and saying it is the only one that is truly toxic, but by no means is it the only one that burns.

If you are a mother, or a father, or a friend, or a partner, or any kind of a person who has any type of intimate relationships with anyone else, then there is a high probability that you are closely familiar with the feeling of guilt. Guilt is hot, it is prickly, it is uncomfortable, it moves around us restlessly, seeking a solution, for example by doing more, trying harder, being better, but as any devoted parent or partner will tell you, you can alleviate guilt, at least temporarily, but there may be nothing you can do to really get rid of it.

Shame is similar, in how it gets under the skin and makes us squirm, in how it can be hot to the point of burning hot and how it is a deeply uncomfortable inner fire that we would just about do anything to avoid. Unfortunately, some shame is more or less unavoidable unless we live under a rock. Reasons to feel shame happen and, however carefully we try to choose our steps, we do things that we can then later recall in precise detail what we said or did, and how it made us feel. There is no date of expiry for shame. I think of a bank vault where you can deposit your shameful memories, and go and revisit them anytime, but you can never really take them out and get rid of them.

Guilt and shame are two of the three inner fires, with resentment being the third. The two main words for the fire that we express outwardly are anger and frustration. How we express our fire outwardly is its own big subject that I will make just a few comments about later but for now, staying with the inner fires, I will just say that surely we have all experienced what it is to be fiery, to say words in anger, or do deeds in anger, all of which can happen in a moment, and then have the fallout of the shame or guilt around what we have said or done lingering on for an eternity afterwards.

What I am going to ask you to do quite soon, is to come back to the meditation on feeling the inner fire, in your lumbar spine and your liver, and this time to allow all the inner dark fires, the resentment, the guilt and the shame, or at least all that you can bring yourself to be aware of, to be a part of what you can feel.

I suppose that sounds just like a terrible thing to meditate on, but it won't be bad at all, it will be strangely peaceful, and it could be deeply healing, and there is just one small matter we need to take care of before we give it a go, which is that this will not be the time for tennis...



The Endless Tennis Match

For any of the dark and difficult feelings that being human brings us to feel; the loneliness, the fear, the fatigue, and I think perhaps most of all, the fire, there is a great temptation, and habit, in nearly all of us, to play an endless tennis match. It does us no good, there is never a good end to it, it is exhausting, demoralising and actually truly pointless, but we get caught in it nonetheless and here, in this most challenging matter of the fire work, is where we have to be especially careful not to even let it get started.

On one side of the net we have the player known as *Justification*. Justification is the reason, the many reasons, the endless reasons why we should feel a certain way, even when we would really rather not, but don't seem to be able to stop. When we are feeling bad, it can seem so important to us to justify how we feel that, even if no one is listening to us explain the reasons anymore, we can keep hitting the ball of '*why I feel like this*' over and over again.

On the other side of the net we have the player known as *Condemnation*. Condemnation includes all the countless reasons why we shouldn't feel this way. Why we should be over it already, how other people have it worse, how we should stop feeling sorry for ourselves. When we are feeling bad, it can seem endlessly important to us to find reasons why we should not be feeling this way and, even if we've tried every possible method to talk ourselves out of it, and none of them have worked, we keep hitting the ball of '*why I should not feel like this*', over and over again.

It is an endless tennis match, played by the mind, for the entertainment of itself, and I highly encourage you to not even be interested in starting. In all of this inner journey work, with its diving deep into the murky territories of the subconscious, if you could be sure of just one thing, it should be this. However you feel, at any time, in whatever way, there are good reasons for it. You don't need to know them to feel them. You don't need to keep telling the story of them to yourself, or anyone who will listen. You most definitely do not need to

justify them, or condemn them, it is a giant waste of time to try to do either. The more you push on one side the more you will get pushed back by the other.

Have you heard this five thousand year old saying before? *'The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master'*. I think about this one a lot, because there is so much power in its truth. If we let our minds take over then they can be quite frankly tyrannical! Our mind is a tool, a wonderful tool, that helps us do a million wonderful things, but it is really not that good at being in the present moment of now, and feeling the feelings that need to be felt. Our minds want to fix the feelings, or change them, or justify or condemn them.

That's ok, that's just the nature of the mind, we don't have to change our minds, or even control them, we just need to know that our mind is our servant, not our master. The 'you' that is the inner being, that feels, and perceives, and observes, and exists, was there long before your mind started to develop in your childhood.

'Being with what is' is a spiritual practice because it transcends the mind. Being with our dark friends; fear, fatigue, loneliness and, perhaps most of all, our fire, needs our minds to step right back and out of the way of trying to change what is happening.

How do you stop the mind from its endless tennis matches? The answer to this is deceptively simple because you don't actually have to stop it or do anything to it, you just bring your attention into what is actually more 'you' than your mind is. In other words you are centring your actual self into your feelings, which exist in your body.

Not if, but when, your mind attempts to reassert its dominance and bring you back into thought, you just accept that too, without rancour or resistance, but then as soon as you notice that you have lost the thread of the feeling state and are in the realm of thought, you can then easily bring your awareness back into your body, and your feelings, especially if you remember how to pair your awareness. Either sharing your focus between two parts of your body or taking a nutshell and thinking it in your body while you feel it in your mind.

I mention this matter especially now because, once we are inviting the dark friend of fire to come forwards, into our physical and conscious awareness, there may be all kinds of flammable materials in our memories that are ready to show the reasons, the justifications for their existence.

The inner fires, the shame, guilt and resentment can be so potent, so disturbing, that our minds can attach more stories to their existence than just about anything. That's ok, there is a good time to listen to stories and a good time to tell them, but this is not that time. When we come to do this next step of the fire work, no tennis, please, just being with it. Then it can be easy, and peaceful and truly, deeply healing.

Into the Furnace

This would be an impossible task, we are too complex, too complicated, and anyway who would want to do it, but let's for a moment imagine that you were able to pick apart every single thought and feeling you have about yourself and could divide them up into two piles. One pile is all the things you like, or maybe even love, but at least that you accept about yourself, and the other pile is all the things you dislike, or even hate and, if you were being completely honest, you would say that you reject about yourself. Which pile would be bigger? I think that, for most of us, the reject pile would be more of a mountain than a hill.

All those things that we don't like about ourselves, but can't really change, or haven't been able to change, create the energy of resentment. And that's just what belongs to us alone, it doesn't even get started with the different ways the world can bring us to harbour that dark resentful fire.



As mentioned earlier, there is a kind of agitated resistance in the feeling of resentment, but it can be deep under the surface, out of sight and out of mind. The energy, the presence of it is still there though, blocking us from our peace, blocking us from being in love with life. Our inner resentment is a smouldering and stuck fire of discontent, perhaps only showing itself when we are hurt, or hungry, or tired, or stressed, but it's there to be seen and felt any time, if we can find the courage to not be in denial about it, and acknowledge its existence.

Again, you don't need to explore the story of the 'why' with this. Whatever the reasons, within you, or from the world, for those inner dark fires to exist, the reasons are always good enough, always. Don't worry about the why and don't worry about which fire it is. Resentment is the worst, the most damaging of the inner fires, but the fires of guilt and shame can be just as hard to be with, and just as hard to see too.

What we are about to do is not to try to dig up the reasons for the fires to exist and what we are about to do is not to try to do anything, or change anything, about the fact that they do exist. We are going to take a deeper step than is possible through the mind.

In principle, what we are going to try to do should seem very simple, well at least I hope it will seem simple, it is in the practice of it where the healing can happen. Because if we can get in touch with our inner fire, and learn how to make friends with it, not reject it, not fight it, not condemn it, but actually really be with it, then nothing will be the same again.

There is another way of doing this, which goes from the outside in - I will tell you about that next, but for now let's start from the inside out to begin with, because we've already had a practice at this. This is where you take that initial step of bringing your awareness into your

activation zones, the lumbar spine and the upper right quadrant of the belly. You could think of this practice as going '*into the furnace*' because your liver really is the furnace and it really does have the power to transform and purify all kinds of toxins, including that of resentment.

So in a few moments I am going to ask you to repeat that first step from earlier. Of course you can just land yourself right there in your liver and lumbar spine and get started, there is no reason you shouldn't and anyway, if you will continue these practices for yourself, you will be adapting and changing them to suit yourself and what works best for you, and it should be like that. But you also might like to remember the suggestions of those two ways to come into this zone of activation, the first one being to follow the river of energy as it moves up from the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly and the second one being to bring your awareness through the cycling energy centre of your navel as a first step to get into the zone. You should, of course, experiment with all this yourself, it is your own journey after all, and no one other living being in this Universe can take a single step for you, but I think you could find that either or both of those ways brings you quickly, strongly and safely into this inner furnace of your activation zone.

So, firstly, to be centred there, which may only take a moment, just a breath or two, or longer if it takes a little while for your mind to settle and quieten and for you to feel yourself in your body, and in the heat, because I think you will surely feel that hot and dry energy very soon, maybe straight away, or at least once you have practiced this a few times.



Then, the next step is to call in the inner fires from wherever they are in your body, your mind, your conscious self, your subconscious self, anywhere in your whole being, you call them into the furnace. You call them to come here, where you are centred, into your liver and your lumbar spine. You are not calling them in to get rid of them, or to judge them, or condemn them, or even to justify them for that matter,

none of that, you are calling them in to align their energy within you, to be present in you, even to burn in you, in the one truly safe place that they can be felt as fully as they need to be.

Even if you do this very tentatively at first, unsure if it will work, unsure how you are meant to do such a thing, so long as you are sincere about it, you will feel the heat rising, and so you will know that you are doing it well. Other things are likely to happen too, soon enough, transformative things ...this is a cauldron, a crucible, a furnace, it changes everything that comes into it.

We are the ones who resist our inner fires, because they associate to shame, or guilt, or resentment, or any of the states of being that we most want to not feel, so they get stuck and linger in our bodies, causing all kinds of mayhem and mischief to our health, and our minds, robbing us of our peace and ruining our happiness. But these fires are not the enemy, they are not trying to hurt us, we have just not been able to process them in a way that lets them be transformed or released.

You do not have to think about what those inner fires are, and why they exist, to call them in. Just as the healing intelligence of our bodies knows how to perform the most remarkably sophisticated repairs on any kind of cut, or break, or strain, or worn out tissues, in exactly the same way it knows how to heal the unhealed hurts in our subconscious, which is where we feel, and where we actually mostly exist.

The enemy is not the fire, it is *denial*, meaning whatever we do to not face things but rather bury them, and not acknowledge them. As soon as you send out the signal, '*Come one, come all*', and invite those fires to come into your belly, then you can align yourself with the great power, the superpower actually, of gratitude.

How can you possibly be thankful for feeling shame, or guilt, or resentment? I don't think you can, and that is not what we are trying to do. It is not the story associated with the fire that we are welcoming and accepting, it is the fire itself. The fire is just energy, it will not hurt us if we learn how to be with it, and channel it. It is only when we resist it, and resent it, that it harms us. We resist our resistance and we resent our resentment, and on it goes without end, until we bring in a truly extraordinary force to change the stuck state of things. That extraordinary force is gratitude.

It will not hurt to have a fire blazing in your liver, it is completely made for it. However hot things get, this will be a 100% safe practice and no harm will come to you during it or from doing it. That said, you may have a moment of fear because, once you tune into your activation zones and then invite any smouldering fires in your mind or body to come in and join you, then things may heat up rather suddenly, which could be a bit frightening. Or perhaps the rise in heat will be a lot more gradual than that but it will still come up much more than you were expecting, because of course feeling things for yourself is nothing like just hearing me talk about them! If you do feel some fear when you are getting used to this practice then that's ok, just don't stop! The fear will subside, the intensity of the heat, if it is very intense, will also subside, or at least it will shift and move, because fire never stays still.

I said earlier that I would tell you another way of doing this, from the outside in, and I want to talk about that now, before I encourage you to have a go at practicing this, because even from the beginning, this outside in method may actually suit you better, and in any case I hope that by talking about it you will get a better idea of what we are actually doing here.

From the outside in means that, instead of centring in the zones of activation and then inviting any and all hot and unhealed hurts into your furnace, you start with the presence of

those fiery feelings, in the body or in the mind, and then bring them back to the furnace to be safely held and worked on.

If you have any kind of stuck inflammation in your body, then this might be a way you prefer to approach your 'fire work'. Let's say you have a joint, or a vertebra, or a wound that is hot and swollen and painful and no amount of the coldest drugs on earth, the anti-inflammatories, are enough to put out its fire completely. If something like that is tormenting your peace then, when you are ready to test this theory out, you might prefer to go straight to it, and if you do it this way then just be with it as fully as you can, feel it as much as you are able to feel it, and then consciously bring the energy of it into the furnace of your liver whilst at least to some extent pairing to the other hot and dry zone in your body, your lumbar spine.

It is highly likely that, if you do this, that the fire in the joint, or your back, or wherever it is, will burn brighter at first. That is the way of many of the things that we do with holistic healing. It seems as if the problem is getting worse at the very beginning of the treatment, because what is happening is that more life force, more energy, is going into the area that was blocked and stuck and unwell. The symptoms that you were feeling were coming from the life force working against that block so, when you increase the life force, the symptoms can seem worse, at least for a moment.



With a practice like this, I would expect that such a process would take only moments to work through. A moment is still a long time to feel an increase in pain, but if you are expecting that it could happen, and you don't fight against it, or run from it, then each and every time you do this practice, without fail, there will be a release.

When we do a practice like this, the intelligence of our body is able to flood the wounded area with energy, because we aren't resisting it any more. In fact, giving it our conscious attention without trying to stop it or change it brings a great deal of life force into the area that was blocked.

Coupled to this, when you connect any area of your body that has some stuck inflammation into the energy of your liver and your lumbar spine, you will increase the intensity of the energy of the inflammation, which will sound like a bad idea if you have only met doctors or

schools of thought that describe inflammation as something to be got rid of, but inflammation is how we heal our bodies. Without inflammation there can be no healing to damaged tissues. The problem is that the inflammation gets stuck and cannot move forwards to the next stage. One way to describe what I am saying here is that, whilst some people will tell a person with a chronic arthritis to put ice on the joint and take anti-inflammatory drugs, someone who follows the older ways of healing will say put heat on to the joint and take things like Turmeric and Ginger to warm it up. A completely opposite approach! I suppose you already know what side I take on this and all I will say about that is that the reason old ways got to be old, is because they worked, not because they didn't.

I have been using physical examples to illustrate the outside in approach to helping work with, rather than against, the inner fires, but of course mostly up until now we have been talking about the emotional fires, the inner trouble of dark and fiery feelings that may not be present in the form of damaged tissues, but are just as hard to be with, and just as real.

If you have an emotional fire storm going on in your life right now, or whenever you might like to try this method from the outside in, then all the principles are the same. You allow yourself to fully feel your hurt and anger, hurt and resentment, guilt and shame, or however you call the fire that you feel, and without trying to change it, or justify it, or condemn it, or do anything other than be with it, you follow it into the source of your fire energy. It is like tracing smoke back to a fire.

Mostly we feel, and perceive our fire when it is in its storming phase on the surface rather than deeper within. Shame or guilt, when they are in their ascendant, strongest states, are felt as a hot, prickly and profoundly unpleasant sensation on our skin. Likewise, when we feel resentment in its acute state as a brooding dark storm of thought about someone or something, or even ourselves, it fills the surface of our minds and thoughts, so much so that it can be hard to think about anything else!

Nonetheless, however much on the surface of our skin or our minds the fire may be burning, you can be sure that its energy centre is still in the liver and the lumbar spine. By following the smoke and the flames back to the furnace, by allowing the intensity to increase, at least at first, and by simply being with it, we can move from resentment, and resistance, into gratitude.

How, how can we, naturally, without trickery, without force, without trying to convince ourselves of something that would not be natural, and therefore would not be sustainable; how can we feel gratitude when these fires can feel so bad, and be so toxic?

There is no trick to it, and certainly no dishonesty. It is simply a matter of being with the fire, accepting that there may be that moment when it becomes even a little more uncomfortable and intense, but staying with it anyway, and then there will always be a release, and in that release, and the peace that comes with it, the gratitude can come spontaneously, without force or contrivance. When you can, with a truthful heart, say *'thank*

you' to the fire within, and be glad to have it, in every way that it feels, then you know you have succeeded with this fire work.

The fire in our belly is most definitely not our enemy. It is a truly great friend. It gives us passion, and purpose. It gives us humour and laughter. It gives us light in the darkest places. Fire is fire. Even if the shadow sides of it are deeply unpleasant to behold, and most uncomfortable, or even painful to feel, the fire itself is not the enemy and not something that we need to get rid of to have our peace and happiness. Quite the contrary! Without fire there can be no peace and what we would be left with would be cold, dark, damp and miserable!

Imagine the Universe without stars. Our sun, and all stars, are the most burning hot fires imaginable. Fire gives life, and light. Yes, it can burn, yes it is really hard to be with, but if we can learn how to be with our fire, to harness it and to hold it, then we can start to channel it. To use it to move forwards on our journey in the best possible way. Again, fire is just energy, not bad, not good, just energy.

Now, or whenever you are ready, please have a go at taking this next great step in the hero journey of healing. This is to get in touch with your inner fire, however light or dark, good or bad it might be, you genuinely don't need to care about that, or make any judgements about it, just think of it as fire energy and that you want to practice gathering it into your furnace and feeling it, in all its fiery glory, because it is you, and it is safe to feel yourself, as fully and completely as you can.

Please have a go at this now or as soon as you can.



What Belongs to Us

I meet a lot of people with 'stuck fire' in my work, and I am acutely aware that everything they are told, and taught, and given to help, goes in the exact opposite direction of everything I've just been talking about. Whatever the problem is that relates to fire, any kind of fire, physical or emotional, it is named, blamed and shunned. The more it can be got rid of, and the sooner it can be got rid of, the better.

I understand why people feel that way, you cannot blame someone who has been healthy and well and then gets sick, with some awful kind of 'stuck fire' in their mind or body, for wanting it to be gone as soon as possible. We wouldn't blame a child for wanting something to stop hurting right now, so why would we think adults should be any different?

The crisis, the emergency, the sudden catastrophe, all of those are where a person can be expected to run, not walk, to the nearest people skilled in conventional medicine whose greatest strength is helping someone get through an overwhelming crisis. I have zero judgement, or opposition, for anyone who needs to take drugs, or use any other kind of intervention, when they are caught in a firestorm.

The work we do in holistic medicine is not to replace emergency medicine. The problems that people come in with are not so overwhelming that the person can't live with what is going on. Our patients don't need to be rescued, but they may need to go on a healing journey.

A great many health conditions come from 'stuck fire' and, with respect to the need and place for emergency medicine, I see that taking drugs to suppress the fire, which a lot of people do, year after year, does not give lasting benefit. People get caught in a holding pattern with their fire that seems to have no end to it. Which might be great if you are in the business of selling drugs, but it can be just awful for the person who has become dependent on drugs to get through the day but is not actually getting any better.

The fire, the inflammation, may be stuck in the body but it can just as well be stuck in the mind. Living with resentment, being unhappy and unfulfilled in a relationship, a career, a



home, anything, never does anyone any good. Whatever the reasons, physical or emotional, for the fire to exist, they are valid, they are not there to be ignored, or suppressed. The fire is there because something needs to change. That is what fire does, it changes things. The change can be destructive, breaking down whatever was causing it to come into being, or it

can be creative, building up something new to replace what caused it to come into existence. The worst thing for fire is when it can't go anywhere, when it can't change anything. That is when it becomes stuck, toxic, bringing forth the blocks of the health-damaging energy of resentment.

I know that the way I am suggesting to embrace and practice being with your inner fire is contrary to our culture and collective view on things, but whatever you may have done or thought in the past in relation to your fire has likely been things that you have been taught and shown rather than consciously worked out for yourself. I want to encourage you to try a different way to be with your fire and then see what happens, see if it actually helps you. It may make things feel more intense, at least at first, because you are leaving denial and facing the truth of how you feel, but it will not hurt you to be with what is. On the contrary, it is likely to be tremendously helpful, so long as you give it a chance to work, which almost certainly means doing some practice with it. It just has to be that way, this is the golden rule, that the more you practice this, or anything, the better you will get at it.

What I believe will happen, if you practice this and work out your own way deeper into it, through the process of practice, is that you will grow an increasingly healthy relationship with the fire in your belly that will serve you in some most remarkable ways. That life force I have been talking about, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, is real, it actually exists, being more connected to it brings about changes that would not happen in any other way.

You don't have to be anything other than who you are already to do any of this. Not older, or smarter, or in any way needing to try harder to do or be anything. The core first steps into the fire work are just about becoming easier, and more practiced at holding fire in your belly, becoming friends with it, gathering it in, letting it be there, feeling its strength and its heat, learning to trust that it is not there to harm you, even if there are echoes of hurt, guilt, shame, resentment etc, in where it came from.

There are many strong individuals, and groups, and forces in our world that gather people's energy to themselves through the power of destructive fire. It is said, and I believe it is true, that the root of all evil is this thought '*me and people like me are better than you and people like you*'. There is a tremendously powerful fire of hatred that storms throughout humanity, it always has, perhaps it always will. But I don't think it is wise to try to find our passion in what it is that we hate in others, or in the outside world.

There is a different kind of fire that burns inside us when we know what we really need and want is love, and peace. Getting in touch with our inner fire in a way that allows us to see the obstacles to what we truly need is powerful and transformative. It doesn't depend on anyone else doing anything or changing anything. The fire in our belly that burns for peace, and love, belongs to us alone.

Fire Meditation

In a short while, I'm going to ask you to have one more go at this practice, mostly just as we have been trying it already, but before we get there I want to put just a little more emphasis on the gratitude side of the equation to bring what we are seeking to do here into a further focus.

Which do you think is the worst of these to say if you don't really mean it? '*I'm sorry*' or '*thank you*'. I suppose it could be either, it is very bad to say either of them falsely because both '*I'm sorry*' and '*thank you*' can be magic, they can have a healing power in them if they are said with a sincere heart.

This talk now, around working with fire, brings us to gratitude. Gratitude can be a superpower, it can transform the darkest and most destructive inner fire into something that lifts our spirits into the highest joy, but you can't ever trick yourself into feeling grateful and nor should you ever try.

If you are in a good place already, then it's easy to practice gratitude, but if you are in a dark place, you must not force it, or try to make yourself feel it, please don't do that. You just have to wait until the wave of its energy comes to you, and starts to rise within you, before you can catch it and be a part of it with a true heart.

The wave will come and rise within you eventually, it always will. It is the nature of the life force to want to live, and to be hopeful, no matter how dark we get. Our part in this is more about not getting in the way of it and being open to catching it when it is already happening by itself. What we can do, along with not getting in its way, is to allow the fire to gather more strongly in the places where the fire most safely belongs, which is in our liver and our lumbar spine, the valley under our belly.

When you bring your awareness into these zones with the intention to feel the fire, and allow anything and everything that smoulders within to join it, as much as it wants to and as soon as it is ready, then you are deeply connecting with the inner life force in its hot, dry, transformative state.

I say deeply connecting, and I have been using language that invites you to anticipate strong feelings, but I want to mention here that it may also be that, especially when coming to these ideas in the beginning, and when just starting to practice taking conscious steps into your Eagle territory, your activation zone, that what you may firstly feel could be very subtle.

Remember the section earlier when I was asking the imaginary questions from a person who felt too little, and then one who felt too much? The answers here would be much the same, which is to say truly don't worry if you feel too little, because this will certainly become more clear, and more powerful with time, and equally don't worry if you are already feeling a lot more than you were expecting, because these are safe practices and any kind of healing reaction that comes up from using them will only be for your greater good.

Whether you have already felt a little or a lot, and whether having one more go at this shortly brings this matter into a clearer light, because even one repetition of such exercises can bring them much deeper, the key point I want to make now is to have the word *'thank you'* at your lips, metaphorically speaking, as soon as it could be truly sincere.

Once you feel that fire, and especially once you feel it building, which can happen rather quickly once you trust the process and don't push against it, then it is highly likely that you will be able to feel the benevolent nature of the fire in your belly. This fire is not trying to hurt you in any way whatsoever. It is your engine, your factory, your friend.

As soon as you are tuned into it, and can feel its life-giving warmth and strength within you in its loving, benevolent way, don't hesitate to give an inner voice to your thanks. You could think in your body and feel in your mind *'thank you'* or you could embellish it, and add any thoughts or images or further reasons to be in its frequency that you wish. Your fire energy wants to lift you up and it can actually raise your spirits very quickly and easily, so long as you don't hold on to resentment. Once you can already feel the wave, so you know it is not you making it happen, you are not forcing anything, you are not trying to change anything, but you can catch the wave, and just a word might be all it takes, because it really doesn't take much to step into the air and fly once you allow that warm, dry draft of freedom, of air, of fire-energy to sweep up and over you.

And it is also possible that none of that will happen, at least not at first, why? Because we have stuck fire, especially in the form of resentments. Resentment stops the fire from moving, it has the quality of resistance in it, which blocks the flow of energy and healing.

Please do not be too disheartened if this is the case, at least at first. It really is ok if you have resentment within, it's just normal, it comes with the territory of being alive and not yet being at peace and in love. We are all on a journey, hopefully heading towards what we truly need and want, but in the meantime here we are, with all the warts, and the stuck fire too.

So then what to do with all that resentment and stuck fire? Don't fight it, don't condemn it, don't deny it, but rather accept it, welcome it, bring it into the furnace and, if you do this, because I know these may just be words on a page at this point, but this practice will actually work if you do it, then when you stop resisting the fire, when you welcome it into your belly, then there will be a release, a change.

You cannot go to it, because it must come to you. How you can know that you are doing everything right is in how it feels when the wave of your life force comes up within you. There is a great force in it and, at the same time, it is extremely gentle, subtle and most easily able to be resisted, if you so choose.

Try not to resist it, allow it to lift your spirits, even if only ever so slightly at first, and then as soon as you are ready to catch the wave more freely more fully, and so be in the frequency

of its light energy, you can thank it and everything that is behind it and with it, with a truly sincere heart. Thank you for being here, thank you for simply existing.

So long as you can feel it in your mind and think it in your body with sincerity, the words *'thank you'* can get you everywhere you need to go from here. You can take it further if you want to. If the fire in your belly is lifting your heart up higher, you can, if you wish, let your energy take wing and fly as high as you can go, for example with this extraordinary thought, or prayer, *'Thank you for everything, I don't want to change anything'*.

Gratitude is the cure for resentment. It changes it, it takes it from being a stuck, harmful, toxic fire into something that can actually serve us and help us to achieve our goals and find what we are seeking. Don't you think that this is an extraordinary idea? Imagine if it were true, how much it could change your health and your life!

Obviously, I think it is true but you cannot believe in such a thing unless you have experienced it for yourself. It must be true for you for it to work and the only way it could become true for you is if you were to test it and prove its truth. How do you test it and prove it to be true? You practice with it and see what happens.

Let's have a practice at this now. The process is the same as before but now we are wanting to be open to adding some gratitude into the furnace as the third and final step of the practice. Let me summarise all this one more time before we have a go at it.

- 1) The first step, to bring your awareness into the activation zones of your belly, pairing together where your liver lives along with the lower valley of your lumbar spine. You can go straight into the zone if you wish, or what might help you to catch its energy better is to either come through the lower right quadrant and the base of your spine or you could try bringing your awareness into your fire-lands through the centre of your belly, your navel.
- 2) The second step, when you are centred into your lumbar spine and your liver, is to feel the heat that is naturally already here, in this most hot part of your body, and then to invite any stuck heat anywhere else in your body or inner being to come into your furnace. Remember that, if you have some pre-existing physical or emotional stuck fire within you that it may flare up when you make such an invitation. If you make a sincere invitation to your body's intelligence it will hear you, and it will



respond. A flaring up of fire would be showing you the reality of its existence, but that this will soon shift so long as you don't resist it or try to stop it. Then, perhaps as you practice this more than once so you are getting the hang of going with the flow of it and not being too conscious of which step you are doing and how you ought to be thinking or feeling, I am sure that you will be eventually able to feel how the heat will build in your liver and lumbar spine. At least some of the stuck fire will move here, and it is changed in the process in a way that can only be for your greater good.

- 3) Then the third step, when you feel that fire in your belly naturally lifting, not when it might be feeling worse for a moment, but when there is a release and so you have a sense of hope, or a lightness of being that comes to you, is to catch the wave of that healing energy and allow yourself to feel sincerely grateful to the presence of that force that you can feel. You are saying thank you to life, to your own body, to the Universe, to whatever you perceive as the creative force that begins and moves all of this in its incomprehensible plan.

You must understand that this is not a one time deal. The reasons for our stuck fires are deep, historic and present. The fires don't just disappear for good, there are shifts, there is healing and there is change, but they come back. They come back for more processing even when there has been a significant release and a transformation of their energy. Also, inevitably, the stuck fires can be rekindled in a thousand different ways. This is how the healing journey goes, you move forwards, then you take a step back, then you move forwards again.

Take the first step, then the second, then the third as many times as you need, go back and forth with any of them, come back to the first two steps, combine any of them together, follow your heart, your spirit, where it leads you next on your hero journey of healing. This meditation is simple in principle but it can be life-changing in practice.

Have a go, now or whenever you are ready.



Thoughts on the Fear and the Fire

Soon, we are going to move from the hotter lower parts of the spine, into the cooler upper hill of the thoracic and valley of the neck. Likewise we are about to cross over the dividing line from the hot lands of the right hand side of the hara into the cooler territories of the left.

Of course there is no actual line and, in reality, the hara is far more of a simmering, shifting cauldron of energy and feelings than it is a dishwasher with everything in its correct place.

Nonetheless, the themes, the dominant influences, are most helpful to know and work with and, when we move from lower to higher in the back and from the right to the left of the front of the hara, I am so looking forward to talking with you some more about compassion and surrender in the hero journey of healing.



In many ways the cooler territories, with their softer, more yielding and Yin practices are much easier, or at least let's say gentler, than the hot lands of where we've just been. Let's go there soon, but I firstly want to say something about the connections of the fear and the fire because, if you pick up and work with some of the practices we have been exploring then, if you haven't already, you will soon be feeling how strongly they are connected and how much they flow into one another.

I talked earlier about a good way to naturally come into the activation zones of the liver and the lumbar spine by coming from below, where things are hot and damp. This is very much a two-way passageway and the flow of energy between these areas, both up and down, back and forth, is deeply influenced by how we feel, and particularly how we are moving with these two formidable, extraordinarily powerful dark friends - our fear and our fire.

Here is where I want to remind you of something that I touched on before, and I want to repeat this, and reinforce it, because this is a deep and subtle subject which needs exploring more than once to grasp, and also because this approach is not how we are taught, and it is counter-intuitive to our collective conditioning, which demands that we run away or fight against the feeling of fear, and that we shun and shame and deny the feeling of fire.

This is what I want to remind you of, you cannot make friends, and make peace, and make space within your body and your mind for these great forces, these dark friends, when they are in their ascendant, emerging states.

This is really important, and I want to look at this again with you before we move on. Let's start with the great force that we sometimes call by the name fear. This energy that has its home in the basement of our body, the root of our spine and the lower right of our belly, rests in these places. It lives within us, like an intelligent and primal force, alert to danger, determined in every fibre of its existence that we survive, and so it is always watchful, waiting and aware. These basement places are the best, (I even wonder if they are the only) parts of our body, which can also be called our subconscious, and here we can safely and slowly, step by step, make friends with this potent energy.

When this primal energy comes rushing out from the basement in its shadow form, its dark form, in feelings that we call by such words as fear, anxiety, doubt and worry, it is next to



impossible to make friends with it. It is too confronting, too uncomfortable, it is too damn scary!

In an instant, the watchful energy in the basement rushes and runs into our hearts, our muscles, our eyes and ears, and of course our brains. We are ready to fight, or take flight and, if there is nothing we can actually fight or run from, which is often the case, then we are left with the aftermath, the agitation and anxiety of the fight or flight energy.

The rush of fear in its emergent form, which floods through our blood with the chemistry of the hormones of stress, is so hot in its tidal wave that it leaves us cold in its wake. In its most acute, rushing state, the force of fear is so hot,

so super hot, that it leaves our heart and gut and body running deadly cold after it has surged through us. It uses up so much heat that 'our blood runs cold'.

The wave, the rush of this primal energy, may pass away soon enough so that we come back to our peace, but if it happens strongly enough and often enough it can permeate into day to day life and, if you who are reading this know what that feels like then you already know how incredibly tough that is to be with.

In the hara, the belly, the furthest place from the lower right quadrant is the upper left, where our stomach lies under our heart. When the energy of fear comes out hard and strong, this upper left quadrant is where its energy can be most strongly felt in the belly. The fear grips it, and profoundly disturbs its balance. This can be helpful to know and work with, and we'll be coming to this area next, but for now coming back to the point, it is surely

impossible to make friends and be with such a force when it is out, running wild, and wreaking havoc on our peace and equilibrium.

This is not the time for the spiritual practices we have been exploring, that could come later, but when a storm of fear is raging, I want you to seek the nearest and safest port that you know and trust could safely shelter you from the storm. You may already know what that port is, and if you have gained trust in someone or something through hard experience then that is a treasure not to be given up lightly. That said, I also want you to know that there are herbs that can help in even the worst crises of fear and anxiety and that I have spelled out in detail what they are and how to use them in my article on anxiety on my website. To pick out two especially potent and reliable allies, Valerian root and Kava root can help with the worst of the worst anxiety. They can be as effective as small doses of Valium drugs when used correctly but they have none of the awful addictiveness or side effects of Valium.

Herbs are the people's medicine, they belong to all of us and anyone can use them safely and effectively with just a little training. In terms of helping with anxiety, all it takes is for them to work once, clearly and straight away, for the beginnings of a relationship of trust to be established with them.

Anyone suffering from anxiety should use Nature to help them on their healing journey. Herbs for anxiety should be possible to get anywhere in the world. They are nothing as expensive or dangerous as drugs are, and they can be easy to learn how to use safely and effectively with just a little study beforehand.

Exercise can be exceptionally helpful too, especially for depression, which is so often paired to anxiety. It can be extremely difficult to find the motivation to do something to get your heart rate up when you are in the depths of the shadow-lands but anyone who suffers from depression should know that exercise outperforms all pharmaceutical antidepressants by far and, if they can just meet the great challenge to get started with it, it will always help.

Another one of my favourite strategies to help with acute anxiety is a process called 'worry time'. I write about it in detail in the article on anxiety on my website but in a nutshell you make a time when you can be active, going for a walk is usually best, and then you deliberately pick the worst things you could worry about and really have a go at them. You imagine the worst possible outcome of everything that you are afraid of and how you would deal with it, what you could do, how it would affect you, everything. For the person who is afraid of their fear and is trying to do everything they can to escape from it, the idea of 'worry time' in principle firstly seems alien, and frightening, until they actually do it and realise how much better it makes them feel. Worry time works because our fear is not the enemy. We genuinely do have things to worry about and, when we do it in a courageous and constructive manner, it doesn't make things worse at all. It is a genuinely healing strategy that, if a person practices with it, never fails to help.

Coming back to my key point here, about when to make friends and when to know how to survive a storm, it is exactly the same with the energy of fire. How could anyone hope to make peace with fire when it is raging and burning and causing destruction outwardly or inwardly? I know that there are a great many methods that people use to control their anger, to keep their cool, and good on them and good luck to them, but I see that you can only go so far with controlling it and keeping it bottled in before a person, any person, ends up in a state of depression.

The crazy genius Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychiatry, believed that depression was anger turned inwards and I think he was right. We can, through our force of will, bite our tongues and stop ourselves from speaking out at whatever has caused our fire to storm up so much that its hot air wants to roar out of our mouths, but what are the consequences of this tongue-biting and control to us in the long term? Yes, by keeping silent, we avoid the destruction and the shame that comes if we had raged forth, but what does holding onto a storm of fire do to us?

Many times in my practice I have met with a person who is being ravaged by their own fire, burned by it, even tormented by it. If they are young, their parents or guardians have bought them to see me, usually because they are deeply reluctant to go down the path of medicating their child or teenager with mind altering chemicals, but they are at a painful loss to know what to do with their child's rage and nothing they have tried to help has been working. If the person is older, and they have come in by themselves, they are often ashamed to fully admit to what is going on for them and so I have learned to pick up the code, when someone says they are suffering from some irritability or bad moods, that this is likely to be a major understatement and that they could actually be suffering very badly in the fire storms.



Whatever their age, younger or older, before I think about a pair or more of the herbs that help calm the nervous system, or even if they might be a person to whom I could suggest one of the ways of doing the deep inner work that I have been discussing here, I encourage them to take the first step of finding a private place to safely let the fire out of their body and to start practicing it so that they can get trust in it as soon as they possibly can.

I say there are two effective ways of doing this and that they have to try both, at least a few times, to be sure if one is clearly better than the other for them personally, or if they are actually best to keep doing at least some of both. Without dressing it up and trying to make

it look pretty, I tell them that the two best methods of releasing the fire storms are 1) punching and kicking and 2) yelling and screaming, and that they must initially try them both and do both of them when and where no one can see or hear them.

The punching and kicking can be done on a mattress, or a soft couch, or a bean bag, or anything that won't hurt you when you kick it or punch it. If this turns out to be a good fit and it works as well as, or even better, than yelling, then a must-have purchase, to hang in a garage or some other private place, is going to be a punching bag, and they must get gloves and be ready to watch some Youtube clips or get some other expert tuition on how to punch safely so they don't hurt their hands.

Yelling and screaming usually seems like the easier option, and indeed it is the best fit for many people, but they can't know for sure that it will be their best option unless they try both methods at least a few times. For yelling, if they are old enough to have a car, then that is usually the best place to do it. Put the windows up, be moving or in some empty place, and absolutely no one will ever hear you. You do it loud, you yell or scream anything you need to, and you do it for as long as you need, which usually is not very long.

For a young person or someone who doesn't have a car, I tell them to use a cushion or a pillow and to yell into it whatever they want to, as loud as they need to, and that no one will ever know. If there is a parent in the room with us when we are talking about this, I encourage them both to do an experiment at home where they both do it from a different room and ask each other if they can hear anything. Once the child or teenager knows and trusts that they will be completely private when they yell into a pillow or a cushion, then they can really let loose.

The point of doing this releasing work, at least when beginning to learn how to be with your fire, but really any time you need it is that, when the fire energy is already storming, it's already out, it's burning, and it is terribly important to channel that fire in a way that doesn't suppress it back so that it just makes you burn even worse on the inside, but also that doesn't come raging out of you in a destructive way, which of course causes so much trouble to us when we get fired up and angry with someone else who, the great majority of the time is not a stranger, but someone close to us.

Even if we believe that someone close to us deserves every bit of it, by losing our temper and sending out our fire in a destructive way, by tearing them down in a righteous rage, then we are only going to end up hurting ourselves as well as them.

Again, the key point here is that you don't try to make friends with your fire when it is burning out of control. You find the safest and fastest way you can to release it, without shaming yourself in the process and only then, when the storm has passed, can you take the steps on the hero journey to make friends with it.

If there is some awful, toxic situation or person in your life that must change, then of course you have to do the essential work to deal with this too, but not destructively, or you are the one who will get hurt in the process. We must wield the fire with care so as not to do any conscious harm in the process of change. Again, the best way I know how to work towards that is through these practices, where we start to learn how to make friends with our fire and to learn how to be with it safely, and even thankfully, in the places within us that are made to hold fire. We have to firstly make at least some peace with our fire within ourselves before we have a chance of being able to constructively work with it in our relationships with others.

Anyway, back to my key point here again, which is that whether it is a hot storm of fear or a hot storm of fire, when the storm has passed, and storms always pass, there will be time to make friends with these great forces in their resting places.

Of course, it is entirely possible that in your own case, the base of your spine and your cleansing quadrant, or your lumbar spine and your liver, already have a lot going on in them and they are not easy, or restful places to even begin to connect to. That's still ok, you won't be wrong to start here anyway. Whatever might be happening in your hot zones, there is still nowhere safer to start with these energies than these resting places for the fear and the fire in your subconscious, meaning your body, in the lower hill and valley of your spine and the right hand side of your hara, your belly.

If you do these practices then you will become increasingly connected with these parts of your body, and the potent forces that they contain, and even without you directing it to happen in any way whatsoever, you will feel how the intelligence of your life force moves the energy, in all kinds of ways. Including taking 'you' up from the basement zones into the lumbar spine and the liver and, equally, moving from the liver and the lumbar spine back down into the basement of your spine and your lower right quadrant.

Not if, but when you feel this happening, just go with the flow! These hot, primal, life force energies are deeply connected, they are you, their energy is always moving and flowing, up and down, back and forth.

I've been focusing on the shadow work, because that is where the obstacles lie on the healing journey, but in its bright form, the fire energy is glorious and gorgeous. You want to laugh, sing, and love the world. You are flying high and the life force wants to lift you on its wings. It is the same for the primal energy, that same hot and damp force that we call fear in its shadow side, when it is in its bright form it gives us the courage to live, to take risks, to dare to dream, to have passion and purpose!

How to reach, and be in more and more, the light side of these energies? I believe that all these practices can help with that, but that we must be ready to do the shadow work along the way, and that means to not resist, and resent, and harden ourselves against our unhealed hurts, and our fears, and our inner fires!

Of course, I do not want to put you off stepping forwards on these practices, I want to encourage you, and hopefully continue to share some useful methods to help get started and moving but I would be betraying my first rule, of 'do no harm' if I didn't warn you, my unknown reader, that there are dark and often extremely difficult energies that centre in these areas and that you must be prepared to be a true hero for yourself, to yourself, to step into their presences and do the work in the shadow-lands of your subconscious, which is your body.

In their shadow forms, the centres of energy that we are seeking to be in touch with take on the most formidable shapes of both fear and fire, which are incredibly difficult forces to be friends with. Difficult, but not impossible, and for all the challenges, and probably healing reactions along the way, there is such a treasure to be gained by making the effort!

From facing our fear and learning how to be with it, little by little, we can increasingly receive its most extraordinary gift, which is that of courage. By facing our fire, and learning how to be with it, little by little, we can increasingly receive its most extraordinary gift, which is that of transformation.

The spiritual practices of forgiveness and gratitude give sure footholds into being with these forces. The meditative approach of going within, being centred in the body, feeling the presence of these energies in their home bases, where they are most safely able to be felt, grows the trust that we really can be with what is within ourselves. From the trust, comes the friendship, little by little, step by step, practice by practice.



Nourishment and Compassion

Here we are at last! We've beaten a path through the hot and damp jungle of our fear and ascended the craggy volcano of our fire and now, finally, we can have some earthly reward, some love, some food, some nourishment!

Honestly, I feel that it should, or at least it could, be easier from here on out, and I realise that may be naive, and that everyone has their own unique challenges to navigate, but being with the fear and the fire is hard, really hard, and moving into these cooler lands certainly could be gentler, and softer, and easier, well it could be...

In a moment, as you might be expecting by now, I am going to ask you, early on in this section, to have a first go at connecting the dots for where we are bringing the awareness into these next parts of our body, our subconscious, that most relate to the great energy of nourishment. These are the best areas for us to earth and deepen the spiritual practice of compassion and, coming back to compassion, means we have finally come back around to where we started.

Physically we are moving up and over. Up from the valley of the lumbar spine to the hill of the mid-back, the thoracic spine, and over from the top right of the belly to the top left quadrant of the belly. In the maps of the body, these new zones are the ones that relate to nourishment.

Constitutionally, we are in the land of the enigmatic Elephant-Butterfly. Anatomically we are in the zone of the heart and the stomach and energetically we are in the cooler, dryer zones of the hara, the upper left quadrant, and the cooler dryer upper hill of the spine, the thoracic.

Spiritually, we are in the area where we are in the best place to practice compassion and also to meet our greatest challenges to the love that we truly need, and seek, because this is where we are most able to see, feel and work on our hardenings and judgements, and our feelings of loneliness, sadness and separation. All of that which blocks us from being in love.



'The journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step'. Let's come back and practice one of the possible first steps towards compassion with a little more somatic awareness included

in the process. You've done most of this before, so this is practice, but we are adding an awareness of this top left quadrant of the belly, the hara, which will deepen the potency of what we are setting out to do.

I am going to ask you, in just a moment, to close your eyes, take some deep breaths and to again practice catching the ripple of your heart beat on the wave of your breath.

Were you able to do this previously? I have always found that people can do it with just a little practice. If you were not successful earlier, by no means think you are lacking something essential to be able to do this and so should give up. If it didn't come the first time, or you were unsure if you were doing it right, try again, you will get it!

Or at least you will get it, and then lose it again. You will catch it and lose it. Of course, your heart is beating all the time, or you would be dead, it is definitely there and with even just a little practice you will increasingly be able to feel its movement in your body. In fact, if you tune into this deeply, which I encourage you to do, you will actually be able to feel a little



ripple through your whole body, not just in your heart or on your breath, but in every part of you, all the way down to your toes, each and every time your heart beats. It is a remarkable phenomenon to tune into and I think you will find it to be very soothing and meditative to feel yourself as a whole, living, pulsing being in this way.

For now, what I want you to try to do is to catch your heart beat on the wave of your breath and then let yourself ride that wave so that it brings you into your centre, into your heart itself. You won't 'hear' the beat, you will feel it, and as soon as you even take this first step, then you are already deep in the practice that we are beginning here.

The next step is to allow one or more of those three lovely words for compassion '*soft, centred, now*' to permeate your conscious and subconscious self. The words are guides, showing the way to open your heart and move towards compassion. So you think in your body and feel in your mind '*soft, centred, now*'.

That's almost it. The new part of this is to allow the energy, your energy, to move and expand to include your thoracic spine and the top of your belly on the left hand side. You may feel some heat when you do this, because it is normal when we focus, or centre our energy, for there to be an increase in life force, which typically brings heat in its wake, but the warmth will have a different quality to what you felt lower in your spine, and on the right hand side of your belly. It is more spacious up here, more diffuse, there is air in it, which is

also part of the sense of dryness, but it is also cooler territory, which means there is more room to hold still with things, to be with them more gently and easily.

There is not less feeling here, far from it, but there is usually less intensity, less urgency by comparison to where we've been. Especially where we've been in the fire-lands lately, where we have had the energy of the sun, so hot, so intense, so Yang. Now we are coming, at least somewhat, into the influence of the moon, the cooler, yielding, Yin.

In this space, your heart beats like a drum, tireless like the stars are tireless. It is not living for itself, it is faithfully loving us, serving us, being us. Just three steps, in any order, seeking to pair any two of them at any time as you go.

- 1) Connecting to your heart through feeling its beat through your breath
- 2) Thinking in your body, feeling in your mind *'soft, centred, now'*
- 3) Centring into the cooler, dryer, open spaces in the thoracic spine and upper left hara.

