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MARY GORDON

The Roots of
Empathy

SHAI TUBALI

The Myth of the
Fragile Heart

MARILYN MONK

A Hierarchy of
Consciousness



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The Heart is the Key



The Heart of a Jedi

Dear readers,

In the ultimate *Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalker*, the Jedi Master Kanan's voice whispers to Rey, "In the heart of a Jedi lies her strength." The heart is our compass. It is the seat of our intuition, the arrow that guides our decisions and emotions. It leads us to our destination. And yet, we often overthink, analyze, and dissect, only to realize once the dust settles that we have the answer within us all along. The voice of the heart is more powerful than we may know.

So how do we learn to lean into the inherent voice of the heart? In this edition, Shai Tubali and Donna Cameron look at how to keep the heart open at all times, while Natwar Sharma explains intuition from a scientific viewpoint. In an exclusive interview from the Spirit of Humanity Forum in Iceland, Mary Gordon talks about the Roots of Empathy program. Daaji continues with his series, *A User's Guide to Living*. Mamata Venkat shares her views on love and relationship, Alanda Greene is back with lessons from her garden, and Ravi Venkatesan begins a new series on developing strategies from the heart.

Have a wonderful February,
The editors

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Also known as Daaji, he is the current Heartfulness Guide. He offers a practical, experiential approach to the evolution of consciousness that is simple, easy to follow, and available to people of all ages and walks of life. Daaji is also a prolific speaker and writer, and his two books, *The Heartfulness Way* and *Designing Destiny*, are both #1 bestsellers.



MARILYN MONK

Marilyn is Emeritus Professor of Molecular Embryology at University College London. She has researched life at the level of molecules and at a cellular level.

Her work as a scientist over 60 years has involved DNA replication and repair, the genetics of bacteria and their viruses, amoeboid cell signaling and aggregation, single cell molecular biology and pre-implantation diagnosis, stem cells and regenerative medicine, gene transcription and epigenetic regulation in embryonic development, and the development of a prophylactic cancer vaccine.



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After many deeply-satisfying years in non-profit management, Donna spends her time blogging about the power of kindness, and always looks for ways to convey the power of stories. She believes that we can change the world through our stories, and through kindness. Her book is called *A Year of Living Kindly*.

SHAI TUBALI



An international speaker, author, and spiritual teacher since 2000, Shai Tubali is one of Europe's leading experts and innovators in the field of the chakras and the subtle system. Currently based in Berlin, he tours and guides seminars and retreats in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, Croatia, Spain, and Greece. Formerly the head of the Berlin holistic center Chiro-Yoga, he has now established the new international center Human Greatness. Shai has published 23 books in English, German and Hebrew, in spiritual non-fiction, prose and poetry. His latest book is *Unlocking The 7 Secret Powers of the Heart*.

MARY GORDON



Mary is recognized internationally as an award-winning social entrepreneur, educator, author, child advocate and parenting expert, whose programs are informed by empathy. In 1996 she created the Roots of Empathy program, which is now offered in many countries, and in 2005 she created the Seeds of Empathy program for 3- to 5-year-olds in childcare. She is also the founder of Canada's first and largest school-based Parenting and Family Literacy Centers. Mary speaks and consults to governments, educational organizations, and public institutions, including the World Health Organization, the Skoll World Forum, and the United Nations.

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THE HEART IS THE KEY

The Myth of the Fragile Heart

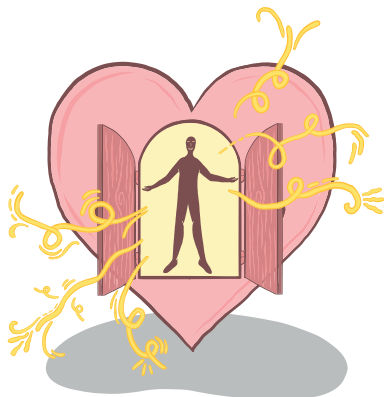
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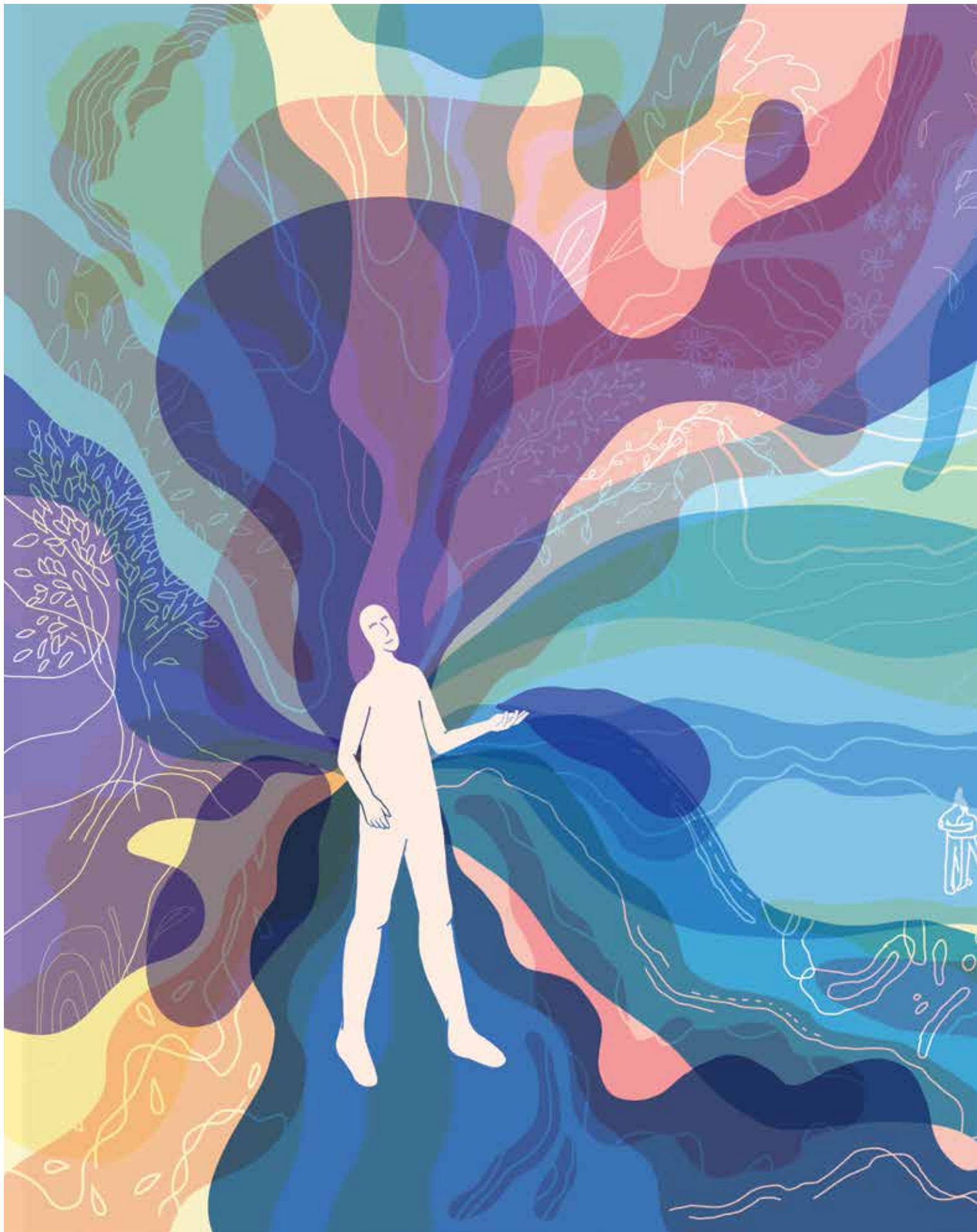
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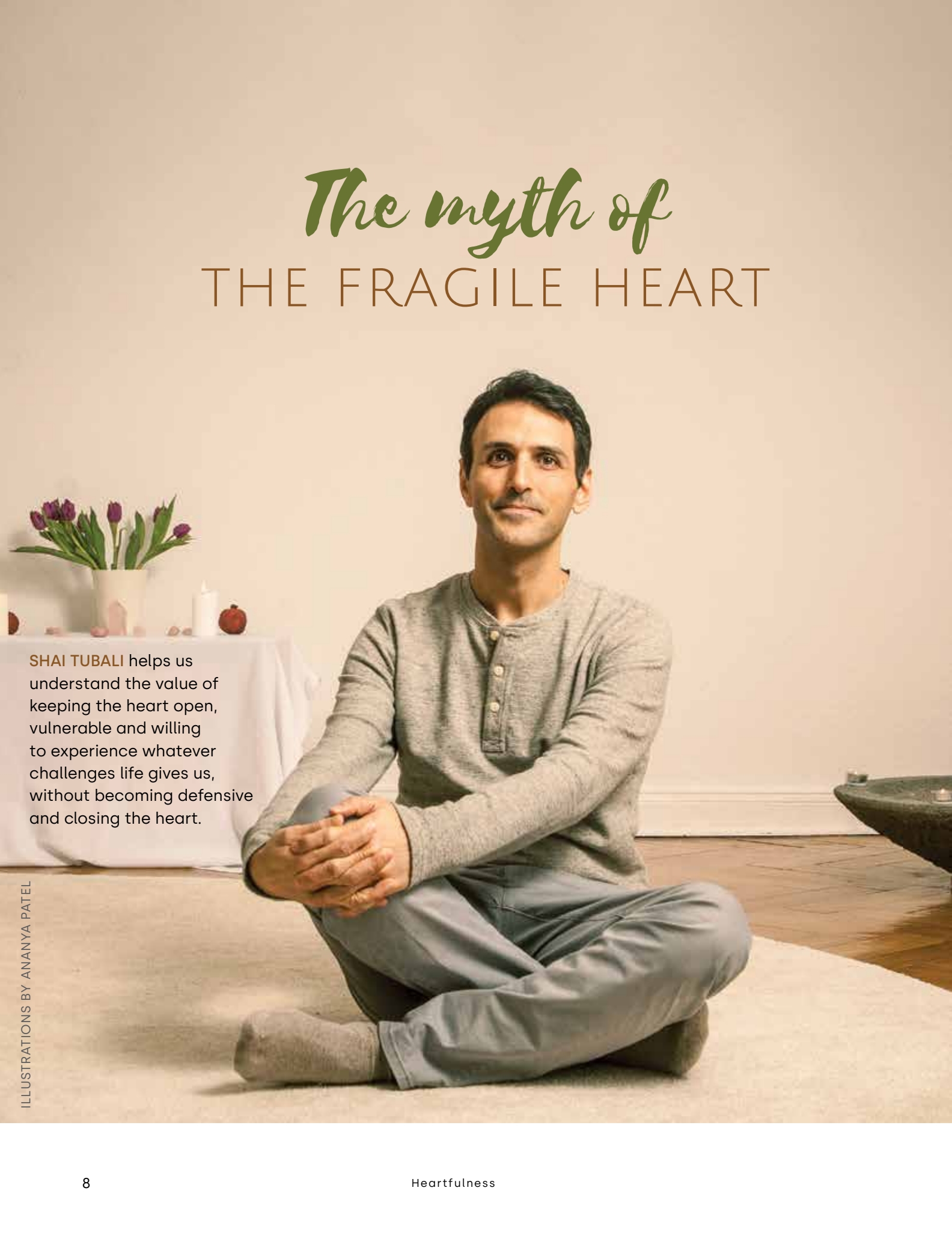
focus

THE HEART IS THE KEY

When we love,
we always strive to
become better
than we are.
When we strive to
become better than
we are, everything
around us becomes
better too.

PAULO COELHO

The myth of THE FRAGILE HEART

A man with dark hair and a mustache is sitting cross-legged on a light-colored rug. He is wearing a grey long-sleeved henley shirt and grey trousers. He has his hands clasped in his lap and is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a calm expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. To the left, there is a table covered with a white cloth, holding a vase of purple tulips, a white candle, and some small red objects. To the right, a dark, shallow bowl is partially visible on the floor.

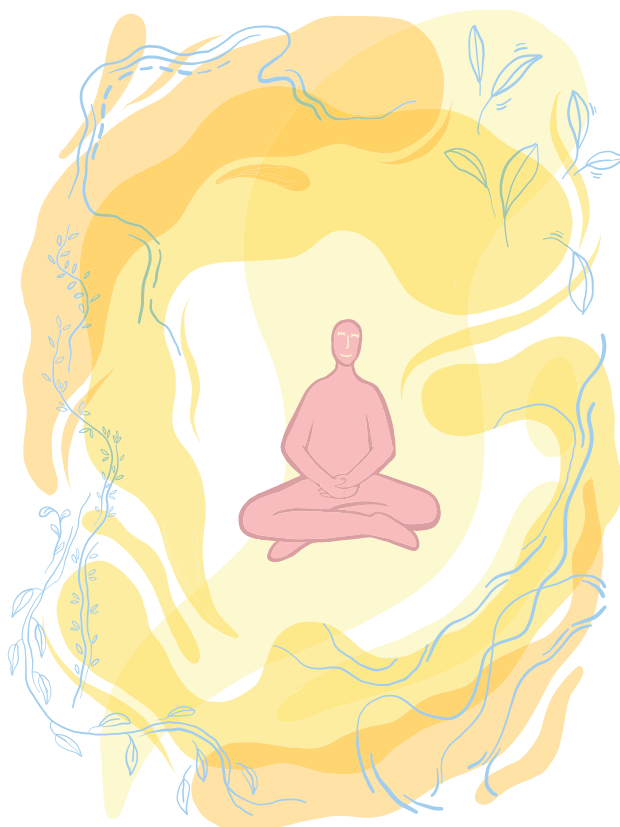
SHAI TUBALI helps us understand the value of keeping the heart open, vulnerable and willing to experience whatever challenges life gives us, without becoming defensive and closing the heart.

Your mind cannot tell the difference between “vulnerable” and “breakable.” It thinks it is obvious that if you are vulnerable you are also breakable. Since this sounds logical enough, your mind chooses the strategy of remaining invulnerable as much as possible.

Of course, your mind only wants to protect you, as its main role is to keep you safe in a world full of dangers. It registers moments when you were vulnerable and, as a result, became deeply disappointed, rejected, betrayed, or abandoned. This left you not just with an unbearable pain but also with a profound sense of weakness.

We are all afraid of being weak. It is a survival instinct: we must not show that we are powerless and defenseless in a hostile and overpowering environment. To conceal this weakness, we put on armor, a thick layer of protection with which we defend our vulnerable heart. This is why we become hard and sometimes react quickly to insults or criticism with anger, hatred, and vengefulness, and harbor grudges.

Your mind strives to become so strong and impenetrable that you will never be harmed or feel pain. To achieve this impregnable condition, it surrounds the heart with a protective wall. This wall is not just a metaphor – you could easily sense it in your chest as a thick layer separating you from the environment and protecting your fragile true being. This wall is not necessarily such a bad idea. If you have no coping mechanism for intense emotions and profound disappointments, it is perhaps wise to keep a thick protective layer around your heart. However, in light of our knowledge of the powers of the heart, we should reexamine this strategy: Does it really work? Do we actually feel safer when our hearts are closed?

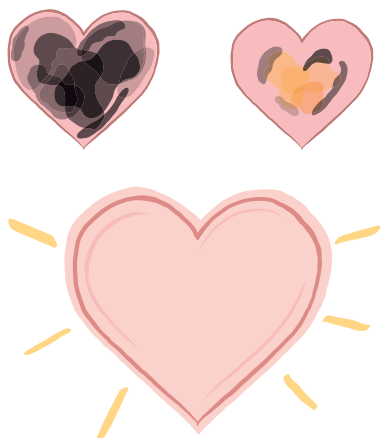


A quick, honest look at our life experience tells us, of course, that this strategy does not work very well. The more we feel threatened and in need of defending and protecting ourselves, the more intensely and deeply we feel our own fragility. In the end, the effort to become invulnerable makes us more vulnerable. The great irony is that the more we contract our heart, the more we feel it needs additional and even more sophisticated layers of protection, with the result that, slowly but surely, we stop feeling pain but scarcely feel anything else. We become cautious and numb, hurting little but also loving little.

The secret power of the open heart

Your wise heart offers a different strategy. With this secret power, you can finally remove the wall: vulnerability is your key to indestructibility. The heart's wisdom confidently defies the effectiveness of the wall. Historically, walls have never really worked, and this is also true for your internal wall. From the point of view of the heart, it is clear that what we believe makes us stronger actually makes us weaker. And what we believe makes us weaker actually makes us stronger.

