

A Guide to Intentional Living

Finding and Expressing Your Authentic Self

Logistics of Heart-Centered Living

A Bridge to the New Earth

by John Donovan



Preface

Over the course of my personal 35-year recovery process and my work as a drug and alcohol counselor of 25 years, I discovered an accountability practice that enabled me to move from dysfunction to self-actualization. It's a simple tool that involves identifying subconscious obstacles to my well-being and setting conscious intentions for the states of being that I want.

Central to the practice is my understanding of the reticular activating system, which is a part of the brainstem that filters information, as well as my understanding of memory, the mental body, and the emotional / feeling body.

I am not a scientist. The information covered here emerged from my personal recovery and my direct experience working with thousands of others. Intentional Living is experiential in the sense that the practice arose from direct perception and experience. It is also experiential in practice, meaning that my healing came through my willingness to experience the feelings that I was either unable to feel or was cut off from feeling as a child.

This guidebook is not a scientific study, and I am not an expert on the reticular activating system or memory.

There is debate about what memories are and where they are stored. It's a controversial issue, and I will leave that debate and determination to the experts. I believe the descriptions I offer here give me a working model for my healing. Take what fits for you and leave the rest. Or, better yet, do your own study and come to your own conclusions. This works for me.

Introduction

This practice is for the person seeking freedom or relief from persistent disempowering attitudes and beliefs, compulsive or obsessive behavior patterns, or feelings of isolation.

Intentional Living is the end result of an accountability practice of identifying subconscious obstacles to our well-being and setting conscious intentions for the states of being that we want. Examples of what we want might include inner peace, or self-confidence, or self-forgiveness, or a feeling of self-love.

The first step in releasing subconscious obstacles to our well-being is to name where we find ourselves without blame or judgement. I call this the “Accountability Tree,” and it is explained on pages 21-22. Through the Accountability Tree process, I move from “reactor” to “actor.” This is what I call living intentionally.

Before my recovery, I found myself in patterns of codependency, alcoholism, work-holism, rage-holism, and a myriad of other addictions and destructive patterns. I now recognize all of these are avoidant behaviors. No matter how hard I tried to change or break these patterns, I continually found myself back in unwanted behaviors, or I would replace one avoidant pattern with another. This left me feeling frustration and confusion.

Early in my recovery, I heard “this is a cunning, baffling, and powerful disease.” My question was: “What is cunning, baffling and powerful?” I got responses like “keep coming back,” or “one day at a time,” or “let go and let God.” These were wise and helpful statements, but they did not answer my question.

In the course of my recovery and my work as a drug and alcohol counselor, I discovered that subconscious beliefs are the cunning, baffling, and powerful mechanisms that kept me stuck in destructive, avoidant behavior patterns that I knew I did not want. In addition to shaping our patterns of behavior, our early life experiences also shaped how we see ourselves in relation to self and others.

Albert Einstein is often quoted as saying “You cannot solve a problem with the consciousness that created the problem – you must look for something new.”

This guidebook will show you how to see and acknowledge the consciousness that created avoidant behaviors, and then how to introduce something new. It covers the process I used to unravel and uncover the following:

- (1) the source of my dysfunctional patterns
- (2) the mechanism that supported and maintained the destructive patterns
- (3) what I have found as a way out of dysfunction patterns
- (4) a practice to establish new/healthy patterns of behavior

The information shared here is intended to challenge your beliefs, your perceptions, and your patterns of thinking and behavior. It will confront what you believe you understand.

In offering this material, it is not my intention to fix you or give you my idea of what's best for you. I don't know what's best for you. It would be arrogant for me to assume that you need this material to be a better person.

Here's what I do know about you. **You hold value as a human being. Before you change anything, before you read this material, you hold value as a human being just as you are in this moment.** So, from this point let's begin. Blessings.