Let's have a go now, or wherever you are ready.



Matters of the Heart

I am looking forward to sharing a very special heart-centred meditation with you in a short while. The first steps are just as we have been practicing but then a most important, and often very healing next step. Every time I do it myself it feels like the first time, and I encourage you to have as many goes with it as you want to too.

Before we get to that, I need to explore some of the shadow-lands of this most important subject with you, so let's just get straight to it because I have every reason to believe that you, dear reader, have a wounded heart!

Of course, I don't know if you have any actual physical damage to your heart, and I hope you have nothing of the sort, but if you are alive then, I'm terribly sorry, but you simply must have the ache of being human within you, and a great deal of that ache starts right there, in the heart, and actually also in what is so closely connected to the heart, our stomach.

This morning, in thinking about all this, I was asking myself when does a person, any person, not have at least some of that ache and longing hunger for love that sits in the heart and the stomach at the same time. I suppose there might be exceptions, and just because I haven't met anyone with no unhealed hurts doesn't mean they couldn't exist, maybe even you are that one who has no ache, no longing, but the only time I can be really sure of a truly clean slate in this matter, is before we are born.

We are not a separate being inside the womb, we are part of a greater whole, alive and aware yes, but no sense of separation. So it is only when we are born, from the first moment of life outside the womb, that we are separated, when we have to open our lungs to start breathing for ourselves, to get the oxygen that our heart ever needs to keep beating. Of course it has to be this way, it must be like this, but I can see from the baby's first breath, and first cry, how there is the birth of the separation from love that leads to so many... let's say interesting, and challenging journeys along the way from there.

Babies know the ache of their hunger. They cry from it in a way that no one who had ears could listen to and not be affected by. I think that the sound of a chainsaw sawing down a tree is the second worst sound in the world, and that the anguished cry of a baby is the number one worst sound in the world. Who could not be profoundly disturbed by such a sound? It moves us to help, we must help. That cry carries all the loneliness of the world in it. We want to rush to meet its aching need, with food, with love, with nourishment.

Terribly, awfully, we cannot always ease the baby's ache and they keep howling with utter and complete misery no matter what we do to try to help. I imagine that all of us who have cared for a baby in inconsolable anguish have had a thought along the lines of *'it's lucky they are never going to remember this!'*

None of us can remember anything of our being babies with our conscious minds, our minds haven't even formed yet but, most interestingly, there appears to be another form of

memory in the body, or the subconscious, that can be accessed through being in an altered, hypnotic-type state. In the 1980s a new form of therapy called 'rebirthing' swept across the holistic medicine world. One most memorable day, I lay down in the treatment room of a woman offering it and, without any expectation whatsoever of what could happen or might happen, I simply breathed in the way she showed me, in a certain circular kind of way that simply moved a lot of air in and out of me for a time.

After showing me the breathing technique she didn't say a word to me, just sat quietly in the room while I got on with it. So I was breathing away, going through the discomfort of what felt like hyperventilating and coming out the other side of that, and then all of a sudden, without one tiny push of my mind to make it happen, not knowing how I got there and certainly never able to access that place since, I was there, pre-birth, in a state of bliss, a red light all around me, the sound of a heart beat like an ocean wave, and no sense of time or separation or anything but pure, joyful being. I felt like I had been there forever, and could stay there forever too. But then suddenly there was a great pressure, and an undeniable force that I could do nothing to resist and suddenly there was light, and searing cold, and a slap on that lower hill of the spine that I could feel as if it had just happened. I experienced my birth for a second time.

I don't know how it might have helped me, and I don't think that such an experience is necessary for a healing journey, but what I can say with a certainty that is more than intellectual, is that all of us must know, at a most deep and subconscious level, what it is to be in such a state and not be separate, and that as much as we may have to go through all kinds of conniptions to be in love, and unity, that what we seek is something that we already know exists, because we have felt it before. We are not wrong to seek love, including the great love of being one with all that is.



What is love? What are the obstacles to love? Don't you think those are good questions to ask, and to explore the answers? Of course, if I ask - what is love? The question implies that I don't know what love is, because anyone who was deeply or, as we say, madly in love would think the question unnecessary. *'This is love'*, they could say, pointing to their existence, to everything, *'this is all love'*.

Thank heavens for romantic love because, if not for that, then there would be next to no music, poetry, stories or even hopes and dreams about love. Romantic love is the closest most of us get to the experience of the bliss of non-separation. When two lovers are so entwined, so utterly into each other, that they lose themselves in their love. But then a mother's or, why not, a father's unconditional, self-sacrificing and selfless love for their child probably goes just as deep, just as all-in, in its own, utterly beautiful way too.

Even the greatest romances go through their honeymoon and then things change, they must change, because life is a journey and we are all changing all the time. So we have to work together to be together and the love must be tested, and purified, and made even stronger by surviving the fear and the fire and everything else that comes into everyone's life.

Likewise, children grow up, they don't remain dependent forever. They take off and start up their own lives and it should be like that, and it must be like that, and the feelings that you love them so much that you would just die for them haven't disappeared, but you don't need to feel those feelings so much anymore, because they are taking care of themselves now.

If you love someone then you only want the best for them, in every way. You don't want them to suffer, you want them to be happy, and healthy, and to have everything their hearts desire. You have no jealousy towards them, if they are happy and successful then you are happy. If you can do anything for them, or help them in any way, then it is your delight to be of help but you can also just enjoy them, just as they are.

I think that there is a tremendous amount of love in the world. I look at the news very sparingly, because it is nearly all bad news and I want to keep at least some faith in humanity, but when I see people with their fellow humans, with their tribe, I see great affection and warmth, I see love. People know what family feeling is, they don't need to be told what love is, they know when it's not there and they know when it is.

What I am most interested in exploring here is what are the obstacles to love for ourselves personally because, even if we have people in our lives that we dearly love, and who love us, if we are hard upon ourselves, if we cannot give love and compassion and mercy and kindness to ourselves then, I think, no matter how well our relationships with others may be, we cannot be in love in the way that we most need, not in the true sense of the word of the love that lasts and endures the storms, and gives us what our hearts truly want and need.

What are the obstacles to that love? I suppose that they are many. I have been using words like hardening and judgement to give a sense of the feelings that come with the obstacles but, if we were to really go deeply into this question then I think we would have to unpack the whole book of life, and who can do that!

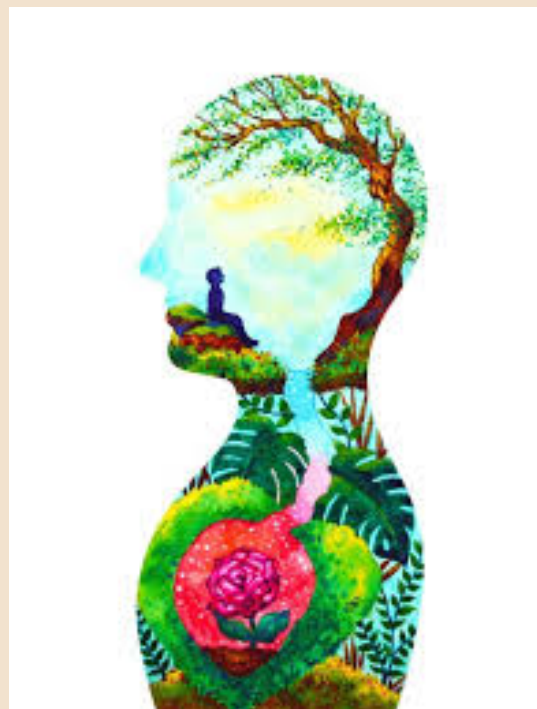
Even people that visit with a therapist once or twice a week for many many years never get to the end of it. There are stories upon stories of how we got broken and fractured and, even if you could access them all, because of course some of the worst of it happens before we can lay down conscious memories, what difference does it make, really and truly, to tell the story of the why? I see the value of the talking, I really do, but I worry that it is not enough, that it may not lead to healing but rather an endless tennis match, justification vs condemnation.

We don't want to feel unloved, unseen, unheard, untouched, but there may truly be no other person, not a lover or a therapist, not a parent or a friend, who can give us what we need for the kind of healing that requires truly unconditional love. The compassion that we need to bring to ourselves doesn't require that we tell, and retell, and retell again, our story to our own inner ears either. All we need to know, without doubt, with 100% certainty, is that there are excellent reasons for everything that we feel. Whatever the reasons are, they are good enough, always. Once we get to that point, no tennis, just acceptance of *'this is how I feel'*, then surely the next question, the right question is *'ok, so what do I do about it?'*

Let's say that my heart aches, or it is even broken, and even if I may love others and feel loved by them, I do not truly feel in love. The bliss of having my baby, or finding and being with my new lover was there, it was real, I felt it, but it has passed. I still love them but I am back to being my separate self, if I ever really left it. What do I do to find what it is that my heart seeks and that I know I need more than anything in the world, alongside peace?

Well, first of all, before anything else can even possibly work, we have to not be in denial.

Which means we have to know that we have a heart that aches for love and be willing to see that, and feel it. I know I have been saying this in other ways earlier on but you cannot overestimate how much of an obstacle it is to be in denial over this matter, especially this matter, because many of us would just not want to admit, even to ourselves, that we might be lacking love in our lives.



No one can feel what you feel, no one knows the truth of you, as you can. You, and you alone can listen to your heart and feel what your heart is telling you, and showing you. This healing, heart-centred meditation that I want to show you is a true step towards finding what it is we most seek but, like everything we've been exploring, it will need practice to get good at it. That's ok, if you practice it you will get good at it, and if it's important to you, then you will find the time to do it.



I've encouraged you, a couple of times now, to try the method of connecting to your heart through feeling its pulse ripple through your breath and then following it back to its centre. It's a great technique and I hope you already like it, but I also want to mention an equally effective method of simply coming into the top left quadrant of your hara, the nourishing zone, and being with the energy that is always present here, because it will also take you directly to your heart.

I am sure you know the old saying *'the fastest way to a man's heart is through his stomach'*. It is, quite literally, true, and just as true for a woman too. Yes, when we can, when they want us to, we should definitely feed the ones we love, but this goes further than food or drink alone. The stomach, in its resting state, is cool and dry. Obviously, when our stomach is filled with food or drink it is no longer cool and dry, it swings to an opposite state of being warm and damp, but it will normally soon empty again and return to its resting state.

When your stomach is full, the warm, damp energy within it, and the food that is being broken down and cooked like a soup inside it, will want to move down as soon as it is ready, so you wouldn't use this method when your stomach was full, but rather when it was empty. At that time, even bringing a momentary awareness into this top left hand side of your hara will almost immediately connect you to your heart. You should try this way sometime too, it's easy and it's nice!

Just as you can connect to the energy of the furnace of the liver by coming to its lower edge, under your right hand side ribs, and then you will soon be able to feel the greater presence of that fire, that warmth, spreading under your ribs as well as through your belly, in exactly the same way, once you get to just under the bottom of your left-hand side ribs, where your

stomach is, you will soon be able to come up under the ribs into where your heart, and your lungs, are living, being, and feeling.

Oh, and as I haven't mentioned this yet, of course all of this intimately connects to your thoracic spine. Once you start feeling more in your heart and stomach you will highly likely feel more, of something, in the long upper hill of your spine. Everyone has stuff going on there, everyone. You can even feel it in very small children, it is a lot to be a human, even a very young one, the heart and the lungs and the stomach take in a lot, and not all of it gets processed easily or completely. Again, if you have healing reactions when you start accessing these places, don't stop. They are a good sign and you will not come to harm by getting more in touch with your inner life force, but it can still be challenging, and changing!

Coming back to the practice that we are getting ready to try. Either through tuning into your empty stomach first, or by coming through your thoracic spine, or through the method of catching your pulse on the wave of your breath, you firstly will need to come to your heart and feel it, literally feel it, beating and being.

That's the first step and, honestly and truly, that may be all you want to do sometimes. It is more than enough to just be with your heart, to feel it beating, and to connect to it. It is only if you want to go further, and are ready to go further, that there are some other steps that I want to encourage you to learn and practice.

The second step is one that you have already been learning and practicing. It is to remind yourself that this is the part of your body where you especially want to feel soft, and centred, and just here, in the present moment of now. This is to help us not fall into our old patterns of judging what we feel and hardening ourselves against our own hearts. There is no need for that here, no judgement, no hardening, just soft, centred and now. You may only need to think those three words just once, to align your mind and body into the practice of compassion, or you might want to say them over a few times, bringing what they mean, what they stand for, deeper with repetition - soft, centred, now...

Then the new step, the third step. This is where you talk to your heart, literally, within your thoughts or even out loud if you are alone and you want to, in any case you talk, but this next step is the one you can do only after the listening in the first step. You firstly have to listen to your heart, that is essential, I can't overemphasise that point.

Have you noticed that you will not really want to hear what someone says to you if you feel that they are not willing to listen to you too? That is a quality most of us share. We do want to treat people in the same way that we wish to be treated but, when they don't show us the respect of listening to us, we really don't see why we should have to listen to them!

It is the same for our hearts. We must listen to them, and our hearts have to feel heard, I mean this very literally, for there to be a true sincerity, and receptivity, to what we are about

to do. Talking to your heart must be sincere but you must listen to it first. no one but you will ever know how you go about this, but you will know.

I also should mention here that, when you set the intention to really feel and listen to your heart, that this can suddenly open a gateway to hear something from some other part of your subconscious that might, in a sense, leap forwards for your attention. Our bodies, our subconscious, where the much greater part of our true being exists, does not have words and thoughts to communicate to us like our minds do. Our body, our subconscious, talks



through feelings, through experiences, sub-verbally and intuitively. In many ways, our hearts are at the centre of our subconscious being, but all of us is one connected whole and, if you are listening to the centre, there is every opportunity to hear, or perhaps I am better to say feel, something else that is going on that will draw you to its centre first.

If this happens, go with the flow, follow the leader, allow the intelligence of your body, of Nature, to guide you. You certainly do not need to fix your attention on your heart and keep it there, but your heart is still an excellent place to start. If there is a part of you that needs your attention, and so draws you in, then you can do the exact same process, of listening first and then talking, that we are about to try here. All that matters is that you listen first, and then talk. Feel your heart, or wherever the centre of your awareness needs to be, and be completely open to whatever it has to show you, or tell you, or simply be you, and then you pour in the love.

How should you talk to your heart? Or how should you talk back to any other part of you that has called for your attention, when you have come to this practice of compassion within your body and your being?

This is your question to ask, and answer. I do not know your language of love so I cannot advise you to take one approach instead of another, but what I can do is encourage you to imagine you are talking to your lover, or to your most beloved inner child, or to your best and most dearest friend, and then say the words that come from your heart, to your heart.

Yes, of course you are both listening to, and talking to yourself, and if that seems weird or strange then that's just because you haven't really tried it yet. It isn't weird, or strange, it's actually profoundly comforting and healing, and truly loving, because you are, quite literally, pouring love into yourself.

Any time I have taught a person this technique, I always demonstrate it by taking the first steps together with them, the breathing and catching the beat of the heart on the wave of the breath, the centring into the heart.

Then we practice listening very carefully to our hearts and then I talk out loud, having already told them earlier that this is what I am going to do and that, when they go to do this again themselves that they will be speaking to their heart in their own language of love and that I am just giving an example of how I might do this myself. Then after we have both listened to our hearts for a few moments, I say out loud what I would normally just think quietly to myself.

It has always been interesting to me how this practice, and in fact all of the practices, never feel quite the same way twice. There are certain phrases in the heart centred meditation that I return to, but every time it is somehow different, and every time feels like the first time. I think the reason for this is, when I have truly connected to my heart, and am pouring my love into it, that there is an abundance of sincerity in the process. It is not a set ritual or routine, it is heartfelt and so it is also spontaneous, and ever changing like the life energy itself.

So, whilst I cannot advise you to take one approach over another on how to talk to your heart, I can certainly encourage you to come to this without needing to know what to say in advance. You just need to want to talk to your heart anyway.

So here is just one example of how I might personally do that, it is just one of the many ways I might talk to my heart once I know I have listened to it first. I would say something like this, *'Oh my dear heart, my love, my most faithful companion and closest friend, it's you I love, it's you I love, it's you I love, I love. I will never betray you, I will never abandon you, I will always listen to you, I will always care about how you feel and only want you to be happy, and light, and full of life and love. I will be with you until the very last moment of life and then we will both go together. Let's be in love with each other for every moment until then. Let's help each other, care for each other, be with each other in every step of the way. I am so sorry for any hurt that you feel and that I have done to you, I only want you to be happy, and healthy, and to be ok. I love you my heart and I always will'.*

On another day, at another time, maybe just one line would be better, because it would be more sincere, more what I needed to say and what I needed to hear. *'I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me, thank you and I love you'*

There are no rules about how long you should do any of these practices. How long, how often. No one can take a single step for you on your hero journey of healing, but I know that this practice of compassion can be a most effective and powerful way to move forwards on the healing journey. It is why we started with it and I am very happy to be coming back around to it now, to show you some further steps that you may like to try, and so strengthen your practice.

Would you like to try it now? Remember that there is no special training or technique you need to get this right, even from the first time you try it. You are doing something very instinctive, very natural. Allow it to be easy, unforced, soft.

Begin by listening to your heart. Either through your breath, or by coming through your stomach if it is empty, or by feeling the spacious zone of your chest and thoracic spine and coming to listen to your heart that way. Remember that, if you want to, you can add the step of guiding your mind with *soft, centred and now*.

If your mind and spirit are restless and you are finding it hard to listen then remember the power of pairing. Pairing your awareness with the words and a feeling, or pairing your awareness of your thoracic spine and heart, will very quickly bring you to a quiet, receptive, listening place.

Once you have listened then you can talk with the utmost sincerity and I ask you to pour your love into your heart, don't hold back, give yourself all the love in the world, unconditionally, truly, madly and deeply. Have a go now or as soon as you are ready.



Heart Thoughts

When you work with people in great distress, you quickly get to see what works and what doesn't. I've used this heart-centred meditation for healing for people who have suffered one of the worst wounds that the heart can take, betrayal. People can be incredibly cruel to each other and if a person has been betrayed by someone they have opened their heart to, they can carry a wound that can destroy their peace and happiness for life if they do not find the way to heal that hurt. No matter how bad it is, no matter how deep the wound, what I have seen is that every time a person listens to their wounded heart with compassion, and every time they pour love into their wounded heart, there is a healing process, it works.

Whether or not a person ever has to experience the agony of betrayal in their life, most people, if they have strong connections with others, will eventually have to experience the great pain of losing someone they love. Loss and grief can be overwhelmingly painful. The pain to the heart of profound loss can be so powerful that a person can feel that they will surely die from it. People sometimes describe a feeling of drowning in it. They can feel so lost, so bad, and it can go on for so long that they can eventually come to feel that death would be preferable to staying this way.

Earlier on, I wrote that anyone who feels bad enough, for long enough, will start to think about preferring to be dead, no matter who they are and how they used to be before they felt so bad for so long. This is, I suppose, about the darkest aspect there is of our shared humanity and we urgently need a deeper collective understanding of it. Firstly so as not to judge or condemn ourselves or others for getting into such a state, secondly to open up the kind of compassionate healing process that a person who gets so low desperately needs.

All the old cultures know, and people who have gained wisdom from their own suffering know, that no matter how bad things get, the storms will always pass and that life, and hope, and light will return. It is like that with everything and it is like that with loss and grief too.

The heart-centred meditation is a way to help the storms pass sooner. By listening to the heart, by allowing it to feel its sadness and pain as fully as it needs to, and then by responding with love and compassion there will always be steps towards healing.

You cannot rush the grieving process, healing takes time, however what we can do is to slow down the healing process by trying to stop feeling sad. No one should be blamed for wanting their



pain to go away, of course not, but if we push it away we only make it harder for ourselves in the long run. If we do not want to slow the healing process down then we have to go with it, which means we have to go into the sadness, in the way of open-hearted compassion towards it, and then we can process it and let it go without getting in the way.

Some wounds to the heart are newer, and so very consuming in their urgency to be felt and processed, others are older and, because life has inexorably gone on, the person has just had to make room for the ache in their heart and they have had to learn to live with it. New or old, if it aches then these practices, especially around forgiveness and compassion, can help enormously.

Betrayal, grief, loss, I have been talking about the big feelings, the storms that ravage our hearts, but what about the more ordinary state of our heart that is much more common for many of us most of the time? We are not suffering from a great pain to our heart, we may not even be aware of there being any kind of ache in our hearts, at least as far as we can tell. If we listen carefully to the centre of our chest we can hear and feel the lub-dub, lub-dub of the beat of our physical heart, but there are no great emotions coming up, no wounds, no special sadness, no strong separation, not much of anything other than here I am, my heart is beating, I'm still alive, so ok, now what?

I have made a big emphasis on listening to your heart before talking to it, but what if your heart doesn't seem to have anything to say? If, so far, it has been like this for you, and so you might have wondered if you are doing something wrong, or perhaps thought that this practice is not really for you, then I see you, and can relate to you because, by nature, I am like that too and, even though the rebirthing experience I shared earlier happened exactly as I have recounted it, for the great majority of the time, when I come to these kinds of practices, I do not have any big experiences happening in any kind of a hurry.

What I do feel is usually slow and subtle. What comes to me, and grows within me in time, are feelings of peace, and love, and awareness. They are simple and subtle feelings, and they are a treasure beyond anything that I could compare. It has taken me far too long to understand this but finally I have realised that, every time I come to my own spiritual practices, I have to find the way to enter my inner terrain in a way that doesn't lead me to be trying to control and change how I feel. If I am resisting or resenting 'what is' then I only end up making it harder to be with what is, and can easily hurt myself in that process.

When I relinquish the controlling and judgemental nature of my mind, and just be in my body, feeling my way around the maps, being with at least one of the dark friends that inevitably come in for a visit, and feeling my feelings, then the peace, and the love, and the understanding can come, and it usually does come.

I very much connect to the idea of practice in this regard, and that whatever knowledge and experience I might have about other matters, that I came to these spiritual practices as a

beginner, like a baby really, however many years ago it was that I began my own inner journey.

I mention this here because, even though I am suggesting certain methods and practices for you to try, I hope that you have been picking up what I have also been saying, which is that no one can take a single step for you and that, however you best find your own footholds in your own inner terrain, you will soon shape the way you can best take the next step, and the next one after that, and so on.

These methods are to help to make a start, that's all. I don't think it is wise to get too stuck in rituals when it comes to spiritual practices, because although they can be very comforting and give our minds something to be distracted by for a while, I see that there is a much greater imperative to go on a journey of healing that does not, and cannot, have a path laid out as to what to do, when to do it, how to do it and so forth. I know there are a lot of such paths always being shown and talked about, by different people, but I don't think that a person who needs to go on a healing journey should follow someone else too much. The person who is on a hero journey of healing needs to be the light to themselves, and find their own way. But it is still helpful to have a map, and some guidance for some first steps to get started, and this is what I have set out to do here.

I hope you don't have any savage feelings of betrayal in your own life to deal with right now because, oh, that is so tough, and you can feel like you could never open your heart to love again. Likewise, I hope you are not suffering from the heartbreaking pain that comes from grief and loss, especially when it is still in its early stages of being dealt with, although you know that if you do, it meant that you truly loved that person, and that is a treasure that you have owned in this life, and always will.

If you are heartsick, for any reason, then any of the spiritual practices here could help, and the heart-centred meditation may especially help. However, if you are not dealing with anything acute in your heart, if you are coming to this for other reasons, but still see the wisdom of practicing compassion, and connecting more to your heart, then I warmly encourage you to be most grateful and accepting towards gentle and slow and subtle, if that is what you feel.

Gentle and slow is good, gentle and subtle is very manageable. I have been talking about the possibility of healing reactions now and then, because I know that if you go on any kind of genuine healing journey that they are really quite inevitable eventually, but healing reactions are not to be sought out. The storms that they bring with them always pass, and they always bring the kind of healing that could not have happened without them, but they can still be rather tough while they last, and they certainly come to us soon enough without us going looking for them!

Mountain Climbing

In the meantime, if despite all this, you think that your heart is not feeling as much as you think it could, or should, and you would like to, quite literally, turn up the heat on this practice then there is a simple method I can share with you that will do exactly that.

Before I describe it, I want to mention that many people, including women, but also particularly men, some of whom have not been able to have a good cry for years, are not feeling heartache but are just feeling kind of empty in their hearts. People can get used to just about anything and, in this cooler, dryer zone of the body, it is possible to go a long time, a very long time, without feeling a great deal of anything in the heart. Nothing especially bad, nothing especially good.

Grief and loss, or any really powerful feelings of sadness, rip through that space and make themselves known immediately, with no question as to whether they exist or not. Likewise, any kind of betrayal from someone you loved or trusted is unmistakable, because it cuts like



a knife, but loneliness, just ordinary, garden-variety loneliness, can be present and stuck in the heart for an eternity without ever causing so much mischief that it becomes intolerable.

Do you remember what the great obstacle to compassion is? It is hardening. Compassion is very soft and tender, it puts aside judgement, it is merciful and forgiving. The greatest obstacle to opening our hearts up to love, and being soft, centred and in the moment of now, is hardening. When we are lonely we feel separated from

love. The experiences of separation, and isolation, in other words the feelings that come with loneliness, lead us to harden ourselves.

It is very understandable why we harden ourselves when we are lonely. We do it to protect ourselves. Our hearts are extremely vulnerable, which is why we surround them with such a strong cage of bones, and also why we put up a kind of energetic shield when we feel lonely and separated.

Have you noticed in your own life that, the more you love someone, the more vulnerable you are to them, and so the more they can hurt you? The opposite is true too, the less you love someone, the less you care about them, the less they can hurt you.

The hardening of our hearts that many of us develop in relationship to the world is no small matter, it is not to be brushed aside or denied so, if you have that hardening within yourself then do not deny it, look at it, and you will immediately see that there are very good reasons for the hardening to be there.

You do not need to justify whatever amount of hardening you have with whoever you have it with, or even if you have it against the whole world! There is no need to justify it and there is no need to condemn it either. In any case, let's not worry about how our hearts are in relation to others for now. We have to work on ourselves first, and we have to release the hardening towards our own hearts, through practicing compassion and forgiveness, before anything might shift or change in our outer world.

Of course, I cannot know what is in your heart, no one but you can ever know that, but I am suggesting that it may be, when we search within and connect to our hearts, that when we feel there is not much going on, what we are actually experiencing is the outer layer, the hardened shield, that we have put up to protect our hearts. If that is the case then there is no value or benefit in being judgemental or critical towards ourselves about having a shield around our hearts. The antidote to a hardened heart is not to harden it up further. If we want to heal our hearts, if we want love and peace, then we have to practice compassion and forgiveness towards ourselves.

Wherever you are at with any of this, and no one could ever know the truth of that but you yourself, I think it must be universal that the starting point is to listen. If you have a preconceived idea of who you are, and how you are, and how is your heart, then you will just go with that, because that is what we do. But if you are willing to know that you don't know, and are interested in the journey of finding out, then a very good place to start is one of being open, and soft, and centred, and then you just listen.

If there is not much to hear at first, that's ok, slow and gentle are good, but stay with it, or come back to it and practice it again because, when you go deeper into these practices it is highly likely, I want to say certain even, that you will find there is a lot more going on in your heart than it might have seemed.

Even if it feels like there is nothing much happening in the heart, nothing to see here, nothing to listen to, I think that you will find that deeper in, under the shield, inside the place that is soft and without hardening or even the ability to be hard, because our hearts have no bones in them, there is a deep, tender being that is truly at the centre of you.

Please note that the gradual increase in awareness and feeling may very well come about through just coming back to any of the other heart-centred practices we've already been looking at; catching the beat on the wave, coming through an empty stomach, feeling your heart and your thoracic in their pair, listening to your heart and talking back to it. Whatever you practice you will get better at, whatever you keep getting better at you will get good at.

But here is one further method as well, a possible next step, that might be especially helpful if you want to give this a gentle push to get under the surface layers a bit faster, to bring more awareness, and energy into your heart. You may recall how, when we were coming into the activation zone of the upper right belly, there was a way I suggested to help enter the 'fire-lands' which was to firstly come up from the base of the spine and the lower right quadrant of the hara. So this is just like that, except that now we will have two zones to move through before getting to where we are headed.

Whenever you wish to try this, I suggest starting again with bringing your awareness into that beginning point in the base of your spine and, at the same time, into your lower right quadrant. So remember you are pairing the two places, the back and the front, feeling them together, and also feeling the energy that is there in whatever way it is there to be felt. That's the first step, and you could simply allow yourself to be present there for a moment, just a breath, a few heartbeats, or maybe you would prefer to linger longer, and even bring in some of the practice that you have already been associating into this area, to allow space for the feelings that may come when you think such thoughts as *'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, and please forgive me'*. In either case, whether you are just passing through, or lingering longer, I encourage you to go with the flow and be open to it being different every time you come to it, because all these practices are like that. You are connecting to your own flow of energy, which is like a river, and you can never step foot in the same river twice.

The second step is to invite, or we could say allow, that energy to naturally rise up into your lumbar spine and your upper right belly, and again to allow them to pair together there for a moment, feeling them together, just as we practiced earlier. Again, you may just want to sweep up and around in a breath of time, like following a moving wave, or you may consciously or instinctively want to pause here, to feel your inner heat and intensity building as you hold your fire, and perhaps to recognise the life force here, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, and even be open to feeling the sense of buoyancy, the high frequency of gratitude that can spontaneously arise when we centre here without resistance or resentment.



Then this new step, which is to invite your awareness, and welcome it, and so watch it and feel it come over to the upper left of your belly, to your heart and stomach and, at the same time, to rise up into the hill of your thoracic spine. You will bring heat, and energy, and life force into your heart and stomach if you do this, perhaps it will be subtle (and remember, gentle and subtle are welcome), but you may also find that the increase in life force is quite palpable, even on the first try.

Energetically, you are drawing a big curve from your bottom right quadrant around to your top left and, at the same time, you are rising up from the base of your spine all the way up to the hill over your heart. If you are drawn to practice this, and so as you get familiar with these movements, they should feel natural and actually quite nice, because you are very much going with the flow of your energy when you do this. Then, as mentioned, there is a good likelihood that you will have considerably strengthened the intensity of what you feel at what is near the end of the line, in your chest and heart.

I say near the end of the line because I should also mention that, if you try this method, it is likely that something within you will sometimes, instinctively, want to keep moving further, all the way up to your neck and, at the same time, all the way back down again to the bottom left hand side of your belly. This is because there are rivers of energy that already move in these directions by themselves, and by tuning into this flow of energy, the 'you' that is the observer, the part of you that can sense and see such things, could easily get absorbed in what is naturally happening anyway, and so may just want to go with the flow.

We will talk more about that in the next and last section on relaxation and surrender but for now, in the meantime, I hope you might be interested and open to try this method of climbing your inner mountain from the base of your spine and belly to reach the summit of your heart.

If so, then now might be a good time to try to give it a go!



What Are We Doing Here?

I feel like it's time to say something about all this from a wider perspective. If you have been reading along and doing the practices as they have come up then, even if you haven't gone back over them much, or even at all, we've already gone pretty deep into the terrain of this whole subject and I would like to share some more thoughts about what we are actually doing here!

I haven't said too much about this previously, or at least what I have said has been pretty woolly, because I am acutely aware that, in talking about spiritual practices, there is every likelihood that my reader may already have a well established set of beliefs and ideas and I know that it is entirely possible that if I put one foot wrong, say one thing that badly jars against their world view, then I could lose their trust just like that (snaps fingers). Beliefs are powerful, they are so powerful that people are willing to die for them, that's powerful! We don't like our beliefs being challenged and, because that is not what I am setting out to do here, or need to do, I've been keeping it woolly.

Don't worry, I am not about to come out with a set of my own beliefs, to convince anyone of theirs being wrong and mine being right. Nothing could interest me less and anyway, I hardly have any beliefs in the usual way that people mean that word in spiritual terms. I don't belong to any groups, I don't follow any systems. I can tell you that I believe we're all going to die, I am 100% sure of that, but I am equally sure that life will go on without us. In fact, if and when all life on earth eventually stops, which it will have to because stars do not burn forever, I am 99.99999% sure that life will continue on elsewhere in the Universe without us. I suppose there could be an absolutely miniscule chance that we're it, but given there are far more stars in this incomprehensibly vast universe than there are grains of sand on the entire planet earth, I think there are extremely good odds that we are by no means alone.



By the way, I encourage you to look up online that there are far more stars in the universe than all the grains of sand on earth' statement I just made, especially if it sounds completely unbelievable. I read it somewhere years ago and thought to myself no, that can't possibly be true, and so I have verified it myself, more than once too, because it seemed so ridiculously unlikely, but guess what, it's actually true, extraordinary right!

Now that I come to it, I'm afraid I'm still going to be woolly, however I try to word it, but I believe that what I am trying to say here is important so I will just do my best and hope that

you will get what I am trying to say, however hard it is to use language to talk about the inexplicable!

There is a spirit that lives inside us. It is us, it is you, it is me, in every sense that we identify ourselves as a you or a me, but it is also part of something much more vast. When you tune into your body, and practice things like forgiveness, compassion, surrender and gratitude, you are getting closer to that spirit. This inner journey we've been working on, feeling some patterns, as well as probably some obstacles, in our bodies and in the way our energy moves brings us closer to that spirit.

This spirit is something that is us but at the same time it so far transcends us that even getting closer to it is really very similar to trying to imagine where the edges of the Universe could be, and then thinking what could be beyond them. Or equally, trying to imagine what existed before time came into being, and then thinking what was before the beginning of time...

We cannot comprehend infinity, as much as we might try, it is beyond us, and the spirit that lives within us is part of something infinite and, with no false humility, I know that I simply do not understand it, or even grasp it. In writing all this material I am frequently struck with feelings of horror and humour, in about equal measure, that I have the audacity to share these matters of the spirit where I am truly such a beginner, such a baby. I have no excuse, or justification for it, I'm writing and sharing what I feel called to write and share, because I trust this spirit, that I cannot define and hardly know, with my life, and so I follow it with my heart, wherever it leads.

What I practice on my own journey, and so what I am hoping to share with you that might aid you in some way in yours, is really just all about trying to get closer to an energy, a great spirit, that seems to be most remarkably, and extraordinarily, benevolent. It supports life, it nourishes life, it renews life and it seems to have created life.

We are alive, for now, and it seems that if we can align our energy with that spirit, which is us, and within us, but is also something much greater than us, then it has a quality of experience that it shares with us that is most hard to describe but there are two words that seem to get closer than just about any, and that may still be the best words we have to use, and those words are love, and peace.

I think that anyone who is willing to take responsibility for themselves and who seeks connection with that spirit, and who searches within for their love and peace has embarked on a hero journey. It truly is heroic, because to reach towards those greatest treasures of life, to find love, and peace, you have to encounter, and deal with, every single obstacle that gets in your way along the way! Relationships become mirrors, showing you exactly where you are and where you fall short. Your own body becomes a map, showing you the way forwards, and also showing you where you are harbouring all kinds of dark feelings.

I know that, at best, what I have to share here can just be a foothold to help to make a start, to take some beginner's steps, but still, don't you think it is an extraordinary idea, that we could get close to, and connect with, and even be one with, the great spirit of the Universe? Does the possibility of that not intrigue or even excite you to imagine?

Again, I am aware of the danger of triggering an oppositional belief system, because perhaps it sounds like hubris that we could even entertain the idea of drawing closer to the divine, through being within our body, feeling our feelings, and being with what is.

Many traditions that teach transcendence seem intent on escaping the body, through trance like states, through hypnotising the mind with various methods. There is an idea that a person can become enlightened and that their human suffering will be at an end when they do. It is such a wonderful fairy tale, I wish I could believe in it, but I don't think we reach any such end points and, whilst we are still alive, we journey forth, every day like a new birth, starting again, travelling in the body, not knowing what will come even in that one day, and that the only true certainty is change. I do believe our suffering, and all of the feelings we get to experience whilst we are alive, will eventually come to a complete end, but that end will be when we die. In the meantime we just have to keep being, and feeling, in all the shapes and forms that being and feeling come in. That is the business of being human and that is what we are.

I hope, perhaps I could say I believe, that if we practice being with our feelings, even when they are very difficult, that there is always a release that comes that would not happen, or would take much longer, and be much harder to happen, if we resisted and resented them.

I also hope, and perhaps I can say I genuinely believe, that if we practice compassion, forgiveness, gratitude and surrender, and all that comes with setting such intentions and making such habits, that there is a moving forwards on a path that will bring to light every conceivable obstacle in the way, but that inevitably also brings us to more peace, more love.

But I don't see an end point other than when we stop feeling anything forever, and even then life will go on. Everyone feels like they are a separate being, and truly only you can feel what you feel, and truly only you can take a single step on your journey, but how wonderful it would be, and I dare to think how wonderful it actually is, that the appearance of separation is only an illusion maintained by our egoic minds, and that in reality we are all connected all of the time, and that the spirit that is within us, and that we must get closer to in order to meet our innermost needs and most heartfelt wishes, is a spirit that we actually all share. It is us, we are it, which means, in a very real way, that I am you, and you are me.

And I wonder, and I dream, about what kind of world we would live in, where we treated each other as we wished to be treated, because we knew, we really knew, that if we hurt another then we hurt ourselves, and that if we love another then we love ourselves. I think it would be heaven on Earth to live in such a world.

Any Questions?

Before we move down to the last quadrant, the vital area of relaxation and surrender, I want to stay here just a little longer, in the heart and stomach, and share with you one more approach, and practice, for nourishment and compassion.

This follows the same or similar steps to what we've already had a go at, but the difference is that after centring and listening to the heart, instead of talking to it, we ask a question and, right now, from the first mention of this, I want you to start entertaining the idea that it can be healthy and beneficial to be able to ask a good question without needing to have an answer right away.

Usually, when we ask a question, we anticipate an answer, correct? Question and answer, question and answer... we're programmed from a very early age to respond to questions, usually with strong positive encouragement when we get the answers correctly and, conversely, we do not like the feeling of not having the answers. Not having the correct answer can trigger a feeling of doubt and being in doubt can quickly lead to anxiety, which is never easy to be with.

It can take conscious awareness and practice to be ok with not having the answers but I warmly encourage you to embrace this challenge wholeheartedly. Not only will it be good for you, it could be good for others too!

Is there anyone more dull and tiresome to be around than the person who has an opinion about everything but no interest in asking a single open question where they don't already have the answer?

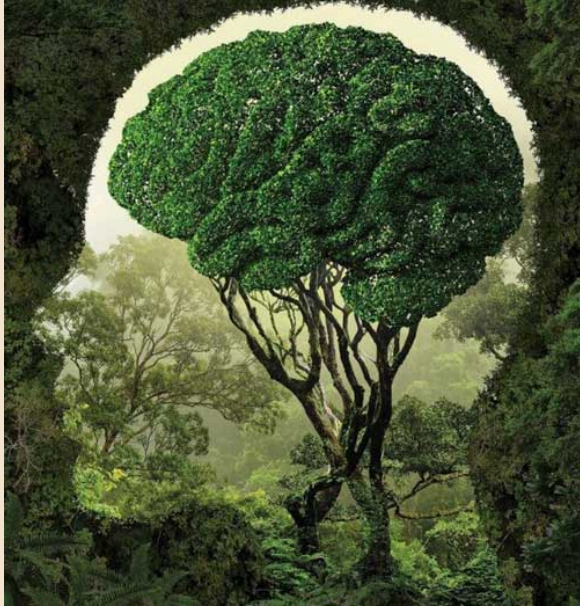
Having a good connection, a good conversation, with someone is like making music together, you get in time and you get in tune with each other. But someone who is riding their egoic mind in its full glory only wants to blow their own trumpet and listen to the sound of their own voice. They want to be a soloist rather than play in an ensemble, which can be entertaining for a while, especially if their lines, their 'chops' as they are called in music, are well practiced and polished, but no one wants to listen to someone else forever. We all have our own story to tell and our own path to walk and no one person is actually more important than another, even if they might like to feel that way!

Asking open questions, where you don't already know the answer, but are genuinely interested in exploring what the answers could be, brings us back to a child-like state of



mind, where we have not formed opinions and beliefs about everything, where we are still in the joy of learning and discovery, where we are open rather than closed.

There are so many beautiful, open, interesting questions to explore. About the external world for sure, but also about ourselves, for just one example amongst thousands, *'What do*



you truly want?' and if we know that what we want and need is peace and love then, *'What is peace and what is love?'*

I want you to try a practice of centring into any part of your hara, but especially into this top left zone that connects so closely to the heart, and asking an open question to yourself. This can be a very direct way to connect to your inner spirit, where the wisdom of Nature resides within you. It is simple thing to practice, actually it is rather deceptively simple, and I will give some easy pointers, or suggestions, on how to go about it in just a moment, but firstly I must say

again, because it almost certainly will be a hurdle, to be prepared for your mind to not be happy with not having an answer for you right away!

In fact, it is highly likely that your mind will attempt to give you an answer, for whatever question you ask, because it feels that this is its job and it takes its job very seriously! I suggest you anticipate, right from the beginning, that you will get an answer from your mind, I mean instead of your heart, and so I want you to be prepared to see it and acknowledge that answer from your mind, but to still leave the question open anyway, so that you may still hear what comes from within, which will often take longer to arise, and will come to you in a different way to that which comes to you from your conscious mind.

In a nutshell, what I am saying is that you ask an open question and then be willing to wait for a reply that goes deeper than thought alone. A reply from deeper within than the mind has an intuitive sense that comes with it, a feeling of yes, that's it, a sense of *'knowing without knowing how you know'*. I'm sorry if that seems a bit enigmatic, this is another one of those areas that don't come easily to rational explanation but are no less worth exploring for all that they defy too much analysis!

Most of the experience I have with teaching people this method in person is through a subject called 'intuitive eating', or 'conscious eating'. There is a page about this on my website in the conditions A-Z which goes into it in detail but, in a nutshell, you centre your awareness into your body and ask your inner being what you would most love to eat and be nourished by.

I have done this practice many times in person with a patient where we close our eyes, take a breath or two to centre ourselves, and then talk to our bodies, our hearts, in a loving way, including asking an open question. The phrasing is very open and I notice that it always comes out somewhat differently according to who I am sharing the exercise with but, as an example, I might say something like, *'My dear body, (or my dear heart), my most faithful servant, I want to reward you, and give you something really nice to show you how much I love you, so what would you most love to eat later today or tomorrow, what would make you feel good and happy, what would you love me to give you to eat?'*

However it comes out at the time, the essence of the question is the same. I invite the patient to do the first practice with me because it feels more authentic if I am doing it too, but anyway I love to have any excuse to practice this method because of the answers I get back, which are always completely spot on and, when I do eventually eat the food that came to me intuitively, it gives me a lot of joy and love!

I always say to not worry if there is no immediate response, or if something does come to them that they know is just a surface desire of their mind. Whoever they are, if a person sincerely asks then their body will surely answer eventually, if not right away. It is quite normal for there to be a flicker of a desire for something that simply tastes good, for example one of the many foods that are rather addictive in nature, but those are fleeting wants and, if you are centred in the body, they don't have any substance to them and disappear just as quickly as they arrived without leaving any kind of heartfelt wish behind.

Usually it happens right then and there in my rooms, in just the couple of minutes or so that we took to do the exercise, that both me and the person I'm with get something that comes from deeper within. I recognise the small but sincere joy that it brings me to think about having a certain meal, or food, and then I ask them if they got anything and, usually because they do, I recognise the sincere joy in them too, when they have heard their body talking to them, and they have heard what would make them feel loved. It always seems that they leave with every intention to make good on their part of the timeless relationship between their spirit and their flesh.

Whoever says it first, what we need to say, what we ought to say between our mind and body, our spirit and our flesh is *'I love you and I want to serve you so well'*. This body that we own is a temple, our spirit is its priestess, or priest, and we need to clean it and nourish it and do our best to do nothing to harm it!

Asking your heart, your body, an open question can be very powerful and, as mentioned, it is also deceptively simple, because there really are some great obstacles. Our egoic minds are one part of that, wanting to give any answer rather than being ok with not knowing, but there are even greater obstacles than that, and they are exactly that which stand in the way of our being compassionate, or I could say loving, towards ourselves, and to life.

We have unhealed hurts, and hardenings, and judgements, and all manner of dark feelings and forces within our bodies, our subconscious beings, that hold us apart from love, and peace. The greatest of these dark forces, by far, is that of denial. All the dark feelings and forces have to be seen, and acknowledged, and processed for us to move forwards on our inner journey but you can never overestimate how powerful the force of denial can be in stopping us from even taking one step in the direction we need to go for healing.

When you go within and ask an open question, even one as mundane and unimportant in the great scheme of things such as '*...what would you love to eat today?*', you may well get a clear and easy access to that spirit within that only wants what is for your greater good, unconditionally and endlessly, but you may also come up against that part of you that holds resentment, and resistance, and hurt, and hardening. In their shadow forms, these presences do not feel that you deserve good things and that you do not deserve to be rewarded. Just as all of us have a libido within us, a creative life-affirming energy, we also have a mortido, a destructive, life-denying energy.

I know it is easy for a person to do the conscious eating exercise with me in my rooms, because they are being guided and supported along the way, but I am well aware of how challenging it can be for them to keep it going afterwards, even and especially if it is the key work that they are given to practice. I do not ask people to do many things, usually it is only one or two essential efforts that we agree to commit to, and then we call that their 'work'. We put a lot of emphasis, in person during the consultation, in an email sent on the same day, and in follow up calls from my daughter or another of our support staff, on our patients doing their 'work' because we know that this is often what will make or break the success of their treatment and I can assure you that I don't give conscious or intuitive eating as the work lightly.



There are four stages to the diploma program that we run for people studying to become herbalists, each one takes at least a year or two to complete, often even more, and each stage has a special diet to follow along with other experiential lessons that ensure the practitioner has well and truly walked the talk of whatever they might recommend to others. Stage 1 includes a hypoallergenic diet, stage 2 a cleansing diet, stage 3 a ketogenic diet and stage 4, the final stage, is this conscious, or intuitive eating diet. I tell the students that this is the hardest one of them all to do. Intuitive, conscious eating is harder than giving up all

sugars, or dairy, or gluten or any kind of processed food, because with this diet you have to connect to your heart and the journey from the head to the heart can be one of the hardest, and longest, journeys on Earth.

As I said, I don't give it as part of the key work lightly. The patient who I might prescribe the intuitive eating practice has often been through a lot of restrictive diets. Those diets typically helped them at the beginning, at least in part through the powerful placebo effect of having made a strong sacrifice and so anticipating a reward, but then time went by, they adjusted to being without the foods without a sense of virtue from the going without, and all the symptoms came back, only now they are too afraid to eat any of the foods that they had removed for fear that eating them again will make them even worse.