The mind's strategy is based on resistance. It refuses to open up because it wants to avoid potential disappointments. It strives with all its might to minimize the pain of betrayal and rejection, pushing people away as a result and keeping a clear distance, since people are able to upset our mind-body system by failing to be there for us.



The heart's strategy is based on love. It continues to trust and open up even if this could lead to painful experiences. It agrees to pain, because it knows that it is better to feel pain than to feel nothing. That is because it knows the secret that, as long as it remains open, even if it bleeds a little it will not be weakened. In fact, it gets stronger with each opening up, despite the disappointment and hurt.

In reality, it is your mind's resistance to pain that makes these past experiences so painful, imprinting upon you dark and trenchant conclusions about life and people. When you closed your heart in response to the pain, it took hold of you. Opening up to breathe into it and to contain it completely in fact has the effect of melting it away, leaving the heart refreshed and intact.

This is the excellent "contain and include" heart-practice: when there is no resistance and you choose instead to open up even more widely, you become greater than the situation. Contained within your heart, the situation fades away without leaving an unforgettable impression.

Use disappointments as opportunities

Generally speaking, the heart is in one of the following three different kinds of conditions:

MOSTLY CLOSED: This is when the mind decides that we've had enough disappointments and betrayals for one lifetime, and so even with those with whom we are close we make sure our heart remains essentially invulnerable and untouched.

HALF OPEN: This is when we open and close our heart, depending on circumstances. We open

it up with certain people in a safe environment, but even then only when they are kind to us. The opening is conditional on circumstances and, therefore, is fluctuating.

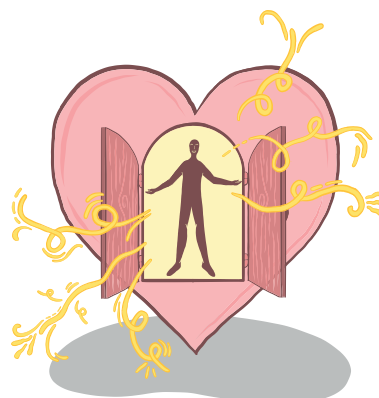
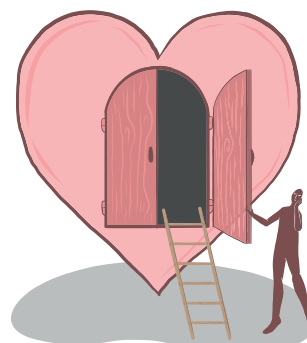
ESSENTIALLY OPEN: This is not only a condition, but also a statement of being. An essentially open heart never closes the door of trust, faith, and communication, despite all disappointments and betrayals.

The state of being half open is the most common – the heart only opens when the situation is clearly safe. It is the mind that allows us to be vulnerable only when there are good reasons to trust. However, this dependency keeps us weaker; it means that our heart opens and closes in response to each and every stimulation, however negligible. This is a fragile heart, constantly searching for signs of approval and recognition and needing to fear any change of circumstances.

For the half-open heart, deep emotions such as love and tenderness are too delicate and can only be expressed in a wholly supportive and nurturing environment. The half-open heart is based on what is probably the greatest myth surrounding the heart – that since it is fragile, it requires a safe environment and cannot handle a difficult or hostile world. When the heart encounters intense situations, it withdraws behind the wall, leaving the mind on the front line to fight and negotiate.

The heart's secret power tells us something completely different: Love and compassion are not tender but rather invincible powers of our being that channel tremendous cosmic waves. They do not need a secure environment to be revealed; they can be expressed proudly and openly even in the most strident and noisy marketplace and in the face of strong opposing forces.

Try this exercise the next time someone offends you or when the next hurt inevitably strikes:

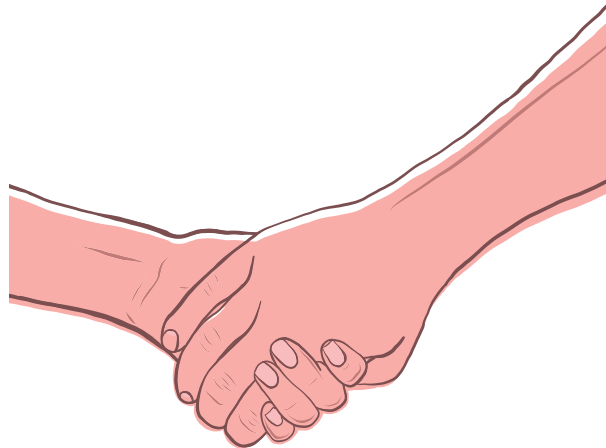


Remain with an open heart. You will feel an impulse to contract your heart, but make the decision not to do so, instead retaining the flow of openness and tenderness, and see what happens as a result.

With your heart exposed, work with the unconscious expectation that has caused you pain – that people should never be disappointing. The reality is that not only will people disappoint you every now and then, but this plays a crucial role

in your own heart's development. Translate your disappointment into the thought that obviously this person should have offended me, and keep the heart open and flowing.

Open your chest fully to the event. Agree to the pain. Direct love toward the person who caused you pain. You will soon discover that this pain flows through you and is transformed into a greater power of love.



The paradox of indestructibility

Your heart does not need protection, it is your best protection. Living life with an open heart is not just less damaging than having to defend it, it is, ironically, the very state in which nothing and no one can hurt you. As the heart lets go of expectations and remains wide open, agreeing to feel unconditionally, a point will come when it no longer feels pain but only love.

Since that pain was caused by your own expectations, you will grow confident enough to keep your heart as an open door that never closes, and which constantly allows the natural flow of goodness and compassion from within your heart.

Here we return to the difference between vulnerable and breakable. Vulnerability means fearlessly keeping the door to your heart open. A tender heart that does not try to protect itself and remains open to experience, accepting, loving, and forgiving under all circumstances, is an unbreakable heart. There is nothing that it cannot envelop and contain, no power that it cannot melt away, since it agrees to receive whatever penetrates it. What enemy could defeat such a heart? Even the most powerful assailant becomes helpless, as it

tries with all its might to attack, hurt, and ruin. The love of such a heart keeps it unharmed.

We can only suffer hurt as long as fear lives within our hearts. Aggression and destruction feed on our fear, but they lose all their power in the face of love. Together, love and the heart's openness form the most formidable power in the world – a power that only increases when we love at those times when it makes no sense to open up at all. We fear being hurt, but what can happen if we are willing to get hurt and commit ourselves to love, even in such circumstances?

Many people consider the life of Jesus a perfect example of the heroism of the heart: the way he lived in this harsh world like the most delicate flower – wide open, exposed, and loving. Do we think that those who crucified him defeated him? No, we know that the heart of Jesus could never be crucified, only his body. You cannot crucify a heart whose last words are “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

An adapted excerpt from the author's latest book, *Unlocking the 7 Secret Powers of the Heart*, available at <https://shaitubali.com/en/webshop/unlocking-the-7-secret-powers-of-the-heart-a-practical-guide-to-living-in-trust-and-love/>. Reprinted with permission.

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Intuitive Science



DR. NATWAR SHARMA shares his experience and ideas about the intuitive role of the heart and its critical place in our lives.

One day my wife and I were watching our two-year-old having fun in the playground. Suddenly she expressed concern that the little one was beginning to develop a fever. The physician in me immediately dismissed it – the symptoms simply did not add up. A few hours later, to my astonishment, he was burning with fever! Instead of snubbing me with an “I told you so,” my wife silenced me with her intuition and premonition regarding our son’s health.

What is intuition? And where does it come from? From my own experience as a mainstream doctor and therapist, as well as a layperson, I am convinced that it is the heart that is the seat of intuition, the sixth sense.

The HeartMath Institute has been researching the physiological mechanism of the heart and how it communicates with the brain and processes information, what are emotions, and how they are perceived or sensed. Among these, their landmark research is about pre-stimulus response, which is nothing but the science of intuition. In one such very interesting study, conducted by the institute, different images capable of stimulating emotions like fear, joy, grief and so on, were displayed one after the other in front of a sample group of the population, and the heart-rhythm activity, or the heart-rate variability (ECG), and the brain responses (EEG) were recorded in each case. It was observed that people were able to sense the emotion before the image was displayed. While both the heart and the brain received the pre-stimulus information about 4 to 5 seconds before being exposed to a future emotional image randomly selected by the computer, the heart actually received the information 1.5 seconds before the brain.¹

There are several other areas of study related to the heart, involving memory and the energy field. In my work as a therapist, when I take people into a deep subconscious state, there are some who reveal memories that go back as far as the time they were in their mother’s womb, as a newly-formed fetus. Medically speaking, pregnancy is confirmed when the heart of the new life inside the mother’s womb starts beating. The brain is not yet formed in any way; it is just a primitive bunch of neurons at that time. But the heart of the fetus is pumping. So when a person recollects and shares an episode which occurred that early in their life, what part of the human system is responsible for that memory?

In his groundbreaking work, *The Heart's Code*, Dr. Paul Pearsall cites several anecdotes on this topic. He combines ancient wisdom, modern education, and scientific research to demonstrate that the human heart holds the secret to the link between body, mind and spirit. His study focuses on the heart’s memory and energy field, showing that the heart is not just a pumping organ, but also retains subtle information and is in itself a source of infinite knowledge yet to be discovered and comprehended by the science of modern times.

Similarly, there are instances when people in a coma are known to capture or perceive what is happening around them, and some of these episodes are termed Near Death Experiences (NDE). What part of the human system actually perceives these seemingly out-of-body sensations, when the brain activity is clinically nil or negligent? What I find even more fascinating is the fact that, like the birth of the fetus in the mother’s womb, the death of the person is medically certified only when the heart stops beating or functioning. It is an indication that the heart is not

¹<https://www.heartmath.org/research/science-of-the-heart/intuition-research/>



The heart is not only the seat of intuition,
but essentially the source or
center of life itself.

only the seat of intuition, but essentially the source or center of life itself. Dr. Raymond Moody's *Life After Life* is a wonderful scientific treatise for those who wish to explore this subject in more depth.

As a practicing pediatrician, I often notice that children walk into my clinic in a state of fear or anxiety about what's going to happen next: What will the doctor do? Will he give me an injection? Will he ask me to take bitter medicine? In the light of this awareness I have been doing a small experiment, where I start connecting with my heart before each scheduled appointment. I take a few moments to be silent and dive into the depths of my heart, with the suggestion that "Joy is radiating from my heart to the child's heart, alleviating all her fear and anxiety." The moment I connect in this manner, I feel a shift in my own inner condition and outer expression. There is a feeling of lightness within, which usually flashes as a warm smile on my face and, ultimately, that reflects in the child. I have observed that in most cases when I welcome my patients in this manner, there is a sense of ease and comfort in them which is distinctly not visible on other routine days.

In almost all cultures around the world, a person is described by the quality of their heart: "Oh, he is such a kind-hearted man," "She is so warm-hearted," or "They are hard-hearted people." So, if you want to change the nature or behavior of a person, where does the change really need to be effected? The answer seems obvious: the heart. And that is why the Heartfulness Institute recommends meditation on the heart, with the aid of a unique and ancient technique known as yogic Transmission. You will find more details regarding yogic Transmission and its benefits at <https://www.heartfulnessmagazine.com/transmission/>.

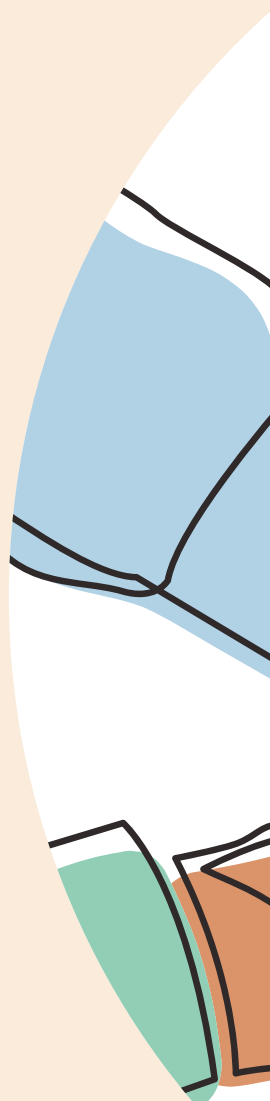
During pilot research with Terrablue XT, we studied the flow of yogic Transmission with the help of a device that records physiological functions of the body while the person is involved in different activities like sleeping, resting, relaxing, or meditating. Our findings showed that there is certainly a flow of energy between the trainer's heart and the one receiving the Transmission, despite the absence of any physical contact between the two people in the meditative state. During every such meditation, the Terrablue device recorded a positive shift in heart-rate variability and galvanic skin response, indicating that the people meditating were in a deep state of calm and rest. Time and again, practitioners have shared the profound changes in their own nature and in their surrounding environment as a result of practicing Heartfulness techniques over a sustained period of time. You may read some of these articles at <https://heartfulness.org/in/humans-of-heartfulness/>.

The heart's wisdom is an ancient science. Shamans or Elders in all cultures were well-versed in using their intuition to predict changes in the season or the weather, in foretelling birth and death, and in identifying nature's resources for healing and vitality. Even today, there are indigenous tribes around the world who are well-versed in the art of tapping into and using the heart's secret potential, which may appear incomprehensible and inaccessible to the scientific community of modern times. Surely a lot more research needs to be done on this unassuming little organ, for I am certain the heart is not merely a physical pump and that there is a lot more to what is visible or tangible. It may hold the key to life, death, and perhaps even beyond.

Thought in Action

Leadership is about empathy. It is about having the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives.

OPRAH WINFREY





Love and Relationships



MAMATA VENKAT celebrates the season of romantic love and reminds us of the importance of self-love for a successful relationship.

Let me preface this article by saying that I am no expert when it comes to love and relationships. My experience with love comes from years of watching corny (yet satisfying) romantic comedies filled with escalating conflicts between two main characters that an audience knows are destined to be together, and a few personal, immature experiences with “love” that ultimately ended up being fantastic learning lessons.

It’s February, the month of Valentine’s Day. Stores burst with red and pink cards and chocolate boxes and mushy signs of love. Televisions play commercials of fresh-faced partners surprising their loved ones with engagement rings from jewelry stores with discount deals. And couples are all abuzz making plans with their significant others for the most love-filled day of the year.

I am at an age in my life when many of my close friends are either in serious relationships, are engaged or married, or are settling down and starting families. Phone and texting conversations

are now filled with sleuth-y discussions on when a significant other might propose based on a hint that they dropped about a trip in January; single friends ask coupled friends how they knew their partners were “The One,” then weigh the pros and cons of getting on dating apps versus arranged marriage; and pregnancy announcements with cleverly-crafted captions and colorful gender reveals now fill my Instagram feed. This phase of life was inevitable, and yet I am surprised by how suddenly it has crept up around me.

I am the single friend that often asks her coupled friends how they knew they were ready to be in a relationship or get married. I collect data from everyone – from my parents’ thirty-year relationship, to my best friend’s nine-month courtship, to the friends that went from high school sweethearts to a family of four. And while all of them have vastly different stories of how they knew their partner, there is one common thread in all of their answers: in order to find love with someone, they first had to find love within themselves.

THOUGHT IN ACTION

No relationship is successful, my friends and family always say, if you can't be your own person, develop your own perspective, and become fully comfortable in your own independence. While the current "self-love" movement can often feel somewhat saccharin, there is so much validity in it – in learning as much as you can about yourself and creating settlement in that before trying to engage with another person.

I am guilty of not focusing on myself enough. In the past, whether it be in a romantic relationship or in friendships, I have been known to give and give and give and, in that unhealthy process, lose myself. I'm sure many of us have been in this boat, or are currently in this boat, and are unsure of how to make the change.

So how do we break this cycle? I've been trying to do a better job of "dating myself":

- I go on walks by myself.
- I spend full days alone cooking, reading, researching, and meditating.
- I write in a diary, often asking myself questions that I would ask a partner or a friend.
- I visit spots in New York City on my own, and challenge myself to do things by myself that I would normally do with friends.
- I put extra effort into my practice of Heartfulness, which ultimately allows me to feel the most connected to myself.

These small moments of self-love are enough to allow me to continue to do more research on myself, to understand what I want and what I need, and to ultimately make those wants and needs the foundation of my individual. The more I learn about myself, the easier it feels to hold my own ground and not feel consumed by other people's perceptions and perspectives. And I know that the more solid I feel as an independent individual, the healthier of a contributor I will be to any relationship.

So, in this sweet season of love, I hope we never forget to take interest in ourselves even when it feels challenging and to give ourselves love first in the best and most positive ways.