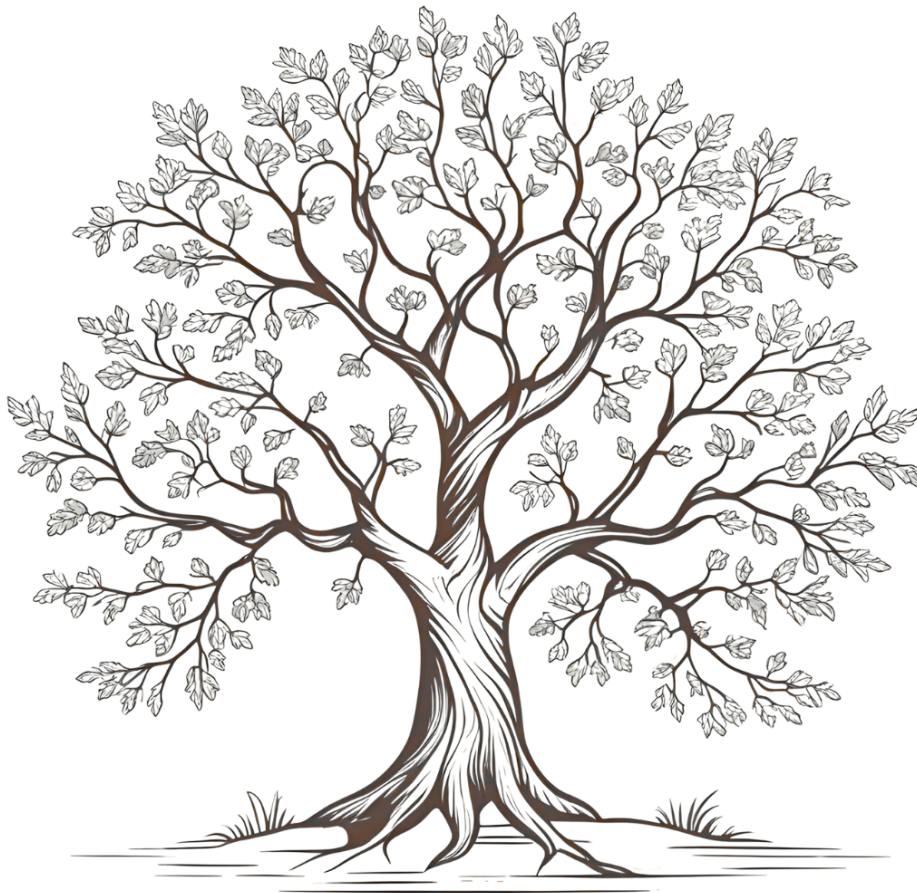
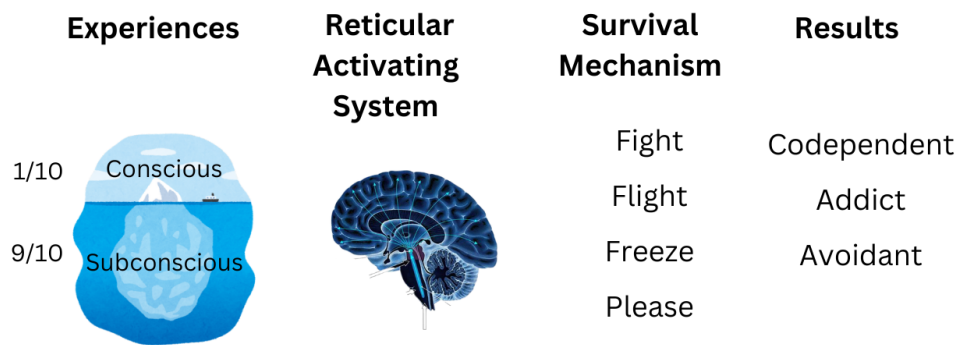


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Overview of the Process

Complex Post Traumatic Stress > Display



I Want _____

Obstacles to what I say I want:

1. Experiences
2. Beliefs, Perceptions, Patterns
3. Expectations

Five Constants of Relationships

The process for acquiring, maintaining, and sustaining what you want:

1. Focus – pay attention
2. Own my projection
3. Move toward my pain
4. Question / change my story
5. Today I intend to

What I Want

When I started my recovery journey in 1988, I found myself at an Adult Children of Alcoholics meeting. At that time it was known as ACoA. The organization is now known as Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families (ACA). The meeting began with a reading of the program's 12 steps, *The Problem*, *The Solution*, and other readings and guidelines.