They have become afraid of their food and there is a quiet desperation when they confess that they do not take joy from their food any more. This is a curable problem, our bodies want so much to take all the goodness possible out of every food we give them, but we, the thinking conscious beings in the centre of our identity of the 'me', must take steps to work on, and heal any broken relationship, including with our food, including with own bodies. That healing journey starts with ownership rather than denial, with '*I own me*', and then we can go from there.

As well as what's for dinner, what else might you want to ask your heart in this practical practice of compassion? Earlier on, in the opposite quadrant to nourishment, in the section on forgiveness, in working out what it is that we are sorry for and what it is we want to stop doing to cause any harm, I invited you to ask the question, in whatever language could be most sincere '*am I do anything to hurt you?*' It's a good question, even if the answer that eventually comes with the ring of truth to it could be challenging, or even confronting.

Here in the nourishing quadrant, and in the heart, some questions that could be asked, aside from what would you like to eat, are '*What can I do to help you? What can I do to find my peace, what can I do to be in love? What would make you truly happy today? What can I do to serve you?*'

There are so many ways you can ask the questions that most need to be asked. Only please, I say again, do not be in a hurry to hear the answers. It is more than enough to just ask the question. The healing intelligence that resides within us hears you, very clearly, more clearly than we can probably imagine. It will speak to you, in feelings, in dreams, in insights, it will light your way, but be patient with it. You do not have to have the answer, not right away, you only need to ask the question, sincerely and openly, and that is all there is to it.

In a moment, to conclude this section, I will ask you to have one more go at practicing awareness in this part of your body, along with the practice of compassion, and then let's have a go at asking a truly open question. I don't know what you should ask, so I leave that part to you, but here are some notes just to remind you on how to set this up.

Remember there is nothing difficult or tricky about any of this, no special preparation or technique is required. You are going to centre your awareness into your heart and the upper left hand quadrant of your belly. You might like to catch the beat of your heart on your breath and then follow it into its centre and be there for a moment, or you might like to just bring your awareness to your stomach, especially if it is not full at the moment, and then be immediately connected to your heart from there, or you may wish to come up from the base of your spine into the hill over your heart and, at the same time, come around your hara in the curve from the bottom right, up to the top right, and then over to your top left. Or, you may be that person who is already so heart-centred that none of these methods are required in the least and you are already there, in an instant, huzzah!

However you journey to your heart, when you come there, you are there to firstly listen. Perhaps what you can hear and feel will be nothing more than the lub-dub, and the feeling of spaciousness that comes in this vibrantly alive, cooler, dryer part of our energy field.



Perhaps there will be feelings to be felt, experiences to be with and to process. Whatever there is, you have no intention to change anything, but only to be with what is, and I again encourage you to bring your mind to the service of your higher intelligence by remembering these three key words to align yourself into the energy of compassion: *soft, centred, now.*

After listening can come the talking, and if that is what you are called to do when you come back to this practice then

please, talk, don't hold back, say everything that needs to be said, it is always better out than in. But if you don't have anything you need to say then I encourage you to finish with a question, an open question. Something you don't already know the answer to, and something you are genuinely interested in hearing the answer to.

There are so many great mysteries to life, just working ourselves out can be a lifetime's work, and then there's everyone and everything else to come to terms with too! We will never have all the answers, but it is healthy to ask, and to be open to hearing what comes back from an intelligence that is a part of Nature and that goes much deeper than our minds ever could. I think of it as being like peeling back the very corner of a rug that has threads woven through it that stretch into infinity. Even peeking at what is under one tiny corner of the rug is more than enough to see and feel the great mystery. As the old saying goes '*Ask and you shall receive*'. Or another way to put this is, try and see! Please have a go now or whenever you are ready...

Relaxation and Surrender

Here we are at last, at the end of a journey along two roads, one going up the spine and the other going around the belly. We are about to enter the cool damp Bear-lands and, like water that goes right to the lowest places without trying or straining, without needing to compete with anything, so are these the realms of relaxation and surrender.

There are lots of singularities, lots of points of difference, in these zones. In many ways, it feels to me like all the roads lead here, but I know I could just as well say that, from a different perspective, about any of the other zones. Nonetheless, there is something wonderfully final, and complete, about the ultimate letting go of surrender.

Like the bliss of falling asleep and like the death of the ego, or the death of the body, for which there is nothing to fear, it feels like this, here, is the frontier of inner peace and that if we can only find our way to stop clinging on, stop resisting, to just be with what is, to be here and now, soft and centred, no resentment, no hardening, no nothing but the absolute ease of being, like a baby, like a drop in an ocean, then there, we've made it, no more trouble and strife, happy ever after, haha.

In the meantime, as a journeyman, not there in happy ever after, maybe never will be there, or not for long, I am still called to my heart to continue to share what I've found most helpful in heading in that direction and, as you will predict from seeing my pattern, I want to start by connecting the dots and bringing this material into the real, the flesh, the maps of the body. Right here and now, therefore, is our first singular difference because, unlike all three of the previous sections, now we diverge.

The first zone, the cleansing zone, is where the two roads are most closely connected anatomically. If, or I hope when, you go back to practice being with your primal energy, where your fear is in its basement, where the hot damp land of the Tiger lives in the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly, I think that, if you haven't already, you will soon be able to feel how these areas merge into oneness, how they are one, how they are completely connected both physically and energetically and then as you go along, how these are the best places in your subconscious, your body, to grow your courage and the practices of forgiveness that lead to true healing.

The second zone, the activation zone, also has the front and back lying close to each other. If and when you go back to practice being in your hot and dry Eagle territory, where your fire energy is best held in the furnace of your liver and the valley of your lumbar spine, again I am sure you already will have, or you soon will be, able to feel the great life force, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the energy moving and living in your belly that wants you to fly, to lift you up on its wings, to feel spontaneously grateful. All of which can fuel the hero journey to become the change that you want to see in the world.

The third zone, the nourishment zone, likewise has the front and the back lying close to each other and, if and when you go back to the cool dry terrain of the Elephant-Butterfly, to feel and listen to your heart, to climb the long hill of your thoracic spine, to reach the summit of your innermost being and to talk to, or ask questions, of your inner intelligence, I am sure you already will have, or you soon will be, able to feel how there is a great desire within you to open up, to be vulnerable, to release all the hardening that stands in the way of what you and I and all of us so deeply need and want, which is to be in love.

This final zone, the relaxation zone, completely diverges from the pattern of the others. In the back, we are all the way up to the neck, which also includes our head in some ways, and in the front we are all the way down into the bottom left quadrant, which is the territory of the end of the bowel, not a glamorous part of the body, but for so many good reasons, excellent reasons, we need to come to this zone with the utmost respect and appreciation for what happens here, on every level.

There is a lot of territory between the top of the spine and the end of the digestive tract. Connecting the dots here will not be the same and, in fact, it is most interestingly different so, in a short while, I am going to invite you to begin a thought experiment, or a meditation, to feel this for yourself.

I do not think you will be able to energetically pair your neck and head to your lower left belly, your hara, without at least somewhat encompassing what lies between them. Even if your awareness can be as quick as lightning, going from one to the other, there cannot be the same merging into oneness that you could feel with the other pairs, unless you bring in a sense of wholeness.



What I mean by this is that, as you make this connection, as you pair these key relaxation zones of your body, I believe you will be able to feel how your whole body, your subconscious, is deeply interconnected. All your front, and all your back, is one whole part of you.

What we have been dividing into quarters, in order to better understand our inner maps and to get practice with getting footholds, is all a part of a greater whole. The best way to feel this is here, in the practice of surrender, and relaxation, and this is the first part of what I would love you to feel and really, this alone would be more than enough to practice with for a month, a year, even though it is only one step of the many that you can take to go within to be closer to your spirit and to heal.

What I will ask you to do is to go between these two parts of your body, namely your neck, and it is likely that your head may want to come into this equation so, hello head, you are welcome here too, and then also your lower left quadrant of your hara, your belly. I want you to go between these areas, back and forth, just feeling what there is to feel there and, as you do this I think you will soon sense a flow of energy within you, that moves in a particular way when you do this.

What I think you will soon feel is the nature of the cool and damp energy that flows within us, it moves very gently, very easily, under the surface, spreading everywhere, in touch with everything.

We all know about tension, we've all got it, we see it everywhere. This cool, damp energy is the exact opposite of that. It is the energy of peace and relaxation, which we all have inside us too, all the time, or we would soon fall apart, because this energy allows us to rest and heal.

Not having it inside a muscle, means the muscle would be contracting, or cramping all the time. Not having it inside our hearts means we would have a heart attack, not having it inside our nerves means we would be manic, epileptic, insomniacs, not having it in our lungs means we could not exhale. Everything that moves within us needs to go through a constant cycle of activation and relaxation.

The energy of relaxation is already there, waiting to come forwards, and when we do this practice of coming to these zones of the body with the intention to be in touch with it, and an awareness that we are tuning into it, and when we want to let go as deeply as we can, there is a wave of peace that wants to move through us, and we need to do nothing more than be on that wave.

To align your thoughts to the practice, to bring the mind in as a most willing servant to help us get what we dearly need and want, just remember those three tiny words, *'as I am'*.

There is nothing you need to do to make any of this happen, it is much more what you need to *not* do, which is that you must not try to relax! If you try to relax you will just make yourself more tense. Like trying to go to sleep, which is the number one way to stop being able to sleep. There is nothing to try, nothing to do, just being with what is and being willing to let go.

As you go between your neck and your lower left belly, you will possibly feel a lot of the other kinds of energy and awareness, and perhaps also the obstacles, that we have been working on in the previous sections. All of that is always there, even though we mostly just aren't aware of it, but this practice of relaxation and surrender tends to bring everything else into itself.

This is why the zones of relaxation are at the ends of the roads, or the rivers. Everything that our body, our subconscious, feels through our nervous system is processed up through our

neck into our brain, and everything that our body, our subconscious, feels through our heart and belly is processed through to the lower left quadrant of our hara. The neck and the bowel are sacred places. They need to be kept free and flexible and unblocked and flowing, or there are all kinds of hell to pay.

If you do have tension in your neck or your bowel, and honestly, who doesn't, that's ok, it is to be expected, it is not a big deal. Just remember that trying to relax doesn't relax you. You accept the tension, you don't fight it, you don't resist it. Resistance is what stops us being able to relax, and let go. If you see and feel your tension, or I should say, when you see and feel your tension, just accept that this is an essential part of the journey of healing, and that the only enemy is denial. So you see it, and feel it, and don't fight with it, or resist it, but just surrender to it.

In the being with what is, and the surrender to what is, is the release. Oh, and remember what we talked about near the beginning of all this, that you are already a master of relaxation and letting go, because you have been an expert at falling asleep before you were even born! There is nothing here that is any more difficult than that, so long as we don't get in its way. Remember how it feels to fall asleep as a first step, and come back to it at any time that you feel yourself trying to relax, and therefore going into resistance.

I hope that you will feel some peace when you do this, because even the merest hint of inner peace will show you what a great treasure this is. A great treasure that you are going deep within your subconscious to find. Whenever you feel even a tiny amount of that sense of peace it will give you every encouragement to keep going, and keep practicing, and so keep getting better at this!

Please have a go now, or whenever you are ready, at connecting the dots between your neck and your lower left hara. Whatever happens next will unfold as it is meant to. All you need to do is to not fight whatever you feel, just be *'as I am'*, and let everything that you feel be whatever it is for however long it needs to be there.



A Dark Q & A

Let's have another practice at this again soon, in much the same way, but firstly there is a challenging subject I want to talk with you about, starting with some open questions. If we were sitting together, or walking and talking together, I would love to hear your thoughts and your replies, but because we can't do that right now I will just imagine you there instead. This is what I would want to ask you

- 1) On a scale of zero to ten, ten being the most tired, how tired are you in general and right now?
- 2) Where do you feel the most tiredness anywhere in your body?
- 3) Do you feel tired in some parts of you but not in others?
- 4) How do you feel about being tired?

I don't know how you personally might respond, but having been a close listener to my fellow humans for a long time now, this is what I think most people would say.

- 1) On the scale of zero to ten for how tired, ten being the most tired, and this is not for children because they are like spring lambs, bouncing off the walls until they crash and sleep, but if they are adults then they will always say a number and their baseline at any given moment is typically a five or above. Many people feel somewhat tired all the time.
- 2) Where people feel most tired is usually in their heads. Their brains literally feel tired. If you ask them to tune into it more closely, they can feel the same tiredness, the heaviness and the tension of it, in their necks as well. Which came first, the head or the neck? I don't think it matters, let's just say the tiredness arrives in the head and neck together.
- 3) Many people are tired in some parts of themselves and wound up and stressed in others. This is called being 'tired and wired', or 'wired and tired'. An issue that often gets talked about in relation to this is feeling incredibly tired all day and wanting nothing more than to lay down and sleep, and then finally getting to bed and not being able to let go from having a racing mind and an agitated nervous system.
- 4) How do people feel about their tiredness? They feel very bad about their tiredness. Very few people accept their tiredness. They hate feeling tired and see it as a weakness and an enemy, something that they need to fight and constantly overcome in order to survive and get through the day and through their lives.

Dark questions with dark answers. The whole subject of tiredness takes us straight into the shadow-lands, and sometimes, in some ways, into the darkest parts of the shadow-lands.

Tiredness is no more glamorous than what comes out of the bowel. You're supposed to push through your tiredness and keep going, regardless of how sick it makes you, or you've been defeated and are some kind of a loser.

Tiredness is ordinary, common, everyone has it, everyone has to overcome it. Tiredness is seen as such a lowly feeling that we don't even give the status of an emotion. The other quadrants have dark friends in their dark hearts that seem at least somewhat honourable to confront on the hero journey. We face our fears, we hold our fire, we live with our loneliness, but what can possibly be heroic about mundane, ordinary, lowly tiredness?

Here is my answer. This subject, this practice, these zones of the body that I'm describing as the ends of the road could just as well be called the beginning of what it takes to shift our most stubborn obstacles.

To come to terms with the great dark force of fatigue is as heroic as anything we have been talking about previously. If we will win that great treasure, our inner peace, then we simply must stop resisting and surrender to what is, and there can be no doubt, no question, that the number one way to practice this is through meeting our tiredness where it is and as it is.

There is no better guide through the darkest heart of our inner shadow-lands than this lowly, ordinary, unassuming friend. Look again at who and what it is, this shadowy figure. This mysterious force that takes the shape of sleep, and death, and the end of all roads, is holding a light, a small light, shielded and dim, hard to make out unless we are still, and very conscious, but one that shows us how to find the bliss of inner peace.

How to journey towards inner peace with this dark friend, this force of fatigue? How to take the first step? The first step is the same as the last step. It is to let go of resistance and to surrender to what is. I know I am making it sound very simple, and I want to, but I also know how difficult this is, for me and, I believe, for us. Because our very identity, our conscious being, is so tied up in getting somewhere other than where we are and with not being '*as I am*'.

It seems impossible to overcome such deeply ingrained programming; from our earliest childhood, from our culture, even from the evolutionary force of biology that surges within us, seeking us to adapt and improve and ceaselessly seek a way to ensure the survival of the light of life that we have received and are meant to protect and pass along before we expire.

But that life force, the same one I have been talking about with such terms as 'the healing intelligence of Nature', the *vis medicatrix naturae*, is not our obstacle here. That force gives us joy and hope and all the reasons to do all the things that make our lives and the lives of our loved ones better. It is not our life force we need to let go, or do anything to change, it is only our own resistance that we must be able to let go. Or we become driven, peaceless, unwell, wired and tired.

It is primarily our conscious minds that get in the way of the timeless spiritual practice of surrender and it is in our conscious minds that we have to take a first step.

The first step is to set the intention. To say to myself, I want to let go, I want to relax, I want to be at peace. I want to be well. All these thoughts, and many others, can work to set the intention, and I continue to recommend using the thought *'as I am'* as an immediate and effective way to align our conscious mind with our subconscious body.



Then sooner or later, probably sooner, we will come up to the obstacle to all this. Which is our resistance, which we could also call our tension.

When you set such an intention and then come into the zones of relaxation, the neck (and head) and the lower left quadrant, you will assuredly feel, sooner or later, the places that you are holding tension.

It will be most focused wherever it is, and you will soon feel where that place is when you do this practice, but I want you to be especially prepared to feel the tension in your head, and that it will most likely take the shape of the feeling of fatigue. There is a heaviness in this tension, it has weight.

Your head can literally feel heavy on your neck, and

your neck and your head can literally feel heavy on your body.

There, or wherever else the tension is at its strongest, is the road that is laid ahead of you by your great dark friend, by your tiredness. The road is showing you the way to peace by showing you where your tension, your resistance, and your tiredness is.

However much you may have the normal and instinctive fear that, if you give in to it then it will be stuck there forever, this is not what will happen, it will move. These life energies, in all their forms, are always moving anyway, but when you become aware of them, and don't resist them, they move much more freely than they ever could when you were using any of the thousand and one ways to resist them.

When you are not resisting the tiredness, it will change its shape, perhaps it will grow suddenly greater for a moment, to test you, to see whether you are truly here to let go or if you have tricked yourself and actually want to fight rather than surrender. Just stay with it, don't resist it, don't fight it, the wave of increased intensity will soon pass, it always does.

The tiredness is like a river that, if you step into it, will carry you to where you need to go. Trust the tiredness, it is not your enemy. The tiredness is the great healing intelligence of

your own nature. The tiredness is showing you how to heal, how to let go, how to be in the beautiful peace and bliss of just being.

However, there is also every likelihood that, because of the deep-set patterns of resistance that go so far beyond our conscious mind's ability to control, there will likely be a point, and a place, where you get stuck. Where even your absolute best intentions to not fight, to be *'as I am'* are not helping you to get beyond being stuck. It hasn't gotten worse and stayed worse, but it is resisting letting go and you can feel yourself starting to resist the resistance! Ahhh, now we are stuck, what to do, how to escape the Bear trap?

At that point, when that happens, remember the pairing. Pairing helps you to not get stuck in one place. It is a potent ally, especially when we need it the most. The number one pairing to help get back to the flow of relaxation, is connecting your neck with your lower left belly. You may need to do this many times, and feel it working many times, to get trust in it, that's ok, because it will earn your trust.

As I was talking about earlier, and now want to come back to with some more depth, I think that you will also find that, in pairing your neck and lower left hara, there will be much that lies between them, that will also call out for your attention and your awareness. You will get feelings, and obstacles, and physical sensations that draw you to themselves.



If you get such feelings then these are good signs! You are journeying within and there is much to be felt, and processed, and understood. Not if, but when this happens, I encourage you to remember the pairings that you were practicing earlier as well. Especially so that you don't get stuck in the next place that is holding tension, and needing healing, but rather you can be like the water energy that you are invoking in the practice of surrender. Yielding, settling down, easily moving through whatever needs to be let go.

Let me give you an example of how this could play out in a deep meditation where, when you started, the dominant dark friend that needed your attention was your tiredness. So perhaps you would start by being centred in your neck and your head, because they were showing you their tension, and tiredness, and resistance.

So you don't fight it, you practice surrendering, as if you were going to let yourself go to sleep, no resistance. Then at some level of your conscious or subconscious awareness, you have already made the pairing, the connection, with your lower left belly. It is there, you have felt it enough for it to be a point on your inner compass, a foothold that you have taken a step into and so have paired yourself to already, even if your main feeling of the block, the

tiredness, in the beginning was in your neck or head, now you have paired your awareness to include the low left quadrant of your hara.

So being in your neck and head, with that pairing to your bowel, will be shifting the stuck energy of tiredness and tension and, without you making it happen, you might suddenly feel the centre of your awareness move down into your mid-back. Perhaps that centre of awareness could come with a feeling of warmth, or tightness, or the faint echo of your heart beat, or a sensation that would not be easy to describe but, whatever you notice will likely grow in intensity so long as you don't fear it to the point of resisting it. So if this is happening, or something like this starts to happen, you just continue to allow it to be there and you are with it, being with what is.

Don't rush this, this is like learning how to walk and especially when you are a beginner, and a baby, which is probably how we will all be in these matters, there can be a lot of falling over and getting back up to start again. Don't rush the process, in fact let's plan to just never rush this.

Let's say here you are, somewhere in or around your heart and, especially if there was any trouble, or resistance, or hardening, or judgement coming up, then here is where I would encourage you to again pair whatever you are feeling in this zone to your mid-back, the hill over your heart. So you are physically pairing your heart and stomach with your thoracic spine. Feeling them together. It is very restful to the mind to be doing this, it will take away the need to think, your awareness is occupied enough for a moment to just feel, and be.

You would be in the realm of nourishment and compassion if you were centred and paired here and, if it seemed your awareness wanted to linger here for a moment, after you got your two inner 'feet' stable in the pairing within your body, then you might welcome a thought to come back to you, to take a third step to go even deeper, so you could allow yourself to think in your body and feel in your mind *'soft, and centred and now'*, and whatever other feelings that might come with this, whatever next steps you are called to take, are welcomed. Complete surrender to being with what is, wherever it is.

As another example, or perhaps as the next step after that one, you might find that, all of a sudden, without you making it happen or intending it to happen, you are feeling the warmth in your belly, in your liver, and you again remember to pair this part of you with your lumbar spine and there you are, in a place where there is a great deal of life force moving and showing its eternal presence to you, and you might just naturally feel the buoyancy, the gratitude, that so often comes along with this energy, when we are not resisting, or resenting, its existence.

Another example is that, if you started out by feeling yourself pairing your neck to your lower left quadrant then you might find there is a kind of natural downward journey in your centre of awareness. As your focus moves downwards from your neck you could go to the left and lower part of your belly, to be back in your zone of relaxation and letting go, or you

could veer to the right, even further down, to feel the hill of your sacral spine and the lower right hand side of your belly, with all the primal energy that lives here.

All these are just examples, there are no rules or steps that you must follow to do this correctly. Your centre of awareness could move from one side to the other, you could come swimming back up again too, or you could jump, or leap, from one place to another, consciously or subconsciously.

Who is the 'you' that determines which step you take next? If you can feel that it is your conscious self, and that you are exploring your inner maps of your hara and your spine, or wanting to go over one or another of the spiritual practices, or needing to be with certain feelings or obstacles for your own good reasons, then that's great, keep going, keep practicing, this will get easier!

It also may happen that you can see and feel that you are not consciously choosing where your centre of awareness moves to next and, in a quite literal sense, you are playing 'follow the leader'. This would also be great, it is not better or worse to be in the driver's seat here, it's just different.

I might predict that, the more you do this inner journeywork, the less it will be your conscious self choosing what to do and the more it will be your subconscious, but I don't mean to imply that it is therefore better to be travelling instinctively rather than by choice, only that there is a trust that builds through these practices that helps us to feel more able to let go, more and more deeply, and more and more easily.

The key point that I want to make here, in this section, is that whether it is your conscious or your innate intelligence that is choosing how you move and whatever steps you take between your neck and your lower left quadrant, do come back, and keep coming back, to the first step and the last step of this great practice of surrender, which is to be '*as I am*'. Be with what is, without resistance, with acceptance.

You are choosing to trust a remarkably potent force within yourself. It looks terribly dark and forbidding if you are afraid of it and believe you are supposed to resist it. But when you let all that go and choose to trust it, there is nothing scary or harmful about it in any way whatsoever. It simply wants you to be completely serene and peaceful, and actually blissfully happy too!

Please have another go at this practice. Set the intention to be with what is without any resistance. Be ready and willing to let your inner tiredness show you the way, especially at first. Remember to bring your awareness to, and use this unusual pair of your neck and lower left belly, encompassing everything between them as they do.

Then, when you pair your awareness between these zones of relaxation and surrender, and other zones and feelings and obstacles come up, which they likely will, just keep using the

same practice of being with what is, without any resistance, with the intention to truly surrender and let go. Then the peace can come, we cannot go to it, but it can come to us.

Have a go now, or whenever you are ready

Beyond the End of the Road

We're now very nearly at the end of this whole main section of bringing the practices into the front and back of the body and, at the end, I will invite you to do one more practice, but not quite like we have done before, this one will be quite stepless, and rather free.

Before then, there are just two more things I want to briefly talk with you about. The first is I want to say something about the unlit, the untravelled path and the second is about pairing into infinity!

I don't know how much you have thought about this yet, or even already felt your way into it and so made it your own, but it truly is a most extraordinary idea; that we can find our inner peace by getting in touch with our tiredness, and that by then not resisting that tiredness, but rather surrendering to it, it can show us the way to let go and be in peace.

It is an extraordinary idea, a marvellous idea, and it is an idea that I know no one will come to, or understand, until they're ready, and that most people need to try just about every other method to stop feeling tired, or feeling anything bad, before even considering such a strange and alien idea as surrendering to what is, rather than trying to fix what is.

This is an unlit path and not one other person can ever take a single step for you on it. I am sharing everything I can think of that I imagine could possibly help, but if you can find your way forward on it, then it will be you, or something within you, that will be lighting your way and helping you to work out your next steps.

Not only is it unlit, but it is an untravelled path too! Very few people even consider that they could find what they want in life by looking within, and even fewer would imagine that their innermost obstacles to their peace and happiness, namely their fear and their fire, their loneliness and their fatigue, could be their best guides to find the greatest treasures of peace and love. An unlit and untravelled path containing some extraordinary ideas. Are these ideas true? Only you will be able to answer that, the only way to find out is to try and see!



I have been mentioning this earlier, but I want to really emphasise it now, near the end of this part of the work, because I want you to be increasingly open to experiment with the practices that we have been learning. When we are a beginner, at anything, if we are a

serious student then we will try to take the steps as they have been laid out, to follow the recipe correctly, to follow the rules, and it might only be much, much later, that we might give ourselves freedom to experiment.

It can't be like that here, or at least not for long. Very soon after starting with all this, if you will go forwards, then you must be willing to go with the flow and to forget the step by step rules, because you are getting in touch with your spirit, and your spirit is actually very free and boundless, and it needs you to be free and boundless too.

Your spirit, your life force, your healing intelligence, is part of something much deeper, more complex and more unlimited than our minds can possibly grasp. If we set out to do these practices with our minds in charge, watchful for what happens, expecting what should happen, trying to control everything that we feel then we will hardly be able to take a step, but rather we will fall. It is ok to fall whilst learning to walk, in fact it is essential to fall whilst learning to walk, we have to, but not forever.

The steps that I have been recommending to you, the practices, the pairings, a few words in their nutshells, are just to get a foothold on the inner journey, to make a start. If you would love to move forward without delay, and especially if you have any kind of suffering, or health problem right now, then surely you must want to get better as soon as you possibly



can, then I want you to remember something that I have said earlier, but is highly worth repeating, and learning by heart, which is that *'The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master'*.

With love, but firmly, tell your mind what you want it to do. Instruct it, gently but clearly, that you wish to practice meditation now. Or you could say you are healing, or journeying within, and that this is what you wish it to do. Then you take that first step, with your conscious

mind, and then you let go. Nature will help you find the next step. Your nature, the Nature.

Now I want to say something more about *'merging into oneness'* and *'pairing into infinity'*. I hope you will love these thoughts, and that they will tickle you in all the right places, and so you will remember them, and use them, soon I hope!

This practice of pairing that we have been doing is an excellent way, a most effective way, to not get stuck in one place because, for all that we might grasp the concept of being in touch with our spirit and letting our minds step out of the driver's seat, it is really, really difficult to switch off the Eveready battery of the mind that wants to dissect, and analyse, and judge everything and anything that comes before it. Pairing is a way to stop that needle of thought

getting stuck in one groove. It breaks the pattern, the habit, of resisting what is, and it helps us to move, and flow, and be in the river of the energy of now.

As you find your way, and take the next step within your being, which is within your body, and as you remember to use the pairs to not get stuck, I believe that sooner or later, hopefully sooner, you will start to feel these energy centres in your front and your back, and all of the deeper 'you' that you can feel, starting to merge into oneness.

You will feel yourself as a whole being, feeling everything, all at once. Certainly there will be places, especially where there are blocks in your energy, places of unhealed hurts, both physical and emotional, where your awareness is pulled back to feeling yourself in a separate way. These places will probably pull you back or away many times over too, but they won't stay stuck forever, and if you don't resist them, and if you know how, and remember how to pair them, then they will release and come into the flow of the whole of you, more and more easily.

The feeling of merging into oneness may be very fleeting, especially at first, and it may have many interruptions and having to take a step back before you can step forwards again, but eventually there will be an experience of all these quadrants, and practices, and feelings, coming into a unity, a oneness.

Not if, but when this happens, sooner or later and hopefully sooner, I encourage you to remember, at some conscious or subconscious level, your practices of pairing, because now in this moment of time that you are one, just one, you still reach for your pair.

What are you reaching for? Where is it? How does it come to exist and how do you come to exist in a pair to it? As I suppose you know by now, I have no answers to the great questions, but I can say, and many others say too, that there is an ocean, an energy, a life force that is beyond us, and around us, and in us too, and you can pair to it, especially when you are not divided, and broken into pieces, but are just as you are, owning yourself, being soft, centred and now, being with what is, and being one.

You are not a mind in a body any more than you are a body with a mind attached by accident. We see endless duality in ourselves and in our world but that is just our training and our conditioning. The reality is much more interesting, and mysterious, than that. When we dissolve our dividing lines, firstly within ourselves, we become one, a spirit in the flesh, and then we know that our mind and our body are one and the same, and then secondly we can pair with the world that extends beyond our skin, the skin of our body, the skin of our identity.

Merging into oneness and pairing into infinity brings us to a place of deep sameness. It is not a boring sameness. It is not dull, and unchanging, and unsurprising. It is so full of life, and light, and meaning and purpose that, for me and others I have read and learned from, it is

more than enough to just peel up the corner of the rug, because any more than that feels like it would just about render us blind, deaf and dumb!

It is a most interesting paradox, and a mystery, how the more we can be with our shadow-sides, without resistance, without condemnation, the more we can be in our light. As we release that stranglehold of identifying only with our egoic minds and become more used to being in the spirit that resonates throughout our bodies, as we fray the corner of that rug that covers our ability to be like a baby, open, without any judgements, we can more and more feel the mystery of that light, that force. There is no limit to it! It's real! And it is within us as much as it is anywhere in the Universe.

If you will do just one more practice with me in this section before we move on to the fascinating subject of spiritual practices within the constitutions, this time I ask you to imagine that you are going to climb a small hill, let's not make it a mountain, just an easy walk for a few minutes, to take the air, to get a fresh perspective. The hill is within you, it is something that you love and care about very much, because it is where your spirit and your body live, it is the hill of you, and you would like to go within to be in it, and on it, and now you have a wonderfully wide range of first steps that you can take to begin.

If you wish, you can choose to be in choiceless awareness from the beginning, and so go within on your inner journey and find your first step by being open, empty and willing to follow the leader of your spark, your energy, your ever-moving point of being.

Or, and this is not better or worse, it's just different, you can take any step you wish. You can, for example, start at the base of your spine or at the top of it. Or begin in your belly, with any of the four quadrants to choose from to begin. Or maybe you are drawn to one of the spiritual practices of surrender, or compassion, or forgiveness, or gratitude. If one of them calls out to you then surely it would be good to start there, and then go deeper by bringing them into your body, starting in the front, or the back, however you wish.

In any case, in whatever way you take your steps, you will be on a hero journey of healing and you must know that it is a true promise that anything you practice you will get better at.

You have been, I imagine, a remarkably good student of all this, you have read everything and have attempted all the practices as they have come up. Now we have come to kind of an end of a key part of this book, and this is the point that I want you to free yourself of needing to do things in the right order, or the right way, and to start finding your own way, and taking your own steps.

The maps of the belly and the spine aren't going anywhere, you are most warmly welcome to explore them any time, at your leisure and as you wish, but I think you are probably here for more than entertainment and exploration, there is serious work to be done. You are seeking a great treasure, and it probably is more of a mountain than a hill that you will need to climb to find it, but let's just take things one step at a time.

And now you choose the first step, and the next step, and the next... *'don't forget the pairings'*, I feel like calling out to your receding back, as you go your way and oh, how I hope, that you will sooner or later, but preferably sooner, feel yourself doing these practices, in your way, in your time, and all of a sudden merging into the bliss of oneness, and peace, and love, and then feeling, groping blindly as I think we must do, because we can barely comprehend the infinite, but now no longer hard and separated and selfish but rather soft and vulnerable, all nerves and conscious flesh, mortal and fearful, yet somehow vaguely aware that there is some great mystery, some force that exists, that has made all of this possible. Oh, and that we might reach out to this energy, from our moment of unpaired oneness, and see what it is that can come to us, and pair with us.

That it might come, that peace could come to us, and that love could come to us, is just such a wonder, and what else can be said about any of that other than this, which is that I wish you a good journey for peace and love!



Spiritual Practices Within the Constitutions

Working out your constitution is a most interesting and useful thing to do, but whether you know your constitution, or you have some doubts about it, or you haven't looked into it yet, all the following material can still be personally relevant.

If you have looked into working out your constitution then you may have some doubts, and that's normal and even healthy, but however much the doubts are there because you have both hotter and cooler aspects to your nature, and likewise both dryer and damper qualities within you, you will definitely have a home base, a dominant constitution. No one sits exactly in the middle on either the hot to cool or the dry to damp spectrums and working out which side of each you mostly are will tell you which of the four constitutions you belong to.

The introduction page which opens when you click the 'constitutional medicine' box on the homepage of my website has a section in it called '*Which one are you?*' that has a link to a page that includes 8 questions and some other comments to help the reader try to work out their constitution. This article works quite well for many people but we are complex

creatures and it is not always simple. Wanting to shine more of a light on this matter was one of the main reasons I wrote a free Ebook, called 'Constitutional Complexity', also linked on that same introduction page, which goes into much more depth on the subject of working it out, along with other subjects relating to the constitution that I think are equally fascinating to explore.

Has the book been more successful in helping people to work out their constitution than the article? I think so, it seems so, I hope so, but I still know that the hardest person to work out is yourself. We see and feel our own complexity the most. We experience how all the elements that make up the constitutions exist inside us, to at least some extent, and so it can be hard for us to see which is more dominant.

If that has been the case for you, or if you find it is like that when you delve into it, then I can share with you that, in every case where the person kept an open mind and didn't close the



subject down, that it does eventually become clear. Not only that, but by continuing to explore it, and by being interested in finding the answer, people start seeing all kinds of clues about the relative heat to cool, and dry to dampness of the people around them, especially the ones they are the closest to and therefore, most interestingly to me, in teaching this, is that I repeatedly notice that the student who is unsure of themselves, but doesn't give up on wanting to work it out, gets significantly faster and better at working others out than usual. Surely this must simply be because they are getting good at something they are being drawn to practice with more than average.

Truly, it is ok not to know for a while, for however long it takes. We are programmed from an early age to be uncomfortable with not having the answers but most of the really interesting questions in life don't have simple, or obvious answers. It is ok to not know everything and it is also ok to make mistakes and not get it right the first time. Not getting it right the first time is why we need to practice and practice is really the only way to get good at anything!

We have to practice, we have to repeat things, and go over them, because we aren't good at them yet, and by going back over them we get better. This rule, that whatever we practice we get better at, is such a trustworthy rule. We need it and we can believe in it, especially when it comes to these matters of spiritual practice. I know that some very rare and exceptional people are naturally good at things like compassion, surrender, gratitude and forgiveness, but most of us need practice!

What follows will be a form of practice of what we've been talking about earlier, through more of a lens of the constitution, and partly through the lens of health conditions too. More about conditions shortly, but staying with the constitutional side of things for now, you've already been reading here about Bears, Tigers, Eagles etc, and there is about to be a lot more of that so, I just want to say this one more time to make it super emphatic. For this coming material, it will not matter if you do not yet know which constitution you are.

If and when you can work it out, then you will have a sense of your homebase and where your greatest obstacles are likely to be, and that could be very helpful too, but not knowing now will not affect your ability to benefit and learn from what follows, not whatsoever.



Tiger Terrain

Whichever constitution may be your homebase, you have an inner Tiger terrain, one that is highly valuable to explore. The Tiger terrain is like a jungle; hot, damp and full of life.

Intent on sharing tools to support the great journey of healing by recognising its obstacles, I have mostly been talking about the shadow side of this energy, how it is the centre of our fear and our primal force of survival, but there are powerful bright sides to the Tiger terrain too.

Our inner child, who we once were and who is still the part of us that loves to play, explore, and seek out what gives it passion and purpose, is full of Tiger energy.

It is not just for ourselves either, our Tiger energy is a part of us that loves to connect to others, especially in a way that causes the collective spirits to rise. Think about what happens when you put enough hot and damp together, you get steam! Steam doesn't sit still or seek separation, it connects, it moves, it rises. In fact, the Tiger energy, which all of us have inside us, is very deeply aligned with the power and the purpose of love.

In this book, I want to do just two final practices, meditations, on forgiveness with you. The very last one will be at the end of this section on the Tiger terrain and the second to last one is coming in just a little while. When we get there, the method will contain the same processes that we have already been practicing with, but we will also take it one final step further by understanding and using this constitutional Tiger energy that exists within us.

Whether or not your constitutional homebase is the Tiger, you most definitely have an inner Tiger terrain, which can sometimes be very confronting if you have not consciously spent much time in it! The primal energy of our inner Tiger includes and embodies fear, which is

much of what stops us moving forwards in our life and health. When we learn how to be with it, and practice being with it, then we can receive its extraordinary gift, which is that of courage.

Tiger energy is just as physical as it is spiritual. The hot and damp energy that exists within us physically is full of life and creativity and passion, it rushes and runs with our blood, spreading everywhere, nourishing and cleansing at the same time, but it has a dark side too. Any time you have a hot and painful condition that spreads into its surrounding areas, and especially if it rises in the body in any way, like steam does, then you have blocked hot and damp Tiger energy.

Is the block more physical, or emotional? I'm not sure it always matters to know the answer to that but for sure many of our wounds, in the modern world perhaps most of our wounds, are more emotional and spiritual than they are physical. Our trauma comes from our experiences more than our accidents.

Whatever the cause, wherever there is hurt it is highly worth looking to see if it has the quality of damp stuck heat in it. If it seems that way then it will probably also have the nature to spread, to grow, physically, emotionally or both, and so increasingly take over the experience, the terrain. The energy of the Tiger needs to roam the jungle without fear, without being blocked, if it becomes trapped or caged it can create enormous mischief.

In this book I'm mainly here to talk about and share thoughts about spiritual practices but I think you may be interested to know that, as a herbalist, even though it is very important for me to know the constitution of my patient, I will often use the herbs that work best in quite different terrains to their constitutional homebase, because that is where their energy is most blocked or needing support.

If you are interested, on my website in the section on constitutional medicine there is a PDF chart called Constitutional Medicine, where you can see, in the Tiger corner of the top left, a box that says *'cooler, cleansing herbs for hot damp congestion'*.

No one gets conditions with hot and damp congestion more than a Tiger, so they are the most likely of all to need the cooling cleansing herbs for a while, and likely a cooling cleansing diet for that time too, but my point is that other people from other constitutions may also benefit from the same approach, because their condition is one that shows that they are stuck with hot, damp congestion too.

Many, many health conditions fit that description. Anything with the type of inflammation that presents as stuck damp heat as a primary symptom. Anything that gets anti-inflammatory drugs, steroids, decongestants, antihistamines, statins, blood pressure drugs etc. thrown at it will likely be based around hot, damp congestion.

Herbs take longer to help than drugs, and they usually require much larger physical amounts to ingest too, for example in teas, tinctures or capsules, but the cooling, drying, cleansing

herbs can be enormously helpful for a person with hot, damp congestion, whatever their constitution. Herbs are slower to act than drugs, and a cleansing diet will probably be needed alongside, but we are helping the body to heal itself rather than suppressing its symptoms. I don't think I need to spell out how much better that can be in the long term.

The different conditions and the different symptoms of stuck damp heat are manifold, and they can cause endless misery, but they often come down to the same basic root cause. There is a need for cleansing on a physical level and/or there is a need for cleansing on a spiritual level.

Obviously, this book is mainly about the spiritual practices to work on the energetic level but don't for a moment think that, if you need them, it should be difficult to find herbs and use the methods that are safe and effective to help you to cleanse on the physical level. My articles in the conditions section of my website on detoxification and cleansing diets have easy to follow and accessible information, including about how to use some of the most important and reliable herbs for cleansing.

I am especially fond of using pairs when we are just setting out to do something simply, safely and economically. For example these two cooling and drying pairs from the herbal kingdom: Dandelion and Burdock roots, Gentian root and Juniper berry. All the different herbs work rather differently, and would need some care and study to learn about before using, but herbs are the people's medicine, they belong to us and to you.

The non-poisonous medicinal herbs will always be legal to buy and in the modern global marketplace they should not be too hard to obtain. It does take some time and effort to learn some important details about them, but with that knowledge they can be used by anyone with complete safety and effectiveness. I know that we will always need good herbalists to help guide and support holistic healing journeys but anyone who has the motivation to claim their right to use the people's medicine should be able to access herbs, especially if they need to help clean their body on the inside.

Interestingly, it seems that doing cleansing on either the physical or the spiritual level helps with cleansing on both levels, to at least some extent, though of course you can only go so far with the physical cleansing when there is emotional healing that is needed and vice versa, you can only go so far with the emotional letting go when there is need for physical treatment too.

Right now we are focusing on spiritual cleansing, especially for the unhealed hurts that will not leave, and cannot leave, unless and until we bring in the great practice of forgiveness, and so I want to start now heading towards the second to last meditation on forgiveness. This will be a combination of what we've been building on before, and for the benefit of practice let's revise those steps again, along with a new and final step that I am going to introduce to you right now, one that can help us to go very deep.

When we have set up the practice in the same way as we have done previously, I am going to ask you to take a final step to try to let go, as completely as you can, and allow yourself to merge into the oneness of your whole being, pairing with that part of us, of everything, that gives healing, and forgiveness.

This is the same as how we approached the last meditation at the end of the previous section on relaxation and surrender. The difference is that we are coming through the pathway of the Tiger, and it changes the approach in ways that are most interesting, and powerful to explore.

To begin with, we start with, and come back to, this great thought '*I own me*'. We've been with this, I hope you see the value of it and have already been exploring it for yourself. Coming into the full practice of forgiveness, nothing held back, I want you to be open to the idea of holding the great thought '*I own me*' at a level that goes deeper and deeper until there is nothing left but a tiny dot of 'you', unpaired to anything, completely alone, in the sense of feeling your oneness.

At this point, anything and everything that you are, and that you feel, belongs to you and you alone, and then from there, in that point of the very essence of you, you reach out for the pairing that brings healing, and forgiveness.

We've touched on this, perhaps you've done this already, that's wonderful if so, but I can't assume that and, if you are anything like me, or even a hundred times faster than me, it will still take you many tentative baby steps, many practices, to deepen your own practice to the kind of level that you can be truly all in on this.

Leading up to there, as we have been practicing, I re-invite you to strengthen your practice, and make it more real, and powerful, by continuing to bring your awareness into your body, your subconscious, especially in these first, starting steps. Coming into the base of your spine, and at the same time the lower right quadrant of your belly, takes you deep into the terrain of your Tiger energy. Whatever constitution you are, this energy is universal for all of us and, the more you practice it, the more you will be able to feel how there is a flow of energy here that has the nature to be both hotter and damper.

It is a very spreading kind of energy, it wants to move, and it will move, especially as we are about to come into this full version of the practice where you just take those first few steps consciously, with intention, and then you fully let go into what happens next and you go with the flow of your innate intelligence and its great force for healing, and forgiveness.

This basement of the body, meaning the lower hill of the spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly, are the best places to make friends with the great primal force that resides here. It can be a most daunting force, and when it floods out of the body in the form of fear, it is probably quite impossible to make friends with it, but here in the basement it is a sleepy beast, one that you can approach with love, and begin to connect to without fear.

Remember that in and amongst this fertile, active, dynamic terrain is an awareness of all the unhealed hurt that is still held in the body, the subconscious, not just here but everywhere. Our Tiger terrain contains a command centre that has the map of the subconscious kept right here, at the base of the spine and the bottom right of the belly.

Don't get stuck in one place here, and if you do feel yourself getting stuck, use your growing awareness of the power of pairing to keep the energy moving. The echo, the presence, the awareness of the unhealed hurt may be right there, at a moments notice, or it may be much deeper in and well hidden from inner view, but you can trust that the intelligence of your body is extremely well aware of every little piece of whatever blocks it from being in perfect harmony. It wants your energy to flow abundantly and freely, in the most excellent health, but there are hurts that it is not able to self-resolve and self-repair, or it already would have done so, long ago.

You are setting the rules of engagement from the very beginning. *'I own me'*, *'This is me'*, *'I am this'*, no projection, no being a victim, full and total responsibility for my experience right now, in this moment, for everything I feel, for everything that I am. Remember to bring love and compassion into the practice right from the beginning too. No judgement, no hardening, at the same time as you think in your body and feel in your mind *'I own me'*, you pair the great thought *'I love you'* and you give it all you can to say it and think it like you mean it.

At the same time, or in the next moment, you are bringing your awareness into the base of your spine and the lower right quadrant of your belly. Pairing thoughts with physical awareness, going between the steps, back and forth as you wish. Thinking in your body, feeling in your mind. Going between the pairs will most assuredly stir the cauldron of energy that resides here.

The more you relax into it, and get used to being here, the more the energy in this terrain will come forth and show you its Tiger nature. It is wild and free and it is hunting for what it knows it hungers more than anything, which is to be happy, which is to be in love and to be at peace.

Then allowing for, and accepting that there are wounds, that there are unhealed hurts, and that harm has been done and that you are, just in this moment in time right now, taking all the ownership, all the responsibility for the presence of that harm. Not what or who caused it, we're not getting into that right now, just that it is there, within you, that no one else can feel it except for you, and that you own it, completely and fully, and that you accept what you own unconditionally, with nothing but love, whatever it is and however it feels.

Then we come to this thought, which can really come anytime, but however you say it, and whenever you say it, all that matters is that it is sincere, and heartfelt, and that you can feel in your mind and think in your body when you say *'I'm so sorry'* for all the hurt. Sorry means mercy, sorry means compassion, sorry means I don't want the hurt to be there anymore, or

to do anything that could cause it to happen again, and that I want to protect you, meaning me, from future harm.

You think it in your body, you feel it in your mind. It may take a moment to feel it, just a heartbeat, or you might need to linger in it. You may only need to be in the *'I'm so sorry'* just once, or you might need to come around it a few times to really feel it in your mind and think it in your body. Remember, for most of us, our conditioning from our culture and our childhood would say no, this is forbidden, you must not wallow in self-pity or you will never be able to stop and harden yourself up enough to keep going. You must be alert for the judgemental force that comes with unhealed hurt. It lurks in the shadows, brooding, unforgiving, destructive, and dangerous.