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THE HEARTFUL STRATEGIST

PART 1

RAVI VENKATESAN starts a new series for 2020, exploring the role of consciousness in developing strategy, and how to actively develop this potential through the expansion of consciousness.



As a student at business school I found Strategy to be the subject fascinating beyond all others. It carried the potential to provide highly transformative skills. The study of strategies and strategists seemed to indicate that the major shifts and changes in human civilization were, in many cases, caused by those men and women who advised the kings, generals and leaders of their times.

These strategists were the best thinkers, the best analysts, the best visionaries, and the ones who had the highest intuitive capacity and access to inspiration. Though they came from various fields, most strategists were traditionally military and political advisors, like Sun Tzu, Kautilya and Machiavelli. In ancient traditions these strategists were thought to have mystical powers and access to sources beyond traditional knowledge, for example, the shamans of tribal cultures.

In modern times, strategists are also common in the business world, in addition to politics and the military, and the role of Chief Strategy Officer has assumed significance in the last three decades.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article, “What Makes a Great Chief Strategy Officer,” the authors describe a few archetypes of strategists. These provide a great perspective on the role:

1. **Architects** look for industry shifts and understand their organization’s source of advantage.
2. **Visionaries** know how to forecast trends and innovate.
3. **Surveyors** look for trends for long-range planning and have their eyes on the horizon.

4. **Mobilizers** drive alignment across the organization.

5. **Fund Managers** optimize the organization’s investments.

What is common to all these archetypes is the concept of synthesizing available information and insights and making optimal choices.

This raises a big question: For whom are these choices optimal?

The traditional answer is: The organization or community or country that the strategist serves.

Strategy is all about synthesizing information and making choices. These choices have consequences that generate outcomes that impact our entire ecosystem.

As we look deeper into the lives of top strategists from the past, we find a mix of success and failure. We also find patterns that indicate that each of them made choices to optimize outcomes based on *their consciousness about those whose interests they served*. In many cases their perception of their ecosystem was narrower than what it could or should have been, which led to sub-optimal outcomes. Sometimes they made choices that were great for the short-term but not for the long-term. At other times their choices were great for one set of stakeholders but not for others. In many cases, even the best strategists reflected a lack of correct thinking and right understanding. Sometimes they lacked integrity and made unethical or immoral choices, which over time came back to bite them. The mindset of these strategists was dominated by a win-lose approach, where someone was winning and someone was losing. This was because of a misunderstanding of what they thought was their ecosystem of stakeholders.

THOUGHT IN ACTION

At the end of the day, the strategist uses her mental faculties to develop strategies. Consciousness is the very basis of these faculties - mind, intellect and ego being the other major components.

So how can we refine these faculties to develop better strategies?

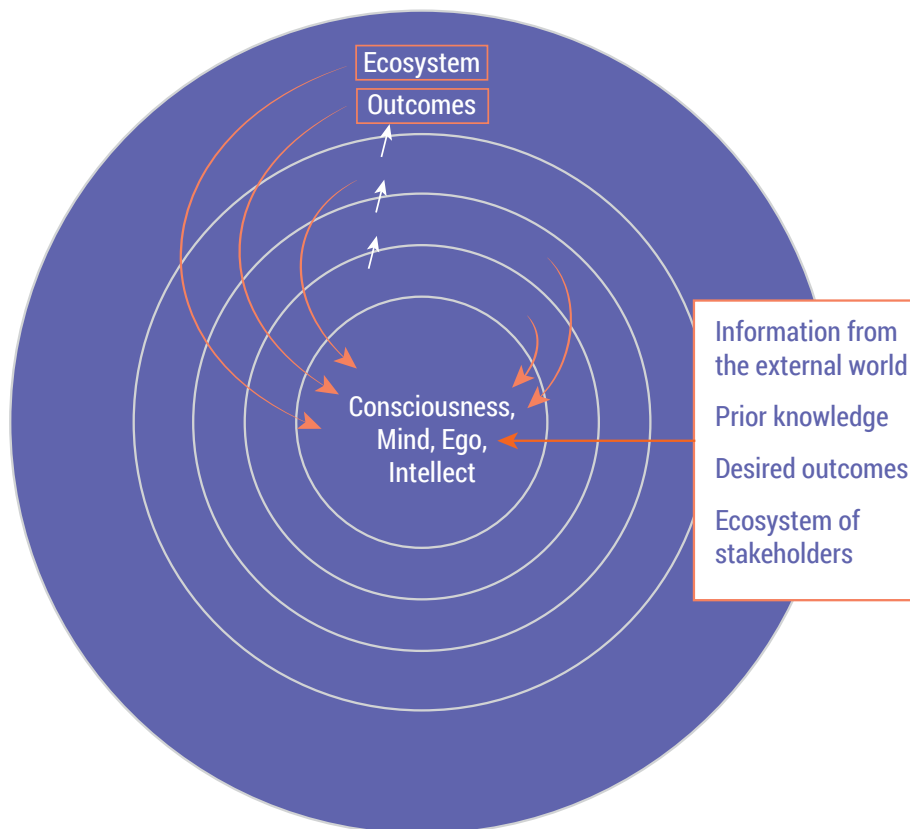
How can we establish a consciousness level that promotes correct thinking, right understanding, and an approach that reflects the highest ethical and moral standards?

Can we become strategists who will always develop strategies that generate the best outcomes for *all* in a consistent manner?

We will explore these ideas in this series of articles by developing the archetype of a Heartful Strategist – one who uses expansion of consciousness as a way to become the best strategist she can be.

The inputs from the external world feed our consciousness. The strategies we develop lead to the choices we make; these lead to consequences that create outcomes. These outcomes transform the ecosystem that we are part of. All these become inputs that modify our consciousness, and further influence our strategies.

A Framework for the Heartful Strategist



In the next few articles we'll explore how to understand and use consciousness as a way to develop the best strategies for all.



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Interview

Empathy may be the single most important quality that must be nurtured to give peace a fighting chance.

ARUNDHATI ROY



Roots of Empathy

PART 1

MARY GORDON was interviewed by **JUDITH NELSON** at the Spirit of Humanity Forum in Iceland in 2019. In part 1 she shares her worldview on the importance of empathy in human relationships and how it forms the foundation for the program she runs in schools on developing empathy in schoolchildren, called Roots of Empathy.

Q: Thanks for joining me, Mary. Can I ask you first about empathy, as your work is especially with empathy? Can you tell me a bit more about your work?

Well, my understanding of empathy is the ability to feel with the other person, not just to understand how they feel, but also to have the capacity to feel with them. And I think that empathy is the number one attribute of being human, and we have too little of it in the world, and it's a shrinking commodity. But I also focus on empathy because when you have cruelty, when you have racism, when you have violence, when you have genocides, when you have any of the big horrific things in the world, the common ingredient is the absence of empathy.



Empathy develops
in the first year of
life, in the loving
relationship
between parents
and babies.

My work is informed by that conclusion, which I came to a long time ago, and also the conclusion that empathy develops in the first year of life, in the loving relationship between parents and babies. And so, our work is about increasing empathy in childhood. And we do that by bringing the relationship between parents and babies, during the first year of the child's life, into the classroom.

The Roots of Empathy program has the schoolchildren sit around a green blanket, with the mother and baby and an instructor. There is a curriculum, which the children don't see, but

which informs what goes on. And the children are coached to observe the baby's intentions, and the baby's feelings. We're talking about a two-to-four-month-old baby who can't walk, can't talk, but can communicate *hugely*, bringing parents to tears, and bringing them to their knees. They can really communicate! So, as the children come to understand how the baby feels, they learn the vocabulary of their own emotions. And it's the job of the Roots of Empathy instructor to ask the children, "When was a time you felt like the baby?"

The program has twenty-seven classes over the school year.



The parent and baby come once a month. There is a week beforehand to prepare, and then there is a week of reflection afterwards. There are different curricula for different ages of children. It is quite remarkable how the children increase their empathy. We have a lot of research that shows when empathy goes up aggression goes down, and prosocial behavior goes up. We want children to be kind, to be considerate, to be collaborative, to be caring, and that's what the Roots of Empathy children are.

Q: You're here at the Forum, and the topic this time round is really about harmony. Is there

a relationship between empathy and harmony?

Well, harmony is such a beautiful word. Harmony has a musical reference, but really, it's a symbiotic word. The whole universe is in harmony and it's in equilibrium. When a newborn baby is born, she or he is discombobulated, and has to seek through the parent (through the mother usually) a way to integrate all of their feelings, and to become in harmony, and to become attuned to the parent. And in the work of Roots of Empathy, the symbiotic relationship with the parent is called an attunement – the attachment and attunement of the parent to the baby. Here

We want children to be kind, to be considerate, to be collaborative, to be caring, and that's what the Roots of Empathy children are.

If you don't love yourself, and if you don't have empathy for yourself, you don't have the ability to love others or to have empathy for others.

we're talking about harmony – one to the other, and to the universe, and to concepts of peace. So, I really like the term “harmony.”

When you reflect and listen to birdsong, and listen to the rustle of leaves, or the waves in the ocean, you can very easily adjust your heartbeat and adjust your whole sensibility to be in harmony with nature. We do that more readily than being in harmony with the world.

Q: If you were to ask yourself what children need in today's world to help them develop the values that are embodied by the Forum, what would you say?

I think the values embodied by the Forum are basic human values: The recognition and inalienable rights of people, human dignity, participation. People who come here typically share a purpose. They might have different avenues, but there is a common denominator of peaceful coexistence on many levels, and, in the Roots of Empathy work, we're really helping children find a sense of balance in their lives. Number one is that they respect and love themselves, have self-empathy. Because, if you don't love yourself, and if you don't have empathy for yourself, you don't have the ability to love others or to have empathy for others. The problem with the absence





It's almost as if
empathy is the
"cure all," the
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life.

of empathy in the world, the decline of empathy, as it can be a generational thing, is that if a little baby is not parented empathically, and if the parent is unable to understand and attune to the baby's needs, the child doesn't develop the capacity to attune to the needs of others, to have empathy.

So, really, Roots of Empathy is about breaking cycles of violence and inadequate parenting. And I think the basic human trait that we need in the world is empathy. If you have that, honesty emerges out of it, respect

emerges out of it. When we say to the little children in the Roots of Empathy classroom, "So, when baby Henri grows up and comes to school, what would you think if people say 'You can't play?'" the children are horrified that anyone would be mean to their little baby. They all fall in love with the baby, and they see the vulnerability and humanity in the baby. During that year, they come to find their own vulnerability and their own humanity, and also their strength. And then they see the strength in humanity and in others.

When we think about the traits and qualities we need in growing up, I think we really need a lot of self-love, giving us the capacity to love others.

It's almost as if empathy is the "cure all," the secret sauce of life. If we can just empathize, it's a little bit like the golden rule: If you understand how someone is going to feel, why would you hurt them, why would you exclude them, why would you say you're somehow less human than I am? It removes the possibility of dehumanizing one another and hiving people off and saying "Your difference makes you unacceptable." We celebrate difference in Roots of Empathy, and it's not visual, it's

not the typical differences of culture and language, of size, or whatever.

We talk about the difference in our innate temperament; that a baby comes to the world with a predisposition to see that world in many ways. Some babies are very intense and emotionally reactive. It's very hard to parent a baby who's very intense. In the classroom, it's very hard to teach a child who's very intense, because they are super reactive. They have temper tantrums; when they are disappointed they have a big reaction. But, if the little baby has a big reaction, nobody says, "You're a bad baby." Nobody says, "Go to your room." Everyone helps the baby learn to deal with the big feelings, and what that does is soften everybody to realize, "Wow, I am like the little baby, too. It's

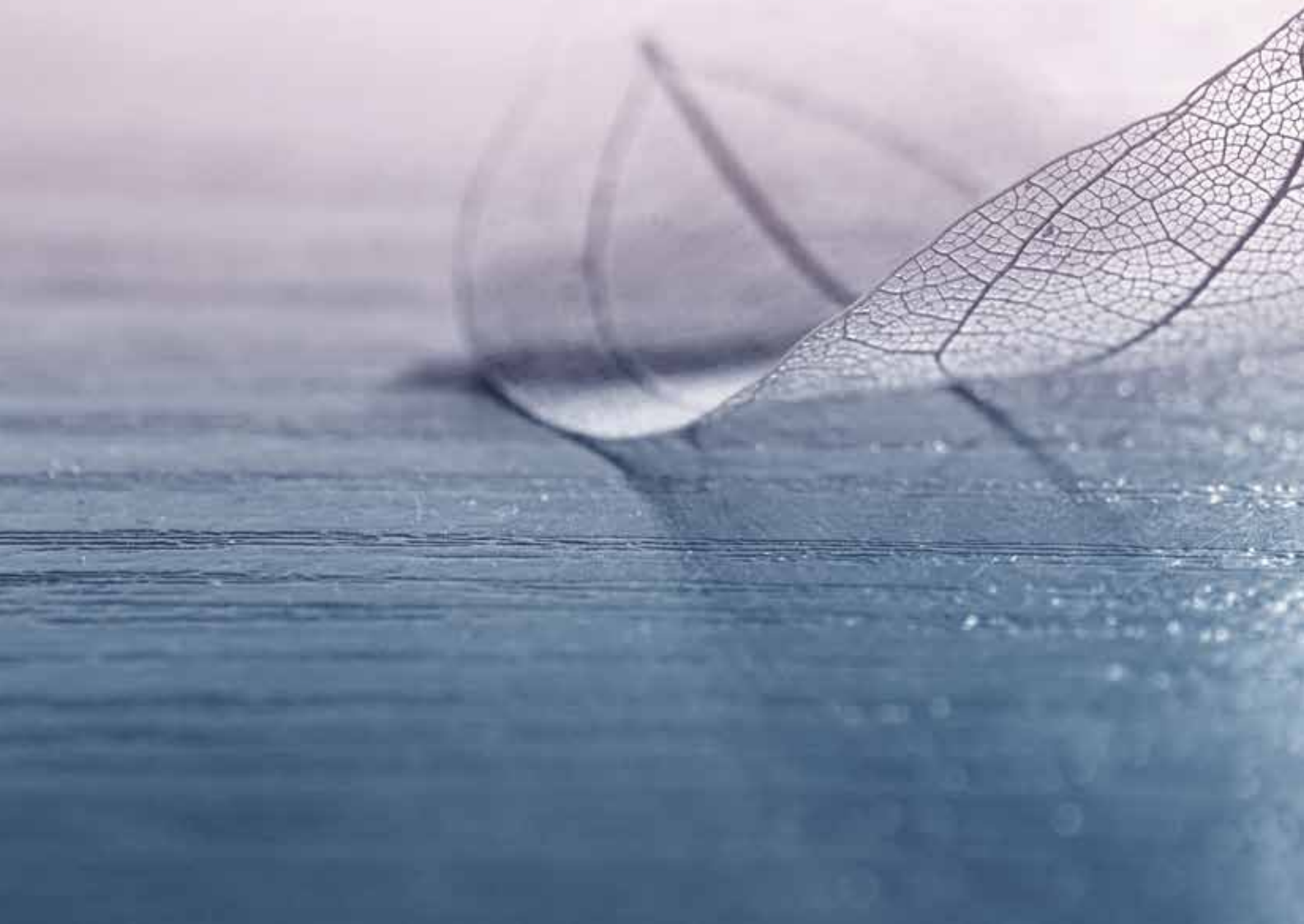
not a moral flaw if I'm very emotionally reactive. It's who I am." And the job of teachers and parents and mentors is to help children recognize who they are, and help them to live in the world that is. It is not to squash them, but to help them understand their reactions. So, when we think about the traits and qualities we need in growing up, I think we really need a lot of self-love, giving us the capacity to love others.

To be continued.