The Problem covers characteristics that many adult children of alcoholics share. It includes fear of authority figures, perceiving criticism as a threat, tending to confuse love with pity, and about eleven other traits (see Appendix, page 29). I related to all the characteristics outlined in *The Problem*.

The Solution that ACA offers is to become your own loving parent. Becoming our own loving parent starts with attending to our feelings. And it speaks to the question: "What do you want?"

When I began in ACoA, I couldn't put into words what I wanted. All I knew was I wanted what the meeting offered. I wanted what they had. As I attended the meetings, what I could articulate was I wanted my mind to shut down for a moment. I wanted a moment of peace. So I learned to identify what I wanted as "peace of mind." This began my recovery journey.

Consciously choosing what you want and saying it out loud starts the process of what you want coming into your experience. This goes for *whatever* it is that you want.

Exercise: Identify What You Want

Begin with this question: What do I want that I do not have?

What do you want that you don't have, have never had, or had at one time and were unable to maintain or sustain?

I want _____

I found that asking this question tapped something inside me that I now identify as my desire center – that place in me that longed for something different. That longing, I believe now, was what kept me coming back to 12-step meetings.

I discovered that when I did not set a conscious intent for what I wanted, my subconscious intents directed my choices. My subconscious led me to where I found myself, which was lost, alone, and seeking help – from either therapy or a 12-step recovery group.

- If you don't know what you want, you will continue to get what you have.
- If you want something that you cannot have you will constantly be frustrated with yourself and others.

A note on what you can and cannot have:

We *cannot* control others – their choices, their actions, their beliefs, or their perceptions – so we cannot have something that depends on what another chooses, does, says, etc.

We *can* choose what we do, how we act, what we believe, how we see things. These are things we can have through conscious intent.

Examples of what you cannot have:

- I want my partner / boss / friend / sibling to stop nagging
- I want to be in a relationship where both people are honest
- I want others to act right
- I want people to act with common sense
- I want someone to understand me

Examples of what you can have:

- I want to live a life of peace
- I want peace of mind
- I want to be clean and sober
- I want to be nurturing in my relationship with my loved ones
- I want to be free
- I want to be honest in my relationships

The Obstacles to What I Want

Now that you have expressed what you want, let's talk about what is stopping you from getting it.

A few of the things I wanted were peace of mind, a sense of confidence in myself, the ability to be honest, and a sense of purpose. Even after I could articulate that I wanted these things, I was still unable to simply move to or embody them.

There is an axiom that says: "You have the answers inside of you." If the answers are inside of you, would you be willing to consider that what is hindering you from having what you want is also inside of you?

The obstacles inside me that stop me from having what I say I want are:

- my experiences
- my beliefs
- my perceptions
- my patterns
- my expectations – of myself and of others (expectations are preplanned resentments)

Let's go through these one-by-one.

Experiences

All my experiences from conception to the present moment are held in my memory in the form of frequency and vibration.

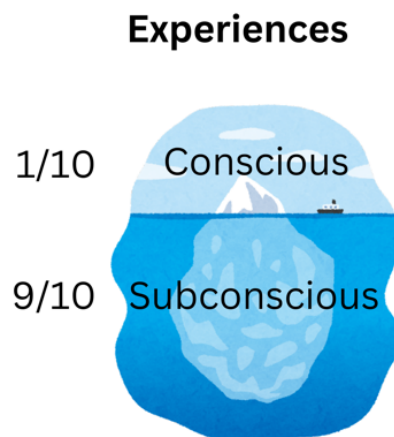
Only one-tenth of my experiences are in my conscious memory. These are memories that I can bring to my mind. It's not that they are always on my mind. They are the memories that I can recall.

Nine-tenths of my memories have been relegated to my subconscious mind. I use the word 'relegated' deliberately. As human beings, we have the capability to access and/or remember everything that has happened to us, and we have that ability for the purpose of survival.

Information that's vital to our survival is stored in our subconscious mind to help keep us safe. For example, if we felt threatened by something or were harmed by something that happened in our past, our subconscious mind alerts us to danger when something similar happens in the present moment.

It's not because we are in recovery that we relegate nine-tenths of memory to our subconscious – every human being on the planet has this ability. The capacity to remember everything that has happened to us is a human quality. And it has enabled us to maintain life on this planet for however long you believe we have been here on the planet.