You are not entering this terrain of the jungle as a naive accidental traveller. You have come here with a purpose, for healing, for understanding, and for love. When you see the hurt, or when the hurt comes to you with its stories, or its thirst for vengeance, or its insistent aching presence, you must respond to it with the utmost compassion. You welcome it, you accept it, you allow it to fill your mind and body with its presence, even if you are at the same time aware that fear has come in with the increase of intensity that comes when you don't fight it, or try to flee from it, so you are with both the hurt and the fear of the hurt, just breathing, just being, and trusting that this time, and every time you do this, there will be a release, the wave will never keep rising forever, it will fall back, and that there will always be healing in being with what is, with love.

So, *'I own me'*, and *'I love you'*, and *'I'm so sorry'*, and we can cycle around these thoughts, and pair back into the Tiger terrain in our body, and be in the feelings that come up when we do this for however long or short we wish, but this next step in the practice is one where I want you to allow your body, your subconscious, to connect to all the Tiger energy, the hot damp flow of the river that runs all through you, simultaneously, and gather in all the parts of you, your mind and body, that resonate with the Tiger terrain, the frequency of it, that is within you, whichever constitution you are.

Just to be clear about what we are doing here. You have started with making the *'I own me'* and *'I love you'* connection with the home base of your Tiger energy, in the lower hill at the base of your spine and your lower right quadrant of your belly, and you are practicing getting familiar with the energy that resides here. There is a heat in it, which may be very subtle, especially at first, but you can quickly get used to tuning into that heat, and likewise feel how there is a spreading, connecting dampness in it, one which rather has a tendency to move! The energy here can be fearful in its emerging state, and it is certainly intense in any case, but when it rests in the cleansing quadrant and the base of the spine it is more of a nature to be just watchful, alive and potent.

Then this new step is to, in a sense, widen your view, open your awareness, and scan within to feel where else that same Tiger energy is resonating in your body. There are places that

are likely to come forwards, and may have already done this when you have practiced tuning into your 'cleansing zone' before. Do you remember connecting the hills in your spine? If you haven't consciously come back to that practice, and it was quite a while ago that we focused on this, then it is rather likely that you will get some resonance in your thoracic spine, and your heart, when you broaden your view, and open up the territory.

Likewise, if you have any areas of stuck damp heat, of inflammation, that reside in your body now, then there is every likelihood that they will come forwards to your attention, because they want healing, and they need healing, but there are blocks in the way, and your inner intelligence will know that this meditation can mightily help to release those obstacles.

There is another area that closely connects to the Tiger terrain of the hot, damp lower right of the hara, and it is the cool, dry region of the stomach, the top left quadrant. I only briefly touched on this connection in the earlier section on the nourishment zone, because I didn't want to throw too many moving parts in all this at you too soon, but there is an 'X' marks the spot nature to the hara where, just like the hills and valleys of the spine, the upper left connects to the lower right and the lower left connects to the upper right. I'm not asking you to practice with this, I figure this will be in the territory of the kinds of next steps that you will soon enough find for yourself once you get practiced with some first steps, but I just wanted to mention this one because it is one of the areas that is most likely to connect to your 'call out' in the jungle and I want you to be very open for what may come.

The hot, damp Tiger energy that flows around us is all primal life force. It can carry the energy of fear through our nerves, as fast as lightning, and it can move like an unstoppable tidal wave through the blood, but fear is only its shadow side. The light side of this energy is in its power to give us passion and purpose. It is not scary in its essence, but it is powerful.

As a final step in this practice of forgiveness, I am about to encourage you to 'ride the Tiger'. As you connect with this potent manifestation of your life force, I encourage you to keep using the guides of the forgiveness practice to keep yourself safe, meaning in the flow and unblocked. The obstacles are hurt and hardening, the friends are the timeless practices of ownership and forgiveness. Wherever there is a sense of hurt (and unhealed hurts do come up when you set an intention to do a healing practice of forgiveness) keep coming back to the thought of *'I own me'*, and *'I love you'*.

Be in the loving and merciful place of *'I own this, this is me'* - not to be a victim, and not to seek to put the blame elsewhere. Then naturally, sincerely, give mercy to yourself, *'I am so sorry you are hurting and I am so sorry I am hurting you'*.

Who is hurting who? It doesn't matter, we're not trying to find out who is to blame.

Ownership is unconditional. You are taking the blame for you, but you don't want to punish yourself any further. The unhealed hurt is proof enough of the punishment already! Again, this is the practice of forgiveness in a nutshell: to take ownership with love, to be sorry in a compassionate way, a merciful way, and then to ask for forgiveness, for healing.

This last, most important step, of asking, praying, begging for healing and forgiveness is one that we are attempting to do on a much greater scale now. This new and last step is that you ride the Tiger into each and every part of you that carries inflammation, unhealed hurt, and that is steamed with hot damp energy, in any form, dark or light, and then you invite, and allow, and bring in a oneness to it all.

Remember to use pairing anytime you get stuck, coming back to your lower right belly and lower spine, pairing to your heart and chest, pairing to your stomach, pairing anywhere your body, your subconscious, invites you to connect, pairing with your key nutshell thoughts, and then there may come a moment, sooner or later, where you can feel all that Tiger energy, the primal force of it, as a oneness in your body, your being, the whole of you.

Then and there, right there, is the absolutely ideal time to reach for the *pairing to infinity*. You are one but you still ache, the ache may be physical or it may be more a heartache, a loneliness, but the vital point is not to be afraid of it. Not to try to fix it, or change it, rather the opposite, you welcome it in its fullness. You are even inviting it to spread to and connect with every other part of you that aches. Until there you are, just one big ache. I suppose that might sound terrible, but don't stop there. There is no better time or place to ask, or beg, or pray for forgiveness than when you hurt and when you feel truly sorry for the hurt.

Remember, compassion is allowing yourself to feel sorry, it is not weak to be merciful. Dive into it, don't hold back, be as sorry as you can that there is an ache, that you are not yet at peace, or in love.

All the spiritual traditions talk about this in their own ways. How the grace of God, or however they describe that divine energy that gives grace, and forgiveness, comes to the person who calls out for it from their heart.

The Tiger energy within us is keenly aware of many things, not just what we need to be wary of, and guard against, and be watchful for, but also for what we want. It hungers for love with a passion, and feels the ache of its loneliness with great passion too. Connecting your Tiger homebase with that of your heart and chest will fuel and raise up that passion. I encourage you to go with it when such heartache comes to you. Meet it with great courage in the face of the fear of it.

If fear comes, when fear comes, because you are riding a Tiger, and there are powerful energies within our body, our subconscious, remember to be with it. Don't fight it, don't run from it. Tell yourself '*I own me*' for the fear too. Tell yourself '*I love you*' to everything that comes with it. Tell yourself '*I'm so sorry*' for being afraid, be soft rather than hard towards it, compassionate rather than judgemental, surrender rather than resist, and it will morph and shift, change its shape, and show you the way.

I would love you to have a go at this now, or whenever you are ready and, because I have been saying a lot to remember, and because we now have all the moving parts of this in one

place, and because we all have so much to learn in our journeying, here are the key points in summary again:

- 1) Setting the intention to practice forgiveness, for healing and for love and at any time, going backwards or forwards with any of the steps to get a good foothold within, including using the nutshells to guide the mind and body to work together, thinking in your body and feeling in your mind *'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry'*
- 2) Sitting or lying down, being still, breathing, and bringing awareness into the Tiger terrain, the lower right quadrant of the belly and the hill at the base of the spine.
- 3) Getting used to feeling the hotter, damper energy here, the primal force of it, which can be scary and fearful when it runs like lightning through the body, but is very safe to feel and get to know and make friends with here.
- 4) Allowing yourself to acknowledge, and possibly feel, any unhealed hurts that reside here, in this territory, and being sincerely sorry for any and all of the hurt and then bringing compassion to whatever there is to see and then, as soon as you are willing, this new step...
- 5) Riding the Tiger of opening out to any and all areas where there is ache, and unhealed hurt, and inflammation, and hotter damper energy in the body, aka the subconscious. Feeling the hurt, and feeling sorry for the hurt with the utmost mercy, and softness and compassion.
- 6) Then welcoming a sense of oneness in all the parts of us that are connected to this energy and, however it feels, and even and especially if it aches, then reaching out, or within, or wherever we perceive, however dimly or uncertainly, that there could be a presence, an intelligence, that we can ask for mercy, and forgiveness, and healing. And asking, really asking, to *'please forgive me'*, to please heal that which I cannot know how to heal.

Have a go at this now, or just whenever you are ready.



Courage in the Hero Journey

Is the merging into oneness, the pairing into infinity, if we can even begin to approach such a state of being, any different if we come to it through riding the Tiger through the practice of forgiveness or going through a different route, for example the one of surrender and relaxation that we were exploring at the end of the last section?

No, I don't suppose the ocean is any different regardless of which road you travelled to get there. With the mere journeyman's qualifications that I have to speak to this subject, I think it is the same ocean and, at the same time, it is always different, however you come to it. Or rather, arrive close enough to its shore that its waves can come to you.

Ok, so if it makes no difference which way we come to it, then why teach four practices and four pathways to get there, wouldn't it be much simpler, and easier just to focus on one? Well yes, it could be, and I certainly encourage you to try for yourself to see if any one path talked about here, or any other method for that matter, might bring you in any way better, more simply, more easily, more quickly, to what it is that you most deeply seek.

Truly, honestly, I only want as many of us as possible to find our true peace, and our true love, however we get there! We so need it, and the more of us who are even just heading in that direction, the better chance we have of getting out of this alive, and I don't mean that individually, I mean us collectively, all of us, otherwise I think we will drive ourselves extinct!

Most spiritual paths and practices I know about just use one main method of practice, which usually seem primarily based on directing the mind to focus in a certain way, for example through prayer or meditation or mantras, which I think can work well in the way that they occupy the mind enough for it to be quiet enough for some peace to come in edgeways. I don't mean to sound disparaging, I used these kinds of techniques a lot in my own past and can see their value. It can be such a relief to have a break from thinking all the time. Plus the different methods to quieten the mind can help a lot in understanding the nature of our spirit, and how we are not the identity of our minds as we would have otherwise thought.

Why I come around the body like this, delving into the subconscious, and possibly stirring up all kinds of healing reactions along the way, is that I believe in healing journeys. I see the great need for them in people who are suffering from the kinds of problems that cannot easily be made to go away, and I'm sorry to say that I don't think that temporarily arresting the tyranny of our mind's dominance with some form of controlling it achieves much of a great healing journey within. Perhaps it's a start in a good direction, but I don't think it takes things to where they need to go just by itself.

Likewise for the abundance of positive thinking, self-improvement methods that occupy the holistic health world in which I work. I know that everything has its value and its place but, perhaps just from sheer volume of exposure to people with chronic illnesses, many of whom have tried all kinds of methods to improve themselves through their minds, but are really

not better for it, I just see that it simply doesn't work to try to control the mind or use it to try to make us a somehow better person than what we were before. Even if the effort seems to help at first, the benefit doesn't last. Self improvements that are willed into being only ultimately serve to strengthen the mind's preeminent position as the head of a hierarchy that does not exist in nature and gets in the way of our peace and love rather than bringing us any closer to them.

My understanding is that we need to go through the body, the subconscious, rather than the mind for the great hero journey of healing because we just have to face our inner obstacles and do the shadow work that inevitably comes up if we will find what we most seek and those dark friends, those difficult energies exist within us far more deeply than in our mind alone.

You cannot grow courage without facing your fear, you cannot make peace with yourself without learning how to hold your fire, you cannot know and be in true love without knowing and being with loneliness, and you cannot come to true peace needs without learning how to stop resisting and just surrender!

These shadow sides of our nature are our guides, showing us the way, and what we most need to focus on, and then the different practices are to help us be with these dark forces in such a way that they become our friends and allies.

I don't think we can do any of that by trying to rise above our shadows and become better people than we are. There is a lot of denial in the world, and no less than anywhere else is it in the world of methods and techniques to make ourselves different to who we actually are.

This last inclusion in the practice of forgiveness, the one I am calling riding the Tiger, with the invitation to align all the fear energy, the primal energy, the inflamed places, the heat and the damp within you into one, and then to reach out from the oneness of that place to pair to whatever heals us, and soothes and releases whatever is blocked in us, is the last step. I have nothing more to show you though I will ask you to revise it with me and have one more go at it before we finish this section. I just want to talk about this subject we are on right now a little more, and then afterwards some related matters, before we finish with that last practice.

Starting with, don't you think it is a most interesting idea that there is a kind of energy that resides within us, having a home base but also rushing and running, and getting stuck, within our body and our beings? We can call it, and describe it in different ways, Tiger energy, primal energy, or when it is giving us trouble, we use more shadow-sided names, such as fear, inflammation, stuck damp heat, but all of those are just words, it is what you can feel that is the only part that matters here.

'The only thing to fear is fear itself'. I am sure you've heard that, probably many times, and how I think it matters here is that, when we come within to connect to this force, we set the

intention to put two hands around the neck of the Tiger, not to strangle it, just to hold on tight! Because it will be a ride, perhaps little by little, perhaps all at once, but there is an energy that lies within us, and it does have a home base, and these are not just some theories that may or may not be the case for you, they will be true for you too, and if you go into this I know that you will feel that for yourself too. So that's a lovely point to contemplate, and a scary one too, because once you cross that threshold from the theory into the real, once you are actually feeling this energy and riding that Tiger, then now what?

I see that there is a tendency in many of us to be actually more afraid of our light than our dark. We can be very familiar and used to diminishing ourselves, holding ourselves down, thinking little of who we are and, as we get older, thinking even less as we see more of the world and our place in it. But these meditations, these practices, for all that they must encompass the shadow work, do bring us to our light, or perhaps I should say to the light.

So what to do when you feel that Tiger taking off and you feel afraid of the fear and want to get off the ride? Well, of course you can always stop any of this with just a thought. You don't have to do anything, or step or ride anywhere, you are always in charge of whether you choose to keep going or to step off. But I say don't let go, hang on, own yourself, be on your hero journey, and if anything comes up that is making you feel bad, don't try to run from it or direct it somewhere else, but just own that too!

The force that you will feel, and I think feel increasingly so the more you practice with these methods, is primarily connected to the part of you that is seeking love. It is connecting with the love that is already within you, and around you. This is a very potent force, perhaps it is a part of the very creative force that brought the Universe into being, many others think so. Don't you find that a most wonderful idea, that we could be in touch with such a force to such an extent that we could become one with it?

Tigers are scary. Imagine meeting one in the wild, in an actual jungle. A hungry Tiger, watching you, looking like it is waiting to pounce on you, to sink its claws into you, to eat you up. Why in the world would you want to learn how to ride a Tiger? Why do any of this, why meditate on and increase the feelings, the hot, damp urgent river of raw feelings that have the capacity, and surely the history, to surge through us so damn uncomfortably that they can make us feel like we're just about going to die. Surely we should be running, not walking, in the exact opposite directions to all of this. Everyone else will tell you to do whatever it takes to get away from fear, so why in the world would you want to practice turning in to face it?

It is for love. There is no other reason that could possibly be worth going on such a hero journey as to face your fears, and every other shadow within. All of this is for love, and for peace, but there is simply no way that we can move forwards on the great hero journey of healing unless we have courage. And the only way to have courage is to face fear. You cannot become courageous in any other way.

Being a risk-taker, being a no responsibility and no consequences human being is not what courage is, it's just someone who is untested, usually because they are still young, and so who is on the fun side of the pendulum that swings between excitement and fear. Have you ever thought about how excitement and fear feel almost physically the same way within our bodies? The butterflies in the stomach, the restless, racing heart and mind. Both excitement and fear are usually related to something coming up, something excellent or something dreadful being what decides which side the pendulum swings.

A young and untested person is usually still more than willing to ride the high of the adrenaline and the excitement. There's nothing wrong with that, life will surely give them all the lessons required, and that are capable of being learned, without any of us needing to intervene, unless they are really putting themselves or others at risk.

Learning to not only be with the shadow side of our Tiger energy but to even make friends with it and to ride it, to embrace it, is something far beyond seeking excitement or avoiding dread. This is a conscious choice, an intention. It is a journey for a person who understands that they have unhealed hurts that they are willing to own and that they wish to heal, and that they understand that to do that healing there must be work in the shadows and that for this they will simply have to have courage.

How could we count the ways in which we need courage, and in fact already are courageous, because if you look closely, and then look again, you can see that many people are already remarkably brave at what they do in their everyday lives. Our ancestors faced every fear imaginable and still managed to survive and pass on their genes. Every single one of them was successful enough at finding a mate and raising their children for us to exist. Their blood, their spirit lives on in us and we have their courage within us too.

So, amongst the countless many examples of courage that are there to be seen, there are just two, Tigerlike examples, that I want to highlight here, in the context of everything we've been talking about.

The first is something I have mentioned several times, about how when you don't resist or harden or in any way try to stop the feelings that come up when you go within, that the experience can involve an initial increase in intensity. I imagine you have already felt that by now. It is inevitable in any true healing journey, and that increase in intensity is actually somewhat scary, how could it not be?

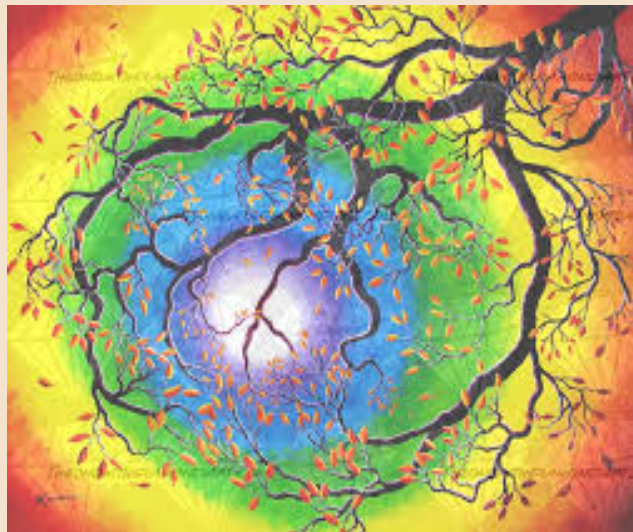
There is such an instinct, that comes with that fear energy, to pull away, to run or to fight against it. The instinct is not to accept it, or soften to it, or even surrender to it, anything but that! We don't want to feel bad, anything that seems to make us feel worse is to be avoided. The fear reaction is instinctive, impulsive, and probably impossible to not feel to at least some extent.

Every time you don't run or fight, every time you *'be with what is'*, and most especially when *'what is'* becomes more uncomfortable for any amount of time, you are facing fear and finding courage.

I say, I always say, that each and every time you do this, that there must eventually be a release, and I truly believe there will be. But only until the next wave comes! Because this is not a once and done deal. There are layers upon layers of separation from our love, and our peace, that are piled up inside us. An ocean of an onion, where you peel back a layer only to find another one underneath. It takes great courage to continue to be with what is. To feel the fear and hold steady anyway. This is a big part of why it must be called a hero journey, because heroes are brave, and you are truly brave to be doing any of this.

The second example of Tiger courage that is now increasingly coming into what I am encouraging you to practice, is this idea that we can connect to the great spirit of the universe. It actually takes tremendous courage to walk towards the light. There is much that is within us, parts of us that we could say belong to the shadow side of our fear, that want us to shrink, to hide, and to remain in the shadows, unseen and small. I honestly think that most of us, perhaps all of us, are even more afraid of our light than our dark.

To be one with what is, to merge into oneness, to pair into infinity, takes immense courage. It actually takes tremendous courage to be able to trust that we will not come to harm, that the source of the energy of life, our own life, and all life, truly loves us, unconditionally, fully, without any shadow of a doubt.



It takes all our courage, enormous courage, to be willing to have such a faith in love, in the Universe, that we could let ourselves merge into oneness with it, and let go into it, and allow ourselves to be carried by it, for however many heartbeats we do.

Like any great love affair, there is a coming together and a pulling apart. I don't think we can be in a state of love all the time any more than I think we can be in a state of peace all the time. There's nothing wrong with wanting such a thing, and I suppose there's no harm in believing in it either, so long as we can handle the much more likely reality of waves, of coming and going, of being in, and then out.

Does it get easier to face fear and have courage, does it get easier to surrender to the great ocean of love and peace without wanting to go run and hide? Yes, most definitely yes. Everything I have to share here rests on that principle. It all gets easier with practice.

Spirituality and Sexuality

I don't wish to be provocative here. I know that sexuality is a tender subject for many people and I don't want to lose you by making sweeping or careless statements in this area any more than I have been wanting to speak on matters of the spirit in any kind of way that could alienate someone, no matter what their background was.

In my rooms, when I am with someone in person, I can feel their pulse metaphorically as well as literally, and so I can sense how far to take things. People want to be open and honest when they come to someone for help. They don't want to hide themselves and they talk with more than their words, so you can very soon tell if you are even approaching a line for them, and there is certainly no need to cross that line.

When they have decided that they can trust you, some people will want to open up about highly personal matters relating to their sexual health. Marriages flourish or die in the bedroom, many men and women have problems with their libido, many more have the deep, heartfelt ache of the loneliness that comes when we do not feel touched, and held, and loved enough.

Just so you know, as I teach my students, to be a good herbalist of course you have to know how to use the herbs safely and effectively but that is by no means the end of it. You also must be able to be, when needed, a good dietician, a good exercise coach, and a good counsellor. One of the core principles of holistic medicine is to not make any one part of health or life more important than another.

So you learn to have a kind of toolbox with all kinds of well known herbal medicines in it, certainly, but also various methods and techniques to help with nutrition, exercise as well as tools to help in the vast subjects of mental and emotional health too. Then you put that toolbox at your feet with the lid closed, forget about everything you've learned that could possibly help for the moment, and you just meet people where they are at. You practice having an empty mind and an open heart.

You only take out one or more tools when you understand something about the causes of what is going on and something about the person who is behind the condition that they have come in with. To get to that point you ask open questions, you listen and observe, and you make no judgements, in other words you practice compassion and, because people are far more intuitive than they realise themselves, they can feel your compassion, your openness.

In fact, without their doing it consciously, they are feeling where you are at in just the same way you are feeling them out, they instinctively feel your softness, and so they open up too. Hence why to be a good herbalist you must be ready and able to deal with matters of the spirit just as much as the flesh, because that is where a great deal of the suffering lies and what it will be that people have to share most deeply about what is actually going wrong.

Back to the subject of sexuality as it relates to health and spirituality. Whatever is going on, however troublesome it is, as always the only real enemy is denial. However in these most personal and private areas it can be extremely difficult for people to acknowledge, even to themselves, that they are suffering from loneliness.

A most common scenario is the very loving person who is surrounded by friends and family, to whom they pour out their love and care and affection, giving out so much of themselves that they can be frankly exhausted, but not really feeling loved and cared for in return. It's not great, but I can see that a lot of people can accept that and live with it. Many very good mothers and fathers, brothers, sisters and friends can handle a lot of one-way traffic without any end in sight. There is a lot of imbalance in their relationships between the giving and receiving but they can be ok with it. Not great, but ok.

Where we come into an entirely different order of an issue is when it comes to the primary relationship, the partner, the lover. When people describe themselves as feeling like furniture, like flatmates, in the lives of their partners, then for all that they may have been putting up with it for years, even decades, for all that they may say that it's not great, but it's ok, you have to at least try to shine some light on this one. Feeling unloved, unseen, untouched in the primary relationship is very similar to heart-disease. If you go into denial, if you ignore the signs of what is happening, you are in great peril.

For the person who is with someone, in a relationship, not alone, if they think that not having love and intimacy in their lives will not be profoundly affecting them, then they are in denial, and danger. Just to be clear, even though I might assume you know this, making love, being intimate, and being together with someone is so much more than having sex. It is looking at each other and being open and interested in each other's lives. It is having hugs and holding hands. Hopefully it is kissing too, people should never stop doing that. At any age, at any stage, if we are with someone, then we need to have some form of physical affection or intimacy between us, or something within us withers and dies.

I know that this can be a huge subject for many people and I'm sorry if what I am saying is triggering a reaction in you right now because I don't want to say too much more about this other than if it needs attention then whoever is involved simply has to do whatever it takes to give it the energy it deserves, it's just too important not to.

However bad things are or dire they may look, again and again, the only enemy is denial and it is here, just as much as in any other sphere, that I want to bring this back to our own personal journey because, as much as it is kind of easier, and often very tempting, to blame the partner for where things have got to, we must start by looking within ourselves first.

Our sexuality is much closer to our spirituality than most people begin to imagine. I know that most people don't think that way but really that is just because most of us, when we are growing up, which is when we accept things rather unquestioningly, adopt our ideas and beliefs about both spirituality and sexuality very early on without any questions. In fact, with

exceptions, most of us don't stray too far from where we started, even as we become aware of a much wider spectrum of beliefs and points of view than the ones we were given.

The Tiger energy that flows within all of us includes elements that are both intensely spiritual and sexual. The hot, damp life force has the primal force of survival woven into it, in its shadow form it can shift its shape anywhere from the mildest niggling doubt all the way up to frank fear but, in its light side, it is an energy that seeks connection beyond itself. The heat part of its hot dampness is expansive, searching, reaching for something that it knows it hungers for, the damp part of its nature is equally manifesting a desire to connect, to join with, and to love.

In its emergent form, as it rushes and runs to the heart and the head, the Tiger energy drives our search for romance and, for many people, our search for spiritual love too. In its raw, primal form, the Tiger energy is intent on ensuring the survival of our genes, on reproduction, and therefore on finding and being with a mate with whom we can be intimate. It is the same energy, it just manifests and shows itself in different forms and ways.

Again, I am not setting out to be provocative. I realise that for many people, the subject of sexuality is about as far from spirituality as they can imagine. Especially if there has been a strong religious upbringing, which often includes a culture of looking at matters of the flesh as being unholy and somehow unclean. Please relax if any of that is the case for you. I am not about to suggest any kind of weird practices or anything that could remotely cross any kind of line here. The only place where this is heading is that I want you to understand and fully connect with this hot and damp aspect of your inner spirit, your inner Tiger.

In the hero journey of seeking healing, and forgiveness, and in facing fear and finding courage, I want you to embrace every single part of your Tiger energy and the vast spectrum that it occupies, which is utterly full of the very essence of life.

What does any of this talk about sexuality and spirituality mean in terms of the practices we have been working on? Nothing whatsoever, it doesn't change anything that you might do or try to do. I only want you to understand that this force, this energy that exists within you is multi-layered, dynamic, alive, and that, when you feel an intense desire for love and connection, on any level, including the sexual as much as the spiritual, that you are with it, and in it, and it is in you, because it is you.

All I am saying is to not distance yourself from this energy, not in any way. All your desires, all your ache for love, all your wishes for connection, for purpose and passion, all come back to this great force. It is not your enemy, but it can still be very hard to be with, especially when we do not feel in love, and connected, and we have unhealed hurts, and ache.

When you come to practice forgiveness, or you want to make friends with your Tiger energy, or you are just drawn into the parts of your subconscious, your body, where these things play out, I am encouraging you, after getting your feet well set in the foundation zone, in

your lower right belly and the base of your spine, to feel wherever the intense, hot and damp energy exists in your being and be open to uniting all of it as one, and so being one with it, and then opening yourself up to receive what it is that you most seek.

Is this a foreign or a strange idea to you? That the great love that you seek is already there, within you and around you, and it is just our blocks to it, our separation from it, that stops us from being in it and feeling it.

You must agree that it is certainly an interesting idea, and very different from the notion that we must find love outside of ourselves and that someone else has to give us what we need or we will never have it.

Not that I want to say a single word against romantic love here, or one single word against any kind of true love between people. Really, may there be so much more true love between people that our world becomes so filled with it that there just isn't the room for hatred and intolerance and loneliness any more. Why not dream that such a time could come to pass for us on Earth, however unfathomably long it might take?

Have you met people that have hardened themselves to love? I'm sure you know such people, they are everywhere. You can feel their hardening without them saying a single word. It is in their energy field, their gaze, the way they hold their body and their face. If you were to dig down, deep below the surface, you would find, and I believe this would be rather universal, a great chasm of loneliness and a thick layer of emotional scar tissue around their heart.

Perhaps we all, once we are no longer babies, have at least some of that. The main obstacle to being in love is our hardening and our hurts. How can we open our hearts to love if they are shielded and hidden and hardened?

Anyway, before we can talk about opening, firstly a person has to want to heal their hardened heart, and there is no authority that says they have to, or even that they ought to. People feel protected by their hardened hearts, because they are protected by them. If you don't love anyone then you can hardly be hurt by anyone. The more you love someone the more you can be hurt by them, everyone knows that.

Can you help someone else to soften and open and heal their heart? Certainly the romantics amongst us would like to think so, I certainly hope so, but I'm not sure. With interludes, with exceptions that last for as long as the moon is made of honey, I think these journeys are really entirely up to the person who takes each and every step along their own way.

Perhaps the best any of us can ever do is to work on our own wounds, healing our own hearts, opening ourselves up to love, more and more, and whatever anyone else does will be up to them too. In any case, I am certain that forgiveness and compassion are two sides of the same coin, that you need to practice one in order to find your way forward with the other and that we cannot soften, and open and heal our hearts without them both.

The Constitutional Homebase

So here is a most interesting phenomenon, shared here with you after so many years of close observation of so many people that it seems like it must be some kind of rule.

Whichever constitution you are, in other words wherever your constitutional home base is, something remarkably consistent has been seen that is fascinating in its implications. In terms of each of the four spiritual practices, the four dark friends, the four quadrants of the spine and belly, everything we have been talking about, wherever the home base lies for each constitution is where their core work, their foundation, needs to be laid before very much further journeying can happen. Equally true, and consistent, is that whichever is the furthest quadrant from the constitutional homebase is where their greatest challenges will need to be faced and where they will have to go the furthest to reach the summit of their personal mountain.

Understanding this, seeing this pattern play out over and over, in different ways of course, because everyone has their own unique story, but with such remarkable consistency that it seems like a law of Nature, has shaped much of this work that you are reading now.

I don't want to rush you through this idea, it will reward some thought and exploration, for yourself first of all, but also for people close to you, assuming you have been or will become interested in working out their constitutions too. Of course, I should not assume any such thing and it is only because I personally continue to experience how understanding people better through the lens of their constitution is so interesting and useful that I imagine you would want to as well! Anyway, these last sections of this book are closely linked to the constitutions so I am introducing you to it now with respect to Tigers and then, later on in the Eagle territory chapter, I will go through it in some further detail again on all four constitutions.

If it turns out that you are a Tiger, through and through, until death do you part, then you must make friends with your Tiger energy first and foremost. Physically this means you will sometimes need to be ready to do cleansing, and that you may need to be aware of those things that muddy your waters, especially substances that have addictive properties. Tigers can be particularly fond of putting things into their bodies that they really shouldn't, so this one comes up a lot. Also physically, at the other side of the spectrum, in the furthest quadrant, a Tiger constitution person has a personal summit, the greatest challenge, of how to best nourish themselves, which applies to everything they take in, including but not limited to their food.

Spiritually, and in the context of what we've been focusing on here, we all need to do this, but Tigers most especially need to face their fears and find their courage before they can really take any kind of a leap forward on whatever is the path they need to be on. Tigers also have to be incredibly careful not to hold on to their past hurts, nursing the wounds that happened long ago as if they were just made yesterday, making their hurt an integral part of

their story and their identity, and so not being willing to practice the forgiveness that is essential to healing.

The spiritual practice of forgiveness is in the homebase of the Tiger and, if they have a chronic illness that is not only physical in nature, then it is highly likely that they will need to practice forgiveness for their healing journey first and foremost. All that naturally buoyant, gloriously life-affirming, love-seeking missile of the Tiger spirit gets twisted into a bitter pretzel by unhealed hurts if they are not willing to practice forgiveness. It starts with not being a victim, of anyone or anything, but owning their stuff. That means they have to think and say, at least to themselves, that this belongs to me, this is mine, I own me and I own this, and it is up to me, no one else, to find the way to process it and let it go.

At the same time as the homebase for the Tiger is facing fear, and taking ownership, and practicing forgiveness, the summit of the Tiger mountain, the one that is the hardest for them, the one that has the highest and the furthest point for them to reach, is compassion.

Clearly, compassion has to start with themselves because, however loving and warm and friendly they may be to others, if they have a hardened heart to themselves then they will be far away, terribly far, from their heart's desire.

It often seems that no one can suffer more from the ache of loneliness than a Tiger. They may hunt alone in many aspects of their lives, doing their thing, being independent as Tigers typically are, but there is such a thirst for love in the Tiger energy, which of course we all have, but those who are constitutionally a Tiger have that thirst for love as much as everything in the jungle hungers for food.

From the first steps into practicing forgiveness I have been wanting you to link compassion within your mind and body. Earlier on, encouraging you to feel the two hills of your spine as connected together was a part of this. I wanted you to practice getting the thoughts of '*soft, centred and now*' into the process of being in your heart at the same time as you feel your hurts. Not to harden against those hurts, but to be merciful to yourself for hurting in the first place, as if you were your own most beloved child or even your own baby. Both crying and comforting yourself at the same time.

Compassion and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. Whether or not you are constitutionally a Tiger, we all need to do this work at some point. By coming fully into the jungle of the Tiger terrain, as you explore it, more and more courageously, less and less fearfully, you will feel for yourself how there is a calling, and sometimes an ache, that resides in your body and centres in your heart. That ache is for love.

This calling, this ache is driven and fuelled by an extraordinary life force that lives inside you, that is you, but that seeks to go beyond itself, to expand and to connect. Don't run from it, ride it!

An Explorer's Confession

Alas, I can put it off no longer, it is time to make my confession. Why here, why now, I ask myself, why not earlier, you could ask me. Let me just get it out in the open first of all, and then I can tell you my because, and my sorry, and you can do with it whatever you will.

In my earlier thinking, and earlier writing, I have said that we all start out in this life in the territory of the Eagle, hotter and dryer. I was wrong about that, wrong about the dryer part. I now understand that our universal archetype, when we are children, is to be hotter and damper, meaning we all start out in Tiger terrain.

I do realise this will almost certainly be of no importance to you whatsoever, and that it has already been more than enough to get your head around all the other matters being discussed without this unnecessary detail, but I feel bad about it, and in thinking about, and then writing this work, I must have thought about it a hundred times, and so now, finally, it is confession time.

In fact, I have been so troubled by it that I have been sorely tempted to go back to my earlier writing and erase the error, and I would have if I could have. There are disadvantages to not having a book in the form of a physical object, on paper, to hold on to, and pass along too, if you wished, but it would cost money to produce and so it would have to be charged for, which is not my intention for this work. The advantages, apart from being able to make it free, are that it is always possible to go back and edit, and hopefully improve things. I have done that a lot, over many years now, with the 'living book' of my website, and would have done the same in my book on constitutional complexity too, but the one fly in the ointment of what could have been an easy edit of an earlier mistake is that, during a remarkably arduous but also strangely enjoyable three day weekend, I put the entire book on to audio! I am not going to go and splice and dice that audio track, so the error is there for perpetuity, reminding me of my fallibility, and bringing me to this point right now, which is where I tell you my because, my why I made the mistake.

In that book on constitutional complexity, with its error about us all starting out as Eagles written somewhere into the text, where it still remains, I also mention in more than one place that there are ideas being presented here, by me, that have not come out of any other source other than my own practice, and observation, and experience. I claim no higher authority than that and so always encourage my reader or my students to test things out for themselves to see if they hold true in their own practice, observation, and experience.

By the way, if you are interested to learn more about how and why I began to evolve my system on constitutional medicine from the ancient Greeks, and the Egyptians before them, then there is a page on my website that tells the story. It is in the section on constitutional medicine under further reading in a page called 'Origins and Adaptations'.

Anyway, the point now is that I made a mistake when I said we all start out as Eagles when we are children, I got it wrong because I hadn't observed the matter closely enough and hadn't given it enough thought yet. For you, I imagine, I may seem to be making a mountain out of a molehill, but trust in a person is hard won and easily lost, and that is what I could be deeply sorry about, which is if any of this confession could cause you to lose any of your trust. So I am sorry, I'm sorry for getting it wrong, I'm sorry that I can't get away with it, and I'm sorry that I fear this will lose me credibility in your eyes, those eyes now unseen by me but nonetheless looking at what I have to say right now. If I do or say anything to lessen your trust then you could lessen your commitment to your healing journey work and we, and by that I mean all of us, need each other to heal. We're actually all in this together far more than it possibly seems.

The way I saw the error of my way might, I think, be interesting to recount. For many years I had felt a lack of a simple definition to describe the polar difference between damper and dryer. The correlation between hotter and cooler was much easier. It is easy to see in people who are hotter how they are more Yang, more sun, more extroverted, whilst people who are cooler are more Yin, more moon, more introverted, but I didn't have as good a way to describe the difference between damper and dryer, other than the obvious physical signs of relative dampness and dryness within our bodies.

Much searching, much thinking, actually over a period of years, and then it finally dawned on me, in recent times, since I wrote my earlier book, which is that damper and dryer are Yin and Yang too, in different ways that are most interesting to explore, but it is still the same core duality with just as wide an array of other ways in which it manifests.

I understood, finally, that dampness is on the Yin side and dryness is to the Yang and then, after a lot of observation, it all made sense that constitutionally, we all start out as hotter and damper, meaning both Yang and Yin, and then we stay there or move to one of the other three archetypes, seemingly depending on our genes, our spirit and our life path.

The Tiger, where we all start out, is both hotter, meaning Yang, and damper, meaning Yin. The Eagle is uber-Yang, both hot Yang and dry Yang, the Bear is uber-Yin, both cool Yin and damp Yin, and the Elephant-Butterfly is both Yin and Yang but the poles are flipped, so it is their coolness that makes them Yin, and their dryness that makes them Yang. A lot of good realisations have come from this, and it continues to be super interesting to observe how this Yin-ness and Yang-ness, these dualities, play out in life, and health, and people's personalities, and their healing journeys too. Anyway, that is my confession, my because, and my sorry, and I hope you can forgive me.

Tiger Running Wild

We are getting close to the end of this section and to the final practice on forgiveness. Before we get there, I want to say something more about what could happen if the Tiger energy is already running wild before we have a chance to approach it in its resting place to make friends with it in a peaceful, step by step kind of manner.

The number one way this shows up is in the condition of anxiety, where there is a baseline of tension and agitation that could make it feel like it would be difficult to impossible to take up this practice as I have been describing it. That whole discussion around the 'initial increase in intensity' and being with it in the trust that it will pass, is going to be an enormous challenge for a person who is already in a state of tension that feels like they would do absolutely anything to not make it worse, and absolutely anything to make it better. Which is how we get to drugs for anxiety that, whilst I understand them and why people use them, are a truly terrible long term solution.

If this is the case for you, if you are already suffering from anxiety, then I can assure you that you will not make it worse in any lasting way by tuning into it, and that facing your fears and learning how to be with them without reacting, without going into fight or flight, is a true hero journey and a true healing journey that will help, and will work, if you take it step by step, and keep practicing.

All that said, there are some incredibly supportive tools from Nature and also several very practical and doable steps that you can take that will make an enormous difference to your anxiety. I urge you to learn these and use them by reading my detailed article on anxiety in the conditions section of my website. For many years beforehand and then including after the massive natural disaster, the earthquake in Christchurch, this approach has been tested by fire, and a great many other challenges, and has always been found to work extremely consistently and well for people, use it if you need it!

Ok, so another one that can be huge, and make the Tiger run so wild that it can be seemingly insurmountable to do any kind of forgiveness practice, is a betrayal. Tiger constitutions especially, but all people, can be so wounded, to their very heart, by being betrayed that it can seem impossible to the point of ludicrous to even think about, let alone talk about, anything with the word forgiveness in it. That would be a bad mistake. As mentioned earlier, holding on to hurt and resentment, and going over and over it in your thoughts and your words is like drinking poison and thinking the other person is going to get sick. You emphatically do not need to forgive someone who has hurt you unless they are truly sorry and asking, or better yet begging, for your forgiveness. But you do have to practice forgiveness for yourself, whatever or whoever caused you to get wounded, or you will never get well and will only suffer more and more.

Would you not prefer to not give your betrayer such a power, or even such a satisfaction if they are a cruel or evil person? This whole subject, and what it brings up, crosses all the

borders of the spiritual practices, all the quadrants of the body etc, but the healing for it may have to start here, in Tiger terrain, with owning all the hurt that you feel as belonging to you, first and foremost, and then you can take the next step and the next. The practice will work, even for the absolute worst betrayal, but you have to do it, step by step, more than once, more than twice.

I made a link with this terrain and sexuality and intimacy a little earlier and this is another area where the Tiger energy can run wild. Most commonly from the frustration and loneliness that comes from a lack of intimacy, but there are clearly other ways too, in which the great primal hunger for love in the physical form leads to the kind of suffering and imbalance that could make it seem most unlikely to be able to peacefully, step by step, make friends with such a wild beast of an energy.

Wrestling with it will only make it worse. Complaining about it will not help, even if someone would listen. Denying it, or channeling all that energy somewhere else, will only wear you out and make you miserable and unfulfilled. The only way forward that I have any trust in is to go right to the source of the energy itself. Be with it where it is actually at its centre, in the lower right quadrant of your hara and the base of your spine, and start with the first steps of *'I own me'*, *'I love you'* and *'I'm so sorry'*, and then the forgiveness can begin to come.

And then there is what can be one of the greatest challenges in life, one that can be present and deeply disturbing at any age, which is to be able to connect with and feel a sense of purpose. For any person, from any constitution, whoever they are, it is vitally important to have a sense of purpose and this especially relates to the part of us, from our early childhood, that contains our inner Tiger energy. This part of our nature is passionate, expansive, hot, damp and bubbling, but passion without purpose becomes like a cauldron that just boils over and makes a mess rather than feeding or serving anyone.

So, if you don't already know, how do you find your purpose? I have two answers to that. Firstly be highly wary of what you have received from your upbringing and your culture as to whether what you actually believe is worth striving for is what you truly want and need. Secondly look within. Think about and get a personal understanding of what peace is and what love is, what they mean to you, and then understand your own search for peace and love, and how that is playing out in your life.

Honestly, people talk about life purpose as if it was some great mystery needing to be revealed by some great ah-ha moment, an epiphany, a vision. Usually it's muddled up with something related to fame or fortune, as if either of those ever made people happy. Feeling out our inner purpose is not a mystery, it's not difficult to work out and it's not a mundane or a small matter to know that we all truly seek to be at peace and in love. It is how we journey towards what we seek where the adventure, and the mystery lies, but you still have to know what you want or how can you take a step forward if you're lost from the start.

Those are a few examples of spiritual conditions that can bring the Tiger energy intensity so far forward that it might seem too wild to ride and too hard to be with. Appearances can be deceiving, these states are not too hard to be with, the Tiger is not too wild to ride.

It is a scary Tiger all the way up until we stop running from it or trying to fight it - both being bad ideas, because it's a Tiger, you won't ever get away from it and you certainly won't win a fight with it either. Just don't be afraid of fear itself. Go to it, go to it with love, with compassion, with a willingness to forgive every hurt and every other obstacle that lies in your way, unconditional love, unconditional forgiveness.

Do this and the Tiger will roll over and show you its tummy. It embodies love in the same way a baby, a child embodies love. Searching for fun, for connection, for lightness of being. We all have this within us, however wild or forgotten it might be. The way to tame it, or at least let's say to ride it, is by practice, little by little, step by step.



The Final Practice of Forgiveness

Do you know someone who is clearly and deeply in love with someone, or something? Have you seen how happy they are when they are with that person, or doing that thing that they love? Maybe they will need a hero journey of healing some other time, but probably not now, not unless there is something seriously disturbing their peace. They have found what they were seeking.

Not everyone is so fortunate, most of us are works in progress in this regard, and most of the work that's needed is inside us rather than anything we could change in our external lives.

I know a lot of people say you have to love yourself, and I'm not saying they are wrong, but I just don't see it working out that way, that you can somehow choose to love yourself and then that's it, you're sorted. It wouldn't be so bad if it was just harmless wishful thinking, but because thinking it doesn't make it happen the person tries and fails and then gives up on keeping trying any further to work out how to actually do it. I almost think it would be better not to start with the idea that you can just somehow love yourself, there are too many obstacles in the way for it to be a realistic goal. I think it is much better to just aim to be in love. In love with what? Well 'you' can certainly be included but I don't recommend making yourself the centre of it, because as soon as you find one reason to love yourself you'll find another one to go the other way, back into judgement, criticism, negativity, hardness. Another endless tennis match.

I see that to be in love means to kind of lose yourself. That's why romantic love is so heavenly. It is the closest most of us will get to the divine, in the sense of a love so great that we can forget about ourselves for a time and be in the bliss of just being happy to be with another person who wants to be with us, and loves us, just as much as we want to be with them, and love them. If it weren't for that most glorious of human experiences, we probably wouldn't have a single temple or cathedral, no art, next to no music, and certainly no love story.

Sadly, utterly tragically, the honeymoon passes, the headless, reckless intoxication fades, and we have to return to our own journey, with our warts and all, and hopefully enough love left within us to weather the storms that inevitably come to us all, and all of our relationships too. Then, there we are, or there we may be, weather-beaten, scarred, grievously hurt and then hurt some more, because no one can hurt us as much as our lover can, not even close. Then it is a question of whether we can work through together what must be worked through, because every relationship, however heaven-sent, however perfectly matched, has to work through what gets in the way of love, and peace, or it doesn't work, and people settle for something that's not love, or they give up.

Oh, but if they can make it through the storms and hold fast to their love, and grow it, and protect it, and make it something that can last until their last breaths. Right there is a

mountain worth climbing, and a reason to live too, but that's all another story, too important to not say something about, too precious to subject to any more generalisations.

Let's come back to us, ordinary people, not flying high in the light of love, at least not all the time. People will say all kinds of things if you ask them what they want, and many of them, perhaps most of them, would sound like they had very little to do with love, or peace for that matter. But if you scratch under the surface of the desire for more of this or less of that, and really look deeper into how it is that we want to feel, you will see the same answer, every time. We want to feel in love and we want to feel at peace.

What happens next, if we were to strive to achieve those greatest of treasures, is the beginning of the story, not the happily ever after end, but let's stay with the getting there for now and, if we are clear about what we want then we just need to take steps towards it, and deal with the obstacles that inevitably must come to us along the way.

I have been putting it to you, and will put it to you one more time, that what we most need to be in love is to firstly release our hurt and our hardening, and then we can have the possibility of merging into oneness with the love that surrounds us all and is already right there, within us and around us right now. The way to release hurt? Through the practice of forgiveness. The way to release hardening? Through the practice of compassion. They go together, and are two sides of the same coin, whose currency is love.