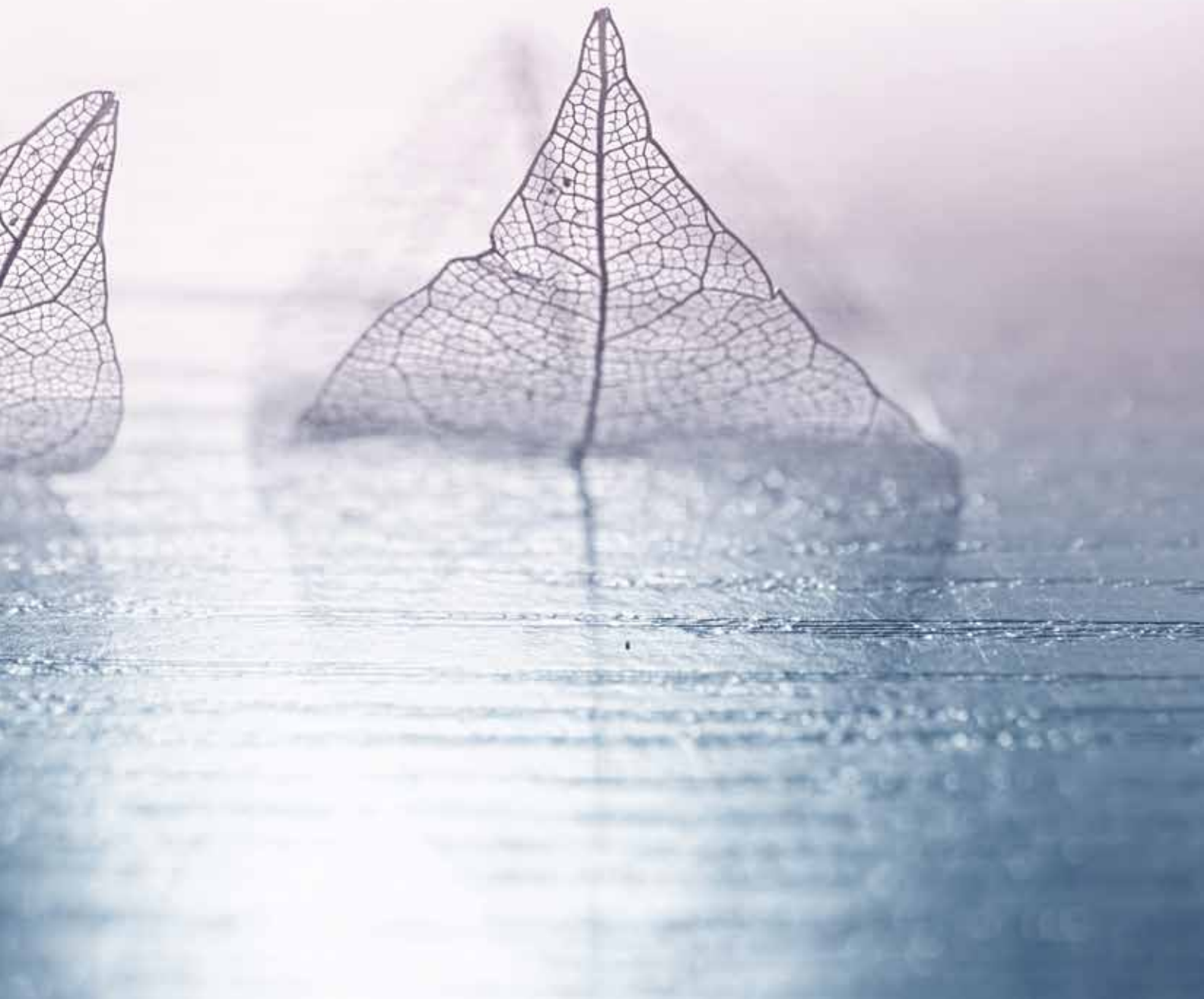


What makes you vulnerable
makes you beautiful.

BRENÉ BROWN



it changes
everything



Kindness and Vulnerability

DONNA CAMERON

explores the beauty that vulnerability brings and its connection with kindness. She also shares her own personal experience of vulnerability and how it has changed her life for the better.



*A gift is like a seed; it is not an impressive thing.
It is what can grow from the seed that is impressive.
If we wait until our seed becomes a tree before
we offer it, we will wait and wait,
and the seed will die from lack of planting. ...
The miracle is not just the gift; the miracle is in the
offering, for if we do not offer, who will?*

—WAYNE MULLER

In high-tech parlance, vulnerability refers to a weakness or flaw that allows an attacker to access a computer without the owner's permission. In human terms, vulnerability describes our susceptibility to being wounded or injured, and also the state of being exposed – to danger, illness, or criticism. For many of us, vulnerability implies weakness. It is something to be avoided.

But is it? Vulnerability may be our way of opening ourselves to the world, and trusting that it is not against us. It may be our way of embracing mystery and not pushing the unknown or the unseen away from us. It may be the truest way of saying “yes” to our lives.

In a relationship, we may be vulnerable when we are first to say “I love you,” or when we admit we don't know something, or that we need help. Our comfort and security are threatened by the “power” we believe we have given the other person. Will he say he loves me back? Will she take advantage of my weakness if I ask for help? Yes, those fears are real. But another way to look at them is to recognize the strength they reveal and to take ownership of that strength. There is no shame in loving, even if the other person doesn't love me back. There is no shame in asking for help, even if it isn't given. The weakness is in burying our feelings or denying our need.

Dr. Brené Brown, research professor at the University of Houston, describes how vulnerability is a trait that wholehearted people share. As she explains in a remarkable TED Talk and in her audiobook, *The Power of Vulnerability: Teachings on Authenticity, Connection, and Courage*, vulnerability is the courage to be imperfect, to do something where there are no guarantees, and to let go of who we think we should be in order to be what we really are. With this willingness, we “allow ourselves to be seen,” with all our imperfections, in order to fully embrace our lives. Dr. Brown further explains that many of us erroneously believe that we can selectively numb our emotions; that we can stifle grief, shame, fear, and disappointment while fully retaining our joy, gratitude, and happiness. It doesn’t work that way. If we suppress the negative emotions, we do the same to the positive ones. Accepting our vulnerability and living wholeheartedly means understanding that the good, the bad, and even the ugly are what make us authentic and beautiful. That place of vulnerability, she says, is the birthplace of joy, creativity, belonging, and love.

Whether we’re committing to love, or art, or business, or kindness, we must have the courage to do it wholeheartedly, in spite of the fact that we know there will always be those who find us lacking. Knowing this is incredibly freeing! We can’t please everyone. Not ever. So we need to stop trying and focus instead on being who we are meant to be.

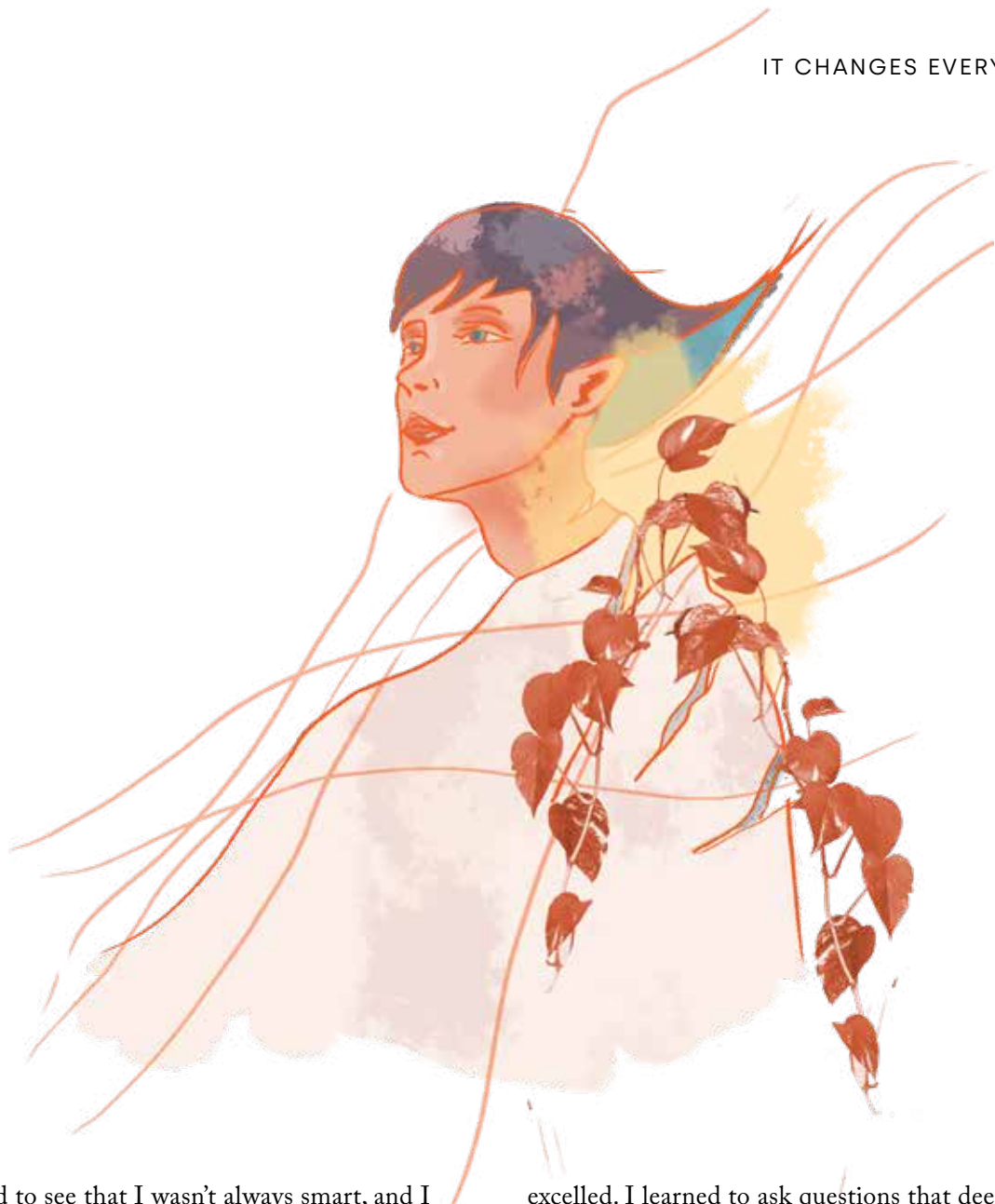
The more I think about it, the more deeply I see the connection between kindness and vulnerability. I’ve talked before about the difference between being kind and being nice. Nice does not require me to be vulnerable. I can be nice without risk, and without exposing too much of myself. I can be nice without making a connection, or without

really caring whether or not you benefit from the encounter. Nice, while pleasant, doesn’t require sincerity or commitment. When I’m nice, I remain safe, guarded from exposure.

Kind is very different. Kind means connecting; it means being aware and intentional about the impact my words and actions have; it means expending energy and effort, and caring about the outcome. It means exposing my truest self in all my imperfections. It also means suspending judgments and accepting people as they are. Kind can be messy, and it may take me to places where I am awkward, clumsy, and tongue-tied. Kindness requires me to take risks. In short, kindness requires me to be vulnerable.

Since making a commitment to living kindly, I have tried to replace nice with kind. The distinction may not have been noticeable to anyone but me. But my noticing it is really all that matters. Whether acknowledging someone’s assistance, explaining a new process, or giving a couple of dollars to someone in need, I try to make a connection, even if it’s only fleeting. Taking the time to make eye contact, exchange a few words, and convey that I see a person and recognize their value – these small actions convey our shared humanity and our shared vulnerability. It feels good.

My upbringing – and I suspect I am not alone in this – was one where I was encouraged to be smart. Grades were important to my parents, and I was rewarded for good ones. Poor grades (that is, anything less than an A) were a disappointment, and I dreaded the thought of disappointing my parents. Being smart and being right became important to my identity. School and career generally reinforced the importance of those qualities. There came a point, though, when I

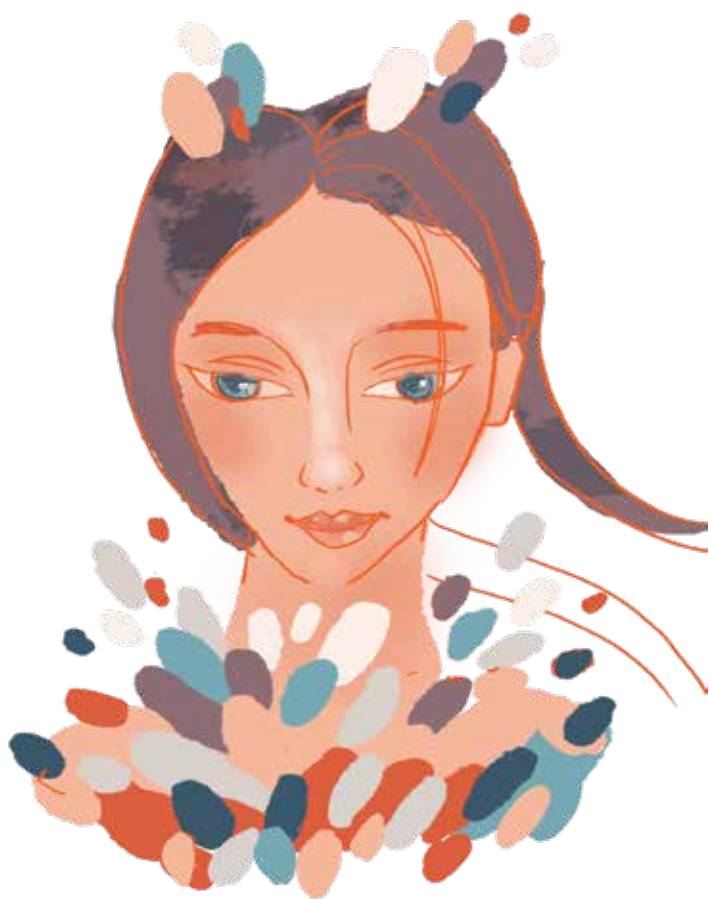


started to see that I wasn't always smart, and I certainly wasn't always right. At first, this felt threatening. If I admit how little I know about this subject or this new technology, will people assume I'm ignorant? Will I be giving up some imaginary advantage I have? It took both courage and a willingness to be vulnerable to start saying, "I don't understand," or "Please show me how this works." It took even more to ask to be shown again when the first lesson didn't "take."

Rather than judging me harshly, I saw that people welcomed my questions. They appreciated the opportunity to share knowledge in areas where they

excelled. I learned to ask questions that deepened my understanding. I breathed a sigh of relief that I was not expected to know everything, understand everything, or always be right. I didn't have to fake knowledge I didn't have. I was surrounded by smart people and, in aggregate, we were very, very smart. The other thing I saw when I was willing to show my vulnerability and admit my ignorance or inexperience was that others seemed more comfortable coming to me to either ask my help or admit when they needed help.

I think it must be very lonely to feel you must always have the answers or be the smartest person in the room.



To make that deep connection, we have to allow ourselves to be seen. That means having the courage to be imperfect, to expose our flaws, and the willingness to be vulnerable.

There is even a vulnerability to writing or speaking about kindness, and inviting people to read or hear my thoughts. Sharing my deepest thoughts – what matters most to me – opens me to their judgment, perhaps to criticism. Beyond that, am I saying too much about myself? Too little? Am I pontificating (oh, I hope not!)? Has it all been said before and said better? Am I missing the point entirely?

If I allow myself to be vulnerable, the answer is that it doesn't matter. As Brené Brown eloquently explains, connection is why we're all here, sharing this planet, and it's what gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

You may feel awkward, exposed, or uncomfortable when you first start heeding the call to kindness. Good! That means you've tapped into your vulnerability. Embrace it, and keep allowing your kindness to grow.

Living our most authentic life, whatever that means to each of us, requires that we let go of our shield and lower our guard, and that we embrace our flaws and our vulnerability. For me – and perhaps for you – it's choosing kindness. It's scary, but the rewards of living an authentic life are beyond measure.

Kindness in Action:

Can you think of a time when you felt vulnerable?
Recall the situation and your response.

Did you back away to “safety”? Or did you forge ahead?

Either way, try to imagine the outcome of the situation had you done the opposite of what you did. Maybe it feels better, or maybe worse, but can you feel the strength of your response when you accept your vulnerability?

Think about the you that most people see: Is that person authentic and real, or are you projecting only what you think they want to see, or what you feel safe allowing to be seen?

What is your relationship to perfection? Do you strive for it, or do you recognize that perfection is a myth that keeps us from being the interesting, contradictory, and often messy human beings that we all are at our core?

Are there messages you received as a child that no longer serve you but that you continue to hold onto?

If you're a parent, do the messages your children receive encourage them to be authentic and vulnerable, or to strive for impossible perfection?

If you haven't seen Brené Brown's TED Talk, make yourself a cup of tea and google it. It will be a very worthwhile twenty minutes!

Reprinted with permission from the author, from her book *A Year of Living Kindly*.







be inspired

Unconditional love for
all beings and every thing
works to support the
flourishing of all.