Our subconscious holds our traumas, our pre-verbal memories, and our non-verbal memories. Our subconscious mind is not unconscious. It is active and offers information to us every time we make a decision. And our decisions have led us to where we find ourselves. In my case, that was in some type of avoidant behavior, i.e. codependent, addicted, etc.



Beliefs

A belief is something that is accepted, considered to be true, or held as opinion.

Beliefs we hold about ourselves are stored in our conscious and subconscious mind. Our beliefs have been formed out of our unique experiences. For example, my experiences being raised in my family of origin — a dysfunctional, alcoholic family — shaped my beliefs.

Some of my beliefs are held in my subconscious mind and were formed around events or experiences that are not in my conscious mind. Although we may not be able to articulate these subconscious beliefs, they influence our decisions and our perceptions and patterns of behavior.

For example, in my pre-recovery life I found myself sidestepping compliments. If someone said, “great job, John,” I sidestepped that by saying things like, “oh, anyone could have done that,” or “you must be talking about someone else.” I could not simply accept the compliment.

In my family of origin, I was given the message that I wasn’t enough. So that message became the subconscious belief “I am not enough.” Because the compliment did not align with this belief, I deflected or rejected the compliment for survival purposes. Our beliefs have been informing our decisions, and our decisions led us to our current reality.

The reality of the child becomes the belief of the adult.

We can discover these hidden beliefs by articulating where we find ourselves. What I mean by “where we find ourselves” is what we have manifested in our current reality. For example, I found myself at an AA meeting. Early in my recovery, I heard a speaker say, “The best you could do, the highest intelligence you’ve have, got you here.” So, the “where” I found myself was in a meeting owning my truth “I am an alcoholic.” That was my reality at the time, and the choices I made – both conscious and subconscious -- got me there.

Perceptions

A perception is a mental image or concept formed as the result of observation. Perception is also awareness of elements of an environment gained through physical sensation or sensory input.

When I refer to perception here, I am referring to how I see myself in relation to people, places, and things. For most of my life, my perception of myself was based on my ability to judge others and then categorize myself as “better than” or “less than” what I judged others to be. I was riddled with judgment and criticism of myself and others. For example, if someone was late for a meeting with me, I would assign meaning to it based on how I perceived myself, which was usually “they don’t care about me” or “they’re disrespecting me.” My perception filtered out any other reasonable explanation.

Patterns

A pattern is a reliable sample of traits, acts, tendencies, or other observable characteristics of a person, group, or institution.

Patterns are not just your physical habitual patterns or addictive behaviors. We also develop patterns of thinking, which can include loop thinking and obsessive or compulsive thoughts.

I found myself in patterns of thinking that never came to any resolution. I would obsess on something I said to someone or on something that they said to me. Or if someone told me that they didn’t believe something I said, I would go over in my mind how to say it so that they believed me. Or I would angst over an offhand comment, going over it again and again and never come to any resolution.

Expectations

An expectation is something considered to be probable or certain. Examples include expecting a phone call, expecting to be forgiven, and expecting that things will never improve.

Expectations are pre-planned resentments.

Expectations are also things that are we consider reasonable, due, necessary, or obligatory. For example, teachers expect students to work hard and utility companies expect customers to pay their bills.

Expectations of ourselves sound like: "I should," "I have to," "I got to," "How come I am always..."

Expectations of others sound like: "They should," "They have to," "How come they always..."

Coming from my experience of family of origin dysfunction and unresolved childhood trauma, I hold myself to a high standard of being right or getting things right. The expectations I have about getting things "right" were unrealistic expectations that were the fodder for self-criticism, blame, and judgment.

Exercise: Write your personal obstacles to what you say you want in the space below

- My experiences:

- My beliefs:

- My perceptions:

- My patterns:

- My expectations:

The Logistics of Dysfunction, Addiction, Patterns

To me “logistics” are concrete steps. For example, if I want to throw a party, there are actions I must take and in some kind of sequence to have the party. These steps could include setting a budget, finding a location, and arranging for tables, chairs, food, etc. There is a lot to put in place to have a successful event.