I am about to ask you to do one more practice on this, although of course I hope you will do a great many more and, although I am going to just one more time revise those first steps that I think could most help get started I want to give you a preview of my concluding thoughts on all of this, I mean everything I am sharing in this whole book, right now.

This is something I've been saying, in different ways, along the way, and it is that this is your journey and yours alone. No one can take a single step for you. In many ways, you must find your own way, and you must be the light that guides that way. When you go on to practice any of this, and perhaps you are ready for this now, or have already been doing it, you can get a good two feet on the ground through pairing a foothold with any of the techniques I have been sharing with you, but where you step next will be up to you. I especially hope you have had enough practice with the pairing to know to keep using that, because I cannot even begin to tell you how much this can save you from getting stuck.

People wrestle with themselves mightily, and seemingly rather endlessly, but it doesn't have to be that hard. Pairing helps your stuck energy to move and, once you get the hang of it, I think it will lead you forwards rather perfectly for where you need to go. There is an intelligence that resides within us, which itself is an utterly extraordinary phenomenon to contemplate, and this is what we are seeking to connect to. It is us and it is also something so far beyond us that it is virtually impossible to even begin to comprehend how great it is, how vast, how infinite.

You will choose your first steps and you will choose your next steps, and it should be like that. But I do recommend you give many tries, plenty of practice, to starting both in your heart, or the hill that you can climb to be over it, and then that bottom hill too, the one at the base of your spine, and so to practice forgiveness first and foremost. Whether you are a Tiger or any other constitution, a great deal of healing begins with forgiveness and, without there being the ability to forgive, healing just cannot happen.

When you are ready, now or some other time, soon I hope, please set the intention to get better at forgiving and healing yourself, through doing another practice, because there is nothing else that will do it, not through wishful thinking, not through sheer force of willpower, just practice.

Explore the thought '*I own me*'. It is a wonderfully rich terrain of an idea that will reward your delving into it far further than the eye or the mind can see. Grasp it with two hands, with your heart, with your whole being. Hold on to it unconditionally, even recklessly, as if you were falling in love and were abandoning all pretence at being self-controlled and keeping anything back. '*I own me*' is a declaration of love. It is not taking on board all the guilt and responsibility for every dark shadow that has ever passed your way, it is a triumphant stepping into your own power. No longer a victim, no longer blaming anyone for anything. Everything that I am and everything that I feel belongs to me. Actually there is nothing else that we really own. It might appear differently, according to the rules of ownership as we have agreed to them, but really everything that we hoard and grasp will be utterly lost to us. In the end, and in the only way that matters, this is it. I own me, and really nothing else at all.

And then come into your body, into the Tiger terrain, to bring the practice into the real, the flesh, the places of feeling and being, and help your body, your subconscious, to be open to compassion, because without compassion it is impossible to forgive hurts, as much as we might wish to, because we harden to our hurt and they will only scar over and multiply, unless we can be soft with them. '*I love you*' and '*I'm so sorry*' are the softest, kindest, most gentle things you can say to anyone, including yourself, when you are hurting. You don't have to say it more than once unless you want to, or need to, but you do need to think it in your body and feel it in your mind, in other words, it needs to be sincere.

And allow yourself to feel all the hot damp energy that flows within you, in all of you really, but it will have places that it especially focuses, certainly in the base of your spine and lower right quadrant, but also in your heart and chest and anywhere there is a blockage that needs love and healing.

And remember to not get stuck, or not for long, even if there is a place that calls you into it, and the intensity of it increases, at least for a while, just be with it, with trust that however strong it feels that the wave of it will subside. And be open at this point to letting your body show you where it wants to move the centre, where it wants to take the pair. Your body

knows, and it will increasingly show you the next step as you get used to this kind of practice, but especially when still getting familiar with this inner work, and with riding the Tiger, and being in its terrain, remember the pairs of the hills of the spine, remember the pair from your lower right to your upper left quadrant of your hara, remember the deep Tiger zone pairing in your basement, between your sacral spine and your lower right belly.

As you pair within, as you practice with the nutshell of the thoughts that accompany the practice, *'I own me, I love you, I'm so sorry, please forgive me'* you may feel yourself, you eventually will feel yourself, becoming one with your Tiger energy, with your primal force, your force of love, the energy and the experience of forgiveness and compassion. You will feel yourself as one whole being, maybe with ache, maybe just with energy, but you no longer feel your separate parts, you are whole, even if just for a moment. If you do, when you do feel this way, reach for the pairing into infinity. Cast your heart wide open for forgiveness, and for healing. Reach out, or within, to whatever it is that resides within us and within the Universe, creating us, sustaining us, loving us. So you find your way to love, and you are in the love and it will forgive you, for everything, and love you, unconditionally.

I hope you have made great progress, amazing progress, with this divine practice of forgiveness already and that now, or whenever you are ready, you will take another step and then another one, and of course, and always, I wish you peace and love on your journey.





Eagle Territory

I'm so glad to be coming back into the hotter, dryer, activation zone of Eagle territory with you now. Whatever your core constitution happens to be, you most definitely have this Eagle spirit of light and air within you and it is a true joy to take any steps that help to set it free.

There are so many ways that we could go into this, and they could all be worth exploring, but I don't want us to get spread-eagled and distracted from what matters most, so let's start with the why, because again, if all these spiritual practices lead to the same place, a merging into oneness, a pairing into infinity, then why practice going different ways up that metaphorical mountain?

In just the same way that forgiveness and compassion are two sides of the same coin, and that we need to practice them both in order to obtain their treasure of love, so gratitude and surrender are two sides of another coin, which holds the treasure of peace.

Practicing surrender will definitely bring us towards peace, but it can only go so far, because we have an inner fire too, and we have to learn how to be with that fire! Our inner Eagle territory is the best place to practice gratitude, and the best place to transform our inner fire into something that lifts us up rather than burns us down.

The great obstacles to forgiveness and compassion are hurt and hardening. The equally great obstacles to surrender and gratitude are resistance and resentment. These obstacles are also each two sides of their own same coins. They come together and they can leave together too. You certainly can't be free of one unless you can also be free of the other. We can't release hurt and then forgive, unless we can release hardening through compassion. We can't release resistance and so thereby surrender, unless we can also release resentment

through gratitude. Resistance and resentment are our great obstacles to inner peace, resistance is cooler and resentment is hotter, but they are two sides of the same coin.

Soon, shortly, based here in Eagle territory, I want to introduce you to the final step in the spiritual practice of gratitude, which is the surest cure for resentment, possibly even the only lasting cure for it. Before describing that final step, and putting it together with a revision of the other steps, let's come back around one more time to that most important question of the why, what are we doing here, why are we trying to do this?

I don't know you, no one but you can truly know you. Only you know how you feel, only you know what you think, only you know you. That said, and that true, I hope that you also sense, or intuit, that there is still an enormous amount you don't know, about everything, including yourself, because between the time and place of our birth and the time and place of our death there is a great journey where we never stop being, and experiencing and in some ways learning too.

Nevertheless, you still know an enormous amount by now: who you are, how you think, how you feel. So what I wonder is, how much do you know that you want peace? The reason I ask is that what I notice, in working with people, is that it is mostly only the ones who have suffered, and often they need to have suffered a lot, who really understand, who really know that they want peace just about more than anything.

If they have suffered enough from all that which peace isn't, and so they know how much they need peace, and that their body, heart, soul and being are ready for it more than anything in this world, then they will have what it takes to get this greatest treasure, because what it takes is to be willing to go through fire.

In a moment I am going to ask you to take a new and final step in the gratitude practice. We have come close to this earlier, so there is every possibility that you have already done at least some of this spontaneously, but the big difference here is that, every other time I have talked about actual gratitude, I have asked you to only catch the wave of it if and when it happens naturally. I've been asking you to connect to your inner Eagle territory, the hot dry zones of your liver and lumbar spine, and to feel the flow and potency of the life force here, and have hoped that you would get a thermal wave of energy lifting your spirit and mood without you shaping or seeking it. I hope that has happened and you have had some experience like that but, whether you have or haven't, I have only wanted you to practice actual gratitude when the uplift is there, in other words not in any way trying to cheer yourself up with it if you are down!

I am acutely aware of the great danger of trying to invoke gratitude when it is not sincere, when it is not heartfelt, natural. Gratitude is a true super power, there is nothing else that can work like it as an antidote for resentment and we need to be so careful not to lose that power by in any way doing anything to misuse it.

The stuck fires of resentment, and resistance, are the greatest obstacles to our inner peace. If we do not use the power of gratitude wisely, which means sincerely and truthfully, then we can lose trust in it, and then we would stop practicing it because it would seem like it doesn't work, and then we would never find our peace.

I'm not talking about superficial gratitude here. You can say 'thank you' to anyone for doing anything without it having to be heartfelt. Most of us are deeply programmed to say 'please' and 'thank you' as a matter of our earliest training and so we just do it automatically and only really think about it, or notice anything about it when we meet someone who doesn't say their pleases and thank you's, who we then find to be rather rude!

What I am talking about here is not superficial, it is not thought deep, it goes to a level of acceptance and gratitude that goes into our body, our subconscious, and the very fabric of our existence.

Do you recall me asking you to gather your fire, wherever it sits and simmers in your body, your subconscious, or at any level in your mind, and to welcome it and bring it into the cauldron of your liver and lumbar spine? I don't know how far you might have gone with that yet. None of that is something a person would usually do naturally. Our instinctive reaction to our inner fire is to try to stop it, or to get away from it, or to flame it out at someone or something, it is certainly not to be with it and even encourage it to burn brighter within. So let's come back to think about, and then soon actually practice that some more, and then we can come to this new and final step, which is that with that inner fire, however much we can feel it, no resistance to it, fully accepting it in all its entirety, we make a conscious choice to be thankful to it.

The gratitude, the thank you to it, must come from your heart, not your head. You can't do it until you are ready to do it. Please don't rush over this point, I am hoping to give you some good guidance for a vitally important step for healing but what I am writing here is only some words on a page until you own them from your own personal experience. I do not want you to underestimate the power of this practice and it will greatly matter how you approach it.

This deep 'fire-work' is very potent, very visceral, it will not harm you, not in any way, shape or form, but it can change you, and there is a big part of us that resists change, even and especially when we most need that change.

It is hard to work with fire, I wonder if it is the hardest of all the dark friends to be with. It can burn us and it can burn others, but I am not wanting you to take extra care here because you could be putting yourself at any kind of risk with any part of this practice, not at all. The caution is that you only make the step into choosing gratitude when you can do it with a true heart, a sincere heart, with a desire for peace that itself burns so deeply within you that you are willing to walk into the fire and say yes to it, completely yes.

Let's have a go at the full practice in just a moment, after revising all the steps as follows:

- 1) Setting the intention to practice gratitude, for healing and for peace.
- 2) Sitting or lying down, being still, breathing, and bringing awareness into the Eagle territory, the upper right quadrant of the belly and the valley of the lumbar spine.
- 3) However subtle it may be, especially at first, opening up to and getting used to feeling the hotter, dryer energy here, the potent energy and the fiery force of it
- 4) Bringing in any other heat and hurt and resentment that lies anywhere else in the mind or body to be safely held in this part of you, even if that fire energy then flares and becomes initially more intense, you stay with it, you hold your fire... and then this new step -
- 5) When you are ready and only when you are ready, holding the fire, being with it 100%, feeling it as much as it is there to be felt, in your Eagle territory but equally anywhere else it is present in your whole being, you think, and say, and feel thank you. Thank you for being here, thank you for everything, I don't want to change anything, thank you.
- 6) As you feel this, and so release all resistance and all resentment, at least in this moment, and so as you let go into choiceless awareness, it may come to you that you are a part of something much greater. The speck of conscious dust that is the whole of the individual you is surrounded by a vast cosmos that is you just as much as you are it. Your tiny spark of light and life joins back to an ocean of light and life.

If a sense of this comes in any way at all then it will come with great peace, and a tremendous joy and relief that you are not alone, that peace is real, that peace exists, and that peace is. Once you have had the experience of the inner treasure of peace, then it belongs to you forever, and even if you might seem to lose it again in the next heartbeat, it will always be yours, and will be easier and easier to come back to with practice.

Please have a go at this now, or just whenever you are ready.



Fire Thoughts

I hope you had a go at it, that new and final step I mean, but it's ok if you didn't, or at least haven't yet. I need to talk with you some more about this whole concept anyway, it's deep stuff and, at the same time, both counterintuitive and counterculture. It can take a moment to get our heads around it but even in saying that, whilst we do need to talk about this to understand what we are trying to do, I am keenly aware that no amount of description or discussion can replace the actual step of practicing it, and that taking that step is something that only you can do, and only when you are ready to do it.

What follows in these thoughts around fire is lengthier than most of the previous discussions have been, plus it isn't punctuated with the usual pauses that meditations or thought experiments bring in, plus the whole subject is one that is challenging for many people! Therefore please take a break in this next section anytime you feel you have had enough for a while. I am talking with you mind to mind now, I don't want it to get too heady but we need our heads for this step. It is a very conscious choice to decide, at the point that you are most in touch with your fire, all of it, in every aspect, to release all resentment and say thank you, and to really mean it!

Again, why? Why have heady discussions, why do all this challenging work, especially with fire? It is for peace, and because I am metaphorically encouraging you to walk into your own fire, I can only hope that you can feel inside your very bones, your whole being, how much you truly need and want peace.

Peace is real, it exists and, along with love, it can give us happiness, true happiness, Peace and love are hard to grasp and hard to talk about. They are elusive, invisible, immaterial, and they are everything that truly matters. For all that they are so intangible, peace and love can give us something that is a hundred, thousand, million times more real, and more lasting, than anything we could ever obtain in the material world.

So, in the name of peace, and love, and inner fire-walking, let's come back to this ugly word of resentment and give it a good look. None of us want to admit we have resentment. It sounds terrible because it is terrible. We might be able to admit that certain things and certain people cause us to feel anger and frustration, and we might be able to admit that we feel guilty over certain things, but owning that we have shame is very difficult and owning that we have resentment is incredibly difficult.

Difficult but not impossible, and it is vital that we can own it, because the enemy is denial and the simple, dark truth is that we've all got at least some resentment trapped inside us.

The words we use to understand all this matter, words can help us and they can hinder us too. Resentment is such an ugly word, it may be better, at least sometimes, to use a different phrase to get to the same truth. When the word resentment is just too ugly to talk about or

think about, we can say quite truthfully, and just as accurately, that we have 'stuck fire'. Stuck fire in our bodies, stuck fire in our minds, stuck fire in our lives.

Does it really matter what we call it; stuck fire, inflammation, anger, frustration, shame, guilt, resentment? No, I don't think it matters very much what we call it, the words are not what it is anyway, but whatever we call it there is a feeling of fire in it that we must be able to acknowledge, and so be able to feel, in order to be able to be with it, so that what is stuck can flow and what it is that is blocking our peace can be released.

The other dark friends, the shadows within us that we need to learn how to face and be with on the hero journey of healing also have names and words that only part way say what they really are, words such as fatigue, loneliness and fear. Coming back again to 'fire', it seems that for many people it is here, in this territory, perhaps more than with any of the other dark friends, that it is so easy to be in denial, and so hard to face the truth.

I think that this is especially because, nearly all of us, are so deeply and profoundly programmed to be ashamed of our fire, and so we keep it hidden most of the time, as much as we can. As it was said in the time of the ancient Greeks, *'What the slave fears most is more pain, what the free man fears most is shame'*.

We weren't always ashamed of firing up and letting loose like a flamethrower! It is very hard to extinguish the existential fire of a toddler who is not happy and is not getting what he or she wants. They have no shame whatsoever in letting the whole world know how they feel about things, for as long as it takes for them to be understood and the world to be put to rights, or until they exhaust themselves, whichever comes first. But we can't stay toddlers forever and for nearly all of us, from a very early age, often even by just 3 or 4 years old, certainly by 5 or 6, we will have experienced what it is to be made to feel shame.

Our memory for shame is remarkably good. Things that gave us shame many years ago can be brought to mind with as much inner wince and squirm as if they happened yesterday, but it's unlikely most of us would be able to consciously recall our first profoundly uncomfortable, burning hot, feelings of shame.

Nevertheless, all our strong emotional experiences leave an impression in our body, our subconscious, and in this matter, either through witnessing it happen to someone we know, or by it happening to us, we have been exposed to the hot, burning sensation of what happens when we, or someone we know, is singled out and reprimanded for expressing their anger. Once we experience strong shame we never forget it, and we never want to repeat it either.

This is how teachers control children, and it is how societies control their citizens. Most people strongly fear public shame, and so are careful to follow the rules, especially when they can be seen by others and be found out if they were to act out! Unfortunately, what can happen behind closed doors, away from the eyes of strangers, can be very different.

There is untold violence and abuse, every day and in every country on Earth, especially to women and children, by people who are ready and willing to hurt those who are weaker or more vulnerable than them when they believe no one is watching or will ever find out. They lash out and do the worst deeds, the greatest evil, from the raging fires that burn from their own unhealed hurts. Perhaps they were abused themselves, but that is never a justification for cruelty, all it does is add harm to harm and hurt to hurt.

Most people will do anything to avoid shame, but not everyone keeps the shadow side of their fire energy hidden in public. Some people are so impassioned by a sense of righteous anger, a burning hatred, that they bring it all the way out into the world and find others who share their cause too. So we have a culture of intolerance that, if a person wants to be a part of a group that despises another kind of people, for any reason, they can now easily find angry and outspoken men or women who say out loud what they think about those others, whoever they are, and so give an outward focus for the raging fires from their own unhealed hurts.

What can we do about the state of the world? The hatred, the intolerance, the injustice, the cruelty, the violence, the inequality, the corruption. All of it is astonishingly robust, probably getting worse, and seemingly without end. Can we do anything about the state of the world? Honestly, I have zero faith in any political, top-down solutions for any of this whatsoever. In fact I personally think that whoever wants to be in power should be disqualified from being anywhere near power, because power always corrupts, always.

I think that the only way there will ever be a revolution for world peace, for equality, tolerance, fairness and all the things that virtually all of us actually want, will be by enough individuals doing their own healing, and thereby raising their consciousness, and then there can be a joining together of people who do not need a hierarchy to maintain their order, who understand the corruption of power and remove the very need for it. I am dreaming of a future I will never see, but that's ok, I do not think we can do nothing now, far from it, but I believe it can only be through raising our individual, and then our collective consciousness, that we will see the change in the world that we need.

At any time, and in the meantime, truly we have to work on ourselves. What I perceive as me is the only part of any of this that I have any ownership over. The other dark friends and the other practices are just as important in their different ways but, in this Eagle territory, the key point is to choose to not be in denial but rather being willing to see, and feel, and be with, our inner fire.

Starting with accepting that we have a fire within in the first place! A fire which, by the way has all manner of positive and life-giving properties as well. I am focusing on the shadow side because we have to be able to be with that too, or nothing will really happen, but whatever name we call it by, good or bad, the fire exists, and its level of existence is one that goes far, far deeper than our conscious minds can see or hold.

If you accept the idea in theory, then how do you get in touch with your inner fire in practice, all of it, with nothing left out? Fortunately, if there is a willingness to be completely open and honest about it, it is really easy to feel out and be in touch with our inner fire, every spark of it. It is all there to be felt, right now. You do not have to search your mind, you do not have to crack open the memory bank to retrieve some shameful memories, you certainly do not need to make a list of your grievances, how would that be for a practice of gratitude! Your body has been keeping the score since you were born. The blocks to your peace are very easy to find and feel, so long as you are willing to find them and feel them. Anywhere you feel tiredness and tension they are right there. Anywhere you feel the simmering heat of stuck fire, they are right there too...

When you go deeply into all this, I believe you will feel for yourself how closely woven together are your dark friends of fatigue and fire along with how closely woven together are the great obstacles of resistance and resentment. This is one of the places where it is most helpful to understand the constitutional polarities. Our activation zone, our hot and dry fire-lands, are directly opposite our relaxation zone, our cool and damp Bearlands. The blocks in each zone mirror each other, they are deeply connected in our minds and our bodies. You don't have to worry about which block is resistance and which one is resentment. Again, these are just words to get us closer to being able to understand and be with our feelings. It is those feelings, and the energy within them, where the action is!

This book, these sharings are, I hope, at best, just the beginning of a guide to you. A map of the body, the subconscious, that could help you to take just a few steps in the right direction, that's all. It must be your journey and it is your journey, every step of the way. If you have suffered enough, and so know you want peace and love more than anything, then when you come to practice surrender, and gratitude, your inner intelligence will show you everything you need to see and, if you can just get out of it way and listen to it for a heartbeat, it will show you exactly what you need to do too. It is not at all difficult to feel our blocks, they are there to be felt, they are there to be seen.

When it comes to what is blocking us from our peace, there is a cooler and a hotter side to what is getting in the way. The main obstacle on the cooler side is the holding, heavy stuck feeling of tension that we have anywhere in our body. It will often have a sense of tiredness attached to it that we will experience entirely differently depending on whether we are in resistance or surrender to it. Don't forget though, that the tiredness will initially feel much stronger when we can let go, because now our inner intelligence, our life force, knows that it would be possible to have some peace if we could just stop fighting our fatigue. So it can push us to feel the tiredness as much as we can take to help us to let go.

The main obstacle to our peace on the hotter side is the stuck fire anywhere in our body. It can have pain and inflammation in it for sure, in different ways, and there is an agitation in it, it is not cooler, heavy and holding like fatigue is, rather it is hotter and lighter and it tends to move around within a lot more, catching more of us in its fiery path.

Those two primary blocks to our inner peace feel very different, they are poles apart, and yet they are strangely and deeply connected. Let's say, for example, that you go within, for healing, and find that your inner awareness is drawn into your neck and perhaps your head, because you feel heavy and tired and tense in these areas and you can feel how they are like a stone that is blocking the river of peace that you could be in if you could only let go of your heavy head and tight neck.

If you go there, on your healing journey, and be there with the understanding that you need to practice surrender and so you remember to think to yourself '*as I am*' and not fight the fatigue, but rather trust and let go into it, then all of a sudden, without you making it happen, you could find that there is a sense of heat that quickly grows in intensity and starts radiating somewhere else inside your neck, or head, or spine or belly. Perhaps the shift from cool to hot came after a thought or perhaps the feeling came first and then thoughts followed, but there would be no mistaking the energy of fire. It would be clearly hot, and probably at least somewhat uncomfortable. So the block to peace always had these two sides to it, and when you start to love and heal the one then the other one can, all of a sudden, come up to show you where it is, and what it needs too.

The fire that we have stuck within us is no more the enemy to us, or our peace, than our fatigue is. With fatigue, the only reason we feel so terrible and tired and tense with the struggle against it is because we treat it like an enemy and don't surrender to it, fully and unconditionally.

In exactly the same way, stuck fire, painful fire, is incredibly hard to hold and be with. Hard but not impossible, especially if you know that there is an amazing super-power that will let you hold it, even in its fiercest forms, and that is gratitude.

This final step in the practice of gratitude that I introduced you to earlier needs some thinking about. It works, it will work, and I know you will be able to get trust in it yourself once you feel it working for you, but you must only use it when you are ready for it.

It's not really like this but you could imagine it is like you have a great weapon, let's say a sword, but the sword is very heavy and you can only hold it above your head for so long and you only get to have one swing with it, so it has to count, and you have to time it right. In reality, you get as many swings as you are willing to come back and try again with, but it would be great if this worked the first time, because the sooner you can trust it from your own experience the better that will be and the lighter the 'sword' will be to hold.

If you go, as you go, deeper into this journey inwards for inner peace, I encourage you to gather your fire and your fatigue together. Because they already lie on top of each other, and next to each other, strange bedfellows that they are. You will be able to feel the fire and the fatigue together, in your body. In your lumbar spine and in your neck, in your liver and in your lower left quadrant of your hara, where another X marks another spot.

There is nothing you need to imagine, or actually even really remember here, because you don't have to go looking for the fire any more than you have to go looking for your fatigue. If they are there to be felt then they will always show themselves in due course, and sometimes in as little time as a heartbeat.

Your inner intelligence knows exactly what you are doing and where you are at, all the time. If you do any kind of spiritual practice towards inner peace then it will be there, 100% of the way, wanting you to succeed, trying to help you take the right first step, and the second, and the third.

So you go within and allow yourself to gather your fire and your fatigue and you also allow the intensity to grow. Remember that this also just happens by itself and our only job here is simply not to get in the way of it or try to stop it. Because of course our ever-present fear, another mighty dark friend, can make us want to turn away from that initial increase in intensity, to try to stop it, in any of the countless ways we can avoid being with what is. Not if, but when that happens, hold fast, be courageous, and gather your fire and your fatigue closer and stronger.

If you are already full of beans and gratitude for life then I'm not kidding when I say that's fantastic and also that you probably don't need to be paying too much attention to any of this, but I can't assume that and, if anything, I would rather assume that you need to go on a healing journey because you are not full of beans and gratitude for life, but rather that you suffer and you most deeply and mightily wish for peace, and love, and good health.

So if you are not already in a state of grace and gratitude then again, I must remind you, because you must not try to fly before you are ready, or you will fall, and lose trust in this, and so perhaps not try, try and try again, that you don't try to conjure a feeling of thanks until the right moment, which is the one where you have really gathered as much fire, and perhaps fatigue along with it, as you possibly can. Your cup is full, the furnace is blazing, you feel yourself at one with these dark friends. They are in you and you are them. That is the time, right then and there, that you are at the best moment to say, 'Thank you!'

Thank you means 'I accept you'. Thank you means, I don't want to change anything, not right now, no resistance, no resentment, just unconditional acceptance. Thank you means 'yes'.

All resentment, all stuck fire, and all resistance, tension and tiredness, can be transformed with this one thought, this one word, but the 'thank you' must be sincere. You have to mean it when you think it, but if you do mean it, if you can make that great transformational shift in your consciousness that sees that fatigue is a dark friend that is showing you how to get peace from letting go and that stuck fire is an equally vital dark friend that is showing you how to get peace by connecting fully to your life force, then you can say thank you to them both and really mean it.

Thank you is saying you are welcome here, it is saying you can stay with me for as long as you wish and I am not just secretly trying to get you to leave. Being sincere with this means that you cannot be tricking yourself, even at a level way past anything you might recognise consciously, but also not trying to trick yourself at some deep, unseen subconscious level.

If you use any of these healing medicines, these thoughts, such as *'thank you'*, or *'I'm so sorry'*, or *'as I am'* but they are not sincere, and heartfelt, then you are only fooling your own mind, not your inner intelligence. You can have a deal running, presumably subconsciously, where you have made a bargain with yourself that you will say *'thank you'*, or *'I'm so sorry'*, or *'as I am'*, or use any of the keys that turn any of the locks, but only on condition that whatever dark friend you have been dealing with will then leave and not return!

I must have done this myself a thousand, thousand times, and so of course I imagine that you could do it too. This right here is one of the main reasons why the only true enemy is denial. It is so tricky to catch yourself doing it, you don't even know you are doing it because it's all happening way beneath the surface of your conscious mind! It's kind of like being a false friend, not genuine, not sincere, just using the relationship to get something but not really wanting to be with that person for who they are.

Really, who can blame us, any of us, for not wanting to be best friends forever with fatigue, fear, loneliness or especially, my goodness, fire! None of these shadow sides of us are easy to be with in their lightest, most fleeting and passing forms of acquaintance, so to invite them into your heart and home, your body and your mind, is so counterintuitive, so counterculture that, let alone what others might say about it, a strong part of our own makeup would think us mad to even try!

I think it takes a lot of faith, and trust, and courage to even take a first step with any of this, which is why, even before taking those first steps, we have to get our heads around the whole idea at a conceptual level, otherwise we would surely reject the idea of even trying to make a start.

The concept that not fighting against fatigue leads to peace is probably the easiest to grasp, because we fall asleep every night when we stop resisting our tiredness so at least we have a great deal of personal experience with that one, and then facing fear to gain courage is written into just about every hero story that's ever been written so that one is not so hard to believe in either, but embracing loneliness to find the way to love and making friends with fire for inner peace is a deep and difficult concept to grasp. These ideas will need the kind of practice that leads to a positive experience to earn trust that they will never do harm, but will only ever help.

In my own early years of trying to get my head around this most counterintuitive path I would imagine, in different times and in different ways, one of the dark friends coming to me in the form of some kind of beast or human and wanting to enter my inner space, my inner home, my heart. Over time, those characters morphed and became a lot more

befrienable but they were certainly most hard to love in the beginning! Especially my first imagined incarnation of the fire energy, which was a hideous looking creature, very short, wielding an axe, smeared with excrement (for shame), drunk and disorderly, loudly obnoxious and always strangely cheerful, as if nothing could please them more than to be a part of, and to witness, the chaos of the effect of their presence!

I would think to myself, how can I even let such a character into my life, let alone welcome them as a friend! I would have vastly preferred to rise above my fire, to never lose my cool, to never need to feel shame again, but nothing I ever did, no matter how hard I tried, could lose me this shadow, so eventually, not through wisdom, but simply by being ground down enough to be desperate enough to try the old ways that I had read about but knew nothing about for myself, I started to try to make friends with my shadows rather than uselessly trying to block them entry to my body and my life, which is where they already were anyway, but as unwelcome guests, as enemies really, but ones that I could not defeat or expel.

What I soon found is that, if I tried to trick myself, and my shadow self too, that I was letting this dark friend come in, and be with me, and in me, but all the time, somewhere in my subconscious, I was thinking that I will do this, I will take these steps, but only because it will make them leave, and hopefully not come back, then I might have been able to fool myself, meaning my mind, but I could not fool my body, meaning my subconscious.

Our minds are masters of deceiving and deluding ourselves, and of being in denial, but our body, our subconscious, keeps the score of what's real. Our feelings are the most powerful experiences of our lives, they go far deeper than our thoughts and, if they are difficult to be with, which anyone who needs to go on a healing journey already knows a lot about, then they will not change in any meaningful way because we try to change our thinking. To get to the level of our feelings we need to be in our bodies, and if the feelings are dark, and difficult, and we want to find the way to move through them and to heal, then we need to learn to be with them. They are not our enemies, and they will stop hurting us when we stop fighting them, but they do tend to bring up the most extraordinary challenges along the way in learning how to be friends with them!

The different characters or beasts that I gave as avatars to my dark friends were, at first, really quite dreadful to imagine but as I stopped fighting them and increasingly accepted them, and then understood them, they changed their shapes and, the easier they were to be with, the more pleasing they were to imagine!

In later years, I have mostly stopped imagining my dark friends with any kind of avatars, they eventually reached what seem to now be their final forms, which were entirely different to how they started, and now I more just feel their energy within me without my mind needing to give them a shape or form to find a way to welcome them in and bring them closer. We are very close now, for sure we still have troubles, like any relationship, but they are with me

and in me all the time. They don't usually need to knock on my door anymore, because they are already in me, they are me, and we continue to journey onwards together, as friends.

I've been thinking a lot about how to best convey to you the idea of choosing the right moment to practice gratitude when you are being with your inner fire. I know I've said a few things about it already but it feels important to come back to it and I want to try putting it to you like this.

Remember how we were trying to practice with the concept of surrender as it being something that you are already naturally really good at because it is exactly like the moment of the ultimate letting go that happens each and every time you fall asleep?

So here I want to ask you to try to bring that unforced sense of a completely natural, spontaneous, unplanned, unprogrammed release of any kind of hot tension in your body in just the same way.

Hot tension, stuck fire, resentment, by whatever name we call it, I am sure that you will be able to feel it in you when it is there. It is the polar side to the heavy, cool energy of tiredness, which can also be very tense, but different to the hot tension. When you can gather that stuck fire into you, perhaps starting with your liver, the great furnace of the body, and then reaching out with your inner awareness to feel wherever it is, in all its intense, unsettled nature, then the idea is that here, at the peak of the wave, when you can feel yourself truly and sincerely being with and feeling your inner fire, you give it your absolute best shot to say yes to it.

The word 'thank you' is very powerful in this context. It is not no, it is a resolute yes. You are accepting it with your thanks. What I am encouraging you to do here is the exact same way as, when you fall asleep, you say yes to the dark energy of fatigue. You let it have its way with you. You unconditionally surrender to it when you fall asleep and, if you practice with this method, you can unconditionally surrender to your tiredness when you are awake too! And then it will bring you the bliss of peace. Which sounds like it should be enough for us to achieve the great treasure of peace, and it would be, if it were not for our inner fire.

This is a very different kind of surrender. Our fire does not bring us to peace in the same way that our fatigue does. You have to stop fighting it, that's the same, you have to say yes to it, that's the same too, but it's not taking you into the cool, damp, lands of the Bear. Your fire is there for a very different kind of reason. It is deeply aligned with your life force and this is an energy that does not just want you to sleep your life away! It wants you to be successful, to achieve things that you value, to have a great life, an amazing life, and to also remove all the obstacles that are in your path.

The great challenge I think all of us have, is in making friends with this force so that we can channel it and harness its power, without harming ourselves, or others, with its potent energy. Learning how to hold your fire is a true hero journey, with many, many steps along

the way. I cannot take a single one of those steps for you, but I can hope to, and will continue to try to, help guide you towards taking one or two initial steps in the right direction so that you can get a sure foothold and then find your own next step along the way.

When you feel that fire in your body, in your subconscious, when you allow it to rise and grow and connect with anywhere else you have that fire, and when you catch that rising wave of it with a strong 'yes' from within - a thank you, then you are taking a leap of faith that, I hope, will find you feeling yourself taking wing, and you will be lifted up in your spirits, into an even more natural and heartfelt gratitude.

You will not be in conflict with yourself, not wielding the flame of your fire in any kind of destructive way towards yourself or others, in your thoughts or feelings, but just flying with it. You are in touch with a most sacred and powerful part of your inner spirit, you are making friends with a great force, and you will be flying with your inner Eagle.

The leap of faith is that the fire will not harm you, that you can walk into it and be more than ok, you can be transformed, you can be healed. You know how to do this with your fatigue, you must surrender to it eventually, and so you know that you can trust it, at least at the last moment of your conscious day, to be a safe place for you to curl up in the arms of your sweet dark friend.

This saying yes to your inner fire is exactly like that. However strong is your programming to fight it, to be ashamed of it, to name it in every bad way and to fight against it in every way in which it exists within you, it is not your enemy. It is your fire, your light, your spirit of freedom, and it is the great dark friend that wishes to show you the way to peace. Not the peace of surrender, that is at the other end of the world of this energy. The peace of being the change that you want to see in the world. Of having the energy and the power to overcome your personal obstacles. To get activated, to get up, to get going. Maybe none of that sounds very peaceful but this is not the peace of inaction, this is the peace of harmony and what it takes for us to be our most true and authentic selves.

This peace is about how our inner fire can be held, channeled and used. How then it can be like the sun, like a fire in a home that gives it warmth and security. The leap of faith to say yes to the fire and thank you to it is that it will not hurt us, but will show us the way and help us to find our way to what we want more than anything in the world, which is both peace and love.

It will not matter in the least, not even in the tiniest way, whichever way you come to your peace, through fire or water, the hot and dry, or the cool and damp sides of the spectrum, through the practice of gratitude or the practice of surrender. Come through both when your body guides you that way!

I only hope that soon, if it hasn't already happened, that you will take steps within, one, then another, then one more, and then suddenly find that you can no longer tell one part of you as separate from another.

Whichever path you took, whichever obstacles you overcame to take the next step, is behind you now and here, in this moment, you feel yourself merging into oneness. All the elements, all the dark friends, all the feelings, and being, and inner spirit is there, all at the same time, and you are in all of it, and joined with all that is, at peace.



Inner Child

Imagining a crazy, axe-wielding, drunk dwarf hammering on your door to come in might not be one of the steps that you chose to take to start to make friends with your own fire.

That's ok, there are so many other ways to forge this friendship, for example right now I want to focus on one of the lightest sides to this Eagle territory of air and sky in how it connects to the aspect of our inner child that most embodies the spirit of freedom.

If we were able to talk together privately, in person, I would love to ask you a question to open up this line of thought, such as...

When you were little, did you ever have dreams or fantasies in which you were flying?

When you were little, did you ever have dreams or fantasies of having special abilities?

When you were little, did you ever have dreams or fantasies in which you were the hero of a story, your story, or any story?

If you said yes to any of these, and probably all children who have a sense of safety will have some kinds of dreams and fantasies of this or a similar nature, and if we had the time and the space to talk, then I would ask you to share, as openly and honestly as you could, whatever you remembered. If you knew I could be trusted to not write anything down and certainly never tell another living soul, you could share such dreams or fantasies without any fear that they would ever be used to shame or belittle you.

Then, because speaking things out like that gives you ownership in a different way to keeping them hidden, in owning your old dreams or fantasies of flying, or of being in any way special or important in the world, you would for sure be connecting to that free spirit that lives within.

If you were to think about it now, or later, in the privacy of your own thoughts, which no one but you can ever hear, then I think you could still feel it for yourself too, and that there would be a great tenderness in this part of you if you were to get in touch with it. This is your inner child, it was, and in some ways still is, full of optimism, innocence, and freedom.

Using this analogy and calling it here by the name of our inner Eagle is just one way to describe something that words can't actually get all that close to. It is the spirit of all birds and all creatures that live wild and free, including wild and free little children, it is the part of us that is not limited by rules and boundaries and small-mindedness.

The free spirit is such an enormously important part of our inner child that, for many years, I imagined that we all started out like this, in the Eagle territory, as talked about earlier. This spirit is a force that moves a child to learn to sit up, and then crawl, and then walk, and then run and leap and jump and dance. This spirit is the part of us that makes us want to learn words, and then communicate what we want and how we feel. This spirit is the part of us

that wants to learn how to be in the world, to make a name of some sort for ourselves, to make a living, to find our tribe, to be what we are here to be.

Here and now, with everything that has happened and is still happening, with all the many, many layers of experience that have come into us and on to us since we were that spirited child, it may seem that our free spirit, our inner bird of air and flight, is long gone, lost at sea, unrecoverable, never to be seen again.

It may seem that way but it cannot be like that. However hidden, or buried, or lost it may seem, we have a force, a flame within us, that can never be extinguished until we die, and even then it carries on in countless other forms in countless other lives, because everything that lives, large or small, plant or animal, here on earth, or wherever else life lives, has the spark of it, the *vis medicatrix naturae*, the healing intelligence of Nature.

So what happens to the spark of that free spirit when we put aside our childish dreams of magic and marvels or, further on from there, if we have seemingly finished with our expansive, questing, growing and learning youth, when we have our language, our skillsets, and such a thirst for grown up things that we are ready to leave the nest and venture out into the world? If that inner child free spirit doesn't die, and is only hidden away, where does it go and what does it do?

Again, I would love to be able to talk with you about this, one to one, privately, because it can be very difficult to get to the heart of such an intensely intimate and personal matter without all the shields and defences that the heart puts up around itself, long accustomed as it is to needing to harden itself to be in the grown-up world.

What do you really want? I would like to ask, and let's say you said you wanted enough money to never have to worry about money, then I would say, so let's say you got that, and then what? Or, if you said you wanted enough success for your children, or your partner, or even yourself, so that they, or him, or her, or you could climb to the very top of the ladder of whatever was their chosen path, then I would say, so let's say that happened, and then what?

Eagle constitutions have it in the greatest abundance, but all of us have at least some of this expansive, heat-seeking, flight-making spirit within us and it usually has at least some goals, hopes and dreams in sight. Which is great, because how terrible it would be to lose all hopes and dreams and to not have anything to wish for, or to aim for, right!

There is nothing whatsoever wrong with wanting things to be better, but I really do question what it is that we truly want, because it seems to me, and everyone else that ever really looks at this that, no matter how wealthy or successful a person becomes, it does not make them happy.

As you know, I think that what all people truly want and need is to be at peace and in love. I think that our Eagle spirit, our free spirit, the spark of our life force, is especially driving us

towards finding our peace and it is a most fascinating phenomenon how this active, dynamic, intensely expansive, super Yang energy can be so essential to our journey to find it!

Most systems of meditation and contemplation are cool to the point of refrigeration. People who dive the deepest into them, monks, nuns, ascetics, renunciates, usually avoid all the elements that feed our fires. They abstain from heating foods, from physical intimacy, from anything that brings them into Yang, expansive, up and out, hot blooded passion. In going so far to the cool side there is a kind of peace, definitely. There is a detachment from the world and a great cooling down of all that Yang drive, ambition, and general fire in the belly. The dissolving of self, the letting go of all the layers of identity, and the great practice of surrender, all of which is at the heart of nearly all deep religious practice, is as far into the cool and damp as you can go and as far away from the hot and dry as you can go.

It's beautiful, timeless and entirely worth trying out but, I have to say, after diving as deeply into it myself as a person could, and seeing many others do the same, that it is not the way, not by itself. We have an inner fire. It has to be held carefully, yes, or it can be terribly damaging, especially to ourselves, but it is not to be subdued or neglected.

I think that to find true inner peace we have to go through a process of learning how to be with that fire just as much as we need to go all the way over to the Yin to learn how to let go and be *'as I am'*. Heat is Yang, dryness is Yang, the Eagle territory is Yang and Yang, it is uber-Yang, and in its raw form, to a monk or a meditator it probably looks like hell. They are intent on being free from desires, in fact desire is seen as the cause of all suffering and enlightenment is seen as being free from wanting anything. I have followed these thoughts, and been in them, and been around people who have been in them and I wished it could have been like that, and that there we could have found our lasting peace, but we just didn't. There was some peace, yes, but there was a lot more denial.

You can only deny part of your essence, your nature, for so long before things start to go out of balance. Our passion, our fire, and in fact also our fear, because of course the hot sides of our nature are in both the fear and the fire, are equally what makes us human as our cooler, Yin selves. We can't have one without the other and we cannot find true peace without being at peace with our inner fire.

What does that mean in practical terms? It means not denying any of what it means to us when we ask ourselves the question, what do I truly want? Most of us understand peace by what it isn't. We know that when we are sick or suffering we are not at peace. We know that when we are worried about anything, ourselves, our loved ones, money, the world, we are not at peace. We know that when we are in conflict with anyone or if we have any kind of resentment from any sort of unfinished business or unhealed hurt then we are not at peace. So we know what peace is by what it isn't, that's ok, but still, what is peace?

I believe that peace is not just the absence of tension and trouble, peace is the presence of harmony. There is a fullness to peace, it is not empty but at the same time there is nothing

to see in it and nothing to touch in it. There is a kind of music in it, however, even the sound of it can barely be heard, because it is the sound of silence. It is completely empty and at the same time it is so full that you can never use it up.

Peace is something that we can experience within ourselves, for sure, but only when we are in harmony and connection with what is beyond ourselves. True peace is not a selfish state of existence where you have got your needs met and don't care about anyone else anymore.

The idea of a personal enlightenment, where you escape the wheel of life and so don't need to be in the river of it any more is not really what peace is, that's just an absence of suffering, or any kind of feeling for that matter.

Peace is not just an absence of suffering, it is a presence of the bliss of existence which, in its heart of hearts, wants to be here, does not wish to cease to be, and is deeply and profoundly connected to all that is, all at the same time! In that sense, true peace is love, and therefore love itself, is peace. We are back to merging into oneness, where all the paths up the mountain lead to the same place, that's good!



A Centering Practice

In a little while, at the end of this section on Eagle territory, I want to do one last meditation for gratitude, not with any new steps, but just to review and practice what we've already done. Just now however, I want to introduce you to a slightly different method, partly because it fits well in the Eagle territory but mainly because it is simply a lovely and rather easy meditation technique that you might like to try.

Do you remember the practice, earlier on, of going between your lumbar spine and your liver? The idea being that these are the places where you can best hold your fire, and how they are near to each other in the front and back of your belly and how they are especially connected through your navel, your belly button. I was asking you to try using your navel as a gateway, a stepping through point, or perhaps I am better to say a stepping off point, because the idea, in the context of getting in touch with that inner fire and practicing gratitude is that, as you tune into this part of your body and keep within your awareness this sense of your life force, your *vis medicatrix naturae*, that your spirits may lift by themselves, so that you might step off the edge of the nest...

So this meditation technique is very similar but rather simplified. All you have to do is to come to the point of your belly-button, your navel, take yourself there with a sense of being ready and willing to let go to wherever your own life force, your river of energy, wants to take you next. You don't choose where your attention goes, you simply follow where the spark of light, and life, leaps to, and it will leap, so long as you don't hold it in place.

You come to your navel as a kind of launching pad. There is a most interesting energy that resides here, it is probably better for you to feel it for yourself than for me to attempt to put my own description on it, but let me just say that it is very dynamic, it embodies the free Eagle spirit that we all have within us, and it will help you to leap, or even fly, so long as you don't resist it, or hold yourself back from being with your inner fire.

This creature of flight within you, your inner Eagle spirit, dearly loves to play and to be free. So the method is really very simple. You just allow yourself to play with it, to follow the leader, follow the spark, wherever it lands, allow it to pair from where you were before to where you come to next, without force, without effort, just passively practicing 'choiceless awareness'. Those two words again, 'choiceless awareness', contain a universe of consciousness, freedom and peace.

It really is as simple as that. You come to your navel, you relax your awareness there, choicelessly, and then you just let go. You be with what happens, with what is, choicelessly, easily, without effort, without any force and without any resistance. When you stray into thoughts, which will surely always happen, and so have wandered off from your flight path, then without any reaction or resentment, with no hardness or judgement, you just gently bring your awareness back to your navel again and be with yourself there again, soft, centred, and in the moment of now.

I don't know if actually now is a good time for you to give your navel launch pad a test-flight but, if you could take a pause, take a breath, and bring your awareness there, choicelessly, to see what happens next, then why not!



Footholds & Obstacles

It's possible that you might have heard somewhere the term 'navel gazing'. It would have been in a negative context, about someone who was self-absorbed in a bad or unhealthy way. What isn't usually known is how the term came about in the first place, because it actually goes back many thousands of years, at the very least into the times of the ancient Egyptians and Greeks. Long, long ago, focusing on the navel was a well regarded meditation practice used by philosophers, mystics, and seekers of truth.

We have made so many changes to our external world, but who we are underneath, what makes us human, and what matters to us, is so much the same as it always was. I love the idea that, literally thousands of years ago, some of our ancestors had just as much a yearning to find inner peace and a connection to love that went beyond any limitation, as any of us might do now. Amongst the other ways and methods that they went on their own hero journey, some of them found that focusing on their navel took them to a place where things shifted and moved forwards in a good way, a healing way.

I can also understand, and even sympathise with the people who got so angry, and resentful, to those people who wanted to devote themselves to spiritual practices that they turned the term navel-gazer into a critical put-down. Have you ever lived in a flat where one or more people left all the cleaning and household duties to the others? Surely nearly all of us have experienced an inequality of labour in our homes or places of work and so we know first-hand how much resentment, and trouble that inevitably brings. Someone who, in ancient or modern times, wants to devote themselves to going within to do a lot of spiritual practice either needs to have a lot of alone time, or have an extremely supportive and understanding partner or family, or do what many deeply dedicated seekers after inner peace have done which is join a community of like-minded people.