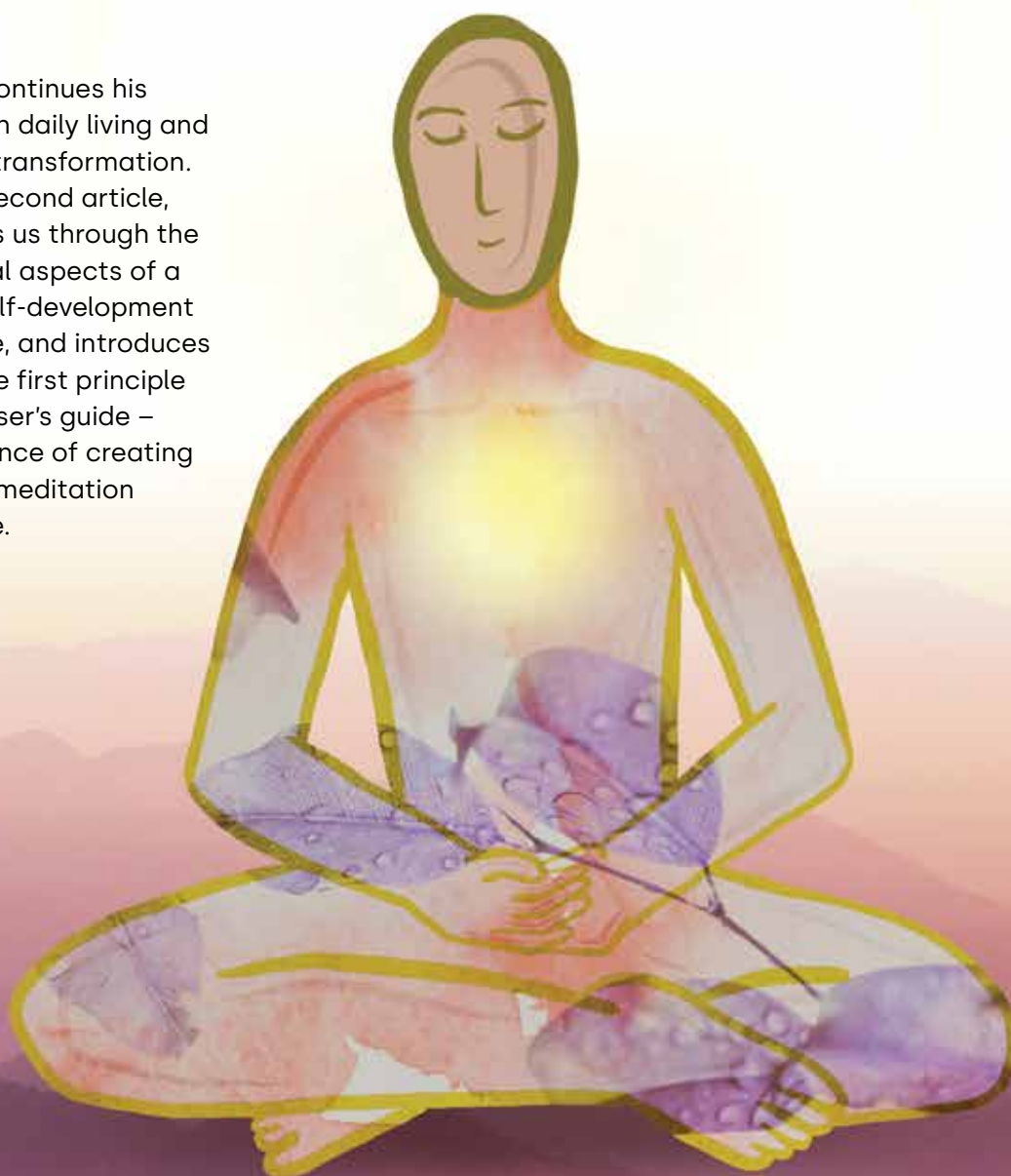
MARILYN MONK

A User's Guide **to Living**

Part 2

THE SCIENCE OF CREATING A DAILY MEDITATION PRACTICE

DAAJI continues his series on daily living and human transformation. In this second article, he takes us through the essential aspects of a good self-development practice, and introduces us to the first principle of the user's guide – the science of creating a good meditation practice.



It may surprise you to know that at the time Babuji wrote his book on the ten maxims in the 1940s, there were just a handful of books published in the area of self-help, including the hugely popular *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles, *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill, *As a Man Thinketh* by James Allen, and *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie. Babuji was the first author in this era to give us a comprehensive guide to living by incorporating the five key elements of self-development: an effective practice, essential values, regulative behavior, leadership, and continuous improvement (see diagram 1). Within those five elements there are also ten principles. Even today, only a handful of books offer such a rich and all-encompassing road map to a fulfilling life.

THE FIVE ELEMENTS AND TEN PRINCIPLES OF SELF-DEVELOPMENT

The ten principles for living follow a daily cycle and inherent sequence, which unfolds like a flowering. At the center of this unfolding is the **practice**. It is the practice that triggers the flowering of consciousness. And it is the first thing that we do in the morning, preparing us for the day, setting the tone, and centering us for what is to happen. As consciousness expands, and purity and simplicity emerge, we are able to peek into our essential nature and start relaxing into our inner being. Our thoughts and actions are then guided by the **essential values** of the heart.

The next segment of the unfoldment is **behavior**. When we are established in the state of **being**, our behavior resonates with that state. As being and **doing** reinforce each other, our consciousness evolves naturally to a level where we want to help others. Hence the capacities and qualities of **leadership** unfold naturally. The last segment of the unfoldment is **continuous improvement** which consists of daily review and corrective action before sleeping at night. This framework is dynamic and fluid. All the segments are co-emergent and seamless. It is holistic, a complete system, a living guidance. As we grow, our work itself becomes our teacher.

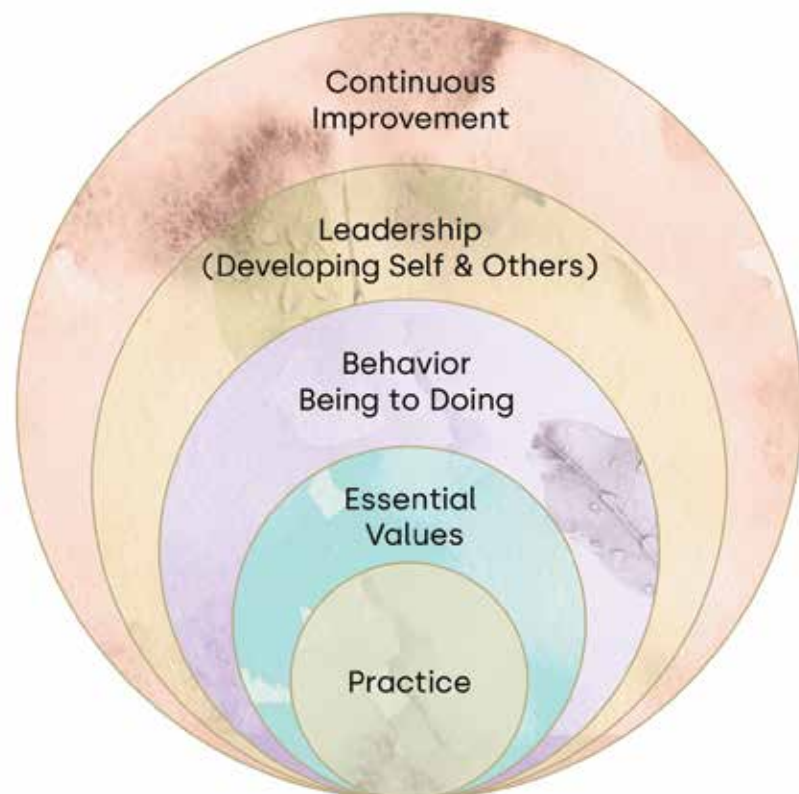


Diagram 1

Within the five elements are ten universal principles:

THE PRACTICE

1

Create a daily morning meditation practice scientifically.

2

Fill your heart with love before starting meditation and before sleeping.

3

Fix your goal and do not rest until you attain it.

ESSENTIAL VALUES

4

Live simply to be in tune with Nature.

5

Be truthful & accept challenges as being for your betterment.

BEHAVIOR - BEING TO DOING

6

Know everyone as one, treating them equally & harmoniously.

7

Do not seek revenge for the wrongs done by others, instead always be grateful.

8

Honor the resources you are given as sacred, with an attitude of purity, including food and money.

LEADERSHIP

9

Become a role model by inspiring love and sacredness in others. Accept the richness of their diversity, while also accepting that we are all one .

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

10

Introspect daily before bedtime, so as to correct your faults and avoid making the same mistake twice.

PRINCIPLE 1: *The science of creating a daily meditation practice*

There are four elements that help lay the foundation of a daily meditation practice: time, place, posture and purity. In this article we will explore the wisdom behind these four elements.

THE PRACTICE

The first three principles are about the practice, the “how.” Anyone who excels in any field knows that practice makes perfect. Michael Phelps, the Olympic swimming champion, amassed more gold medals than any athlete in Olympic history. When asked what differentiates him from his competitors, said that it was practice that made the difference. He practiced 365 days while his competitors took occasional breaks.

When the Heartfulness practices of meditation, cleaning and prayer are done regularly, the knots of solidified tendencies of the mind start to loosen, leading to a purer, simpler field of consciousness that can more easily expand.

This expansion allows the inner condition to percolate into awareness, leading to experiences of higher states of consciousness. The veil of ignorance is lifted step by step during each meditation, finally leading to a state of being which is in resonance with the original pure mind. In short, each meditation is a step towards the Higher Self. As everything in creation is energy and vibration, we experience a higher vibration as a result of meditation.

Time: Align with the cycles and rhythms of Nature

Both ancient traditions and modern science have a deep understanding of the rhythms and cycles of Nature, including circadian rhythms, lunar cycles, the movement of the sun through the Zodiac, and changes in the seasons. All organisms are connected to the rhythms of nature. Plants, animals and birds naturally align to the cycles, and their daily activities of waking, sleeping and feeding are based on them. Seasonal activities like mating, migration and hibernation are also influenced by them. Natural cycles determine when trees shed their leaves and flowers bloom. In modern science, this field of study is called Chronobiology.

These laws apply to human beings too. When we are aligned with natural rhythms, we are in tune with Nature, resulting in health, harmony and balance. We are in the flow. Today, however, we often disregard these cycles, whether in the time we go to sleep at night and wake in the morning, our eating patterns, or how we balance activity and rest during the day. This has led to various lifestyle diseases, disharmony and imbalance. So, the first principle is about setting our lifestyle to be in tune with Nature first thing in the morning.



Based on his deep understanding of the ancient wisdom traditions combined with his own direct perception and experience, Babuji discovered that the ideal time for meditation is just before dawn, culminating in the moment when the night meets the day. He wrote, "Rise before dawn and offer your prayer and meditation at a fixed hour, preferably completing them before sunrise." At this time, the flow of energy in Nature is almost still, helping us to also become still when we meditate. The sun's rays have their least influence at the time of dawn, so when we meditate at this time it is easier to resonate with that original state prior to the universe being created, before heat manifested.

When we meditate before sunrise, the external heat and other influences that have been driven out

of the body during the night cannot creep in again due to the effect of the sun. This helps us to derive the best from the time spent meditating.

In Heartfulness, because we are receiving Transmission during meditation, it also helps to be in a receptive period of the daily cycle. Once the sun rises, our energies shift to an outward flow and it is harder to be receptive. Again, it helps to be in tune with the natural cycle of energy flow.

Sunset in the evening is also suited for the practice of Heartfulness Cleaning. Before the sun sets, our energy cycle is still outward-flowing, so it is easier to remove complexities and impurities from the system. After the sun sets, the flow once more turns inward. When we meditate in the morning, clean in the evening and pray before going to sleep, we become aligned with the natural 24-hour cycle.

This is the ideal. My suggestion for beginners is to fix the same time every day to meditate – one that works for you – it could be 4 a.m., 6 a.m. or 7:30 a.m. Create a date with your inner Self for

meditation at that time, and let it become a habit. Once you adopt the habit, you can shift the timing to align with natural cycles by meditating before dawn.

Space: Create a designated meditation place

All of us have experienced that when we create a regular place to do any activity, whether it is work, sleeping, eating, reading, or watching TV, our whole system automatically identifies that space with the activity. We create automatism or regularity very easily by habit. In fact, in all cultures, it is generally advised to create a separate space of each type of activity where possible.

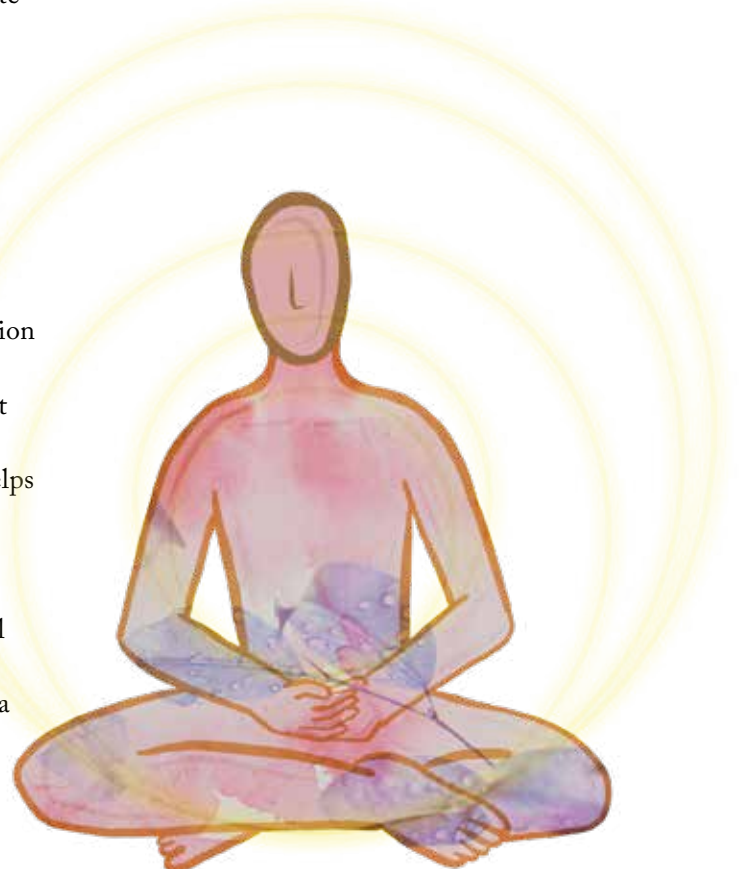
The same is true for meditation. It helps a lot to create a dedicated space for meditation that is personal, clean, comfortable, cozy, and free from distraction. When we have a separate place for meditation, we automatically tune in.

Further, as we continue to meditate, our meditation space becomes charged with our thoughts and feelings – in particular around the source of light in the heart – and the vibrations of sanctity and purity begin to prevail there. This atmosphere helps us to meditate even better, and the charge is not diminished over time.

Having a separate space for meditation is critical for creating the conditions of very effective meditation. Have you ever sat for meditation in a place where a great sage has meditated for some time? The charge is palpable!

Posture: A position that you can hold comfortably

Traditionally, meditators have sat upright in the cross-legged position on the floor. Why this cross-legged position? Crossing the legs create a contraction in the lower body, so that the energy in the limbs is drawn inward rather than being dissipated outward. The contraction starts from below and proceeds gradually upward because of its upward tendency. In order to go upwards, we start contracting from below. We bring the legs to one steady pose and this is known in Yoga as *Asana*. The word *Asana* comes from the Sanskrit root *as*, which means ‘to sit’: the original *Asana* was the sitting pose for meditation. Patanjali explained in his Yoga Sutras: find a steady and comfortable sitting posture so that you can relax your efforts



and allow your consciousness to merge with the Infinite, and you will become free from the impact of the dualities of existence. Babuji wrote, "As far as possible, develop the habit of sitting in one and the same pose."

This is the purpose of *Asana*. It paves our way to the Ultimate. The posture can then remain the same and our physical body will become like an antenna, attuned with the great Source, the very thing we take up in meditation in order to attain our objective.

When we sit in an upright position rather than in a crooked position, the energy can flow up the spinal cord without any obstruction. It also indicates alertness, a healthy disposition, and freshness of the body. In his book, *Raja Yoga*, Swami Vivekananda explains that a lot of activity goes on in the body when we meditate: "Nerve currents will have to be displaced and given a new channel. New sorts of vibrations will begin, and the whole constitution will be remodeled, as it were. But the main part of the activity will lie along the spinal column, so that the one thing necessary for the posture is to hold the spinal column free, sitting erect, holding the three parts — the chest, neck and head — in a straight line. Let the whole weight of the body be supported by the ribs, and then you have an easy natural posture with the spine straight."