My thinking about the current conditions in which I find myself is similar. When I find myself in a situation that is untenable or chaotic, I know something had to happen in a sequential manner for me to be in that situation.

When I entered my recovery program, I found myself in codependency, addiction, and other avoidant behaviors that I swore I didn’t intend to be in or want. I was isolated, alone, depressed, and anxious. I perceived myself as being victimized, powerless, and helpless. Miserable. I wondered why my life had turned out to be such a disaster.

“When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

– Sherlock Holmes

I’ve come to know that my unresolved traumas, held in my subconscious memories, are active in supplying information that influences my decision-making process. The three questions below will shed light on this.

1. Have you ever hurt someone you loved and later regretted it? And then hurt them again, usually in the same way?
2. Have you ever realized in the middle of an argument with someone that you were on the wrong side of the argument, but you continued to argue anyway?
3. Have you ever known you were about to do or say something that you would regret – maybe you even heard the small voice, or the sometimes loud voice, in your head telling you to stop – and yet you found yourself unable or unwilling to stop?

My answers to these questions were “yes, yes, and yes.” What the hell?

The Reticular Activating System

My unraveling of what was so cunning, baffling, and powerful that it kept me locked in patterns of behavior I knew I did not want, began with an understanding of the Reticular Activating System (RAS).

The RAS is a net-like group of cells that permeate the brainstem and midbrain. It functions as a filtering system between the conscious and subconscious mind that allows you to focus on what matters most for survival and goal achievement.

It prioritizes incoming information that is perceived as valuable or important to survival. It alerts us to danger or anything that might adversely affect our safety or wellbeing. And it also helps us notice things that have pay value – in other words things that are life-giving or pleasurable. Perceived threats and things perceived as having pay value both make it through the RAS filter.

The RAS is part of our survival mechanism. It has played a key role in enabling us to survive as a species. It tends to prioritize negative information, making us more attuned to potential threats. The threat may be mild or life threatening.

When we perceive a threat – whether it's mild or life threatening – adrenaline is released, and we move into fight, flight, freeze, or please mode. The amount of adrenaline released will vary based on our assessment of the degree of danger or harm.

The RAS has access to our held experiences. If we encounter something in present time that resonates with something that presented danger in our past, the RAS will quickly move us towards safety.

The RAS also filters out non-essential information in order for us to maintain a focus – any focus. Have you ever been accused of selective hearing? You and everyone else on the planet has this ability. I could also call it a curse, depending on the situation.

Here's an example: I'm watching a football game, and it's the fourth quarter with three seconds to go. My team is down by five points, the ball is on the third yard line, and it's fourth down. If we score on the next play, we win. Or should I say, I win.

If my partner asks me to take out the garbage, that request is non-essential information while I'm fully focused on the game. I either don't hear the request at all, or I dismiss it outright based on my sense of entitlement, arrogance, and presumed authority as "man of the house." If something flies over my head and hits the TV, that will likely make it through the filter of my RAS because it is a perceived threat. The smell of hot buttered popcorn would also get my attention because that has pay value for me.

The RAS also filters out information that does not fit our beliefs, perceptions, and established patterns of behaviors. It uses what our brain has learned is important for our survival and well-being.

Most of our beliefs are held in our subconscious. And most of our beliefs were formed in our early years. If I formed the belief that "I am not enough," and I survived my childhood while holding that subconscious belief, then that belief stays active in my adult life. This is why I was unable to accept a compliment.

Have you ever talked to someone about how to help them fix a problem – either a relationship problem or a job-related problem – and you can clearly see and articulate the problem, but the person who asked for your help just can't hear you? Or they act as if you insulted them? I was that guy – I couldn't hear the person I asked for help, or I felt they were blaming me for whatever the situation was.

When something happens in the present moment that triggers a subconscious trauma, I automatically go into a reaction response. The example I often give is I found myself going into a rage if someone burned toast. The burned toast is the trigger. My reaction response of rage is based on something that happened in my past that I may or may not be aware of in my conscious mind. It makes no rational sense for me to be raging about burned toast in the present moment, and the rage reaction happened before I could consciously stop it.