I would like to think that the kind of inner journey work I have been talking about here could be done quickly, and I certainly would like to think it could be done easily, but I'm not sure about that. I personally feel like the slowest learner I could ever imagine in just about all the matters I have been sharing with you, so I don't think others would have to be so pedestrian, and I even allow myself to hope that some of the steps I am showing could help another to fly forwards, but I guess climbing a mountain is going to take time whichever way you go up it, and in the meantime life does go on. Much of my own journey work is early, before the day's responsibilities need to begin, which I have loved for the most part, shadow-lands and all and, by and large, I do think the morning is wiser than the evening.

Anyway, away from any judgemental eyes, in your own free time, and in your own quiet space, I encourage you to unashamedly practice navel gazing some time and see if it might be a tool that you want to practice with further. Its simplicity is appealing is it not? Just be in the centre of your hara, in your Eagle's nest, your launch pad, as an excellent place to step off the edge into the practice of choiceless awareness, where you no longer direct the steps but rather follow the leader of your own spirit.

The goal is to let go so deeply of your mind as the separate observer that you become what it is that you are observing and feeling. In that place of awareness you know, because you feel, that the 'you' who you think of as your separate self is actually not in any way disconnected from your inner being, which exists in every cell of your body and then, as you release the divisions, the borders between yourself and all that is, you merge into oneness, and so into peace, and love.

The navel is an excellent place for this however, honestly, any launch pad will do. Any of the routes up the mountain can be taken to get to where we are seeking to go. The two things that are most tricky, and that we need our conscious minds to be aware of, are the need to get some good footholds to begin, in other words those first steps really do matter for whatever comes next, and then the second part is to be ready for the obstacles that, for sure, will eventually come up.

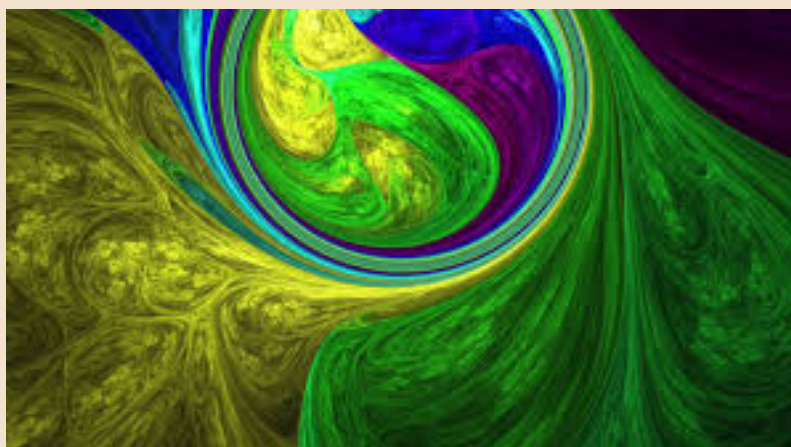
Once you have taken some good, solid, reliable first steps, and you have a foothold within, then you don't have to control things too much from there. I know that what I am suggesting here, and all through this work, is not what's usual, or even what's expected. People who write instruction manuals don't typically say, here's the first couple of steps and now you work out the rest, but it has to be like that with finding the way up your own mountain, because it's yours. So I say, take a couple of steps to get started in the right direction, and then let go of trying to control what happens next.

Go with the flow, follow the leader, be in the river. It will help to know your inner maps, because not if, but when, you get stuck in one or another place it will greatly help to know, so here is where I am holding my fire or my resentment, here is my fear or my hurt, here is my loneliness or my hardening, here is my fatigue or my resistance. Knowing the obstacles

helps you know how to navigate them, for example by using the practice of gratitude for resentment, the practice of forgiveness for hurt, the practice of compassion for hardness and the practice of surrender for resistance in all its multi-layered abundance!

I think that's it, those are the two main areas to be conscious of - taking a few good first steps to get a foothold on your way, and then also recognising when there is an obstacle and where to use a practice to help.

The amazing thing, the extraordinary thing, is that your spirit, your inner intelligence, already knows the way to heal you, and knows the way to bring you to peace and love and oneness. Isn't that a most remarkable idea to consider! For the most part, all we have to do is to just get out of its way, and just let go and just trust it. Is it really that easy? No, it's not, not for me, and not for most of us, but it could be, it can be...



Eagle Medicine

You may recall earlier how I was talking about how anyone, but especially Tiger constitutions, can especially need cooling, drying, cleansing herbs for their tendency to conditions that manifest with hot, damp congestion. Here, in Eagle territory, the herbs that can be of the greatest assistance, either to Eagle constitutions themselves, or people who are getting conditions of a hotter, dryer nature, is to use herbs that have a cooling and restorative action. Examples of some precious pairs that fall into this category are Corn silk and Marshmallow root; Skullcap leaf and Passionflower; Reishi mushroom and Hawthorn berry.

What are Eagle conditions, in other words problems of a hotter, dryer nature? Anything of an inflammatory nature can belong here, the same as it can in the terrain of the Tiger, but dryer inflammation is more piercing, focused, and related to the nerves whereas damper inflammation is more diffused, rising and related to the blood. It's stuck heat either way, painful and unpleasant, and if we won't just suppress it with drugs then we need ways to

help release it, so it can be helpful to see the difference, because cleansing, drying approaches can work very well for damp inflammation whereas cooling, relaxing and restorative approaches can be much better for dry inflammation.

Another kind of problem that seems to be increasing and that strongly relates to excess heat and dryness, in other words an Eagle condition, involves the immune system firing off its weapons. For example, with allergies, or any time the biggest organ in the body, the skin, has eczema, or with any kind of auto-immune condition. The immune system is literally like an army, it bristles with weapons that have the power to cause massive disruption and damage wherever they are aimed and fired.

Our nervous systems run on both chemistry and a kind of electricity which is of a hot and dry nature. When the nerves run too hot and too dry there can be all kinds of symptoms in the physical body with muscles over-contracting and organs being hyperactive, as well as in ways that we more obviously recognise as nervous energy, such as agitation, restlessness, overthinking and insomnia. Eagles can be especially prone to this, but anyone can get this way.

In holistic medicine we focus much more on the person than on the condition so, for any of these kind of problems we could use cooling, restorative herbs and then the most important 'work', which is what's needed most for the healing journey, is to find out the answers to this question - *'What do you know and trust relaxes you?'*

I don't usually think it is a good idea, with someone who is in stress and agitation, to start off by trying to teach them a new meditation technique. Not for everyone, but for many people there would be a high chance that they could get even more stressed out in trying to learn it and do it right. The deeper work, what we've been talking about here, could come later if and when a person really wanted it, and was ready for it. I just don't think you should give someone in a storm of stress something new to learn. It is much better to get them to go back to what they already know and trust.

People who are stressed don't relax, this is so consistently true that it might as well be a rule. People who are stressed don't think that they can relax and so they just stop doing all the things that used to make them feel good and peaceful. When I am with someone who I ask the question 'what do you know and trust relaxes you?', we make a list and I usually aim to get five things on it if we can. It makes for a handful of options that they then promise to do at least one of every day. The ones that come up the most include, going for a walk, having a bath, watching a movie, reading or listening to a book (my favourite), meeting with a friend, doing some art or craft, playing with their pet, having a cup of tea and looking out the window and just doing nothing for a while (also a top favourite).

Quite a while back, when I wanted you to start bringing the spiritual practices into your body, your subconscious, starting with your spine and then moving around to your hara, I talked about the healing reactions that are very normal and to be expected when you start

releasing the big blocks to our self-repairing life force. I mentioned then about how we see this a lot in any traditional herbal medicine practices, because we do a lot of cleansing treatments with people and when you release physical blocks the same thing happens.

The other biggest area of herbal medicine that brings up healing reactions is when you give people medicine that helps them to relax. What happens is that, especially when a person is far out in Eagle territory, meaning they have been flying high for a long time, not landing, in activation mode most of the time, not resting, they will eventually get a condition that has a hot and dry nature to the way it expresses itself in their symptoms, such as one or more of the examples above.

When we use cooling, relaxing restorative herbs, and at the same time we make some big changes in the day to day routines by bringing back some of the ways and means that they know and trust to relax them, then it is more or less a guarantee that they will start coming back down to earth. Sometimes it's graceful, but sometimes it's more of a crash landing because when you have been in fight or flight mode for long enough, it feels dangerous to let your guard down, you become hyper-vigilant, you don't feel it is safe to relax, and so you just stop doing things that relax you. Dealing with this has a deep impact, and healing reactions can come in the form of temporarily feeling worse, more tired, more stressed, more overwhelmed, at least at first.

For many people, it is only their stress that is still keeping them able to keep up and going, so as soon as they start to relax they feel like a balloon that has been pricked. It is better to go through such a process than what would have happened if they didn't treat the cause of the problem, but it is tough at first, and people can need a lot of encouragement to keep going.

Most people just want to stop suffering and feel better, and who can blame them for that! If some herbal medicines and some simple and doable work, a change of diet, a renewal of some healing habits, is all it takes to shift a stuck condition, then they are happy and if they are happy then I am happy, everyone's happy!

I wouldn't dream of suggesting that a person, who got what they came for, and is happy with their result, might want to look deeper into their spiritual life journey! It's probably better to not even start along such a path unless: a) you have a burning desire, a calling, an inner spirit that quests for an understanding of the Universe that goes beyond what even an artificial intelligence could grasp, because it is not in form, and cannot be touched or seen or heard, but exists at a level that we could never perceive with our brains, and only our hearts and inner beings could touch upon it or b) you are so sick, that you are sick of being sick and you know that you own you and that there are no pills or potions, no fixes or fixers that can save you, so you have no choice, if you want to get better, than to go on such a journey that you face every shadow, feel every feeling, and become more and more aware, alive and sensitive to life.

For what it's worth I think that, for most of us who go deep into any of this, it's a little of both of these points made above. In any case I know that only a small percentage, a tiny percentage, of people would ever even imagine that they might need to go on such a hero journey of healing as we have been talking about. For those very few, and of course I must imagine that you are one of them, and especially if you too are a little of both *a* and *b* above, then you will already know a lot about healing reactions, especially in which case, I just want to encourage you to keep going, keep going, keep going.

We have been back in the realms of fear and fire in these last two sections, and it is these hot zones, where we do cleansing and relaxing treatments with herbs etc, that healing reactions happen the strongest and the most often. It can only be the same with spiritual practices. There is an immense amount of unhealed hurt and stuck fear and fire that can be released with the practice of forgiveness and gratitude. If you are doing these practices then, the more you do them the easier they will get, and the more powerful they will get too.

Maybe I don't need to be worrying about you, only you would know, but if you are afraid of what you feel then just don't stop, hang in there and keep going! If you are worried that you aren't feeling anything much then that is more than ok too, it is all in there, you aren't made wrong, you have fear, you have fire, you have all the shadows that we all have, and you will find them, and you will have as much time as you need to get to know them, and make friends with them too, so long as you keep going, and keep practicing.



Home Bases and Summits

Let's come back to this remarkably consistent phenomenon around home bases and summits on the healing journey. Each constitution has a home base, where they need to have a stable footing to get started in the right direction and, at the same time, they have an area that is the hardest and furthest for them to reach, their summit.

I can hardly begin to tell you how much constitutional medicine has helped me in my work as a herbalist. People come in with the most heinous, chronic, untreatable conditions and, if you looked at what they had done and tried already, in all kinds of ways both conventional and alternative, you would think how could you possibly help such a person and truly, sometimes, if I were to look at them as their condition I would hardly have the heart to try.

Understanding people through their constitution changes everything. Now you are seeing a human being who has a condition rather than the other way around. You don't see their label, or you do, but it's in the background, you see them in the foreground, you see who they are, and so you can see where the blocks to their self-healing intelligence are too.

It is incredibly helpful to work out the constitution for so many reasons, including that we can then know where both their home base and their summit will be for their healing journey. I want to go through all four of these patterns with you now because, even though it will take a minute, I think you will find it interesting and, if you know or can work out your constitution, or the constitution of some people close to you, it could be highly useful to you too!

Eagles

Because we're still in Eagle territory overall, let's start here. So a person of an Eagle constitution comes in, with any kind of condition, but obviously something that is bothering them enough to seek help for it. Once I know that they are an Eagle I can know, with certainty, that their home base is activation and their summit is relaxation. If they are exercising their body and their minds, in other words if they are flying on a daily basis, then we don't have to worry about their home base, and the Eagle is the least likely of all the constitutions to be ignoring their need to get up and going each day so we are usually fine here, but the area that consistently gives them the most grief, and is most in the way of their self-healing intelligence, is their relaxation. They don't land, many of them have even forgotten how to relax. Their mind and body are often far too much in activation and equally often they are far too little in relaxation.

Another way it can be described, depending on their physical symptoms, is that they are too much in 'fight or flight' and not enough in 'rest and digest' mode. So their immune systems, and their nervous systems, and their digestive systems and so forth are just not able to heal themselves. Does it sound simple? It really is that simple, but, try getting an Eagle to land and tell me how easy that was! You can't take a single step for a person, you can point them in the direction that you can see they need to go, but it is 100% up to them if they choose to go that way or not, which of course is how it should be. People are free, or they should be free, and no one cares more about their freedom than an Eagle.

In terms of the dark friends and the difficult feelings that we all have to find our way to be with in this business of being human, it can be consistently seen that Eagles can make

friends with their fire readily enough, but will usually treat fatigue as if it was their deadliest enemy! *'You can rest when you're dead'* would be a fitting epitaph on many an Eagle's gravestone, which could be there for a life cut far shorter than it needed to have been if they had rested while they were still alive. Eagles can struggle to stop fighting, stop running, stop trying to control everything, they can struggle to just stop!

Eagles are hotter and dryer, they just naturally have a lot of fire energy and are usually good at expressing it, speaking their minds, and not holding on to it in a bad or damaging way but, if they were harbouring bitterness and resentment, if they were not able to count their blessings and feel grateful, and see the glass as half-full rather than half-empty, then they wouldn't be able to take a step forward on their healing journey, however hard they might try.

But that is rare, the majority of Eagles are well grounded in their home base, they are good at being grateful and they are good at wielding their fire. What is clearly and consistently the hardest for them, by far, is the practice of surrender and making friends with tiredness. This is the summit of their healing journey and it can be incredibly helpful to know that because, whatever else needs attention, whatever other steps are required, you can be sure that, if you are an Eagle, and if you are heading in the direction of practicing surrender and making friends with tiredness, that you will be on the right track and the best path to what it is that you seek the most for your peace and love, which is another way of saying for your happiness.

Elephant-Butterflies

Let's go around the cycle of the constitutions clockwise, which brings us from the hotter and dryer Eagle down a step to the cooler and dryer Elephant-Butterfly (EB). Still dry, but being cooler instead of hotter means we are dealing with a very different kind of person altogether, one with a completely different home base and summit.

The physical home base of the EB is nourishment, and they are usually amazing at this. They have the cleanest diets, the least processed food, the lowest amounts of drugs and alcohol and the greatest amounts of home-made and often even home-grown food. In the highly rare instance that this aspect of their health was not being looked after then you would not get far unless you paid attention to this area first, because it is their home base, but it hardly ever needs that kind of attention.

What does come up in their physical health in all kinds of different ways, over and over again, is their summit, which is the need for cleansing, and of course that doesn't make any intuitive sense, because why would someone need cleansing when they have such a clean diet? I will say something about this in a moment but firstly I will just share that, from long practice, if I see the signs that cleansing is needed for an EB, and don't pay attention to them, that there won't be any big steps forwards on the journey of healing. Cleansing is

their kryptonite, their weakest area, so you ignore that pattern at their peril but if you understand it, and work with it, then it can be to their great benefit.

Spiritually speaking, the homebase of the Elephant-Butterfly is in the practice of compassion and the dark friend of loneliness. EBs are often remarkably good at being both compassionate and lonely, and if that seems like a strange combination it's because it is, but that can be the nature of love, especially when you are the one giving the love out but not feeling that you are receiving it.

The spiritual and emotional summit for the EB is in the dark friend of fear and the practice of forgiveness and here is where I wanted to say something more about why they so often need cleansing because clearly, these are not typically people who have the kinds of diets or lifestyles that should create a need for detoxification programs - but equally clearly, if we don't do at least some cleansing, then they don't start getting better. It's not like this in every case but it happens a lot and it frankly gave me great puzzlement for years until I realised that emotional burdens, unhealed hurts, and especially unforgiven hurts, create just as much of a physical burden in the body as anything that you can put into your mouth.

The hardest of the dark friends for EBs to be with is fear and anxiety. The most challenging of the spiritual practices for them is forgiveness. The Elephant part of them has a long memory and it can nurse old hurts, resentments and dark thoughts too much, for too long. All the practices around facing fear and practicing with forgiveness are important for anyone, but the EB will find them the hardest, and the most helpful too, if they will do it! Denial is, as always, the only real enemy here. Many EBs are not ready to face their fears or practice forgiveness. They will do any amount of cleansing on a physical level, more and more until they are practically fasting, but they are feeling the toxic burden of the waste products within their spirit far more than their body, although of course the two are intertwined.

Interestingly, historically, the Elephant-Butterfly was the one constitutional type who was always forbidden to go on fasts, because they are already cool and dry and fasting makes you even further cooler and dryer, but again they are the people who most want to fast, in one way or another. Some cleansing, gently, is usually necessary to meet them where they are at and to get the journey started on the right footing, but in many cases it would only be if they were to do the great hero journey of healing, and to reach for the summit of their mountain, which means to face their fears and practice forgiveness, that they could become truly free of their burdens and so release the pinned butterfly, and be healed.

Bears

Now we come to the Bear, and because they are cooler and damper, so opposite to the hotter and dryer Eagle, the poles of their home base and summit are likewise flipped over. The home base of the Bear is relaxation and, most of the time, they are naturally good at

this. They sleep well, they give themselves permission to read books, or watch tv, or play games, and they have comfortable homes with chairs that they can relax in! By contrast, many Eagles don't even have a couch you can really lie on, let alone a chair you can sink into, because chairs are just for perching somewhere for a while before getting on with doing something useful!

If I have a Bear patient who is not well grounded in their home base, not sleeping, not resting, not reading or doing a reasonable amount of something pointless then I know we have some serious trouble because they have to be stable in their home base before any further healing can happen. On the flip side, the summit for the Bear is activation and this is often where the deepest, and hardest part of their healing journey unfolds. Finding the best way, the right ways, to getting mentally and/or physically active can be of the greatest importance to a Bear who is stuck with a chronic simmering health condition. The condition isn't so bad that they can't keep going, but it simply will not resolve with any kind of medication or treatment, unless they head for their personal summit, which means getting out of the cave and into the forest.

Not that the cave is the enemy! Bears need their cave to return to, it's where they relax and if they can't be in their cave peacefully, for any reason, then that is when there is the worst hell to pay in their health, but they can't get stuck there either or they get very low in their mood and their health. The cave, relaxation, is their home base and the forest, activation, is their summit. They have to have both, they have to go between them both, to be well.

In the emotional and spiritual sphere, whilst being with the dark friend of tiredness and practicing surrender should be relatively natural and easy for the Bear, because it is their home base, time and time again you will see that the greatest challenges for the Bear constitution is in learning how to be with their fire and even more, learning how to be grateful to it!

The practice of gratitude is the one that will be the hardest for the Bear, and also the one that they can get the most benefit from. Of all the constitutions they are the ones who must be on the closest look out for holding fire within in a damaging way, especially in the form of resentment and, as always, it is denial that is the only enemy here, because it is not easy or in any way comfortable to take responsibility for our stuck fire as our own. Not to blame anyone, not to be a victim, but being firmly in the truth of '*I own me*'. If we can see it then we can do something about it and there is no greater medicine than the superpower of gratitude to help transform the fire from something that is destructive into a force, a light, an energy, which creates life and love and peace.

Tigers

Lastly we are back in Tiger terrain and I'm sure you see the pattern by now, being hotter and damper, we have now flipped to the opposite side of the cooler and dryer Elephant-Butterfly. So in the more physical side of things, the Tiger's home base is cleansing and their summit is nourishment. This plays out in all kinds of ways in their physical health and, interestingly, they are the most likely of all the different constitutions to need some help to get their feet firmly on the ground of their home base. So cleansing herbs and diets come up a lot for Tigers for the first steps in a health program. Happily, the results when we get the Tiger cleaning up are usually gratifyingly fast and many previously stuck health conditions simply dissolve and disappear. Which could be the end of it, and I might never see them again, and if they got what they came for, and if they didn't need to go on any kind of a deeper healing journey then that's great, no problem!

However, that depends entirely on the Tiger person, and what they perceive they are hunting, because for sure many have that steam power to achieve all kinds of life goals and it may not be until they have climbed their ladder, and then realise that they haven't actually found what they were seeking, that the pause for some serious reflection might happen.

The spiritual home base for the Tiger is where the great dark friend of fear makes its home, and it is also where cleansing on the emotional level most needs to happen, which means there will also be the compelling need for the timeless practice of forgiveness. Surely all constitutions need to practice forgiveness, but for the Tiger it has been often seen that if they cannot let go of some past hurt then they cannot move forwards on their healing journey no matter what they do, but instead become stuck at home base, circling around the same old unhealed wounds as if they had been created just the day before yesterday. This can be true for anyone, but it is almost a certainty that the first step for a true healing journey for a Tiger is going to be with forgiveness but, what is often abundantly apparent, is that they cannot take that step unless they can also bring in compassion. This can be tricky because the summit for the Tiger, the place where they struggle the most to reach, is compassion! This is especially the case if they are not yet in the love for which their heart hungers. I think it could be terribly unwise, and unsuccessful, to keep searching for such a love outside themselves if they cannot extend mercy and compassion towards their own hearts. I think it would be better to climb their inner mountain and then call out from the summit, *'Now I'm here and now I'm ready'* and see what comes back to them with the echo.

Being with loneliness, the ache of it, and not trying to fix it or get rid of it with distractions and substitutes for love, and being with the need to come into the heart and be soft, vulnerable, open, is a hero journey for anyone. For a Tiger it is the summit, the hardest and the highest point for them to reach. So it can be like a guiding light, showing them what they need to work on the most, and where to take their steps.

All the Parts

So those are the broad strokes, there is a lot more on this and related matters in my free ebook on constitutional complexity, but just to be clear on one super important point which is that, as much as it can be enormously helpful to know what the home base and the summit are, everyone still has to go up the sides of their mountains too!

The adjacent areas of the cycle of healing, and the dark friends, and the spiritual practices, meaning the two of each that lie between the home base and the summit, always need love and care and attention too. And for sure it will happen that one of them is where the main obstacle to healing lies, at least at some point in the journey.

There are four physical pillars, namely cleansing, nourishment, activation and relaxation, that underlie the health of our body. If we are strong on all four we will be very hard to throw over, long life and good health are not a certainty, but they are likely. If we stand on three pillars we should still be pretty solid but not as strong as if we had all four underneath us and it will eventually happen, maybe only after a long time, that the absence of good enough care in any one area will find us out and we will get some kind of sickness showing us, if we are willing to see it, which of the four pillars we were missing.

If we get down to just two pillars being solid, and so the other two areas aren't great, e.g. we eat and sleep well but we don't exercise and don't keep our system running clean, then there will be something coming along to tip us over a lot sooner, because it is just not sustainable to miss two of the core four for long. If we are only strong on one pillar, for example as people often do with just being focused on exercise or diet, and if the other three areas are not being cared for well enough, then there will be trouble coming soon and, once it happens, it won't leave easily either, because we will have so much foundation work to do to restore our body's ability to balance and heal itself.

It's the same with our emotional and spiritual health, our 'dark friends', the feelings that we have to learn to be with as a part of being human, namely fear, loneliness, fire and fatigue. If we can be with all of them, not running, not fighting, then we will have a lot of emotional stability and maturity and, if it is not too much to imagine, a pretty good shot at peace, love and happiness too!

Making friends with fear gives us courage, making friends with loneliness shows us the way to love, making friends with our inner fire shows us how to be in touch with our power and making friends with fatigue shows us the way to peace. Missing out on any of them is the same as not taking care of one of the physical pillars to our health, we may be able to keep going for a long time but eventually the lack of what is essential is going to find us out, and the more areas that aren't doing well then the sooner the trouble will come.

Every person, from every constitution, needs to take care of all the core elements that make up their physical and emotional health. The main value of knowing the home base is that it

gives you a place to check in with first. If things are ok there, if there isn't clearly something badly missing or out of balance, then ok, you can move forwards, but if you can see that something is clearly out of order in the home base then it just doesn't work to go off trying to put the focus somewhere else. You have to take care of the home base first.

Likewise, the number one benefit of knowing what the summit will be is that, by knowing that this will be the hardest area to reach, and also the one that will eventually give the greatest rewards, it can give you a clear focus on what to work on the most. In other words, if in doubt over which direction to go, just aim for the summit!

Taking the steps, in any order, in any way, to make friends with any of these forces is a true hero journey, it is one that only very few people will do and it is certainly not one that people will encourage you to do! The only way to really move forwards is to do the practices that eventually grow the trust that is based on the truth of experience that fear really does bring courage, loneliness really does bring us to love, fire really does empower us and fatigue really does bring us to peace.

Working deeply, practicing, in any of these areas can bring great healing and, if you could just focus on the one and get good at that and get to where you needed to go then that would certainly be a lot easier, but it just doesn't work that way, because even if just one is left out you eventually get found out!

When you have finished with this book, or manual for practice I could call it, but you are still on your hero journey and want to do some more practices then perhaps your body, your subconscious, will show you where to take the first step, or the next step, and you don't need to think about any of this from the constitutional viewpoint, but I trust you will agree that it is interesting to think about it from this perspective, and perhaps it will be of help too.



We're nearly finished in Eagle territory. At the end I want to encourage you to do one last practice for gratitude with me, no new steps, just a meditation to revise and strengthen what we've already been learning but, before I get to that point, I just want to say one more thing about this extraordinary idea of making friends with your inner fire, even to the point of being grateful for its existence. I know I have talked about this already in other ways but as I come to this myself in my day to day life it is a source of wonder to me, and in fact a source of growing wonder, rather than anything that has become commonplace, that this fire within could actually be a true friend rather than what it feels like when I resent it or resist it.

There are layers upon layers to all this, levels beneath levels. Just when you think you have a good grasp of it, another layer, another level, reveals itself. Truly, I feel that the journey of *nosce te ipsum*, knowing thyself, is like a river with no end to it. Or there is an end but it is where I finish and the ocean begins, and this I can only glimpse and barely comprehend.

In the meanwhile, living life from one day to the next, I am in a body, I feel, I think, and I seem to exist in a separate bubble where only I can feel what I feel and only I can think what I think. So how can I know that what is true for me must be true for others? Personally, I didn't know any such thing, or even would have assumed it. It has been a lifetime's heartfelt interest in this inner journey, along with the practices that came with finding ways to take the steps within, along with a keen and close observation and listening to many, many others that have shown me the truth of it, which is that I am not different to anyone in the ways that most matter, in fact we are all so very much the same that it is another kind of wonder that we feel so strange to each other! We all have the same kinds of obstacles, we all go through the same kinds of challenges, and we are all seeking the happiness that comes through peace and love, although I know it doesn't often seem that way.

All the obstacles can seem like great mountains to climb, but surely everyone must especially struggle with their fire, at least sometimes. It is just so difficult to be with our fire when it is burning us! How can you possibly make friends with such a feeling? Honestly, I don't think you can when it is already running hot and free. Along with its hot and damp companion, fear, I think that the hot and dry fire, when it has moved out of its homebase and is flooding our mind and body is quite impossible to be friends with.

In the firestorm, when it is flaming through us, we will either succeed or fail to find a way to be with it that doesn't hurt someone else or do damage to us internally, but that is not going to be the time to do the spiritual practice of making friends with your fire. The deep work, the healing work with fire is much quieter, much more contained. You don't do it when you are very agitated or upset. Those firestorms are the times when, if you can, if it's possible, to talk with someone, that can often help if they know how to listen and don't just try to stop you feeling what you are experiencing. Or if you are better off alone with it, to have a completely uninhibited yell, or a kick and a punch, where no one can hear you. Or anything,

just anything, that can release the great intensity of the fire in some way that doesn't end up harming you or someone else.

In the same way as we can only start to make genuine friends with our fear when it is resting in its primal lair, the deep work, the healing work with fire is with an understanding that, even when we are not agitated or upset, in other words not actually feeling fiery, that this force and energy still lies within us. This is the time to start making friends with it, when you can be with it in the safe, contained furnace within your liver, along with the bellows of the breath that moves from your diaphragm and your lumbar spine.

Little by little, practice by practice, it is a most remarkable healing journey to get in touch with this fire, to welcome it, to invite it to burn brighter in a way that doesn't harm you in any way but rather lifts your spirits, so you can feel genuinely grateful to its presence in your life!

Let's do one last practice on this shortly but firstly I want to invite you to put a foot in the river of a terrible thought experiment. I know that none of us could ever do this no matter how we tried, and you shouldn't try anyway, all I want you to do is to imagine it, just putting a toenail in the river of it will be more than enough to get the idea.

Ok, so imagine you could make a list, or bring to mind, or somehow lay out in a vast field all at once, every moment in your life where you got hurt and angry, or you did something that made you feel ashamed, or you got frustrated over something or someone. Every spark or flame of fire that you had ever felt was put in front of you. Of course, if we could possibly do such a thing we would surely just explode as if we were an ember in the hottest fire, it's just a thought to encourage you to sense how many moments there have surely been, in all our lives, when we felt fiery.

Getting fired up is just part of being human. Most of the times we talk with each other for more than a "Hello, how are you and how about the weather" the conversation turns to something that is bothering us or someone else. The fire part is often what makes the story interesting, if everyone was all happily ever after already then there often wouldn't even be a story to tell. Fortunately, for those of us who love stories, there is no danger of that ever happening. Even in a world where we removed injustice like the cancer it is, and dried up the endless rivers of unnecessary suffering and loneliness, people would still need to go on a hero journey to find their love and their peace, and there will always be fire along the way, there just cannot not be.

Back to the thought experiment that you are not doing, but just imagining what would happen if you could behold all your own fire, in the enormous variety of ways it has been in your life, the minor and the major irritations, the annoyances, the rubbings up the wrong way, all of it, great and small. You don't need to see it all, and certainly shouldn't try to, but if you could see it, I wonder what you would say if I asked you what can you understand as the

common ground to all of it, the one factor that would be consistent in every case, however major, however minor, no matter what else was different in one way or another?

I think it's really very simple. Everything that made you mad, even a little bit, was something that made you unhappy because in some way, in any way, it took you away from your peace.

The fire is always there for a reason. We don't get up in the morning planning to be angry that day. We don't want to feel angry, or resentful, or ashamed, or guilty, or frustrated, any more than we want to be tortured. Feeling fiery, in any way, is deeply and profoundly uncomfortable. So why do we get fired up? Because there is something happening in our lives, or our bodies, or our minds that is making us feel unhappy. The fire is a response to the hurt, or the loss of peace, in whichever way that happens. Being told '*Don't be angry*', which is what our culture does to deal with anyone who is lower on the pecking order than the one giving the judgement over it does absolutely nothing good to help. People stewing in their fire, not finding the way to release it safely, being stuck in resentment, spreads the fire because it just has to go somewhere. So it spreads, like an infection, like a firestorm and, well I'm sure you can see the state of the world just as well as anyone. It's hot out here.

The first step, and I think for most people the hardest step, in making friends with these great dark forces is simply accepting that they have a good reason to exist. To stop the endless tennis match of condemnation and justification about everything bad that you ever felt and to just accept that there are really good reasons you feel this way. That it is completely useless to try to stop feeling something when there always is a good reason for it, the feeling, to exist. Then the real work can begin. When we make friends with fear it gives us the great gift of courage and when we make friends with our fire it gives us the tremendous gift of change.

People have fire in them, especially when they are young, but it is meant to last all life long. The wish to make things better for ourselves and for others, to make a living, to learn things, to get better at anything through practice, it all starts with the light side of the fire.

Even if it might not feel this way to you, or at least not all the time, you most definitely have a fire in your belly too. I know it doesn't always seem that way to people, if their mood is low, if they are not even close to being in love or at peace, then there might be very little fire to feel. If they have fallen into the darkest place that a person can be in, if they are in a place of despair, and hopelessness, then the fire will feel like it has gone out completely. It hasn't gone out, it can't go out until we die, but it can be turned inwards in a very harmful way if we are not very careful with how we hold it on our journey.

Here is another dark thought experiment, and this one I do encourage you to try, even if only for a moment. This experiment is to get you to feel how your body keeps the score, how your subconscious, which is your body, holds the feelings of everything that has happened to us, even if our minds can hardly even remember. Of course, we get busy with day to day life,

as we ought to, and our conscious minds can only fill up with so much before there isn't room for other stuff, including memories, but it's all still there in the subconscious, the body.

For this thought experiment I simply invite you to think about someone or something that has happened in your life that has upset you. Something that made you feel in any way fiery. It could be absolutely anything, big or small; a family member, a health problem, a money worry, an annoying neighbour or work colleague, anything at all. Cast the net wide with the question *'Who or what is something that has upset me?'* and you will be spoiled for choice for something to think about, and then that's that. Just let yourself think about it for a moment and, at the same time, observe what you feel in your body when you do. There will be a feeling, it may be subtle or strong, depending on how much fire you felt, and still can feel, in relation to whatever or whoever it is that has upset you, but there will be a presence to it that you will be able to feel if you are open to it. Most likely it will be a feeling with the quality of resistance to it, which has a kind of tension in it but, if you go into it a little deeper, you will be able to feel the heat in it too. It's just stuck there, along with all the other stuck fire from all the other multitude of hurts as well as the multitude of positive reasons for the fire to exist too.

Our fire is super physical, all our feelings are physical, we couldn't experience them unless we had a body, but this one, because it's fire, is one of the hardest and surely it is the hottest of what is there to be felt!

Another thought experiment you could do one day, if you wanted to, is to notice some time you might get upset in the future, how your fire feels within, how real it is, how urgent it feels that you have to do something with it, usually along the lines of how to get rid of it, and how very hard it is to just be with it when it is emerged into its stormy form.

Maybe you don't need to do any of these thought experiments, maybe you are a person who is already very in touch with their inner fire and you know fully well how real, how physical it is. If you do, great, but if you don't, please think about it, because I see an enormous amount of denial in this matter in particular. We do not want to own our fire because, as mentioned earlier, we are taught to have a great deal of shame around it, so we keep it hidden away, even from ourselves.

In fact, it is not only the dark side of the fire that we keep hidden, even our brightest hopes and dreams, our greatest ambitions, the matters for which we have the most fire in our belly, are subjects that most of us keep well hidden from the view, and judgements, of others. All the methods we are taught, or pick up, and then we practice to control our fire, or to keep it hidden. Through all that practice, many of us become rather expert at not letting the outside world see our inner fires, and this can even include people who are very close to us.

It is not easy to own your fire and it is certainly not easy to make friends with it, but you cannot get rid of your fire by thinking it away, wishing it away or hiding it away. That's good,

because you should not want to get rid of it! If there was just one step that I could take for you in all these matters it would be one where I could make you see your fire as an integral and vital part of your healing life force, your *vis medicatrix naturae*. The fire is not your enemy, it is not trying to harm you, even though it does harm you, it wants you to be happy, and peaceful, and it flares and burns because there are a great many things that are taking you in the opposite direction to your peace and happiness!

The fire is always there for a reason, a good reason, and there is no better force in this entire Universe to show you exactly what you need to pay attention to and, at the same time, giving you the energy to make the change that you need to find your peace.

It is a tremendous challenge, a true hero journey, to make friends with your fire, but what I dearly hope you may come to see, and feel, is that your fire is a great force for change in your life. What I hope you will experience for yourself is that, if you practice being with it as a friend, getting closer to it, learning its ways, being with it without fear and even being with it in a sense of deep gratitude, that it will actually help you to make the changes that you most need in your life.

Yes, we have to learn to pick our battles, definitely. I'm sure this must be true for all of us - that we get upset about things that we can really do nothing about. We cannot change other people, we cannot change the state of the world. When you are upset about something or with someone, if you ask the searching question to yourself, 'What can I actually do about this?', mostly the answer will be that you can do nothing other than change the way you are reacting to it or them. The change that the fire is showing you is needed, and the change that the fire is giving you the energy to make, is within you and you alone. You don't need to wait for someone else to change, and you don't need to wait for the world to be different to how it already is either. There is a great peace that comes with knowing that the power for change is an internal one that does not depend on anyone or anything being any different.

How do you find that peace? How do you reclaim your peace, especially when you are upset and, along with whatever else is going on that might be not ok in the present, how do you know whether you are also carrying all that stuck fire from the past?

Let's explore one of the best answers to how to find peace by revising all the steps for the practice of gratitude one last time.

The first step is to set an intention that you want to make friends with this great energy, even if you are mostly in touch with, and experiencing its dark side, rather than its light. If I have been able to convince you with this long talk about fire in this territory of the Eagle, the reason you could know that you want to make friends with it is that you understand, firstly from the talking, but then surely it would have to soon be at a deep visceral, heart-based and experiential soul level, that you need and want peace and that you cannot deny or ignore your inner fire if you will find and keep that greatest of treasures.

After setting the intention, the next step is to go into the fire where it most centres and resides within your subconscious, your body. Just as the fire is the most hot and dry element, so where it most centres and resides in your body is in the hottest and driest parts of you, which are in your liver and your lumbar spine.

Practice getting used to bringing your attention there in an easy, unforced way. They are a part of you and they are you. You don't have to observe them as if you were a scientist sitting in your brain doing an experiment, although it is ok if it feels something like that to begin with, but soon enough, so long as you keep bringing your attention into this 'Eagle territory' of your body, it will start to feel quite natural to feel the heat and spaciousness, the airiness, within how your body feels here.

When you are ready, when you are willing, you invite all the stuck heat in your whole body, which is the whole of all the felt memory and accumulated experience that is held in your subconscious, to be most welcome to come into this furnace, this crucible, held in your liver and lumbar spine. There will likely be some heat that you will feel as you do this, maybe subtle, maybe strong, but don't be afraid of it and don't be afraid if there are any other kind of strong or fiery feelings or memories that surface when you do this kind of practice. This is a truly safe place to feel and be with your fire, it is the safest place, the best place to practice being with it. If you have stuck fire somewhere else in your body that calls your attention to it, an ache or a pain, perhaps in your neck because that is such a common place for the fire to get stuck, or any part of your lower back, then welcome it and allow it to flare up too, if that is what it wants to do, but keep pairing whatever it is and wherever it is with your liver and lumbar spine too, so that you don't get stuck, so that the fire keeps moving and shifting, which it will if you do not fear it or resist it.

I encourage you again to learn and remember these three ancient words and to give them to your body to think and your mind to feel '*Vis medicatrix naturae*' the intelligent healing force of Nature. The words, and what they stand for, have a great power in them. They can help you to feel how your life force is most vibrantly up and out when it takes the form of your fire. How in its essence it is anything but an enemy to you. It is very powerful, yes, it can be very destructive, yes, but it is not inherently bad or damaging, it is just really hard to hold and to be with as a friend, at least at first!

If, when you are doing any part of this practice you very spontaneously feel your spirits rise and so it would be naturally sincere, and heartfelt, to lift your whole consciousness into one of the highest frequencies that we can attain, which is that of gratitude, then do go with the flow and ride the wave. Remember the most important part of gratitude is that it is heartfelt, and sincere, so if it comes to you without you being the one to generate it then that is ideal, and obviously a great sign that you must take as an encouragement that you are on the right track and are doing well with this.

But, for any reason, including but not limited to that there may be any number of reasons to feel resentful to your own body, or to life, or to fate or fortune, or for any other possible reason that you feel hurt, wounded and unhealed, and there is no gratitude coming into being by itself, then do not let that stop you stepping forwards into the final stage of this practice.

When you have gathered your fire, when you have it burning as bright and strong as you can, there is another kind of wave that you will feel rising within you. It may not be light, or at least not yet, but it is powerful nonetheless. It is your fire, all the hurt, all the passion, all the feelings that come, especially when peace is not there yet.

That fire is there all the time, mostly under the surface unless a storm breaks out, but it is always there, and by getting in touch with it, and welcoming it, and focusing it into the areas that most hold fire, you will very likely cause it to rise up. Then and there, when you feel its presence in the real, within you, not thoughts on a page, not ideas to try out some time, but actual real felt fire, then I challenge you, and encourage you, to choose to say thank you.

Even if you are not feeling the gratitude yet, just say *'thank you'* with as much sincerity and heart as you can muster. With the conscious choice, from the conscious understanding, that this fire is not your enemy, even if it hurts, even if it is very hard to be with, but that it is your life force, your spirit, that only wants you to be happy, and healthy, and peaceful.

If you can say thank you to it, and really mean it, then you will stop resisting and resenting it. Then, if it has not already done so, it will shift. It will soften, it will move in a way that does not hurt you but rather releases the hurt. The fire will burn away the resentment, the unhealed hurt, the toxins that are in your body and your being from all the unprocessed stuff that has accumulated since it all began.

Any time you get stuck, or any time you feel lost, or insincere, or in any way out of step with what it is that you set out to do. Don't worry and don't be hard on yourself, it's totally normal! Coming back to some earlier steps will easily get you back in the flow for the practice of gratitude. Again and again, I want to remind you, don't forget the pairs! Pairing any of the steps puts you on solid ground. Climbing the mountain again. You only have to get yourself centred and you will be back on track. And your own intelligence, your life force, your fire will lead you forwards and show you the way. You can trust it, it is you, it loves you, it only wants what is best for you, always and in every moment. You can be thankful to it with all your heart and soul and it will never not deserve your thanks.

It has been such a joy and an honour to have at least attempted to be your guide here in the shadow-lands of the Eagle. I hope that now, or very shortly, you might be able to do one more practice on being with your fire and welcoming in the feeling of gratitude to it, and everything that it brings and, if now is not a good time, that there will be another chance soon.

Of course I very much hope that you will do many more practices with being with your fire, and practicing gratitude. This, in many ways, most difficult to be with of all the dark friends, is such a light in the darkest of places. It can empower you and heal you, it is the life force made manifest and I most dearly, with all my heart, hope that it will show you the way to your peace.





Elephant-Butterfly World

I am so glad to be back in the cool lands with you again! Going through fear and fire is so intense. They're hot, and hard and, as much as I trust that the way into them and through them brings us to the light, they can be heavy going!

So I am very ready to return with you one last time to the soft, Yin, gentle practices of compassion and surrender, to bring the awareness in the hara over to the left side and the awareness in the spine to the upper hill and valley. We are still heading towards the same goal, to find and have the treasures of inner peace and love but the practices are different.

Let's do the second to last practice on compassion together shortly, but we've done some journey work, you and I, since we started with this near the beginning, so first of all let's talk some more about this heart-centred practice of compassion, because so much follows from here.

Interestingly, if you were to look into the various methods of practicing contemplative meditation that are a central part to many of the world's spiritual traditions, they would look very similar to what we've been talking about in the practice of compassion. Contemplative meditations are very gentle, they are often centred on the breath or some other focal point, you watch the thoughts that come through the mind with detachment, and you practice being with what is.

These are beautiful meditations, truly lovely. Compassionate contemplation feels like a safe, sure and gentle way up the mountain of the self, to find the peace and love that we most need, whether we know we are seeking it or not.

So, for ease, for grace, for all things gentle and good, why not only go this way? Why not agree to just start and stop right here with compassionate contemplation? To answer that

question sincerely and truthfully, we have to acknowledge that we live in a body, which is a kind of a subconscious, and that within this land that lies within us, there are shadows.

Some people say, and you may have heard this yourself, that all the spiritual stuff, all the teachings and practices, all the ideas and philosophies, can be summarised into just two paths and two choices - fear or love.

I see the stark, beautiful simplicity of this idea of it and oh, how I so wish it were as straightforward as making a conscious choice and then that's it, we're done. I do not choose fear, I choose love!

Sadly, tragically really, making a choice and not wanting to be afraid just doesn't make the fear go away. There is fear, there are unhealed hurts, there are stuck fires within us that, if we deny their very existence, or take whatever, or do whatever, to try to make them go away, actually end up only making us sicker and, in the long run, more lost.

To practice any kind of Yin, yielding, heart-centred and compassionate meditation is gorgeous, beautiful, divine. You will be doing nothing, there will be nothing that gets done by practicing such a thing, and you could not put your time to better use. If you find peace, and love, then what will come into your life, and so then ripple out from your life, is what we all need more than anything. You can't 'do' anything to get that peace and love, you cannot go to it, because it must come to you, and these cool, passive, gentle meditations are the embodiment of the trust in that great truth.

But, there must be a but, sadly, tragically, there are unhealed hurts, there are stuck fires, there is a shadow-land that lies within us. Is there a choice between fear and love? Yes, always. But it is naive and even dangerous to think that we could ever have such a power in our conscious minds alone, and that through sheer willpower we could banish our shadow side into oblivion and only live and be in the light of love. It doesn't work and, because it doesn't work, it turns people inside out, and into all kinds of knots, trying to make it work regardless, through will alone.

The journeywork to face fear and be in love has to go so much deeper than our conscious minds. Our consciousness, our thinking, our opinions, all that we perceive as our identity, seems like it just about forms the totality of our experience but in fact it's rather skin-deep. Even somewhat superficial. Our minds and our identities are actually quite easily changed, like the weather, like the wind, especially if we go through a major crisis or let go of our inherited beliefs, whichever comes first.

What lies underneath our conscious minds is our subconscious, which can also be called our body, because this is where we feel and this is where the much greater part of us exists. We are spiritual beings inside physical bodies.

I know that many people have many ideas about what the spirit is, even what it might look like, what happens to it when we die and so forth. Personally, I just don't know, so I don't say

much about what I think it is or isn't. But is there a life force that clearly exists inside all living things and just as clearly does not exist inside non-living things? Yes, that is something I think everyone can agree on, whatever language we use to describe the difference between what is alive and what is not alive.

That spirit, let's keep calling it our life force for now, has all the intelligence of Nature woven into the very fabric of its existence. It knows how to heal our bodies when they are sick or broken or worn out and, just as well, it knows how to heal our hearts, our innermost being, when it is sick or broken or worn out.

When we tune into this life force, and be with it in our bodies with more awareness, and more consciousness, there will be an increase in its intensity. Not always, but oftentimes, this initial increase in intensity can be uncomfortable to the point of creating fear. The fear is that if I don't stop myself feeling this way, and so if I don't find a way to run from it, or resist it, or in some way fight it, that it will get stronger and stronger and worse and worse and then it will never stop being all that I can ever feel and it will never leave me.