Swami Vivekananda also suggested how we can maintain this alignment of the spinal column and the brain: "Say to yourself that you are firmly seated, and that nothing can move you. Then mention the perfection of the body, bit by bit, from head to foot. Think of it as being clear as crystal, and as a perfect vessel to sail over the sea of life."

Babuji explains further: "Performing meditation in an upright sitting pose has been thought to

Performing meditation in an upright sitting pose has been thought to be most advantageous from very ancient times, because in that position the flow of divine grace descends straight upon the seeker.

be most advantageous from very ancient times, because in that position the flow of divine grace descends straight upon the seeker. If a seeker sits crookedly or in an unsteady pose, the flow of effulgence will necessarily be impeded or disturbed. The seeker will thus be deprived of the full benefit of the descent. Therefore, in order to get the greatest spiritual benefit, one must sit in a proper steady pose."

We also sit with our hands lightly clasped in our lap, so that the energy in the arms is also contained within the system rather than being dissipated outward through the fingers.

In summary, meditation is best done sitting with your legs crossed, your hands lightly folded, your eyes gently closed, and your body in a natural, relaxed upright position. The emphasis is to have the same pose consistently, so that the *Asana* also becomes associated with the habit of meditation. If you cannot sit cross-legged, you can sit in a chair with your feet crossed.

Purity: The essential nature of Reality

There is a saying that “Cleanliness is next to Godliness.” Babuji wrote, “Give special attention to purity of body and mind.” When we fix our attention on the highest, its purity impels us to imitate its nature. In his commentary on the first maxim, Babuji tells us, “The principle of purity was based on the thought that the eternal and pure Existence which we have to enter into is entirely free from all contaminations. It is perfectly pure.” He also says, “Our attention being directed towards the attainment of purity of that highest level, we begin to imitate it in all outward ways, looking particularly to the cleaning of the body.”

So we prepare ourselves for meditation by giving special attention to external cleanliness, creating a feeling of purity. But what about purity of the mind? It is not enough to only focus on the body. If necessary, we can do a few minutes of Heartfulness Cleaning before meditating, as it will remove the impurities in the mind. Babuji explains that this feeling of purity itself becomes a power making our path all the more smooth so that we can soar higher and higher. Thus, purity itself helps us to attain our goal of Yoga. In the Heartfulness tradition, when the system is purified with the subtle power of Transmission, the downward tendencies of the mind are diverted upwards, and this automatically creates a craving in the heart for the Source.

From the perspective of creating the habit of practice, purifying the body and mind prepare us for meditation, smoothening the process.



REFLECTIONS ON PRINCIPLE ONE

The four elements of time, space, posture and purity come together to support the habit of daily morning meditation. We are creatures of habit. When we develop a habit, it goes into the subconscious mind and becomes automatic – we no longer have to consciously try to do it. The body remembers through biophysical processes, for example muscle memory, and effortlessly performs the action automatically. Examples of this are driving, smoking and swimming. We create the habit by repetition. Neural networks fire and wire in the same pattern through repetition, creating the habit. Time, space and posture are woven into this pattern. Per contra, if we keep changing the time, place and pose every day, it becomes impossible to form the habit. Instead of a daily habit it becomes a daily struggle.

Purity is another important aspect of forming the habit. In addition to the physical act of cleanliness, purity is also an attitude, a feeling and a quality. So, when we prepare for meditation by cleaning ourselves physically and mentally, it triggers a

Making the practice a daily habit is vital. The four elements that are essential to creating the habit are a fixed time, preferably before dawn, a dedicated place, a steady posture and purity of mind and body.

habitual response, just as a smoker reaches out for a cigarette when he smells cigarette smoke in the air.

In my experience, the preparation for morning meditation starts the previous evening with cleaning. Remember, that we discussed two auspicious windows of time in the day for spiritual practices – one is in the evening and the other is in the morning. I would consider 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. in the evening and 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. in the morning ideal windows of time for spiritual practice. If we sleep before 10 p.m., it is possible to catch eight hours of restful sleep and wake before 6 a.m. for meditation. This way your wagon is hitched to Nature's 24-hour auspicious cycle.

Coming back to the preparation for morning meditation, the complementary practices of evening Cleaning and bedtime Prayer set the attitude and inner state. Cleaning removes all impurities and complexities from the system and prayer re-establishes our lively link with the Source so that it continues during the sleep. Before going to sleep, if you subtly suggest that

you are being prepared through the night for morning meditation, you will be happy to find that you wake up fresh in the morning and slip into meditation with ease.

This first principle is fundamental to a good life. Practice is the first step in the process, as there is no possibility of real progress without practice. Therefore, making the practice a daily habit is vital. The four elements that are essential to creating the habit are a fixed time, preferably before dawn, a dedicated place, a steady posture and purity of mind and body.

In view of this, evaluate yourself: can you improve the way you prepare for meditation? What will motivate you or inspire you to take action? The most popular answer is self-discipline. What drives self-discipline? Of course it is willpower. But when does this process become effortless, requiring no willpower? If you ponder over it, you will soon see that it is when we have so much interest and enthusiasm. Does a small child need willpower to eat ice cream? No. The word "enthusiasm" comes from the Greek *enthousiasmos*, meaning "to be inspired or possessed by God." By connecting with the Divine, the Source, through prayer, our enthusiasm grows and grows naturally and automatically, so that our interest in meditation also grows side by side.

And where does prayer take us? We don't have to look far, as it is within us, within our hearts. The path of the heart is the path of love. Everything is fueled by love.

And what is the source of that love we feel in our hearts? I want to leave you with this question. It is something that you will have to find for yourself, and when you find it, you will have everything.



MARILYN MONK, Emeritus Professor of Molecular Embryology, University College London, shares some fascinating insights into the nature of consciousness from the perspective of science.

A HIERARCHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

from Atom to Cosmos

Before I begin, let me confess that the study of consciousness is not my field. I am a molecular biologist. In over 60 years of my research of life at the subcellular and cellular level, I have been concerned with DNA replication and repair, cell signaling, epigenetics and regulation of gene expression in development, Lamarckian inheritance, regenerative medicine, early diagnosis of genetic disease and embryo/cancer genes. So why now consciousness?

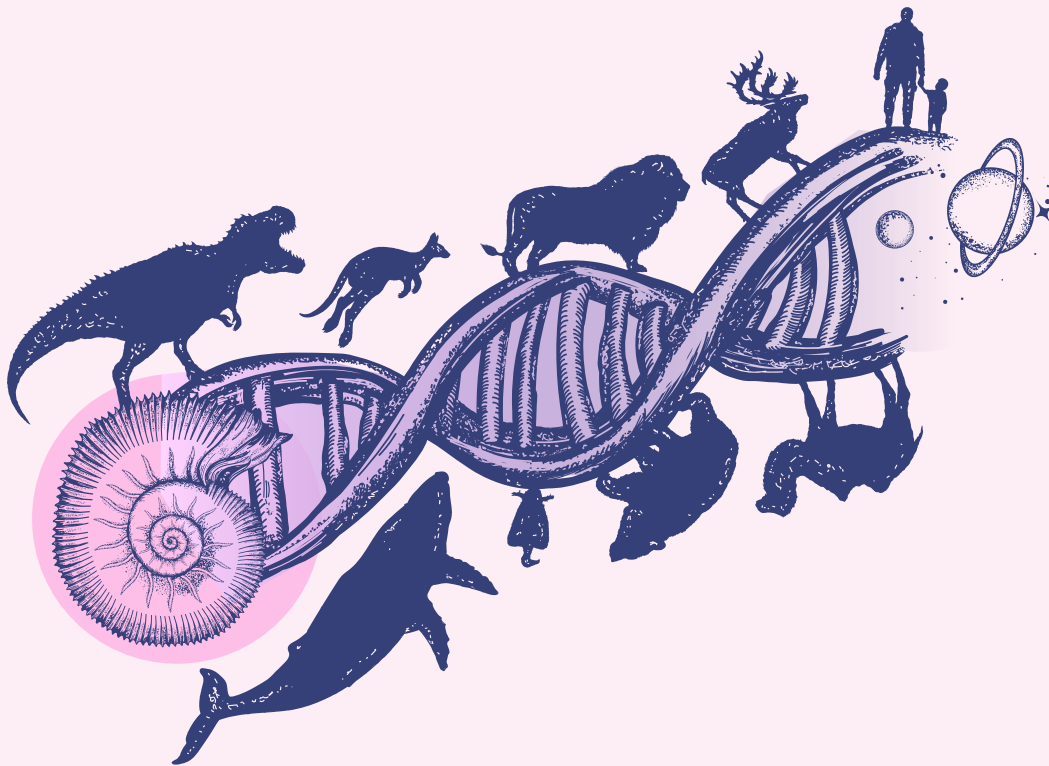
Over the last year I have found presentations of consciousness studies very confusing. Is consciousness in the brain (as Francis Crick expounded), or not just in the brain but pervading all existence (as in panpsychism)? Does consciousness use material mechanisms in its operation, or is it non-material? Is consciousness a human phenomenon or is all life, and perhaps non-life too, conscious? So, first of all, I asked myself where is consciousness for me? Experientially, I

know in everyday activities I have consciousness. But then, in times of meditative experiences of wonder and beauty, when I am aware of being aware, I feel strongly that consciousness has me. As one who has always happily embraced paradox I think both are true. But is the mechanism of consciousness in either sense material? I decided to start with the definition of consciousness from the Oxford Living Dictionary, which is “The state of being aware of, and responsive to, one's surroundings.”

People who talk about consciousness studies are mainly concerned with human consciousness and may use definitions that are human-centered – indeed, the Cambridge Dictionary definition of consciousness is “The state of understanding and realizing something.” Certainly that has been the main focus since Descartes, who confined consciousness and mind to humans. More recently, there has been much debate about consciousness in animals – even in plants – and I have observed in my research, and in my love for all creatures on this earth, that all life is aware and responsive to surroundings. The term “aware” is certainly more of a human concept, and may be taken to include a huge range of consequences of awareness – sensations, feelings, self reflection, memory, imagination, and so on. But, as a biologist, when I consider the simple definition – aware and responsive to surroundings – I see consciousness extends outside of the human realm, though in lower life forms, or even non-life forms, we see awareness more simply as detecting and sensing surrounding environment.

Consistent with my usual approach to scientific exploration, I began without investigation of the vast literature on the topic of consciousness. In this way I hoped to avoid being overwhelmed by the myriad of ways of thinking about the topic. During my early studies I was mentored by a wise scientist (Professor Bob Pritchard), and then later by my spiritual teacher (Bhagwan Rajneesh or Osho), to

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approach my work of exploration with an open mind. Bob said to me don't read the literature before you begin – you will be indoctrinated and think it has all been done already. Rajneesh said to me that there should be no *a priori* hypotheses, no preconceived ideas guiding my research. So I decided to start thinking about consciousness at the level of the atoms, molecules, cells and tissues of my laboratory research, and found myself working my way up from the micro- to the macro-cosmos, looking for the mechanisms of consciousness (sensing environment and responding to change) at each level of increasing complexity.

My starting rules for this analysis were views I had already – specifically, that everything is interconnected and everything is in service to its own higher order structure. These principles came from influences in Edinburgh University in the early 70s: Henry Kacser taught the concept of interconnectedness as metabolic flux in the metabolome – the intricate interconnected

biochemical pathways within a cell; and Conrad Waddington taught the concept of service as epigenetic programming of different cells in the body to serve their higher order structure – the different tissues and organs. My scientific approach was to look for material mechanisms of consciousness at each level. And, indeed, I found that material mechanisms were known at all levels, with a few exceptions that might require a greater knowledge of quantum theory and entanglement. Surprisingly, with such a materialist approach throughout, I ended up with a model encompassing a sense of belonging, meaning and purpose throughout evolution.

Just starting with consciousness as a state of being aware (detecting or sensitive) and responsive to surroundings, it is clear to me that my experience that I have consciousness relies on my senses of sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste. I also get messages from my body to my brain if I am hungry or tired or in pain, and messages from my brain to my body for different emotions I experience. And

My starting rules for this analysis were views I had already – specifically, that everything is interconnected and everything is in service to its own higher order structure.

indeed messages from within the environment of my self as I am conscious of my mental functions of memory, imagination and the machinations of mind (the latter more confined to human life). These are functions of human brain/body communication. A lot (but not all) is known about material mechanisms involving the wiring of millions of neurons in the brain, and transmission of signals between brain and body via informational molecules binding to special cell receptors. However, it is evident to me that all forms of life have consciousness but at different levels of sophistication of the consequences of their consciousness.

A worm is conscious – it detects and responds to changes in its environment. A bacterium can detect a gradient of sugar involving special receptors on its surface and responds by transferring the information to its means of movement, its flagellae, to swim towards a food source.

As an example of consciousness in lower life forms, we can look at an area of my own research in the early '70s, namely, how slime mold amoebae (*Dictyostelium discoideum*) become aware of changes in their environment and how they respond. Aggregation of the individual free-living amoebae into a multicellular structure is triggered by their awareness that they have run out of food. The individual amoebae detect the effects of a change in their environment (starvation) and start to emit a signal (pulses of cyclic AMP), which diffuses out into the territory (see Figure 1). The fastest signaling amoebae establish and take control of the territories. Amoebae in a territory, detecting the gradient of cyclic AMP, make movement steps towards the source, and emit their own signal to attract amoebae further out to join the aggregation. So the signal is relayed out and bands of amoebae move inwards.

They move towards each other as they come closer to the center to make amazing spirals looking like galaxies. The aggregate formed in the center of the territory forms a multicellular slug capable of movement over a greater distance than the individual amoebae could manage. The slug develops phototactic and thermotactic receptors at its tip so that it moves towards the light and heat at the soil surface where it forms a fruiting body. A third of the amoebae in the slug sacrifice their lives to create a stalk, which bears the spores aloft so that they will be distributed to better feeding grounds. I worked on the material mechanisms and parameters of aggregation in the early '70s and it was amazing to understand how clever this organism can be when triggered by the need to move to new pastures. It is a good example of a lower organism sensing and responding to the environment at several levels and the material mechanisms are known.

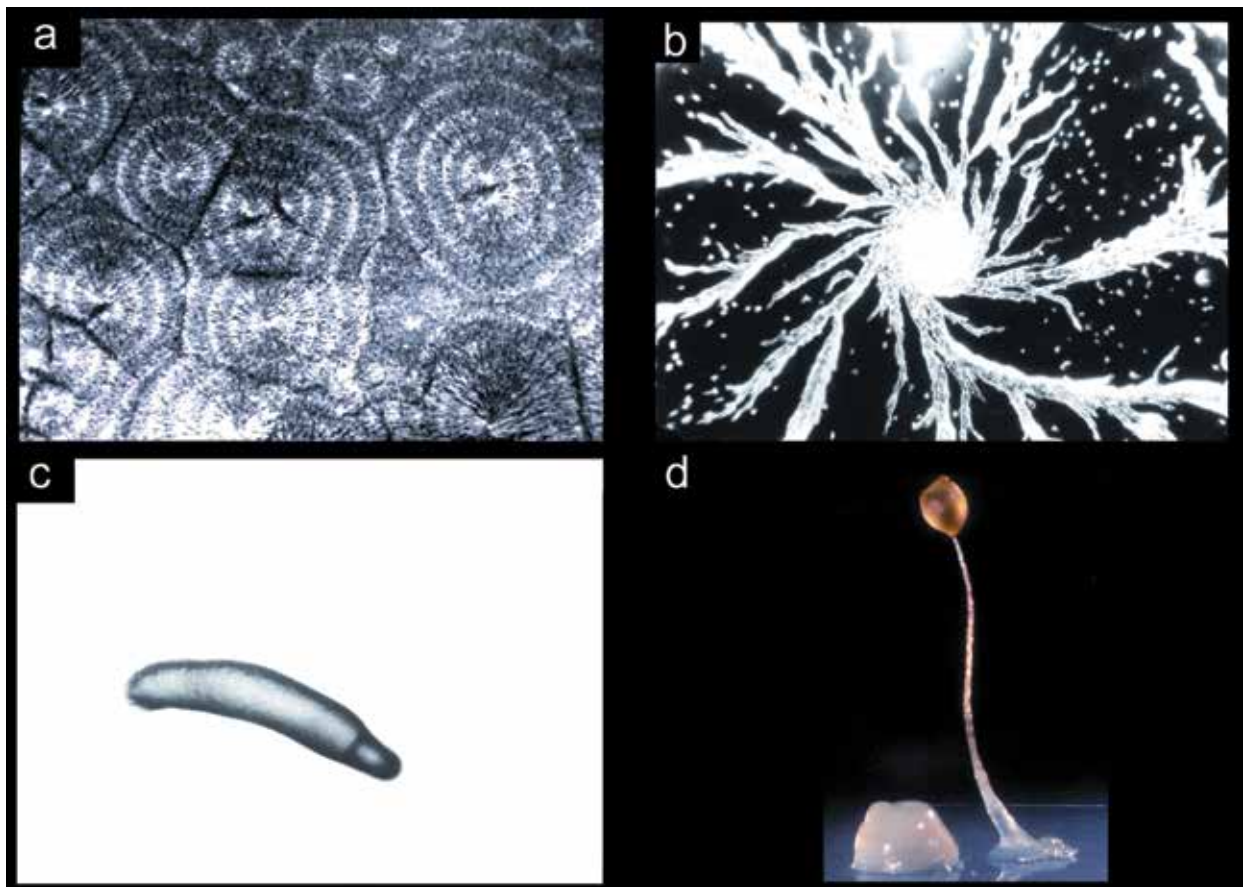


Figure 1. Aggregation, movement and fruiting body of Dictyostelium after the amoebae detect they have run out of food.

a) Amoebae in the field emit a signal of cAMP triggered by starvation and those with fastest periodicity form territories with amoebae relaying the signal outward and making a movement step inward towards the source.

b) As they approach the center, amoebae are attracted to each other's cAMP signal and the streams form spirals.

c) The slug, measuring several centimeters, has receptors that detect heat and light, and so can detect, and move the distance, to the soil surface.

d) At the surface the slug transforms into a fruiting body. A third of the amoebae in the slug sacrifice their lives to form a stalk to bear the spores aloft (Alcantara and Monk, J gen Microbiol 81;321-334, 1974).