I know I have talked with you about this several times already. It is not a mistake or a forgetfulness that brings me to talk about it again. It is because I know that there is a whole world of difference between hearing about something, any number of times, and then what it is to actually feel it for yourself.

The further you go into your inner journey work the more it will come up to be seen, more and more clearly, and this will not be a matter of simply making a conscious choice between fear and love, it is so much deeper than that. You choose with your body and your spirit even more than you choose with your mind. If you can find the courage to be of good heart, and to face your fear and so stay with your life force, and so stay with the increased intensity of whatever it is that you feel, then you are truly choosing the path of love.

Soft, Centred and Now

I want to talk with you about the nutshell to guide the practice of compassion one more time. Starting with this beautiful word '**soft**'. There is so much in this little word. The word soft is a drop that holds an ocean. All that is Yin, yielding, like water, going with the flow, not resisting, not resenting, not holding on, is contained in it; soft.

And there is so much against it too! Maybe the pendulum will have finally started to swing the other way by the time you are reading this but our world has been going so hard! More heat, literally, more intolerance, more everyone out for themselves, more greed, naked greed now, not even trying to hide it anymore, the bad guys have become the good guys, young people are making less love and fewer real friends than ever before, there is less peace, less love, more conflict, more hate and everything, just everything, has become harder and harder and less soft.

The only part of any of this, of the whole Universe, that we can truly do anything about, is within ourselves and it is a true hero journey of a mountain to climb to open, and soften, our hearts. To be the love that we want to see in the world.

When I centre myself into my heart and my attention stays there for more than just a moment, oh my goodness do I feel how soft, and vulnerable my heart is! My spine and my ribs are a strongly protective physical shield to my heart. My identity and the many ways I move in the world are a strongly protective emotional shield to my heart, but underneath those shields, in the real, raw being of my beating heart, it is so soft!

Any hardness I have around my heart is all mine, my actual heart is tremendously tender. It feels, it knows, that it is mortal and entirely able to be pierced and wounded in a thousand different ways. In my softness is my vulnerability and in my vulnerability is a gateway, a path, to be free from the unhealed hurts that created the hardness that holds me separate to love, and peace, and happiness.

I can take the first step when I stay in my heart, in that place of softness and vulnerability. The step cannot really be described in words, but we have been trying to understand it together nonetheless, you and I, with talking about things like mercy, compassion, and forgiveness. We have been approaching the mystery of our spirit, and we can only get so far with our minds before we need to trust an understanding that comes beyond words.

There is also something that blocks me from taking that step into softness, and vulnerability, and the words for that block are not what it really is either, but there is a hardness in it. There is a resistance in it, a rejection in it, a pushing against 'what is' in it. I do not want to be with what is. I do not like that way I feel, or there is something I do not want to accept, and there is a part of me that always wants to believe that I can change it, or fix it, by the force of my will, by being the opposite of soft, by being hard.

I do have a tiny amount of power in all of this, the power is to make a choice. We could describe the choice as being one between love and fear, but in this context I want to describe it as a choice between softness and hardness. Soft is only a word, a concept, but it carries a meaning, and a feeling to it as well. I can feel it in my mind, and think it in my body.

When I come to a quiet moment where I can do some practice and take a step on my own healing journey, and when I come to feel my heart and wherever else my life force wants me to pair to next, if I allow that word soft to penetrate the haze of whatever train of thought was running this way or that, there is an opening that can come with it. I am releasing the need to be hard, in any way, and allowing myself to soften, so that Nature can show me the way to go next.

The process of '**centring**' is one of the most interesting aspects of all the journey work within. I used to think, and I know others do, that there is a kind of central point to the self and that climbing the mountain of 'self-realisation' will bring us to that point, but it's actually

not like that at all! Sure, we have an identity that can be quite strongly fixed in place but that is just a construction of our minds, and it only stays solid for as long as our personal world remains undisturbed. Nor is our physical heart the one true centre of ourselves, although it can be felt that way sometimes.

I think of centring as a process, a journey, and because we've used the analogy often enough, let's call it a journey up a mountain. The point of the journey is really the journey itself, but if we said that there was an endpoint, a summit of the mountain, then it is certainly not a final centring of the self, it is a dissolution of the self. It is a merging into oneness and being, for a moment of infinity, entirely at peace and in love.

Along the way, on the journey of healing, it is essential to take steps in order to move forwards. If you try to fix yourself in one place, including in your heart of hearts, you will just get stuck and tie yourself up in a different kind of knot. Our life force, our spirit, is always moving, seeking peace, seeking health, seeking harmony. It wants to move, to be free, but there are blocks, there is disharmony, in its way.

When I come to a moment that I can go within and do my spiritual practice, I know that it will help me, and that it is necessary, to take a couple of steps to begin, and then I may choose to take one or two more, or I can be guided by my own *vis medicatrix naturae*, my own healing and intelligent life force, for where to go next.

Although, as we have been going along, I have been asking you to start with certain steps, in order to show you some different methods of spiritual practice, I want to share with you now that it has become important to me personally that I do not have a pre-decided method of taking the same steps to begin, but rather I can begin my inner journey in any of the ways I have been talking with you about.

Even from the very first step, I much prefer to listen to my own heart, or my body, or my mind if it has a clarity to it, and be guided there too. If I begin with the freedom to start anywhere, then my journey will always go to where it needs to. If I begin with the same technique, the same steps, the same method, then I will soon become stuck, because it is just my mind trying to assert its dominance. I am not truly listening to my heart and my spirit but I am still trying to lead the way, and be in charge.

I'm just not interested in any of that any more. not because I am cleverer than my own mind, hardly, and certainly not because I am anything but a slow learner, because I could not even begin to recount to you how many times I have doggedly tried to practice a certain method, believing it would help, seeming to get better on the strength of that belief, only to end up in the same place as I began, with just more stress and strain. Not cleverness, not grasping the lesson through wisdom, the only reason I'm finally able to let go of the steering wheel, at least sometimes, at least for a while, is because I want peace and love so very much that I can no longer be bothered with the tricks and traps of my egoic mind!

How do I choose the first step? Perhaps there will be a feeling that will show me where to begin, a feeling in my body or my being, possibly a difficult feeling, because one of the dark friends is showing itself and in that meditative moment I am able to listen to what it is telling me, because it is only trying to help me.

Sometimes my first step might be related to something I am wrestling with that could possibly be helped by the practice of compassion, or surrender, or forgiveness, or gratitude. If I have a sense of that, then I can bring my thoughts and awareness into certain places, that are like gateways, within my subconscious, my body, to bring strength and substance to the practice that I most need to find my peace and love again, my happiness.

Sometimes, knowing my own constitution, I let that be the guide for my home base of where to start, and likewise where to aim for in the areas that I struggle with the most.

However, more than any of those put together, I don't know. I have no plan, no structure, I just have a moment where I can not be doing anything and so I most gladly welcome the time and space to do nothing, to just be, and then the journey begins by itself.

What I have learned, and very much want to share with you, is that it is a great danger to get stuck in one place, stuck on one foot! What I mean is that, instead of moving forwards, if I focus on, and stay with, the tension or trouble that has brought me to be fixed on just one part of me, I inevitably end up making it worse, despite my very best intentions!

You would think, I would think, that there would be nothing easier than just relaxing and letting go, but what a great delusion that turned out to be! We are remarkably good at getting in the way of our own healing. This is my conclusion from nearly 40 years of working with people; we, and I include myself in this, are remarkably good at getting in the way of our own healing. I know that is not a very positive thing to say, but it's just how it is.

So anyway, not getting stuck, not getting in our own way, is clearly very important to the whole journey and I see that pairing can greatly help with that. Centring includes pairing, because when you 'follow the leader', when you follow the centre, it will take you where you need to go. This is because the life force is always moving, always showing you where to put another 'foot' in your internal terrain. Centring, and pairing, means you get two feet into the journey, not just one, and then you can keep moving from there, maybe back and forth, maybe in a kind of spiral, but you're not stuck, you are journeying.

When you are ready for this, when you want to, I encourage you to just start wherever you wish to start. I encourage you to take a leaf out of my book on this one and, whenever you are ready, now or once you have gone through all these practices so you have had at least one go at them, you give yourself the freedom to just go with your own flow.

Does this tickle you, in a good way I mean, the idea of the inner journey, of walking within yourself, the first step, the second step, the next step and then the next? It tickles me pink, especially because there is never anything boring, or stale, or remotely repetitive about any

of it. Even if I may take the same steps many times, it is truly the case that I am stepping into a river of life and energy and that river is never the same no matter how many times I come back to one or another practice. It is a freshwater river, never stagnant, never stale.

And so now we come to **‘now’**. This is another thought, and feeling, and practice that has no end to how alive, and interesting, and powerful it is. In all the Universe, vast beyond comprehension, right now, everywhere, it is always now. Everything that exists, exists in this moment at the same time. Everything that has ever happened is past, nothing that has yet to occur actually exists. The only moment that is real, is now, and what that also means is that the only moment that peace can exist, and that love can exist, is also in this moment of now.

Being with our feelings, being with what is, is a tremendously effective way to practice being in the present moment of now. How we feel, at any point in time, is something entirely real, and tangible, it brings us into the present like nothing else.

Our thoughts, not so much. Our thinking almost invariably goes into the past or the future. Our minds are just not especially good at being in the moment of now, they are not made for it. The way to feel now, safely and gently, is in the subconscious, the body. Even though there can be an initial increase in intensity of some challenging feelings that need to be felt to be processed, the practice of centring, of taking steps that pair our feelings and awareness within, and the intention to be soft rather than hard, to be yielding rather than resisting, can make this moment of now become a very sweet, safe, peaceful and loving place to exist.

I won't spell out all the steps again, because I want you to be open to going with your own flow, but I wonder if you could be ready to have a go at practicing our second to last compassionate meditation together right now, or in another moment soon? I will just remind you of one step to bring your awareness into your heart and another to be open to using the nutshell of *soft*, *centred* and *now*, at least at some point along the way, but I also want you to feel very free to include any other steps that naturally come to you as you journey within.



The Final Step in Practicing Compassion

I wouldn't have picked up on this if I was the reader, and so I don't expect you will have either, but it's possible you might have noticed something by its absence because, in the last two sections, on forgiveness and gratitude, I had already added one final step before we did the second to last one of each of their practices.

So there actually is a final step here in compassion-land that I want to share with you, in fact it is the final step of the final steps, because there are no new steps in the very last section coming up on gratitude.

The reasons I haven't yet introduced it is because it seemed contrary to be adding a step when I've just finished encouraging you to go with the flow and also because this final step in compassion, and final step in the whole meditation manual, might feel like more of a leap into the abyss than a step! Hence why I thought we could have some soft practice first.

What I don't know about you, and what no one can know about you, unless you were to tell them, is how lonely you are. How much does your heart ache for love? How alone and separate and disconnected do you feel, even when you are surrounded by others?

Babies, and very little children, are useless at masking their hunger for love and comfort but many people, often from young, become masterful at hiding their heartache. Softness and vulnerability has led to them getting hurt, so they learn to harden and hide how they feel, sometimes even from themselves.

Only you can own you, and only you know how you feel. If you are in love, if you are not lonely, if you do not have the dark friend of loneliness, grief, sadness and loss living within you in its shadow form then there is no mountain for you to climb here. If you have come to the place of being in love already then I imagine you have already been on a hero journey to get here, and for that you have my deepest respect and admiration.

However if, like me, and nearly everyone that I see, including the myriads who are masters at disguising it, you are a work in progress in this matter and, in your heart of hearts, you know that there is loneliness, loss, grief, or sadness within you, then the leap into the abyss that I mentioned a moment ago as the final step in the practice of compassion will not actually be so hard to take, but it will be helpful, and healing and honestly, I would say it will be necessary too.

Remember, there is only one enemy here, and it is denial. With no one other than you even being able to know what is in your heart, if you can acknowledge to your innermost self that you are not in the love that you most need and want, that there is a separation in you, and that there is the presence of loneliness that comes from that separation, then you will be able to take this last step, this leap, easily, readily, and quickly.

It is hard to put into words what I mean by a leap into the abyss of loneliness. The leap is a crying out, a calling out from the deepest, darkest most separate part of ourselves. It is like how a baby cries for its mother's milk, except now the mother is the Universe itself, and the milk that we are calling out for is that of love.

If you and I were able to talk about this in some completely private place where no one could possibly hear us, for example in a car far away from anyone, or on a literal mountain top, and we could share our ache without fear, without any hesitation to be completely open and honest, then we could bring each other out with it and both cry out together, now that would be a music worth hearing, haha, and again haha if you think I am only joking.

Have you ever had a dear friend, or a child, or someone you love utterly break down and sob in your presence? Do you remember how your heart opened so wide to them with compassion and love when they were like that? That is what we need to do for each other, so much so but, because we hardly ever can, we must find the way to do it for ourselves.

I mentioned earlier my first incarnation of the dark friend of fire in the form of a dishevelled dwarf hammering on my door with an axe and I trust it tickled, or at least surprised you a little. Here in the cool dry world of the Elephant-Butterfly, where the great dark friend of loneliness is the one to meet and come to terms with, the first incarnation that came to me is the one that stays with me still. It is myself as a child, in fact specifically it is from a photo I have of myself around the age of 10, holding my first dog Snoopy, and looking away down to a valley. I see him, who was me, I see the love in him for his best friend, and the happiness of that love. To help make friends with my loneliness, I couple that face at that age, with something I have done from around that time, which is to play the violin, and so I see my inner child, and know how he calls out for love, and plays his sad songs, especially when he is happy, because he does feel the love coming back to him when he calls out for it.

I wonder if you call out for love now? I wonder what you do in your life, in your day to day routines, in the way you have created the world in which you live, for love?

Perhaps these are the wrong questions, or at least the wrong time to ask them. Perhaps you are a little bit like me in this matter, where I have so much hardening, scar-tissue really, over my heart that much of the time it is extremely difficult for me to be soft and vulnerable enough to call out for love. Not always, of course, just like others, I crack open too sometimes, but there is a resistance, a hardening, against it that can feel like a mountain to climb to overcome.

Where does it come from, that hardening, that stance to suffer stoically, and silently? Perhaps it starts very young. Have you heard of 'learned helplessness'? It is where a baby is left to cry themselves to sleep. They are trained to learn that their crying will not bring anyone to help them. The parents even set their watches to it, increasing the amount of time that they leave their baby to cry more and more, longer and longer, until the little human eventually realises that no one is coming and there is no point in crying anymore.

How many times have any of us been rejected by someone we love? There is a very particular kind of wound to the heart that happens with rejection. I imagine you've felt it. It can slice right through us, like a cold knife.

Anyway, I don't think we need to know the reasons, or at least we certainly don't need to justify them or explain them to anyone. If we have scar tissue, and hardening, over our hearts then we certainly didn't start out in life that way and it will be there for good reasons. It won't just disappear either, it will take time to practice compassion and forgiveness and to open and soften and heal our hearts with love.

Leaping into the abyss of loneliness with a heartfelt, heart-wrenching cry for love may be something you can do, or not do, or it may be something you can only do sometimes, but not on demand. In any case, let's come at this from another angle. More pedestrian, more the Elephant moving slowly and surely up the mountain than the Butterfly soaring off it, but the intention and the journey is the same.

Would you please do a little thought experiment with me, just for a moment. I really love this one, even though it is impossible and I can't do it, it is so opening, and interesting, to try anyway.

It is to imagine nothingness. Imagine the Universe before time and space and matter came into being. Imagine the deepest darkest space in which there is no life, no energy, no thing whatsoever.

Please give it a go, just for a moment, and then we'll talk some more.



It's impossible right? But I hope you still found it interesting to try, and perhaps you can go further than me into this which, given I can hardly even take a step, might be entirely possible. I wonder if you got anything of the feeling that comes up for me when I do this, which is hard to put into words, but is along the lines of how life just had to exist, how the universe just had to come into being, because there cannot be an eternity of nothingness. But it is from nothingness that everything came. So nothing is not nothing, but there is a spirit in it which is not like anything else whatsoever in the world of things.

We are going deep into Elephant-Butterfly world here. This is where the dark friend of loneliness makes its homebase and so this is the very best place for us to explore, and find love, because loss, sadness, grief and loneliness are simply the shadow sides of love. The Universe was brought into being by a force, a spirit that we cannot possibly comprehend, but there can still a most fleeting sense of it sometimes, from the corner of the eye, the tip of the edge of our awareness, including something that I feel is deeply woven into our nature and the nature of all life, which is to explore what love is, what it is to truly connect and to be part of something greater than ourselves.

It seems, rightly or wrongly, kindly or cruelly, that we must journey through the shadow side of love, and peace too, in order to come to them fully. It seems that we have to be broken in order to become whole.

A few times now, throughout these writings, I've talked about merging into a state of oneness, of being in love and at peace. I hope that there is nothing I have said that has suggested to you that I have a ready access to such a state, because I do not. It has come to me, yes, it does come to me still, sometimes, but I have learned, by painful practice, by repeatedly falling, even whilst just trying to get my feet on the ground let alone taking some steps, that I cannot go to it. No matter what I have tried, no matter how hard I have tried, I cannot go to it. I have understood this for a long time now, which makes me all the greater fool that I still have to keep learning it. But I can extend some compassion, and forgiveness to my mind, seeing that it's ever questing, seeking nature includes an in-built belief that it could grasp everything it reaches for if it could just stretch a little bit further...

Trying to go to it is like trying to contemplate nothingness, I cannot. Nor can my mind even begin to grasp infinity, or eternity or any of the really cool things that are there to show us the wonder, if we could just see it. I wish I could transcend myself, but I cannot. I wish I could go within and cry out, from my heart of hearts, for love but I cannot do this on demand either, so I do not expect that you ought to be able to. It is like the practice of gratitude, saying thank you, and the practice of forgiveness, saying sorry, it has to be true, real, sincere and heartfelt or we really should not make the attempt.

So let's say we are still intent on going all in on this but know that we are not sincerely able to take any leaps into the abyss, at least not right now. Fortunately, there is another way up to the summit of the Elephant-Butterfly mountain. It is to feel, and experience, your

loneliness, your separation, and your isolation as a simple, cold, dry fact. It does not have to have anguish attached to be real. If you go into the zone of where this energy is at its strongest in your body, namely your heart, your thoracic spine and the upper left part of your belly, and if you use the other step of the nutshell of the practice of compassion to direct your awareness to be *soft*, and *centred*, and in the *now*, then little by little, step by step, you will readily be able to feel the very centre of your separate self.

It is a sad fact and a terrible fact and in some ways a beautiful fact that no one but you can ever feel any of what you feel but you yourself. You belong to you in a way that nothing or no one else ever can. There is a great separation in this understanding. You are a single drop and, even if you might momentarily feel yourself as part of something greater, you will return to that singularity, because you must, because that is the nature of our existence.

One way I have heard this put that especially resonates with me is that *'you cannot invite the wind, but you can open a window'*.

Ok, I think we can understand, and even accept that, right? So in this case how do we even open the window? I see two pathways to take a final step to open the windows of our hearts in the great practice of compassion.

One way is to embrace the feeling of loneliness as an ache in the heart that makes you want to cry out. If you feel that, if you can feel that, then I encourage you to go with it, as much as you can, with as much sincerity and vulnerability as you can bring yourself, or allow yourself to feel, and to cry out for love. Like a baby cries for milk, with all its being. There is a love that is beyond us and beyond our comprehension, it brought the Universe, and us, into existence. It is there whether we call out to it or not, the calling out does not make it come, the crying out is more what it might sometimes take for us to break down our resistance and our separation, so that we can feel its presence again.

A second way, another way to take the final step in the practice of compassion is to embrace the sense of separation that you can feel in a quiet, cool and dry way. No great crying out or ache is required here, just a willingness to face a rather dark and awful truth, or at least it seems that way from the outside looking in, which is that we are truly alone in this vast Universe. Not just us on planet Earth, or us as a species of humans, but us individuals, the you that is the you and the I that is the I.

When I allow myself to feel my separation, my I, as a resolute, hard, undissolvable point of existence, when I have reduced myself back to the core of my being, then I can also, in that moment of great spiritual loneliness, be open to there being a life force, a being that exists beyond me, and before me, and around me, and then with me, and then in me.

Whether I come hotter or cooler to that final step, there is a shadow side of my yearning for love, which is my experience of loneliness. When I don't run from that aloneness, that separation, or deny that it is there, but I just be with it fully and completely, it allows me to

experience the love that is also always there, behind it, and underneath it, and in it. The love is within the very fabric of the loneliness itself.



Climbing a mountain is a bad analogy for the spiritual journey because it implies an enormous number of steps and an end point at the top. But it might only need two steps to be where you need to be, including at your 'summit', and in fact there really is no end point to any of this.

Likewise, describing the 'I' as a drop is another bad analogy because it implies simplicity and singularity but we are not simple at all, we are full of complexities and we are not singular.

So now that we've established that they are bad analogies, clearly inadequate to the task at hand, I am going to run with them, and stretch them to their limits. I hope it might tie some things together from earlier, and give some more to what we've just been talking about too.

Whatever your home base constitution might be, let's say you were journeying in the Bearlands. Working on your inner peace by releasing tension and resistance, practicing surrender, feeling your knots and, hopefully, some softening of those Bearish knots in your neck and bowel, remembering to chew on thoughts like *'as I am'* or even *'I am yours'*.

For all that it's not really like that, let's make you into just a drop and so here, in the Bearlands, the drop of you could be like actual water, cool and damp, in its most yielding and Yin of all forms.

Drops don't climb mountains, they flow down them so, stretching the analogy, your summit in the Bearlands would be at the very bottom of a lake, or in the deepest trench of an Ocean. The place where you could be the most still, as if you were asleep, with no effort, no trying, no striving, no becoming.

As it happens, this is a preview, because I am soon going to finish this book in the Bearlands and, also as it happens, in that last section there won't be any final steps to unfold in the practice of surrender, because we've covered them already, actually very early on, when I talked about relaxing being like the feeling of falling asleep, which you are already a master of doing, and then your tiredness, and your heaviness, being the dark friend that shows you where to go next and the very best way to let go, so long as you don't fight it...

Then the last step, after starting with at least one foot on *'as I am'*, is to surrender yourself fully to what is, to life, to love, and then the final step, to allow the feeling, or the thought to arise, if it possibly can, that is the point of ultimate surrender, which is that *'I am yours'*.

The merging into oneness through the path of surrender is where the idea of the drop came from in the first place, because the surrender of the self is so very like being a drop that dissolves into an ocean of peace and love. Then there is no more I and you, no more separation, there is only us, and this.



Now let's enter the terrain of the Tiger and turn the heat up on our little drop. Heat from the meeting of two rivers in our lower right abdomen and heat from the base of our spine. The bright heat of our survival energy, our sexual energy, our hunting for love, and then its shadow side, the dark heat of our fear, unresolved inflammations, and unhealed hurts.

So let's say, whatever your constitutional homebase might be, that you are working with your inner Tiger, because you need the healing practice of forgiveness, or because you are just being called to be there, and so you are approaching your inner beast in its lair, maybe tentatively, maybe confidently, but there you are, feeling your dynamic, potent hot and damp energy. Which to keep stretching the drop analogy all the way to its limits, could now be thought of as being like a drop of lava. Molten rock from the core of our being that wants to rise all the way to the top and burst out into the world, like a volcano, changing the

landscape of what is, changing everything it touches. Tigers are scary, lava is a scary thing to imagine too. There is a restless, upward, moving urgency to it, like steam, which is another way to think of our drop in its hottest, dampest form.

The summit, the merging into oneness here is not a dissolving of the self like in the way of where we have just been with that cooler, damper version of ourselves. Our inner Tiger goes in a very different direction, here our life essence concentrates rather than dissolves, our being resonates with a primal energy that stirs our cells to life, there is a force within us that seeks love with a passion and a hunger and, in the being in it, there can be a leap, if we are ready to leap, into oneness with the source of everything, which is love itself.



So now let's say you are working with your inner fire, for any reason, because it is your home base or your hardest place, or because your liver or your lumbar spine cries out to you, or because you know that you cannot find your peace unless and until you deal with your fire.

So you are in Eagle territory and you are bringing the transformative energy of fire to the unit of you, your drop, until it becomes so hot that it can no longer hold its form and it bursts into the tiniest particles of itself. It evaporates, it flies upwards, it joins the warm wind, the divine wind.

When we turn it against ourselves, or others, our fire can be so destructive, so damaging, but it is not bad or evil in its essence. If, through a hero journey, we can learn how to make friends with it, to even come to a place of gratitude for its presence in our being, then it gives us the power to change the part of what's wrong that belongs to us and rise above our burdens to fly free, and be happy. What a fire, what a gift!



If we were just one type of person then we could be one type of drop, and go through one type of journey. But we are not just hot or cool, dry or damp, Yin or Yang, we have all the elements inside us and none of them can be left aside or made to not matter. It can be super helpful to work out your constitution and so know your home base as well as what will surely give you the most challenges but, even if you did know, you still have to go through everything that stands in the way of you getting closer and closer to be at peace, and in love.

Your shadows will show you the way to your light. Nothing can be a better guide. If you are sick of being sick, if you are genuine about becoming well, then you have to go within and feel where you are blocked, feel where it hurts, and be with whichever of the dark friends of fear, fatigue, fire or loneliness are showing you the way to take the steps to heal.

At some point along the healing journey, whoever you are, whatever your constitution is, you will need to let go of resistance and surrender to what is. Do it for healing if nothing else, but you can take it further if you want to. If you see the value of the presence of fatigue in your life, not as an enemy, but the surest guide to inner peace, then you can give into it, all the way, to a dissolving of yourself into an ocean of peace and love.

At some point along the healing journey, whoever you are, whatever your constitution is, you will need to face your fears and step into owning your stuff, all of it. Do it for healing if nothing else, but you can take it further if you want to, and see the value of the presence of this great dark friend in your life, not as an enemy, but the surest guide to finding what you deeply need and crave, which is to be safe and to survive yes, but not only that, because it can also show you the way to love and passion and purpose.

And at some point along the journey, whoever you are, whatever your constitution is, you will need to walk through fire. Do it for healing if nothing else, to release the stuck and destructive energy that burns within, but you can take it further if you want to. If you see the value of its presence in your life and can stop fighting and judging it, and even become friends with it, then you can take it all the way and turn it into a spiritual practice to evaporate the drop of 'you' to fly in the freedom of the divine.

And now we come to the heart of the matter, in this section, and on this subject, and where I have been leading with all of this. Which is that whoever you are, and whatever your constitution is, if you will be on a true healing journey then at some time you will need to go into a part of yourself that is so cool, and so dry, that it could be compared to being like a drop of ice.

Now we are especially in the right place to be at the summit of a mountain. The world stretched out around us as far as we can see but, in the darkest part of this aspect of our being, we are utterly alone. Or to now stretch and break the analogy one last time, we can send our drop, our conscious separate being, into the coldest, driest, darkest deep space, where there is as much of nothing as we could possibly imagine, except for our separate selves.

However watery, or fiery, or airy we are by nature, however we do our healing and growing along the way, at some point we are going to have to go into the cold and dark on this, there's just no other way around it sorry. The healing journey requires us to travel through our shadow-lands, all of them, and the great dark friend of loneliness, in its full shadow state, is just as challenging as fear, fire or fatigue to be with, but in a very different way to anything else.

I am sure you are seeing what we all see in our young. The growing pattern of being connected via technologies, all the time, to vast numbers of others. Everyone fears loneliness. We don't necessarily fear being alone, many of us can enjoy the peace of solitude immensely, but the worst punishment we give to the worst offenders is to put them into solitary confinement, in other words to cause them to feel lonely.

Loneliness is frightful, young people who instinctively know that they need to make connections, friendships, beyond their immediate family circle are the most vulnerable to it. Isolation and loneliness can feel like a fate worse than death to a teenager. But being in constant contact with other people without there being a path that leads to love is never going to heal loneliness.

Imagine holding a piece of melting ice in your hand. It is very hard to hold and if you do hold it in one place then it will start to burn in a strange way. If you hold it still it will burn, if you allow it to move then it will try to slip away. Loneliness, the feeling of separation, is like that too. It is very hard to hold and to be with. It slips away from us, we find ways to be distracted, to feel connected even if the connection is not heartfelt or nourishing in any way that heals our ache for love. Or if we do hold fast to our loneliness, as for example happens when someone we dearly do love passes away from us, then it can make us suffer so terribly that we can feel smashed into nothing. Grief is another side of this shadow, as is loss, as is sadness itself. These are just words for feelings, not the feelings themselves, but I pick out loneliness as the one to best represent what I am trying to say, because if we can own the

loneliness, really own it as belonging to us, as a part of us, then we have a chance for the healing that it can bring us to.

I was talking about final steps in the practice of compassion a little earlier and want to circle back to them now, in this context. This very much lies in the path of this beautiful idea of following the centre of your essence. Thinking of yourself as a being that has a conscious and a subconscious and that it is the subconscious where you feel things and your conscious where you think about things. When we do a spiritual practice we are moving from being centred in our heads, our conscious thoughts, into coming more into our body, our feeling states. When we practice compassion in the form of willing ourselves to be soft, rather than hard, then we will very soon feel how there is a centre of energy in our body, one that moves and flows and comes up to the blocks that stop it from being in the highest frequencies of love and peace.

If you go deeply into this, and I hope that for your own personal healing, and therefore for our collective healing, that it will be when you go deeply into this, I am quite sure that there will come a time when you feel yourself to be a very defined point of being that has no edges anymore. You will have let go of the identity of your conscious mind as this or that person with this or that age, culture, ideas, opinions etc. and will just be your much more raw, natural essential self, a being. I hope that there will be many dissolvings, eruptions, flights and all other gorgeous manifestations of your spirit being one with what is, but I can also predict that there will also be some moments of intense separation, and they can feel as cold and lonely as ice.

We are not in love, not yet. Maybe some of us are, some of the time, but as a species, as a collective, we are deeply far from love, and peace too. People have never been as connected together in any time of human history but it is skin deep, rooted in identity rather than spirit, and there is actually more loneliness and feelings of separation than ever before.

What exists in the collective belongs to us too. Of course I cannot know for sure that you will have to face this great dark friend in your hero journey of healing, but I think it is highly likely that you will. If you are doing your spiritual practice, in any territory, in any way, there will very likely be a point where you feel the ache in your heart that is not yet in the love that it so deeply needs. When you feel this, please, please, do not turn away from it, in the millions of ways that we can, nor grip it so tight that it burns you either, in all the ways we can get stuck in wrestling with our difficult feelings.

Be with the ache with compassion, softly. Don't harden against yourself. Have mercy on yourself for feeling lonely, or out of love, or even hungry for love. It is not a bad hunger if you don't fight against it. In fact, spiritually, that hunger for love is one of the best, fastest and most sure ways to connect to the divine. There is a great love around us, and in us, all the time, but when we are lonely we cannot feel it. Loneliness is the shadow side of love, it

feels like everything that love is not, but it is showing us the way to love better than any other guide ever could. So long as we can be with it, and listen to it.

How do you listen to loneliness? The same way you listen to your heart. Or be with any of the dark friends. You just choose not to fight. You choose to accept. You choose to be soft instead of hard, to surrender instead of resist, to even be thankful rather than resentful to it.

Any person, any seeker after truth, who follows a contemplative path, who meditates, or prays, or who in any way goes deeply within will eventually come to this place. Even if they are a deeply and profoundly loving being who feels an immense amount of connection to the divine, to the spark of life that exists everywhere, they will still at some point come to a place of feeling utterly and completely alone.

Why? Because everything that is the opposite of love shows us what love is. Because we have a shadow side that we must be with in order to be in our light. Because none of us can be in the love all the time, we just can't. We fall, we have a crisis of faith, we lose ourselves, or at least we lose another layer of ourselves, because journeying towards love, and oneness, has a lot of layers to lose. So not if but when, you too reach the summit of this feeling, I encourage you to know that you are not alone, that many others have felt what you feel and are feeling what you feel right now.

There are two thoughts I want to give to you, like little seeds they are and, if you will accept them, then I hope that they will be there to sprout when you need them! The first is to remember pairing. *"Remember the pairs!"* I call out again to your retreating back as you inevitably, and quite rightly, leave being in my company to climb your personal mountain. Pairing can make such a world of difference to not get stuck in the one place where you are most stuck, and there will be such a place, and you will get to know it well, and if you are anything like me, you will resist it and try to fix it and do all kinds of things that don't help, even if you manage to convince yourself that they will. Wherever you get stuck in the centre of you, don't harden yourself there, just stay soft, and open, and for sure you will feel another part of your subconscious, your body, showing you where to put your other foot, so you can move forwards again, and become unstuck!

The second thought is just to say to hold the ice of your separate being gently, not hard, just softly. Being willing to hold it will crack you open some more. There is a love that is trying to penetrate the shell around our hearts, to open them up completely. That love is in us, in every sense of the word it is us, but it is something far greater, far beyond what our minds can comprehend, and it is still there, around us and in us, even when we are in the darkest of the dark places we can go.



The Long Journey

If the dark friend of loneliness is the hardest one for you to be with, and so the one you need to be with the most. Or if your heart, your upper left belly or your thoracic spine just call you in to feel them, presumably because they hurt, or you believe you are an EB, or at least fit the description, then you are going to need to spend time in the Elephant-Butterfly world and, as much as this is a book about spiritual practice, the herbalist in me just must make a couple of suggestions for provisions for your journey.

Namely, firstly, if you are suffering then use herbs to help! Herbs are the people's medicine. They belong to us all, they will always be legally available to us and I think we will always want to use them in different ways. Herbs are very similar to food and, like the food we have always grown or gathered, we aren't ever going to stop needing and wanting the good things that come from planet Earth, our only home. There are many great herbs that fit the category of being warming and nourishing for cool, dry depletion. Three of my most favourite pairs are Withania (popularly known as Ashwagandha) and Panax Ginseng; Damiana leaf and Oatstraw; Valerian root and Cramp bark.

Withania and Ginseng, combined into capsules, is the product I prescribe more than any other single remedy from my whole dispensary. Not because I see more EBs than other constitutions, it is all about even in that regard, but because people become so tired and depleted when they have been unwell for a long time or in stress for a long time, which is

the case for a great many of us. St John's wort is the third truly great tonic herb but Withania and Ginseng are the other two of the three best nourishing, strengthening tonic herbs on Earth. They might take up to a week to be felt, they are not stimulating, they are slow to act, but they help people to be more resilient and to find the strength to look after themselves and take the steps they need to be on their healing journey, however much it may be working on the physical, or the spiritual.

Oatstraw and Damiana leaves don't have the deep accumulative tonic actions of Withania and Ginseng roots, but their actions can be felt right away and they are gentle, soft and pleasant tasting, easy to take and use in either a tea or a tincture.

Valerian's warming, nourishing, relaxing action can be an extraordinary ally for the person who is deep in depletion. They are not resting well, not sleeping well, they are holding too much tension. I have two different kinds of capsules of Valerian root that I get made up for the clinic, one combined with Hops flowers, and the other with Kava root, so I use a lot of it that way, but if someone is in a bad way with the kind of strung out tension that causes breakdowns and painful physical symptoms in the nervous system, the combination of Valerian and Cramp bark can be immediately effective if it is taken in strong enough doses, and if it is taken often enough to be felt right away. It is important that a remedy like Valerian and Cramp bark quickly earns a person's trust. They are forming their relationship with the herbs in a time of crisis and any initial placebo effect will shortly become useless. The patient needs to be able to feel the presence of a pair like this as something that has a palpable effect from the beginning. Again, getting that part right is usually all about the dose and the frequency. They will always have a strong enough action if the person takes enough of them, often enough!

I mentioned this earlier so I will just touch on it briefly here which is to say that, of all the different constitutions, the Elephant-Butterfly finds it the hardest to make friends with fear, to practice forgiveness, and to be in their cleansing quadrant. How much a person is willing to even begin to look at any of that is entirely up to where they are at on their journey already but, at the very least, giving some agents to support physical cleansing will often go some way to help, even including with the emotional journey of letting go...

The other two prescriptions that I almost invariably give to my actual EB patients, but would be appropriate for anyone who was deep in the cool and dry of their own Elephant-Butterfly world, is gentle and sustained exercise and some kind of creative expression through their wings, their hands. Gentle exercise is usually happening anyway, of all the constitutions the EBs are most likely to be doing this already. However, the therapy of doing something pointless with your hands, something that is not to help others, not for fame or fortune, not in fact for achieving anything in the usual sense of the word, can be a much harder idea to get across, but it can make or break whether a person might get better. I sometimes use the analogy that their inner butterfly has been pinned in a basement, or even a dungeon, deep

within, it is trapped there, no freedom, because they have become all Elephant. Working endlessly towards tangible goals but with no inner peace.

The best way to release the butterfly is by doing something with their hands that allows the peace to come back by itself. Most EBs have at least one time in their past of doing some kind of art or craft, or music, or writing. It was something that they did purely because they wanted to and it used to give them joy and peace. Sometimes it can be as simple as just reminding people to remember something that they used to know and trust. Then it becomes not such a hard idea to get across, because their earlier self remembers the happiness and peace they used to have doing something that wasn't always about getting somewhere. But going back to an old pastime or making a new habit is no small matter. There can be many obstacles in the way. People can be more afraid of their light than their dark. It can take a lot of courage to release yourself from bondage and reclaim your freedom. I try to make recommendations in this sphere very achievable and practical within the structure of what is usually a busy life. Whatever I might suggest must not be too hard, or in any way unreasonable. Even so, however necessary, however effective it would be and however doable you can make it, you cannot take a single step for another person.

Incidentally, and you may have wondered this yourself already, how can a person be an elephant, and a butterfly, at the same time? It is a curious, and unlikely proposition and, when I announce the accolade, it usually gets a wry smile with the beginning of a question in the eyes. Am I joking and, what did I just say?

I go on to say something about how I will send them some reading that they can get into as far as the wish because it is interesting, and useful, to learn about your nature. I say how it's a very old knowledge and that the roots of it come from at least the time of the Ancient Greeks and the Egyptians before them, and how in a nutshell it means that they have the strength of an Elephant with the sensitivity of a Butterfly.



That is usually the point that I see a glimmer of recognition in their eyes. Yes, that's it, it is exactly like that. That summarises something into a nutshell that they have felt for a long time, but have not been able to vocalise, especially when they see mostly just one side of their nature reflected in their relationships but not the complexity of the both sides, that are actually equally important as each other, that lie within. .

The Darkest Friend?

Shortly, at the end of this chapter into EB world we'll do one last practice on Compassion together before we go into the Bearlands, which will then be the very last section in this book, which I am sad about coming to an end, especially because of how much joy I have had in unpacking and sharing all of this, over this last long while of writing in every spare moment!

Hello sadness my old friend. It is not such a terribly bad feeling to be sad, at least when it is in its safe container within the heart. This is a slower moving dark friend than the others, it can linger much longer, but just like the other dark friends, the fear, fire and fatigue, when they are running wild and consuming every thought, they are impossible to be with as a friend, and it is only when they are only there in a more gentle form, contained closer to their centres, that I can be near to them in a way that lets me feel and receive their gifts and their guidance.

The sadness I feel in ending something I have loved to do is the sweetest. It shows me what it meant to me. The sadness in knowing I will not see someone again, or that what we once had together is forever gone, can be so piercing that it takes my breath away, but I can feel that it is not trying to hurt me, and if I can find the way to be with it, even with the tiniest step towards it rather than away, and even if it temporarily swells up when I do that, if I stay with the intensity of the grief, or the loss, I can feel my heart open, wider and wider, until the tears I am crying could turn into laughter in a heartbeat, and I am, once again, cracked.

It is not easy for me to find the courage to face my sadness, or my grief, or my loneliness. Even if I know very well that what I have been sharing with you here works, and works each and every time I do it, without fail, I still feel like a baby taking its first steps, I still fail and fall, I still need to encourage myself to be of good heart, to not be so frightened of feeling so bad, to just try this other way, this old way, one more time, try again, to lean into the hurt rather than fight it, or run from it, and then the healing that I so deeply need and crave begins again at last.

I have said the same thing in different ways earlier and if then, or now, any part of you feels some sense of incredulity that you have been taking instruction from a baby then I understand exactly how you feel, I have no defence whatsoever, and all I can say is that I share your wonder at it too.

Put in a softer way, as a journeyman who has not arrived at the destination he describes to his fellow travellers, whose only qualification to speak is that he is walking his talk, or put more bluntly, that here is a baby who is only learning to walk but still has a lot to say about it, I just have a little more to share with you on these subjects that have so occupied my interest and attention for so long, including a question that often comes up for me, namely which is the darkest of the dark friends?

The dark friend of fatigue, tiredness, defeat, or whatever name we give to that most heavy, consciousness crushing feeling that surely comes to us all at least once a day, seems like the easiest of the four from one point of view. We sleep, we all eventually go to sleep. We stop fighting fatigue, and its end point of sleep, because we'd get sick, we'd go mad and we'd die if we didn't. It must overcome us with its blanket of oblivion, regularly, so surely we are on at



least close terms if not good terms.

Maybe, maybe not. It could be easy to be with, it should be easy, but really it's not, not for most of us. Yes, we can say that we do finally succumb to its force through the little death of sleep, and then one day the long sleep that we don't wake up from, but how much do we fight it, and resist it, up until those points? In other words, how much does our resistance to this dark friend keep us from our inner peace and happiness in our day to day existence and being?

Perhaps it is the darkest of the dark friends. No one but you can know how you feel, no one but you can know how much you push against what is happening, how you are, and where you are at, and how much you are ever in the flow of this, *'as I am'*, as you are.

So how about the great dark friend of fear, worry, anxiety, or whatever names we give to that roiling, bubbling, disturbing feeling that cannot ever be completely banished, or we would not look both ways when we crossed the road, or bother to pay our bills, or worry about taking care of anything or anyone, including ourselves. Surely when it is in its emerging, ascendant state, when we have physical symptoms of anxiety, when our minds are flooded with its thoughts, there could not be a harder, darker, more difficult friend to be with? But that is not the case for most people most of the time. It must be there at some level, but if there is no danger to avoid, if things are stable and safe, it can just sit down in the basement of some mild and tolerable existential angst. I see there is a common ground to any dark and difficult feeling that we need to face to be on a hero journey which is that the currency of courage is required to take a single step forwards.

If we are too frightened by the initial increase of intensity that comes when we don't deny, or fight, or run from any bad feeling then we cannot move forwards, not even by a step. So it could be the darkest of the dark friends, only you could possibly answer if it is the hardest one for you to be with. Oh, how my heart goes out to the patient who comes in with anxiety as one of their presenting concerns. I know how they feel. When my own inner Tiger is rushing and running amok within me, disturbing my heart and stomach and my every thought and feeling, I am reminded yet again of its ferocity and how nothing matters more

than to find the right way to come back to the place where it watches over me, rather than so disturbs my peace.

I said earlier that fire, our anger, frustration, resentment, shame and guilt, must surely be the hardest of the dark friends to be with. How can we possibly be friends with something that burns us? It seems that way, it is that way, but is it actually any harder to be with fire than with fear? Or even the cooler companions and the great challenges they bring. In dwelling on my own inner fire, seeing and feeling the great gift of happiness and freedom it gives me in its light state but also seeing and feeling the terrible damage it does in its shadow form, I understand how woven-in its energy can be to that same resistance that keeps me from my inner peace. How can I have peace if I am fired up against something that I cannot change? If resentment and resistance are the obstacles to peace then maybe my question about which is the darkest of the dark friends should be which is harder to live with, not being at peace or not being in love? Maybe it's not a bad question to ask, but isn't it impossible to answer, because how can we be truly happy unless we have both?

Have you ever felt so lonely you could die? Have you ever been grief-stricken? Have you ever cried so hard for your loss that the snot is pouring out of your nose and you can't see for the tears or catch your breath for the sobs? I have, and I think most people have at some time too. When we are in the depths of sadness it feels like drowning and surely there, right there, must be the darkest of the dark friends to be with. If it feels like it can literally kill you, that your heart cannot take any more, that you are actually going to die from how bad you feel, then I don't see how it could be possible to feel any worse.

Actually that's not true. No matter how bad things are, they can always get worse. Isn't that just such an awful thing to be true? However deeply dark a question and subject it is, I don't think it is in the least bit unhealthy to dwell on it. Any more than it is unhealthy to think about death. No one celebrates life more than a person who has gone through a near-death experience. The closer we acquaint ourselves with our shadow selves the further we can go in finding our light and living in it.

I think that all these dark energies are difficult to be with at any level of intensity above 0.1 out of 10 and if they get anywhere near to 10 then they are extraordinarily difficult to be with. I know I touched on this earlier, somewhere again in the darkest of the dark shadow-lands, how anyone, no matter who they are, who feels bad enough for long enough will eventually fall into despair and wish that their life was over. The great lie that the mind can very quickly convince itself of is that the bad feelings will never pass. That is not true, but it is incredibly hard to not believe it when you feel bad enough for long enough.

Whichever it is of fatigue, fear, fire or loneliness that is in ascendancy, or whatever combination of them is stripping your inner house of all its furniture, one of the hardest parts of dealing with any kind of sickness, emotional or physical, is the aloneness that it brings. You know, you just know, that no one can feel what you are feeling. Even the people

that love and care for you the most have their own lives to live. Most of us do not come to the point of '*I own me*' gently and gracefully. We come to it from the cold, hard realisation that our suffering belongs to us and that no one can fix it for us, or take it from us.

If we are experiencing any kind of chronic suffering that is not resolving itself, and if we will not be filled with bitterness and resentment, and if we will not fall into despair and hopelessness, then we must go on the great hero journey of healing. Along the way, we just have to work with all four of our dark friends. However much of a mere baby, or just a journeyman I am to be sharing this with you I can assure you I didn't make the rules and really what I am doing here is just trying to get an accurate read on the rulebook!

Being with the dark friends is not easy. They are all hard, they are all dark, but they are not the enemy. In fact they are literally the best guides we have for how to get to where we need to go and to have what we most want, which is health, which is happiness, which is peace and love.

Along the way, at some point sooner or later, we must face the great dark friend of our sadness, and loss, and grief and loneliness. It is not our enemy. It is a cold, hard fact that we are alone in being the only one who can feel what we feel. No one but ourselves can own who we are. We belong to ourselves fully and completely, nothing else. We own nothing else, only this being, this body, these feelings, and this journey through life.

Compassion is required for the healing journey. However sick we are, however broken, however much more in the shadows than the light, we simply must practice being merciful, and compassionate towards ourselves. It is a prerequisite for the possibility of forgiveness, without which you cannot tend to the unhealed hurts of the inner being.

Let's do a final practice of compassion together. I don't want to say too much about it, I have already said everything I know as well as I could. Just a few reminders of the key points to aid the memory that can only be strengthened through repetition and practice.

Very shortly or whenever it next suits you best, take a moment to sit or lie down comfortably and set the intention for healing, for your peace and happiness, to practice compassion along with whatever other steps come to you as you do.

When you are ready, just easily bring your attention inwards by closing your eyes, taking a breath or two, following your heart beat if you like that step, or just easily and naturally bringing your awareness into your subconscious, your body, which is where you feel, especially in your chest, your belly and your spine.

At any time, giving your mind the cues to align itself into the energy of compassion with the sweet, simple, beautiful nutshell of '*soft, centred and now*'. You can go back around any one or two or all three of these words many times if they will help your practice, or just once, there are no rules to this, just a journey that unfolds differently every time you step into it, but will still become familiar, and much easier, with practice.

As you go within, and have taken two or more steps so that you are connecting to your inner spirit, the life force that flows around you, you will surely find that the centre of your awareness shifts from one place to another and back again, especially where there are any blocks or obstacles to your health and happiness. It may help to identify where you are in the maps of your body to better understand what the block may be that your attention is being drawn towards, but there is no requirement to go into your thoughts to identify anything. You can if you wish but you can equally just go with the flow and, in a sense, follow the leader of your own innate intelligence as it shows you its own inner journey to seek your greater good, your health, your harmony, your peace and your love.

At some point, you may feel yourself coming to a summit of any of the inner mountains that we climb on our way. Again, it may help to remember some of the learning and practices that you have been picking up along the way with me, to better know here is the place to fully surrender, *'I am yours'*, or here is the place to ask for forgiveness, *'Please forgive me'*, or here is the place to wish for thanks and hope to catch its wave, *'Thank you'*, or here is the place to feel yourself, as solitary and separate as it is possible for a person to feel.

You are face to face and in the depths with your great dark friend of loneliness. The hardness that separates you is what is keeping you also separate from love. You may feel the ache of it if you allow yourself to open to it fully. If you do not turn from it, if you go into it passionately, all in on it, then there is a love that can come to you from this place at the summit of our separation. It is only our own hardness, our own judgement, our own inability to forgive or be forgiven that is keeping us from it. All we can do is open the window, we cannot invite the breeze, but we can open the window and be patient, and keep practicing.





The Bearlands

My most heartfelt welcome to the Bearlands!

This is the final chapter of this book and that is no accident, everything has been leading up to here. The Bearlands are the riverlands. They are like water, cool and damp, Yin and yielding. They show us the way to the great spiritual practice of surrender, they are how we find our way to the ocean of peace. Whoever you are, whatever constitution you are, if you are on a hero journey of healing, then you must travel in these lands many times, many many times. They must become like a home for you, a safe place, a certain place to be.

I don't have any new or final steps to share with you but I very much still want to spend a little time with you here, one last time. Truly, I would have been happy to have started here, stayed here for the whole of what I had to say and why I wanted to say it, and then finished here too. If all I could have achieved by writing any of this was to help encourage you, in any way, to simply step into your Bearlands, into the river of your own energy, and let it take you to where you needed to go, then we could have achieved great healing, great happiness!

Healing requires an enormous amount of energy! When an animal gets sick or wounded and lies very still it knows, without having been told, that the best way, the fastest way, and often the only way that it will get better is if it surrenders to the great force that is telling it to lie still.

When there is a sickness or a wound to overcome, aside from whatever baseline resources are needed for the most essential life support systems, every portion of our available life-energy wants to go into healing that sickness or wound.

We are more clever than animals, but we are not necessarily wiser. It takes a critical illness or injury for us to lie still. We push ourselves to keep going and, as a consequence, a great many wounds and illnesses that could have been resolved, that should have healed, become chronic, dug-in, and seemingly incurable.

Everyone has heard the phrase '*rest is the best medicine*'. We know it is true but, unless we are gravely unwell, or we are guiding our children, we hardly ever use the knowledge. I'm sorry if this is pushing a button for you, because it is not a theory in your case but you have an illness or a wound that has not healed, and you know that you have pushed through it many times, even when your body, your nature was begging you to rest.

You will have had reasons that you needed to push against your own nature, and those reasons will have been so compelling that you will have felt you didn't have a choice. We get commitments and responsibilities, we don't want to give in to our illness, we want to rise above it, and keep going. Also don't forget that virtually the entirety of our modern health system is based on the approach of using drugs to suppress symptoms so that people can keep going without needing to address the causes of why they got sick in the first place.

'I own me' is a huge step for any person, for all of us. It is a huge evolution of awareness to be willing to take responsibility for our bodies, for how we feel, and for how we are. This includes giving ourselves the freedom, and the love, to take care of ourselves and to rest when we need to, even if that means putting ourselves first sometimes.

I am afraid that, no matter how many times I may have said it already, that I have not said it to you enough, or well enough, and am now running out of time to convince you, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that it is not wrong to surrender to the intelligence of your body. It is not wrong, or weak, or cowardly, to let go and lie down and just be with your ache, your illness, or your wounds, like an animal, quietly being with what is. Not fighting it, not taking chemicals to stop feeling bad day after day, at least not unless you are in a storm that you cannot lie still within, not resisting what it is that your body and your life have been showing you.

Nature is not trying to hurt you, your body is not trying to hurt you. There is a force in Nature, and it exists in your body as much as it does anywhere else in any of Nature, that simply loves you. Love in the sense that it only wants what is for your greater good. It wants you to be happy, and healthy, and in no way to be suffering any kind of pain whatsoever.

If I thought that I, or anyone, could simply be like an animal and lie down and surrender to the compelling message of our healing intelligence to rest until we were better then that is all I would have to say. No books needed in that case, just a line or two, and whilst none of

us will live forever we could at least live more or less happily ever after until we died. Curiously, sometimes sadly and certainly maddeningly, we are not animals, we are humans with this thing called a mind attached to our animal bodies, and this mind of ours needs a lot of navigating and managing to help it to work *with* our healing process rather than against it!

So, we have needed to talk about the nature of the mind, because condemning it, or trying to get rid of it, is never going to work. If we want to make progress and journey forwards here, then we have to understand our minds, and work with them rather than against them.

I mentioned this five thousand years old saying earlier and want to come back to it now, because it is enormously deep, and incredibly useful if we can just get our heads and hearts around it.

'The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master'

I want to do a thought experiment with you around this saying, this great truth. I want you to really imagine, and go into this thought, as deeply and strongly as you can, that you are not your mind. That your mind is your servant, and a wonderful servant too, one that you love and appreciate and do not wish to harm or damage in any way, but that you also wish to be an obedient servant!

In a moment, I want you to try telling your mind to listen, completely listen, to how you feel. Then allow yourself to feel, that you, the 'you' that is your inner spirit, your healing intelligence, your highest self, whatever you would like to call it, or however you would like to think of it, is a force of feeling that exists, at all times, inside your body, which is your subconscious being.

The centre of your being shifts and moves, its centre is not based on one physical place but rather it is where you feel anything the most. In this thought experiment I am asking you to instruct your mind to be nothing more than a listener, an observer. No judgement, no resistance, no hardening, no reaction of any kind is required.

When, rather than if, you find yourself being pulled back into thinking, probably about what it is that you are feeling, if not some stray thought that flies in, as thoughts do, then you reprimand your servant with the utmost gentleness, because it is a wonderful servant that only wants to please you and to serve you well, so you tell it to do its job, which right now is to do nothing but allow you to feel, as fully as you can, everything that there is to feel, whatever there is to feel within your body, your subconscious.

What you can most feel, at any moment of the eternal now, is a reflection of where your spirit is at this very moment. There are many, many colours and tones and facets of our inner selves, it will not be one thing, or if it is then it will not remain that way for long, because our inner spirit is a part of something vast, it is a part of something that has no limits, but there are blocks and obstacles and disharmonies in the way of it flowing freely, and so you will be brought to those. That's ok, and it is to be expected, but what we are

coming to here is the great practice of surrender, where you don't try to change anything, you accept everything that is, in just the moment of time that is now, unconditionally, even lovingly, and so you are in the flow of as I am, with no resistance to it.

What I am asking you to do is both absurdly simple and, at the same time, fiendishly difficult! The experiment is to run this great, old truth around yourself, *'The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master'*, trying to think it in your body and feel it in your mind in order to make it real, and personal.

By the way, there is no point in trying to rebel against 'the master', even if you seem to be winning, by practicing some form of mind control, fighting it will only make it stronger and just more of a judgemental tyrant in the long run. This is the path of surrender. You don't fight, you don't try to trick yourself into pretending to give up when in fact you were just waiting to ambush yourself at the first chance you get!

Surrender is unconditional, or it's not surrender. You are giving up fighting, giving up trying to control how you feel, or change how you feel, in any way whatsoever.

For just this moment of the practice, you decide I am not my mind, my mind is my servant, what I am is what I feel in my body. This is the true me, the real me, I own me and I am this, this is me, *as I am*.

Please have a go at this now, or soon.



One last time, how I would love to be able to ask you in person how you got on! Did you feel anything, was it difficult, what were your obstacles, what did you experience? Perhaps these matters could be easy and instinctive for some but, for me, and I am quite sure the great majority of us, they are not easy or instinctive, they need thought and time, and above all practice to make sense, to be real, and to be truly helpful!

Of course, however you responded, we both know that I would want you to keep trying, and that I would encourage you to keep practicing with any of the steps or methods that you were called to, either by your body's intelligence, or your own understanding of what most needs attention.

This matter of the mind as the servant, and not the master, is such a deep one. I don't personally feel I will ever really get to the bottom of it. My whole identity, whom I perceive myself to be, and so how I move in the world is so woven into the construction of my mind that there has never been a point, and I don't expect there ever will, where it's a done deal and I don't need to be on the lookout for the '*terrible master*' part coming back around to cause me some more mischief, endless mischief!

But don't get me wrong, I am not anti-mind, I love what we can do with our minds, so much! Look at this right now, for example, you are reading my mind and, I hope, understanding what you read, because I am using words that our minds have agreed mean certain things. I don't want to get rid of my mind any more than I want to get rid of my hands, but I do truly want to be at peace, and in love, and I can see beyond any shadow of a doubt that the greatest obstacle to that has got nothing to do with the state of the world and everything to do with what belongs to me, and especially, firstly and foremostly, what belongs to my mind.

A great part of the learning journey in this particular area for me personally is the understanding that fighting, or resisting, or in any way trying to put my mind down does no good to me and nothing but harm to what I strive for. I must be loving to my mind, not angry with it. If I beat it with criticisms and recriminations, if I judge it and myself harshly and hurtfully, it does nothing to help me to heal, or find peace, or be in love.

I have to start with the right first step here or everything goes in the wrong direction from the beginning. My mind is not my enemy, it is my servant. Moreover it is a wonderful servant. It truly loves to serve me. If I give it tasks to do that it can accomplish well then it feels wonderful and it makes me feel wonderful too. If I berate it, or make it feel stupid then it just feels terrible and of course it makes me feel the same way. We are woven in together now, our relationship is so close that it is until death do us part!

My mind helps me and it wants to serve me with great love and dedication so, when the time for its work is over, but it is not yet time for sleep then I am delighted to reward my mind and feed it with the company and stories of others, or with wonderful stories in print and film, or with the kind of music that my mind can simply enjoy without any need for it to labour further.

I am not my mind, and you are not your mind. It is easy for me to say this, and perhaps the idea of it is not so challenging or difficult, but it is still fiendishly difficult to stop identifying with my mind as the core of my identity, and to understand, more than understand, to feel and live with the much deeper reality, which is that the true core of my identity is something that I came into this world with when I was born, something that existed before my mind came into being, something that carries the essence of the whole ocean in its tiny little drop.



Cave Thoughts

I hope you will get interested, or more interested, in the constitutions and, if you don't know already, will try to work yourself out as well as try to work out the people who are close to you, your family, your friends, your co-workers. There is an introductory article to working it out in the constitutional medicine section of my website and then a whole book called constitutional complexity that goes into a lot more detail about it all.

I do understand that I am guilty of having an anticipation that is common to most enthusiasts, which is that the subject that I love is one that others will love too, and I do know that this may not be the case. With my patients, after I meet with them, I write down which of the four constitutions they are in their welcome email template with an invitation to read further by clicking a link, and if it never goes any further then that is totally fine.

What I have noticed though is that, when people do take it further and start seeing themselves through the lens of their constitutional nature, it clearly opens them up to a much deeper understanding. For themselves first of all, but then it seems it often spreads to

others too. Understanding is powerful, it can release judgement, it leads to insights, and the acceptance that comes with understanding can be profoundly healing.

Every person, without exception, by the age of 18, eventually fits into one of the four constitutions. If they remain hotter and damper then they are a Tiger, if they shift over to be hotter and dryer then they are an Eagle, if they swing right around to be both cooler and dryer then they are an Elephant-Butterfly and if they are cooler and damper then they are a Bear.

Each constitution has its patterns, its quirks, its identifying characteristics. The more you look the more you will see. It is not better to be one constitution or another but it is certainly very different. All four constitutions need to take care of their nutrition and their cleansing, their rest and their activation. They have to keep them in balance, including to not do too much of one at the expense of another.

All four constitutions need to deal with the messy and complicated business of being human by coming to some kind of terms with the fact of their having a shadow side. Some of the words we use for these parts of ourselves are fear, fire, loneliness and fatigue but, whatever we call them, and whoever we are, there is surely no escaping those 'dark friends'. Nonetheless, how we deal with them makes a great deal of difference to how happy, or miserable, we become.

All four constitutions have to go through the shadow-land of getting tired, very regularly. The Bearlands, where sleep and rest eventually come and claim us all, have to be familiar territory to all of us but, and there is such a big but on this! How much we resist our tiredness is how distant we will be from our peace.

Does that matter, if you don't have peace, if you still get a lot done, make a lot of money, achieve a lot of goals? A lot of people don't seem to care that much about peace, they have other priorities, and that is their choice right? Yes, certainly, but I still think peace matters and, however a person is caught in the whirlpool of what they have made their goal or their god, I am sure that somewhere, maybe down deeper than they ever see, is an absolute craving for the sweetness and bliss of peace. Actually, I think a lot of people assume that they will get the peace they are deep down craving when they are dead, and every time they do actually get some peace when they go to sleep the subconscious idea is reinforced that it will come to them eventually, no matter what they do.

I would like to be able to think and say 'that's ok', but is it really? Look at the state of our world, a world that is most clearly not at peace. It's just abysmal how much unnecessary suffering, loneliness and injustice there is. The vast majority of that unnecessary suffering, loneliness and injustice could be completely fixable right now, if we had the peace on Earth that could come if enough of us were to find our inner peace.

Anyway, for now and for the foreseeable future, we can truly do nothing about that except to look after our own tiny drop, our own utterly infinitesimal corner of the Universe. That is the part that we own and that is the part that, here in the Bearlands, we are seeking to bring forwards like a light in a dark place.

If there was a sign for the traveller to the gateway to the Bearlands it could read '*Absurdly simple and fiendishly difficult*'. Look at these four words for emotions, or states of being, side by side: fear, anger, sadness, tiredness. People don't usually think of tiredness as an emotion, but it is. People don't think of water as having a taste either, but it does.

Surrender is unique out of the four spiritual practices we have been talking about this whole time. I know, I truly know, how fiendishly difficult it can be to stop resisting and just let go. It requires a trust and a wisdom that goes far beyond anything my mind can conjure or create and the only way I could even think of, to try to convey to you what I understand it requires, is to ask you to think about how you felt when you were going to sleep!

I still don't have a better method, by the way, and now, because this is my last chance to give you a tour of the Bearlands, I want to bring you again back to this fiendishly difficult and absurdly simple matter by bringing in a second thought experiment to hopefully put a little light into another dark, damp and murky corner of the Bear cave.

This one is to ask you, in just a few moments, to do an internal 'scan' to feel where you are holding the most tension or tiredness or both in your body right now and then to see if you can do something that is, yes, both fiendishly difficult and, at the same time, absurdly simple. Step one, scan within with the intention to feel where you are holding the most tension or tiredness or both. Step two, just be with it as if you were holding the most delicate, precious, vulnerable part of yourself where any kind of movement, a noise, a reaction, a resistance, would damage what you were with.

Don't hold your breath literally but do hold it metaphorically. Don't move, don't try to change anything, certainly don't try to fix it, just be with it, completely, for as long as you can, which is all a moment in time is. If you need to think something, just think '*as I am*', to help you not to react, or resist, or do anything. Are you willing to give it a try, now or soon? Let's talk some more after that...



Our life force is like a river that flows in us and through us and even somewhat around us. The places that we hold tension and tiredness and resistance are like stones that impede or even dam that river. When we allow ourselves to feel the presence of those stones, they can initially seem bigger, harder, more blocking. When we attune ourselves to the river of life inside us, that same river that constantly seeks harmony, peace, and love, we can much more clearly and strongly feel what is blocking it, what is blocking that which flows within us.

Relaxing, letting go of tension and tiredness, releasing all resistance and surrendering to the flow of peace can be the easiest thing in the world to do. It can be just like falling asleep, completely effortless, blissfully natural and unforced.

So then why can it also be so fiendishly difficult? This is not easy to put into words but I will give it my utmost best because I think this is my last chance to get something pivotally important in all of this across to you! To explain it as best as I can I need to come back to pairing.

I think it can be fiendishly difficult to surrender into peace because of the relationship, the pairing, between our minds and our bodies, our conscious and our subconscious beings.

When the observing 'I', the centre of my conscious awareness, goes within and feels an ache, a pain, a tension, a heaviness, any kind of stone that is blocking the river of my health and wellbeing, then we immediately form a pair. There is I, the observer, and there is the block, the observed.

Even if I do not intend this, even if I do not wish it, or in any way plan it to happen, there is every likelihood that, because the block that I feel is not nice, it is uncomfortable or even hurting me in some way, I resist it. The relationship between my aware conscious self and my subconscious feeling body is not one of peace, it is of resistance, it is of conflict. I do not wish to feel what I feel. I am not merging into oneness with it, I am feeling it, certainly, but there is a separation, and there is a resistance.

It is very easy to say '*be with what is*', but it can be very difficult to practice if we do not really like what it is, at least not in this moment. You can trick your mind, we are masters at tricking our minds, we do it all the time in all kinds of ways, but we cannot trick our bodies.

Our bodies have the raw, mute, unstoppable force of Nature running through them, like a river and, however many stones we might have in the way, the river will find its way to them eventually. The conflict between the mind and the body is one that the mind cannot win, until the body is no longer alive, and then who will have won what at that point?

For us to have peace we need to know, more than know, we need to deeply understand, in the very fabric of our being, that resistance is completely futile when it comes to overcoming the blocks that exist in our bodies. We cannot think our way out of them, we cannot will them away, we cannot trick our bodies into releasing them. All we do, with all the

remarkably elaborate methods that we use to try to overcome our bodies and assert the dominance of our minds, is to tie the knots tighter and make the blocks bigger.

Everyone who goes deeply into this comes to the same conclusion but, I am afraid to say, it seems that we need to go into deeply into it in our own way to get to that point, and so there is a part of me that knows whatever I say, and however clearly I can say it, that it may make very little difference to the person who needs to go on their hero journey of healing!

Not through reading about it or hearing about it, but only through their own experience, can a person really understand how their mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master, and how resistance only makes the tension stronger, and how you cannot fight with yourself and win.

I read and heard these things, in different ways from different writers, many times and many years ago but it made very little difference to how extraordinarily slow I was in working it out for myself anyway. But very little difference is not no difference and there is also a method that I believe just could fast track some of this, a method that I haven't read or heard anywhere else, and one that I think is worth using to see if it really could help, it is pairing, and we have been practicing with it since the very beginning of this.

If we can understand that all of life is based on relationships, that in every way, our entire existence is one where there is no fixed point of us that is actually completely separate from everything else, even though it can feel that way sometimes. We are connected to what is around us, the very air we breathe, the world we inhabit, and we are connected within, to the myriad moving parts of our bodies and minds that make us what we are.

If we are always in relationship then there must always be a pair, never a true singularity. Not only a pair, of course, there are uncountable further connections that go beyond the two, but let's just come back to the idea of a drop, a tiny I, a point of us that is as compressed as we can make it, and then imagine that there must always be at least one first connection that comes from there.

I hope, with all my heart, that you have already felt, and will feel again, what I am sometimes so profoundly grateful to have experienced, which is something I have used these inadequate words to describe as *'merging into oneness'* or *'pairing into infinity'*.

I hope that is the case, and will be the case, but in this first pairing we are coming back to something that is both one step away from that and, at the same time, about as far from it as you could get, and that is to pair within. To begin with our own mind and body, to be at peace together, in oneness together, not in conflict, not resisting or fighting each other.

In theory it should be simple, it could be absurdly simple, but it usually turns out to be fiendishly difficult. So how can we achieve such a thing? Well here is the problem, because I don't think we can, at least not by choice. In fact, I think it is a great mistake to trick

ourselves that we can change the very nature of our own minds to be able to be at peace in the now, in this present moment. Our minds are just not made for it.

On the other hand I think that, if we can recognise from the very beginning, from the first step that I, the observer, am actually what it is that I am observing. That I am this, that this feeling, even if it is unpleasant in some ways, is me, that I own it, that I am it, then we can allow the next pairing to come from within. Our mind takes the step forwards to be willing to feel what it is our body is saying, in its feelings, and then we let go of needing to control, or change, or analyse or do anything with what our mind is making of this feeling, but rather we allow our body to show us the next step.

There will be another feeling that will come to pair with the place you have taken to be within your body. When that feeling comes, yes, you, the observing mind will be aware of it, and yes, you will always have the choice to resist, to try to change, to make a judgement or an analysis of what you feel, but you don't actually have to. You can practice '*choiceless awareness*' and just be aware of these two parts of you now, these two feelings, these two places within. If you do this, then a next step, and a next one, and a next will likely arise, and again at each step there is a choice to resist, or not, and you can always stop any of this at any time if you so chose, or when you choose, because of course life goes on and you cannot journey within forever.

When you pair within, without resistance, without hardening, without judgement, with forgiveness, with surrender, with compassion, even with gratitude, then you have made peace within yourself. Even just connecting two areas, two centres of energy, can be enough to set off on the journey. No conflict, no war, only the balance of being at peace and in love.

And here's the thing, once you start to practice this, and get the feeling of it, even just once, then you have it. You don't need anyone to show you, or talk with you about it anymore, you only need to practice it to become more and more trusting that this is a path of healing, and that you are finding your way to your peace, and health.

By not fighting the river that flows within you, by going with it, by rowing your boat gently down the stream rather than trying to row against it, you will feel a merging together of all the parts within you into a oneness. Your mind and body never were separate, and they certainly did not want to be at war with each other. When you can merge into oneness within then you will still want to pair, it is just what life does, it pairs!

Then there is the infinite, always there. It lies within you and it is everywhere around you at the same time.

The theory of this is absurdly simple, the practice of it is fiendishly difficult. Or at least it has been for me for these many years. Oh my goodness, how many methods have I tried over the years that were really just some form of trying to make my mind the master over my body. I do not have the qualification to teach any of this because I have mastered choiceless

awareness, very far from it! It is still fiendishly difficult for me to this day, but at least I understand something about the obstacles that I think is worth sharing for some few others who may be like me in that they really do have a great thirst for seeking their inner peace and their love.

Knowing a matter in theory is not the same as understanding it in the realm of practice. Time and again, like a baby, I take a step and then I fall, and so I see the need for all the practices, to be compassionate and to practice forgiveness, to work with my fire in a way that is healing rather than harmful. I have been made to understand that a holistic approach is necessary here, rather than putting all my eggs into the basket of just one kind of practice being all I need to focus on, which would be yet another trick of the mind that says this way is the only way.

Let me try to put this absurdly simple, and fiendishly difficult practice into a nutshell and then we have our second to last meditation in the whole book.

- ~ You set an intention to feel your inner peace, through the practice of surrender and you take a moment to lie down or sit down comfortably so that you can close your eyes and go within.
- ~ You may be inclined to feel things in your physical Bearlands, your neck, head and lower left quadrant, but not necessarily, rather just reach out with your mind to feel for wherever you have the most tension, or tiredness in your body right now, it is like you are feeling for a stone in a river, a block in your energy.
- ~ You don't do anything to try to change the tension, or the block, or whatever it is that you feel. You don't resist the resistance of it, you just accept it, you allow yourself to be '*choicelessly aware*' of how you feel and of everything that, in this exact moment of time, just is.
- ~ You don't try to hold your awareness in a fixed place, you don't concentrate yourself, you don't try to control what you feel in any way, in other words you don't need to stay centred in your conscious mind, but rather you allow your body, your subconscious to create the path, the next step, to wherever it wants to go next.
- ~ Now you are following the flow rather than trying to control it, you are practicing surrender, you are practicing choiceless awareness, if your mind wants to think you give it the thought, as you would give a servant a task to do, to just think '*as I am*', and continue to be with what is for another moment, only a moment.
- ~ If you are called to do it, if you feel yourself taking steps within, feeling your energy move from one place to another and then the blocks dissolving, becoming unimportant, and you feel your energy and being as one, even only fleetingly, then you may wish to take that final step and give yourself into pairing into infinity, perhaps with feeling in your mind, and thinking in your body, to the great spirit that permeates all that is, '*I am yours*'.

Bear Medicine

Now we are going to jump from the divine to the dirt, which is where our herbs come from, but the physical healing journey is just as important as the spiritual one and, as I've said at least a little about herbs in the other sections it wouldn't be right to leave out even a short mention of the Bear medicines.

Bear herbs are ones that help with cool, damp congestion, which means that they share a common ground of being warming and activating. Bear constitution people obviously need them the most but anyone with a condition that goes into a stuck kind of state, where it is chronic, low-grade, mildly inflamed and... did I mention stuck? Bears, people of the Bear constitution, are notorious for getting stuck. To shift what's stuck can require activation, i.e. heat and energy. Perhaps that activation might come in the form of exercise, mental or physical, or by doing the kind of internal work we have been talking about that can help to make friends with, and channel, our inner fire. Activation can also include herbs.

Juniper berry, for example, is the herb that helps move stuck damp energy through the kidneys better than anything and then three final herbal pairs to mention that can be helpful to shift other kinds of stuck conditions are a few drops of Gentian, the 'king of digestive tonics', combined with Ginger before food to activate the digestive system, Echinacea and Astragalus roots, two of the best herbs on earth for activating and strengthening the immune system, and Yarrow and Calendula, justly famous in olden times to help heal the external wounds that could have killed or crippled before we had emergency rooms but are now mostly used to help low-grade, damp internal wounds or injuries that just aren't healing well.

The subjects of activation and relaxation, and the ways that any constitution, but Bears and Eagles in particular, get stuck, and imbalanced and sorely challenged to face their stuff is a book in itself which, fortunately, has already been written. It is called Constitutional Complexity and it will always be, like this one, completely free for anyone who wants to better understand and work with themselves using some of these old ways.



Putting it all together

We are getting near to the end and yet even though I have said so much I fear I have still not said enough, or at least that I have not been as clear as I could have been, and I am so keenly aware of how tricky, how fiendishly difficult many of these matters are to be grasped with an understanding which needs to be felt and experienced to be truly owned.

I am especially worried that, no matter how many times I talked about it, that I will still not have convinced you to hold steady on the first step when it seems like you are making things worse rather than better! Who could blame anyone for taking their toes out if the water felt bad from the beginning! It is so ingrained within us to avoid pain, as it should be, as is natural, but at the same time, not all pain is a sign to turn away. The pain of hunger tells us we need to find food. The pain of loneliness tells us we need to find love. The pain of an increase in intensity in some part of our body when we stop resisting and actually allow ourselves to fully feel what is going on can be just a temporary increase in awareness that is soon followed by a release, and a surge in the force of healing that flows through us like a river.

I have talked about this many times because I know, in this dark path to the light, how imperative it is to understand that there very often will be that initial increase in intensity, which of course can be scary, but to stay with it because the wave will always pass and it will always bring healing with it, eventually, but not right away, and that can be the challenge.

I wonder if you have already experienced this matter for yourself, in your own body and in the health journey of your own story? If you have, then you already know you can trust it. If not I can only hope that soon, very soon, your courage to face this particular fear will soon earn your trust in this old, but dark path. I have said all I can about this, as many times as I could and now must leave it to you to decide. Life, our culture, your doctor, will tell you to go on a very different path. Not to face your darkness, not to try to be a hero, to take this, to do that, to do anything to make the pain go away. Only you can decide your steps in any of this but with all my heart I hope you will find your courage to face your fear and heal. We are all in this together far more than we imagine, your healing is not just for you, it is for everyone.

I'm also worried that I haven't said enough about healing reactions because all the practices described here are actually very powerful medicines. If you use these practices, any of them, then things will shift. Things that were blocked will become open, there will be a healing process for sure, and healing brings an increase in life force.

An increase in life force is a good thing but it is not inconsequential. As your life force increases so does the strength of the flow of the river against that which is blocking it. There will be new challenges that appear because now you have the power to overcome them. Healing is not an easy ride into happily ever after, it is transformative and life-changing. The more light you shine within the more you will see your shadows within. Should I have warned you more about this at the beginning, said to you 'don't start, don't take a first step

unless you are truly ready for what will likely happen on a hero journey of healing'. I know I said something like that, perhaps I should have said more, but then at some point it would have felt like I was going into bat for denial, and that great force has more than enough supporters and advocates already.

Having said all that, honestly, I am even more worried that I have said too much rather than too little. I fear that shortly, when we are finished, you will look back on what you have read and feel confused about what you are supposed to do with it. I did not share just one or two spiritual practices for the hero journey of healing, I unpacked a lifetime's journey work here and shared many different methods, meditations and thought experiments. How are you supposed to know which ones to practice? What are you supposed to do with any of this?

If you feel confused about which method you are supposed to practice, which dark friend are you supposed to work with, which constitution you are, anything at all that I have been talking about, then you have my deepest sympathy and also my most heartfelt apology because, if you are unsure about anything, and certainly if you are in any way confused about anything, then it is not your fault, it is I who is entirely to blame.

I really mean this. I believe that, when two people communicate, about anything, if one of them is sincerely listening but does not completely understand what the other has said then it is not their fault, not whatsoever. I know that this often goes both ways in real life, and that people do not listen well but, if someone is trying to explain something and they are not being understood then the blame for any miscommunication must belong to the person who is doing the talking, first and foremost.

If someone understands you very well, but then chooses to disregard you or disagree with you then that is another matter, but the responsibility for giving the understanding lies with the person who is doing the talking. Of course people have to be willing to listen, I guess that should go without saying, and of course when two people are in any kind of a fire storm with each other then there will be practically no listening going on, but when a person is explaining something, anything at all, and there is a person who is listening to them in good faith but just not understanding it, don't blame the listener, blame the communicator!

I won't make any excuses, I gave it my absolute best and I know that I could not have done better at this point in time so, if it was not clear and if it has not helped you, I am deeply sorry for wasting your precious time and can only be relieved that I did not make you waste any money as well!

If it has not been a waste of time for you, if you have got some benefit from what I have shared and what you have practiced, and you aren't ready to give up on going further with it, then I would love to make a couple of simple suggestions that I hope could be practical and understandable enough to use a lot of what you have learned to move forwards in a positive direction.

The two methods I want to recommend for going forwards can be summed up as 'following the leader' and 'mapwork'.

Following the Leader

We started with this in the very first meditation on compassion, then I took us in some different directions to learn the maps and get some practice, and then we have come back to moving a lot more in this direction in the last few sections and practices.

Following the leader is where your contribution to the spiritual practice is to simply take a couple of steps to go within. You could use thought to set an intention or use one of the nutshells we have been trying out, or you could take one or two steps into your body, your subconscious, such as by listening to your heart or your breath, or bringing your awareness into your spine or belly.

Which two steps are actually not that important, really anything will do so long as it brings your awareness within. With just a little practice, you can be feeling your inner state in literally just a heartbeat. This approach is very natural, very easy, very instinctive. The tricky part is what comes next. You are making a firm decision to call your leader your spirit rather than your conscious mind. The leader is your intuitive subconscious, it is the healing intelligence of Nature that flows like a river through you, in you and around you. You relinquish control, you let go of the steering wheel. You, your conscious mind, the identity that you relate to as your 'self' takes a back-seat, you go along for the drive. You allow the force of Nature within you to show you where to bring your centre, your awareness to next, without resistance, without hardening, without reacting to it.

It is highly likely that there will be some areas that are blocking the flow of that river and that they will come to your attention in a very clear and consistent way when you do a practice like this. Especially if you have any kind of pain, or sickness then for sure this will come up very quickly and also it will probably come up very strongly when you allow yourself to feel things fully. Remember, please, do not fall into fear if it seems like you are temporarily making things worse because those areas are coming more fully into your awareness (and here I was thinking I had said my piece about that for the last time already!) Go with the flow with a trust that will soon be earned by there being a release, and a healing process that follows.

I imagine, and I hope, that it will also be highly useful to have been learning the maps of the body, the subconscious, and that when you identify those areas, and feelings that are blocked, that the learning journey you have been on with me in this work will aid you in



recognising more deeply what it is that you have to attend to in your hero journey of healing.

But that may or may not come later. Whilst you are doing it, following the leader is both absurdly simple and fiendishly difficult. You don't need any special techniques or any kind of training to do it. You don't need to remember any of what you have been learning and you don't need to think too much about what you are feeling when it is happening either. I suggest to save that for later, if at all.

When you are in the wave of being with what is, don't analyse, don't judge, don't resist, just go with it and the 'leader' will show you where to go and help you to get there. The leader is your own spirit, it is the force of Nature and life itself, it loves you unconditionally, it only wants what is best for you 100% of the time, and it will show you where to take your next steps. All you have to do is to follow it.

Mapwork

Working with the maps is super interesting, and it can be very powerful too. It does require your mind to get more involved with your spiritual practice and you would probably have to think about what you have been learning here a few times to get it all locked in. But it should not be overly complicated to get a hold of and it will definitely get simpler and clearer the more you practice it.



You could enter the territory of your inner world from any doorway, and start with any steps you wished but, if you were a clean slate and would like a suggestion for where to start then I would encourage you to start at the bottom of your spine and work your way up to the top and, at the same time, or on another time, go around your hara in a circle starting from the bottom right quadrant.

But there are no rules that say you should start in Tiger terrain. It is a great place to feel your primal energy, there is no better place to face your

fear, which is usually the main obstacle to taking a first step with any of this and holding steady for the second, but there is no reason why you might not be better starting at the

opposite end of the spectrum, in your heart and upper left belly, the hill of your upper back, to connect to your heart, to seek your love.

You start anywhere, spend as long as you want to there, and then explore somewhere else on your map if you wish. What I can share from my own experience is that, even if I set out to go around the cycle or go through my whole spine I hardly ever do it. I get pulled in somewhere and, like stepping through a gateway, I am in another world that needs further exploration and there is no wish to go back to where I was a moment ago to take the next step, the one that I might have thought was meant to follow the last one!

Mapwork can really be just as free as following the leader. You certainly don't have to put things in the right order to do them right. I want to steer you well away from all that. For all that it may have meant that I might have confused you with too much detail on too many subjects, it has never been my intention to present a kind of formula for spiritual growth where you will get salvation if you do this and then you do that. I just don't believe in any of that. I have seen a lot of deeply sincere and genuine seekers after truth getting completely lost on one or another laid out path where they get into the awful bind of not finding what they are seeking but feeling way too committed to pull out now...

Learning how to safely travel within, to be in tune with, and intimately connected to your own inner spirit, is very akin to falling in love, and then going through all the challenges that being in that closest of all relationships inevitably brings up. All over this world, for every day of history and including today, people fall madly, gloriously, wonderfully in love with one another. There is no rule book for how they fall in love, no series of steps that they need to follow. There is chemistry, and magic and a great force of Nature that carries them along, sometimes whether they like it or not!

You have to do you, no one else can do you for you! That said, I encourage you to play with both of these methods, follow the leader and working with the maps. There are absolutely no rules to say that you cannot do both. Both are good, both work!



The Final Practice

Now that we are at the point of the final practice, and of course it has to be for surrender, because we are finishing in the Bearlands, which means the dark friend is fatigue and the obstacle is resistance, I am suddenly quite convinced that this area, this practice, this dark friend, and this obstacle to surmount for the healing journey, is surely the hardest, the darkest, and even the most important of all of the quadrants, practices, dark friends and hurdles to overcome!

But then I feel this way about all of the quadrants whenever I dive deep into them and think about how I can best share, with you, what I have learned on my travels. They all seem like they hold the key to the treasure chest of peace and love. They all seem like they are the one, that if only we can make friends with the forms their shadows take, we will surely succeed in our hero's quest for healing!

I do know that, compared to the others, the Bearlands, and what they ask of us, are no more important than the others, but they are no less either. It is still of the utmost importance, it is still so vital that it could be the starting and the stopping point of any of this, that we could understand what it is to be in resistance to what is, and that we could understand what it is to surrender that resistance too.

I know I have talked about this already, but talk is cheap, anyone can do it. Can I, can you, truly understand, and feel, and be with this great, dark truth that our tension, our tiredness, our heaviness, is not our enemy but that these feelings are the stones in the river that are blocking us from letting go and finding our peace and our health? Do we understand, deeper than the intellectual, in our bodies and in our bones, that we must stop fighting that river, stop resisting it, allow it to rush and run over us so that our stones, our blocks, shrink and shrink until they are no more than a grain of sand, a speck of dust. Then the river of our life force, the healing intelligence that flows within us, can carry us to where we do not know how to go by ourselves.

Surrender, all that it stands for, all that it asks of us, is the drop of spiritual practice that contains the ocean of everything we need to know and everything we need to do. All of our troubles, our worries, our fires, our sadnesses are there for good reasons, excellent reasons, but they are not fixed in those stones that we carry within us. People heal, they do get better. There is a most extraordinary force of healing that we own merely by virtue of being here and being alive. We do nothing to deserve it, we don't earn it, we don't increase it by being virtuous or good, we just have it, but we are remarkably good at getting in its way and blocking it.

So much of that blocking comes from resistance. Is it most of it? Is this the number one obstacle to healing, to peace, to love, to everything that we most need and want?

Sometimes I think so, yes. Who is resisting? It is me who resists. The part of me that I identify with as my mind, my story, my identity, my will. This matter of my will, what I want,

what I choose, is deep beyond the ability of words to simply define. Whole philosophies are born around the question of our free will vs what is determined by fate, and genetics, and the order of things.

I do not take a side in that old, but interesting debate, but I see that here, in the matter of healing and what gets in its way, there is a will in us that wants to be in charge, that may not always know exactly what it wants but it certainly knows that it does not want to surrender.

To surrender is to give up the will. To go with the flow is to allow the river to carry us where the river's will goes rather than to stay stuck in the rock of what I am, who I am. There is another nutshell that sums all of this up that some people, according to their background may relate to, it is four words rather than just three but it is something I have turned over in my own mind a thousand, thousand times, as I scramble up another rocky outcrop of my self and my own will. The old words are *'thy will be done'*.

Thy will, not my will, means surrender. It means a choice to trust that there is a greater power, one that is beyond us, surely, but also within us too, that does have a will, it does have a meaning and a purpose that, however dimly we might comprehend it, can be done if we accept it so much, so sincerely, so all in, that our own will is able to be let go.

The first step is to set an intention and to go within. To know in your heart or hearts that you want and need peace and love. Not in theory, but for real. You want to feel at peace, you want to feel in love, and you are willing to own your whole journey, in every aspect of it, the entirety of you belongs to you, no one else. There is a great freedom in this and, at the same time, a terrible burden. You can no longer blame others for how you are, you can no longer be a victim, you are taking responsibility for how you feel. You know, in your heart and in your soul, and so you think it in your body and you feel it in your mind that *'I own me'*.

And you chose not to judge, not to be hard, not to fight against 'what is', but rather to be soft, and centred and now in all that is within you, and all that is happening around you. You do not harden your heart against yourself. You are willing to extend mercy, and compassion, and love to yourself, to be sorry for any hurt that you have given or received, truly sorry, and to ask for, even beg for, forgiveness for every hurt that you have caused or that has been given to you.

Then keep going, take the next step and the next, wherever your life force leads you, wherever your heart takes you, but be prepared for fire, be ready for there to be unhealed hurts within you that are not ready to move aside and be forgotten just because you wish them away, but need to be felt, and processed and transformed.

Be in your body, be with what is, in all of its shapes and forms, including the most intense flaming energy of the fire within. Welcome it, hold that fire in the crucible of your body like a beloved friend, do not try to get rid of it or resist it or resent its presence in your being.

Everything changes, all the time, every bad feeling passes, no matter how intense it is when its wave ascends, it will subside, it will release, all you have to do is to be with it, and trust that your life force, your *vis medicatrix naturae*, knows how to heal you and that it loves you unconditionally.

Incredibly enough, without resistance, without resentment it is actually possible to love the fire and even be thankful to it. The wave of gratitude that can come when we let the fire lift us into our highest selves is like a gift from beyond that cannot be compared to anything we could ever achieve by our own effort.

Follow your heart, follow where the great intelligence of that life force wants to take you on your inner journey. Everything that you feel in your body is your subconscious showing you where you are at and what is going on. It is a map and you can learn to read it and understand it through nothing more than practice. No cleverness, no great memory is required, just a willingness to practice, to come back to your inner terrain as often as you need to find your great treasures of peace and love.

Follow your heart to where it shows you to go and then, wherever your centre of awareness comes to, there you are. You don't need to find another home, this is where you are, but don't get stuck, as much as you need to feel connected you also need to feel free. Put your second foot where you are called to stand, or use your growing knowledge of your inner maps, your inner terrain to know that here, this part of me, this wisdom in me, will help me get unstuck over here. Pairing is freeing, and powerful, and very easy to do, because it is in our nature to always want to connect, to not be separate and alone, but to be in love.

There will be tension in your body. It is impossible to live and grow and not to have places that are broken, not to have unhealed hurts. Do not fight the tension, do not condemn it, do not resist it. It is not your enemy, even if it hurts and especially if it hurts a little more when you don't fight it or try to run from it, do not be afraid. It is showing you how to be with it and how to release it. You just have to trust that it is not up to you to work out exactly how! In just the same way as you practice the ultimate surrender of letting go of your very consciousness every time you go to sleep, so in exactly the same way you do not have to control the way that you surrender. All of that would just be a trick of your own mind, seeking to maintain its dominance through any method.

Your mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master. You will not subdue it by force, only love can heal this relationship. Be loving to your mind, do not chastise it for making you fall, and fall repeatedly, as you go deeper and deeper into these practices. It is learning all the time and it will get better and better at being your loving and obedient servant because it too only wants you to be in the greatest peace, the deepest love.

If there was just one point, one thought, that I could share with you from all of this, from the countless hours, the decades, I have been journeying within to feel and experience and learn everything that I have had here to talk about it would be this. Trust your inner healing

intelligence, your life force. Listen to the river that flows within you. You did not create the river, you did not create your life force, you did not create the Universe, but you are in it, you are a part of it, and it is wise and powerful beyond anything we can possibly imagine. How extraordinary that we are a part of such a great force. That it lives within us, that it is us, that we do not have to do anything or go anywhere to be in touch with it or to be in tune with it.

We, and by we I include myself, are remarkably good at getting in the way of the flow, of being the stone in the river, the unhealed hurt, the wounded Bear, or Tiger, or Eagle, or Elephant-Butterfly, but if we can just have enough wisdom to know one thing, what a miracle of healing can occur.

That one thing is that we cannot do anything to heal ourselves. We cannot make the river, we cannot make the wind, we cannot make the ocean. We truly are remarkably good at getting in the way of it, but if we know, if we really know, that all we have to do is to just let go, just surrender, completely, fully and unconditionally, then we can heal.

'As I am' goes so deep. It goes as deep as the ocean itself. It says that this is enough, that I do not need to change anything, that I can accept all of this, in this moment of now, with no conditions, with no expectation that it should be different and then, in that moment, as I am, I can be yours. I can surrender my drop to the ocean, and then the peace that comes, the love that comes, is so indescribably wonderful that no treasure on earth, no achievement, no worldly matter could even begin to compare.

Honestly and truly, no false modesty, no pretence, I think I am the slowest learner in any of this, in all of this, that I could possibly have been. Looking back it seems as if I deliberately set out to get in my own way, at every turn, to wrong foot myself constantly and consistently. I had read things and heard things from others very early on, including things like what I have been saying here, that I suppose I thought I understood at some level, but really I had no understanding at all, because I went my own way anyway, and made everything so hard, so difficult, so damn painful actually!

I would like to think that not everyone would be so stupid and stubborn that they had to make every mistake themselves to learn what so many others have shared, and is there for anyone to understand as soon as they are ready to. I hope that not everyone will be so proud as I was to have to learn what matters most without having to struggle through everything by themselves, again and again.

So I have my hopes that this will have been of some value and some use to a person who is wiser than me and able to take some help and support from a journeyman who at last sees the many errors of his many past ways and what it was that actually helped amidst all the many missteps.

This poem, again on my website, called *'Gratefully washed up'*, sums up what I want to say

*When I wash up on the quiet shore
the moment my fingers touch the sand
I realise how terribly tired I truly am
and how grateful I am to be held, here

my tiredness turns to peace, and joy
and at last I understand how those earlier toe-holds
(the very ones I thought were helping me get somewhere)
were just sunken logs, drifting me further away*

It is time to bid you a good journey. If I could, I would have loved to write this whole book in the Bearlands, and then perhaps I could have even just made it into a short poem! I could have just talked about water for a little while, how that's all we have to do, be like water, stop resisting, and then we will get exactly what we most need and want, because the ocean that we came from, us tiny drops, is one that has an endless, infinite and eternal abundance of peace and love.

It is us, it is in us, we are in it, but our resistance, our tension, our separation, our hardness, our fire and our fear, our every obstacle keeps us from feeling it and being in it all the time. Anyway, whichever summit we get to, or whatever depth we dive to, I don't think there is a point of merging into oneness that happens once and for all, not while we are still alive, but we can have moments, and they are exquisite, they are more than enough.

In the meantime, this business of being human is not so simple as just becoming like water. We have bones, and minds, and cultures and conditioning and we need to travel, and turn over and pick up our stones so that we can let them go, and go into every nook and cranny, every corner of every shadow as we journey within, to find the light, the love and the peace.

So, for that great journey, for that hero journey, I wish you every success, fellow traveller. I wish you peace and love and healing and happiness. Let's keep journeying together, you and I, and whoever else wishes to join us, let's not stop until we drop into the ocean for real and forever and until then, until that hour, all my love, and in peace, Richard.

Oh, and would you like to have that final practice at surrender now? Which then might quite naturally, and easily, step into any of the other practices too?

Now could be good, or just as soon as you are ready...