So consciousness can operate at the level of whole populations of individuals. What about lower and higher levels of complexity – atoms, molecules, cells and tissues, or ecosystems, solar systems and galaxies? Does it make sense to say that the mechanisms of consciousness are still material throughout?

In the following model of a hierarchy of consciousness, I propose that mechanisms at all levels of complexity depend on interconnectedness of the parts serving their higher order structure. A model of interconnectedness applied to increasing orders of complexity is shown in Figure 2. This is illustrated as a binary model for simplicity (clearly more than two atoms make a molecule, more than two molecules make a cell, and so on). Nevertheless the binary interconnected model links all parts at all levels of increasing complexity

into one unified structure. The steps to increasing complexity are due to a conglomeration of parts from the level below (survival of the fittest due to safety in numbers). Note, however, that this rule is broken at the step from populations to ecosystems where I have brought in another hierarchy of non-life to create the ecosystems – soil to rocks to mountains, rivers and oceans.

Analysis of this hierarchy of interconnectedness will show that, at each level, the parts are in service to their higher order structure – the electrons to the atom, the atoms to the molecule, the molecule to the cell, and so on. The parts in service at each level are conscious, in that they detect and respond to their environment. In fact, service of parts to their whole is essential for survival of the whole in evolution. The mechanisms are material at all levels, as we will now examine, starting with the atom.

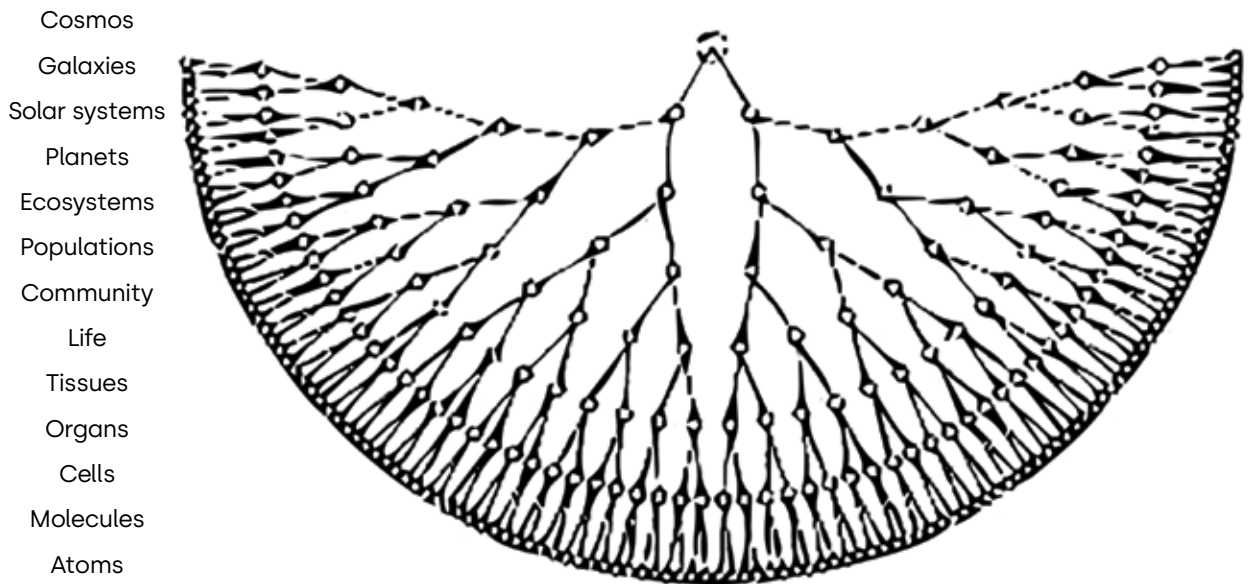


Figure 2. A diagrammatic representation (an inverted ancestry model from Gregoire, 2014) of an interconnected hierarchy of increasing complexity in evolution. This is a binary model for simplicity – the number of atoms making a molecule, or molecules making a cell, and so on, is greater than two. It also shows a path of increasing complexity limited to eight levels, going through life forms familiar to the author (my own expertise is at the level of molecules and cells and differentiating tissues). Clearly there are many other intermediate life forms between the atom and plants and animals, which are not included here. A similar hierarchy could be created for non-life, starting with grains of sand.

Atoms consist of a balanced number of neutrons and positively charged protons in the nucleus and negatively charged electrons in their orbits. For example, a carbon atom has six electrons and six protons; an oxygen atom has eight protons and eight electrons. When the balance of protons, neutrons and electrons is disturbed, the atom decays. The components or parts of the atom are in service to their higher order structure – the atom.

Next we have the molecules, which consist of several atoms joined together by covalent bonds formed by a sharing of electrons in outer orbits. The stability of molecules is variable depending on the strength of bonding between the atoms and the possibility, or not, of their bonding with another atom or molecule. One could say that the atoms are in service to the molecule and the mechanisms by which they bond and form the molecule are understood.

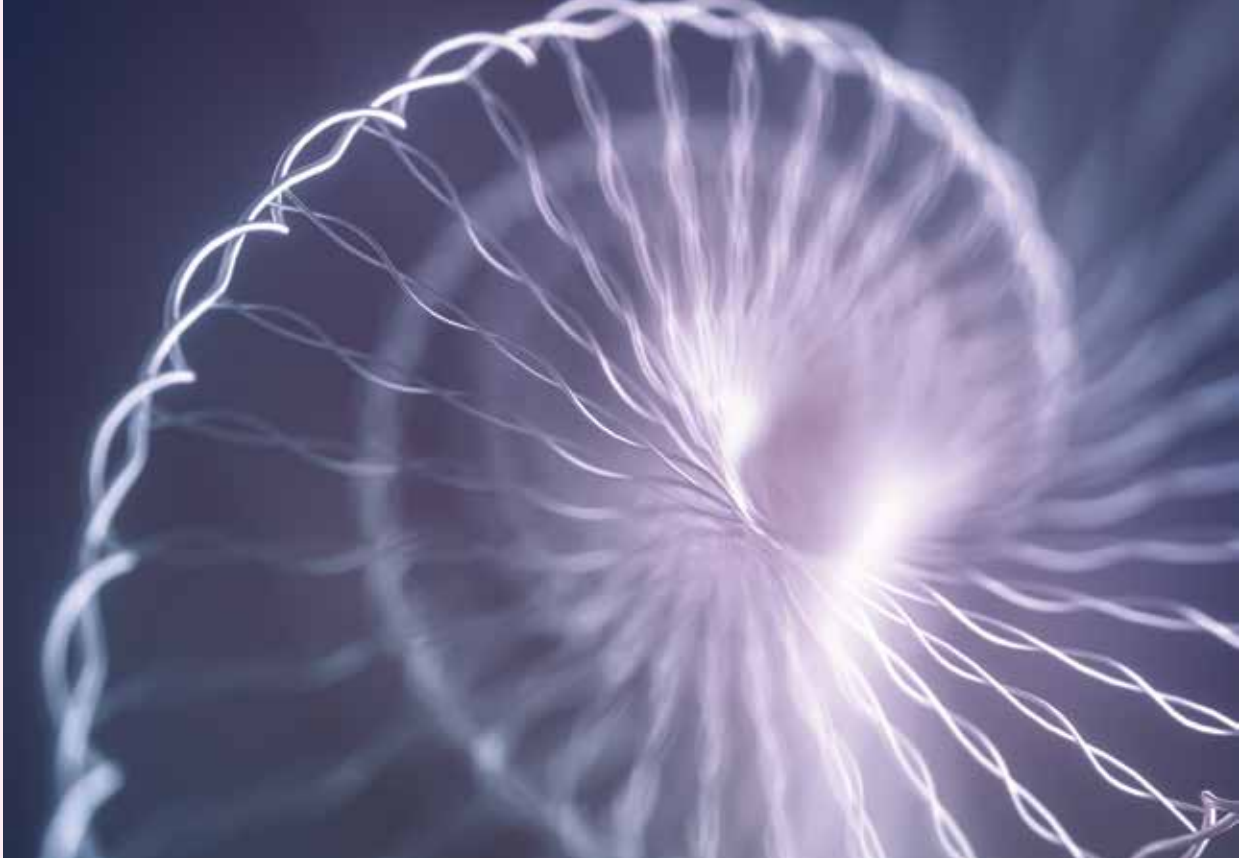
Molecules interact in an interconnected way to form cells. There are approximately 3,000 biochemical pathways, with their associated substrates and products, enzymes and cofactors, interconnected in every cell. This is called the metabolome. As students in the '60s and '70s, we would have a Boehringer chart attached to a door or wall somewhere as a sort of biochemical bible. I developed many single cell enzyme assays to monitor gene transcription changes in early embryonic development from studying my Boehringer chart. Interconnectedness means that a change in any biochemical pathway affects all the pathways in the cell. The interconnected changes in all pathways are called metabolic flux, which can be observed by mass spectrometry. For instance one can distinguish a starvation metabolome, from an addiction metabolome, from a sugar eating metabolome, and so on. Metabolic flux shows the interconnected pathways detecting and responding to a changing environment – our definition of

consciousness. The molecules are serving their higher order structure, the cell.

Referring back to Figure 2, we see that the next items in increasing levels of complexity are tissues and organs. Taking a mouse as a mammalian example, all cells in the mouse body have the same 20,000 genes. The differentiation into over 100 different cell types in the mouse body is directed by signaling from the different environments of the cells in the developing fetus to program their genes to be on or off, up-regulated or down-regulated. The programming is by epigenetic mechanisms – modifications superimposed on the DNA of the mouse genes to regulate their expression.

In computer language, the genes are the hardware and the programming is the software. The cells detect information from their environment in the developing fetus and respond by differentiating into cells with the required function (bone, muscle, blood, skin, nerve, and so on). In this sense, they are conscious and serving the tissues and organs of the body. Maybe even more incredible is that all mammalian embryos have 90 per cent of their genes in common, yet differential epigenetic programming from the species-specific environments of ovary, testis and uterus, determines the differential development of species.

We have been looking so far at two rules – interconnectedness within and between levels of increasing complexity, and service of parts to their higher order structure at each level. It is time to observe a third rule: even though the parts are in service to their higher order structure at each level, the parts do not know what they are serving. However, if they do not serve correctly the higher order structure will not survive. It is also important to note a fourth rule: the whole is looking after its parts at each level.



Referring back to Figure 2, we see the next level included is populations. Populations of different species can form a higher order structure, for example, the beehive, or the Portuguese Man O' War jellyfish. Here we have a colony of organisms working together to make a greater whole. One can see this too in simultaneous movement in flocks of birds and shoals of fish all moving as one. And indeed in humans sharing a common event, like football crowds moving as one in response to events on the field.

I do not know the mechanisms of communication between individuals in flocks and shoals and football crowds; however, the material mechanisms are known in populations of individuals living in service, e.g., in the beehive. The genes of different worker bees – nurse, farmer, forager and warrior – are epigenetically programmed to differentiate them to perform their specific tasks. If they do not serve their higher order structure, the beehive will die and so will the bees. Anarchic behavior in worker bees causes destruction of the beehive. Throughout we see that service of the parts to

their higher order structure through consciousness, aware of their environment via interconnectedness and responsive to change by service, ensures material survival at every order of complexity. One could argue that consciousness is primary and that matter is derivative from consciousness. Indeed, evolution can be seen as a model of interconnectedness (awareness) and service (responsiveness) ensuring harmonious survival at each increasing level of complexity.

The next level of complexity I have included in my hierarchy is the ecosystem. An ecosystem is an interconnected biological community of interacting organisms and their physical environment. It will have the right pastures for the herbivores, the correct herbivore to predator ratio, it will have rivers (and maybe an ocean) and mountains and forests. The parts are in harmonious interconnected service to the whole for survival of the ecosystem. The mechanisms are known. As we know, if the forests are destroyed, if a river is diverted, if the top predator is removed, e.g. the wolves in Yellowstone Park, these disturbances can create imbalance

in the whole system, leading to the death and destruction of the ecosystem.

And the case is the same with the next level, our solar system. Although we trust that our planet Earth will safely look after us in the future, a glimpse at the past is not so reassuring as it contains inhospitable ice ages and a meteor that wiped out the dinosaurs. And now our planet is threatened by climate change and the melting of ice caps; or possibly a solar flare. Indeed only this year, Nature published a report that astronomers had observed a distant star spitting out a flare 100,000 times the energy than any seen from our own sun (Argiroffi et al., *Nature Astronomy* 3:742-749). This is the first detection of a remote star emitting a coronal mass ejection of a type that could wreak havoc on surrounding worlds.

We have reached our galaxy and the cosmos, and we can summarize in the following key points:

- A view of a hierarchy of interconnectedness through, and within, levels of increasing complexity from atom to cosmos.
- At each level the parts are conscious – aware of, or detecting, or sensing, their surrounding environment, and responsive to change – in service to their higher order structure. The material mechanisms of service are established and known.
- Even though the parts do not know what they are serving, the higher order structures are caring for their parts.

Some important consequences flow from the above model:

1. Interconnectedness means that reverberation (or flux) can move through a whole system, top down or bottom up or middle out.

For example, a solar flare might disrupt ecosystems, scattering populations into new environments, leading to cellular adaptation and reprogramming of the DNA of genes. Or the human race could become extinct leading to the recovery of ecosystems.

2. Flux through the system leads to events that do not seem to have a material mechanism because consciousness (awareness of change and response to change) is happening across several levels of complexity. This leads me to wonder whether aspects of the paranormal might be explained in this way, certainly in space, for example, remote viewing. However, it is not so clear to me how paranormal events happen across time. Here, connections made between individual aspects in the interconnected system due to flux must be recorded in some way and be recoverable later. What could be the mechanism of recording previous events in time and re-membling?
3. Service of parts to the higher order structure to which they belong is essential for survival at all levels of complexity, and ensures development in evolution. However, it is important to note that this is not an imperative, because it is essential that there is turnover – the replacement of the old with the new. Extinction is equal to creation; for all species that exist on Earth today an approximately equal number have become extinct. The rule is that death equals birth. One wonders whether this means that birth and death apply to our whole cosmos.
4. This scheme of things establishes consciousness as the unity of everything, and the belonging to the unity of all things in service to their higher order structures. It fits with my experience that I have consciousness at my particular level of the hierarchy,



and that consciousness has me though my interconnection to everything else. It celebrates *belonging*, and *meaning*, and *purpose*, for everything on planet Earth and beyond. My scientific approach is material – understanding the material mechanisms throughout and even showing how aspects of the paranormal might be understood. My current scheme, based on interconnectedness and service, provided that we use sensing and detecting as part of our definition of consciousness, shows that consciousness is all-pervasive and its material mechanisms at each level of complexity are known.

5. And finally, service is imbued with the concept of unconditional love. Unconditional service in humans is an evolutionary selectable, in that it activates the pleasure centers in the brain.

And, beyond that, unconditional love for all beings and every thing works to support the flourishing of all. Anarchy in this scheme may lead to extinction.

So now, do we draw a line at the top of this hierarchy? Remembering that parts cannot know who or what is being served at all levels, and that the higher orders structures are looking after their parts, we cannot know the next higher order structure beyond the cosmos. It is plausible to argue that beyond this entire scheme of all that exists, beyond the cosmos, there may be a yet higher power caring for everything.

Adapted from a publication with the same name in *Paradigm Explorer*, Vol. 2, 2019, pp. 3-7.

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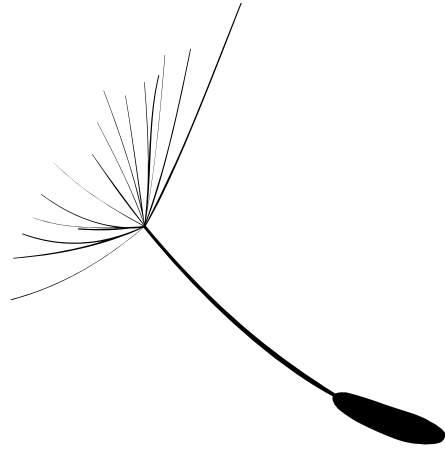
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Taste of Life



When we try to pick
out anything by itself,
we find it hitched to
everything else in the
Universe.

JOHN MUIR



Lessons from the Garden

Being with Berries

ALANDA GREENE is picking blackcurrants in her garden. Reflecting on the nature of these tiny fruit helps her see the importance of valuing everyone and everything, of being in tune with Nature, of interconnectedness, and of Mitakuye Oyasin.



The cycle of seasons has circled again to the blackcurrant bushes where berries have turned from green to bronze to glossy blue-black. And again, in this steady and rhythmic process of picking, these berries offer understandings. My mind quiets enough to be receptive to insights. My tendency is to move along quickly with tasks. The garden cares little for my inclinations about efficiency and speed. It requires that I adjust to its rhythm. It is much wiser than me.

This morning, with a twig broom, I swept the stone patio and was reminded of Zen monks tending the gardens around temples in Japan. I used to think the slow care with which they swept was about their practice, like the walking meditation where each moment is attended to in awareness. The sweeping probably is about this, but today I understand that they also sweep slowly because this kind of sweeping just doesn't work if done quickly. When I try, which I did repeatedly today, feeling time pressure and wanting to get this patio cleaned and get on with other things that need doing; when I try this way, the pine needles, the dried catkins, the cones, the papery leaves just get stuck in the cracks and in the broom. The debris that covers the gravelly parts gets mixed with bits of gravel itself, which is not what I want. Sweeping

slowly and lightly allows the ends of the twigs to nudge the bits of litter along without carrying a lot of what needs to remain.

Like the currants cycling to ripeness, my thoughts turn again around seeking the balance between an impulse to be efficient, to use time effectively, and the recognition that going slower can sometimes mean a job is done in an effective way. When I try to move faster in picking berries, I end up dropping them, or getting stems and leaves mixed with them, or squashing them. Yet the nature of my life – of other things in the garden needing attention than just this bunch of berries or this patio full of twigs and dust and leaves – means that time is a factor to consider. I have a meeting later in the day. I don't feel comfortable about arriving late, keeping others waiting just because I want to explore the Zen-monk method of sweeping the patio.

The garden cares little for my inclinations about efficiency and speed. It requires that I adjust to its rhythm. It is much wiser than me.



Now, in the case of the currants, it isn't effective to rush the picking either. When I hurry, it takes longer to correct the add-ons from rushing than if I slow down and pick carefully. Voices from the past rise up, unbidden, sometimes unwanted, but still good advice, then and now. "If you don't have time to do the job properly the first time, how are you going to have time to correct your errors or do it again?" I think this is my mother's voice. She also liked the humor of the well-known, "The hurrier I go, the behinder I get." She has become much wiser as I age, even though she died over 25 years ago.

Certainly picking the berries carefully is a more pleasant way. A rhythm develops, I forget about time, and the shiny bead-like black spheres fill my container, a small bunch at a time, giving a pleasing soft thump as they land on top of the other berries.

A poem I recall from childhood likened a spilled bucket of blueberries to the sound of tiny rabbit feet running. It's the same sound I hear now when the blackcurrants are dropped into my pail. When I hurry, I don't even notice that sound.

One by one, I drop them in. They are small in comparison to plump blueberries or to the blackberries that fill a container in just a few minutes. The currants require careful picking that is pretty much a one-at-a-time process. Yet the container is filled. And another. In a few days more will be ripe, and eventually the freezer has a stack of containers labeled "Blackcurrant." In fall and winter, these will transform to incredibly tasteful jam or concentrated juice.

As I pick one berry, it seems so small compared with how many are needed to fill the tub. It isn't

like this one berry is the make or break berry of the collection. There isn't a berry that is more important than the others, or acts like a kingpin around which the berry collective organizes itself. None of the berries seem exceptional, not famous or accomplished or more worthy or valuable than any other. Yet I can't identify any berry that isn't part of it all, that doesn't matter.

One by one, I bring these berries together, and together they will be part of something else. It's a one-berry-at-a-time process, yet it isn't the one berry that matters. Yet it also is. I have a niggling, unformed idea at the edge of my mind that this contains wisdom about humans and our actions, our concepts and ideas.

A Zen teacher, when asked what enlightenment is, replied, "Small moments, many times." Like one berry at a time, many times?

I think of communities where people intentionally work together for a common purpose with shared ideals. In such collectives, there's something that emerges that is more than any particular individual. Every berry matters. Every person matters. But not in the sense of being more important than any other one.

Many examples in modern cultures reveal pervasive ideas that some people are more important, more worthy, than others. It is at the core of a class system, whether the class is defined by ancestry and lineage or by acquisition of money and things, or by education, or by power. With berries, they are visibly alike, small differences but nothing exaggerated. They all have a similar role – feed something and maybe let the seed find a place to grow. Humans have diverse roles and easily observed variations. Somehow this has become

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linked to worth and value. Those not perceived as having high value, or worth, or importance, do not receive an equal share of goods and services, of opportunity, of access to resources. Of respect.

If I sorted out the currants, picking them one by one and deciding to keep only the ones of a certain size or shape, tossing out the rest, what I would be doing is depleting the potential of what is collected. It would be less, limited. All the berries contribute. All people matter. The opportunity to contribute just needs to be included in the container.

Indigenous teachings throughout the world focus on relationship; it is the network of connectivity that is the important thing, the thing to be served and cherished and supported. Not just the network of human beings, but the network of all parts of creation. Mitakuye Oyasin, in the Lakota or Ojibway language, means "We are all related," and refers to the interconnectedness of all things. The phrase appears in most languages of

Life is not just
networked;
it is network.



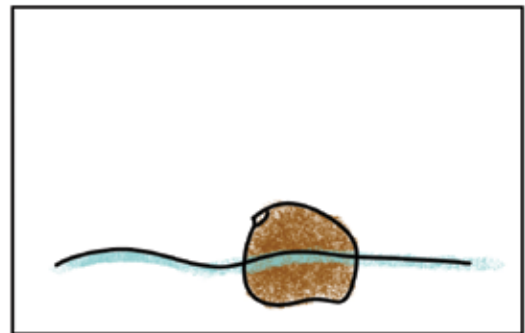
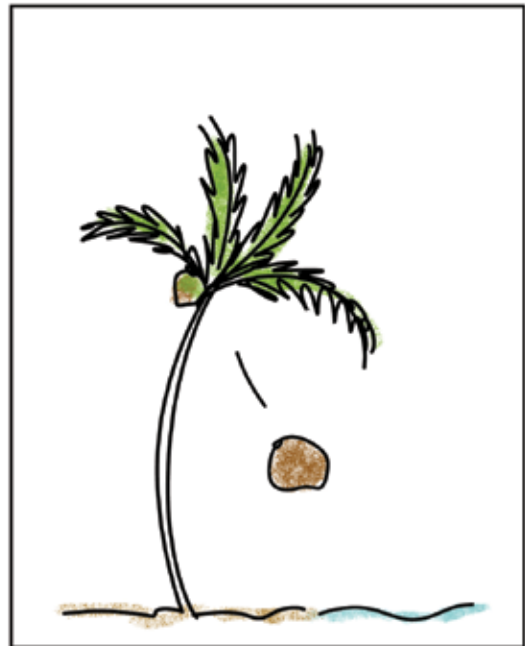
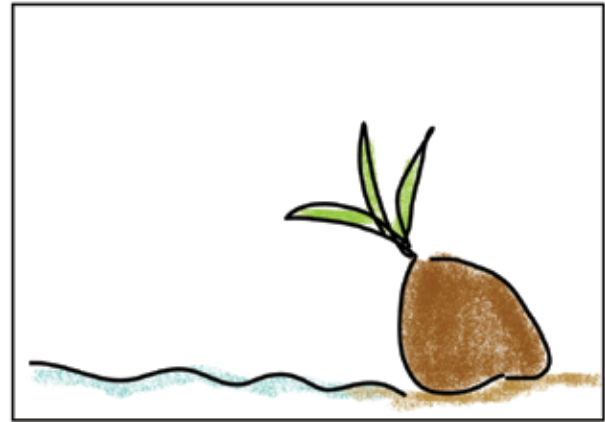
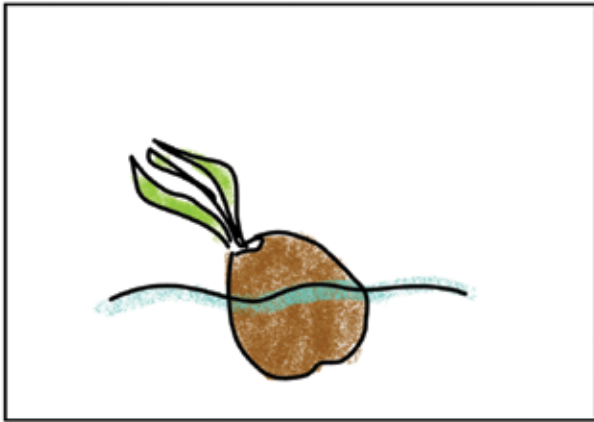
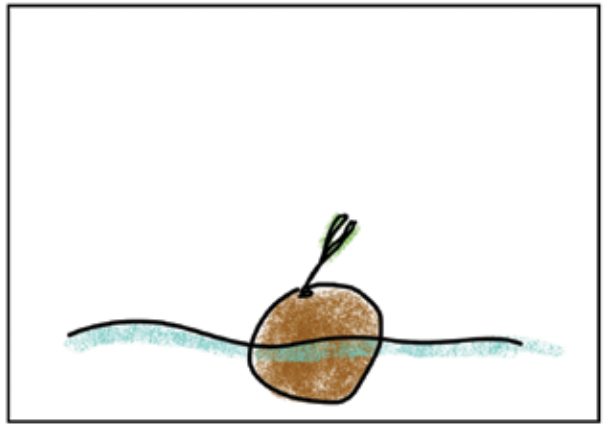
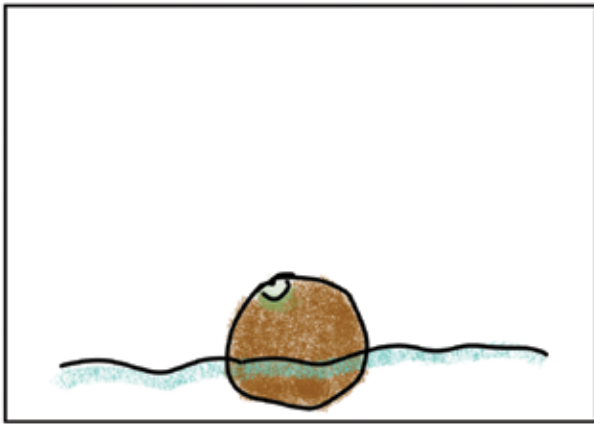
indigenous peoples of North America. It is spoken to close, sometimes to open, an address. It is an acknowledgement regularly repeated, to encourage remembrance that we are all part of the same life. We all matter.

In his exquisitely written book, titled *The Songs of Trees*, author David George Haskell writes about his observations and studies in the boreal forest of Ontario (as well as about many other trees and forests in the world). He explores the fossil record and the trail of emerging life, an evolution that reveals the role of this network of connection. “The fir tree’s life is relationship,” he says. “Life is not just networked; it is network.”

In the complex connectivity of life, with so much we humans do not yet understand, how is the network, the relationship, impacted by the loss of so many species, so many habitats? There is a continued process of change in the life on the planet, but most of the current changes, losses, are the result of human activity. That activity seems driven by self-interest and lack of understanding about this fundamental relationship of all things. My carelessness with picking quickly, or an arbitrarily selected standard that would determine which berry to pick and which to leave out, becomes today a potent metaphor.

I pick the currants more slowly. What isn’t completed today will be waiting tomorrow. My impulse to move quickly and get it done so I can get on to the next thing is colored with an attitude that doesn’t honor Mitakuye Oyasin. This is my chance to be the change I want to see in the world.

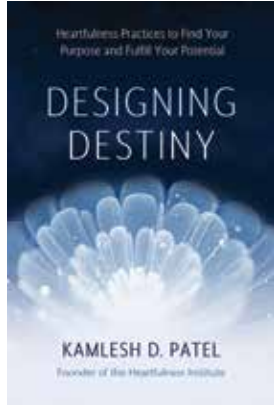
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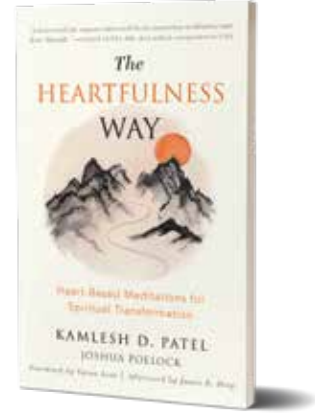
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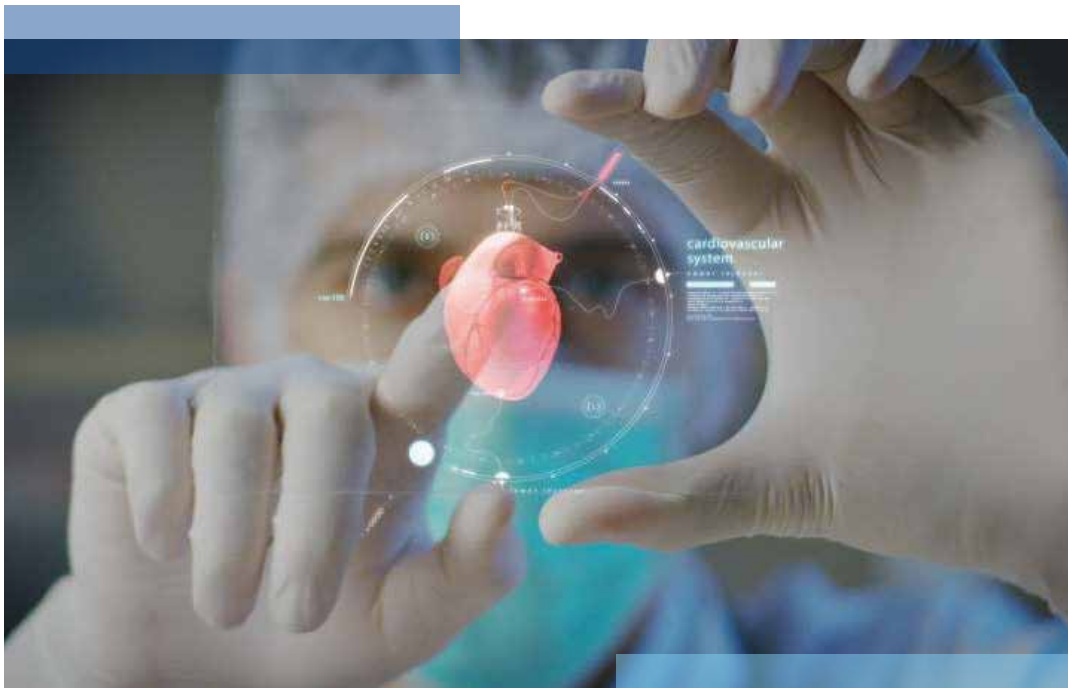
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