My experiences are held in my memories, and most of my memories are held in my subconscious mind. The subconscious mind also stores traumas and preverbal and nonverbal experiences.

Preverbal and nonverbal memories are held in the form of *feelings*.

Feelings are frequencies that contain information.

If an event in my current reality evokes a feeling aligned with a preverbal or nonverbal trauma, it is my survival mechanism's job to react.

Here's an example from my experience. Someone in a group raises an eyebrow while I'm in the room, and I have an unresolved trauma around raised eyebrows. Maybe someone in my childhood raised an eyebrow, and I experienced an emotional event that I was too young to process and there was no guardian or caregiver present to soothe me or help me move through the trauma. That trauma is unresolved and stored in my subconscious mind. My survival mechanism is still on the lookout for it to happen again. If it does happen, I go into a reaction response, and my body is flooded with adrenaline. That adrenaline flood would prompt me to want to rage, confront, or run out of the room as a way of surviving an unresolved trauma.

Gabor Mate believes that any condition you find yourself in – addiction, disease, mental health disorder – is a result of unresolved complex post-traumatic stress. I've come to believe this too.

The Intentional Living process is about healing unresolved trauma, and understanding the function of the RAS is an important part of that healing process.

Emotions, Feelings, Thoughts

Our ability to sense and respond to our environment allows us to survive and thrive as a species. Our environment includes people, places, and things. Emotions and feelings enable human beings to interact within their environment in a situationally appropriate manner.

The ways we take in information are listed below in descending order of importance. These three information centers have been given to us as human beings for us to survive and thrive throughout the process of evolution.

- **Emotions:** Heart Signals – Information
- **Feelings:** Body Sensations – Confirmation (coming to form)
- **Thoughts:** Cognition – Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition

The term “heart signals” is my way of understanding the word emotions. Heart signals enable me to navigate life with a modicum of safety and to be aware of my surroundings. They also alert me to something in my vicinity that might present a danger or that might have pay value for me.

Heart signals alert me to things that are beyond my five physical senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch – so I can move accordingly either toward or away from the person, place, or thing. I can move towards safety or away from danger. My ability to make myself safe depends on my connection to my heart signals, aka emotions.

My connection to my heart signals is what I have come to believe is life itself.

Emotions are awareness. They supply us with information vital to our safety and to our ability to relate to people, places, and situations. Emotions and feelings include our interpretation of what we can see, hear, taste, touch, and smell, as well as our interpretation of input that is non-tactile. For example, we can walk into a room of people and feel that there is tension present in the room.

Emotions are sources of information for my well-being.

Feelings can be explained as a *whelming* felt in our body as the emotional information is being taken in. We experience feelings or body sensations viscerally or physically. They are the **confirmation** of emotional information.

Thoughts are the cognition we have that reflect our interpretation of our emotions and feelings. They are our responses to what is happening in our environment. These responses enable us to interact with people, places, and situations in an appropriate manner.

Thoughts that are informed by / from our emotional bodies and then confirmed by our feeling bodies allow us, in the present moment, to access our capacities for imagination, inspiration, and intuition.

I would like us to consider that our connection to our emotional and feeling bodies is what was lost growing up in a dysfunctional and traumatic environment. The loss of connection to our emotional and feeling bodies was also reinforced by societal expectations of men and women.

Understanding Emotions and Relationships

Many men have been taught to deny or dismiss that they have any emotions and feelings. They are told to be rational and logical, and that emotions and feelings are signs of weakness. Women, on the other hand, can be emotional and have feelings. And they are also demeaned and diminished by men for having feelings, and they are seen as illogical and unreasonable.

Emotions and feelings in men are denied.

Emotions and feelings in women are diminished.

So, we are left to navigate relationships with people, places, and situations without our most important sources of information – our emotions and corresponding feelings. This leaves us unable to relate to each other in meaningful ways. Thoughts (cognition) without the vital information supplied to us from our emotional and feeling bodies, are not adequate for us to successfully navigate complex, fluid, and organic relationships.

Interpersonal relationships are neither logical nor rational. They are workable when we are connected to our emotional and feeling bodies, which gives us the capacity to respond in ways that are spontaneous, fluid, and in alignment with what is happening in our current reality.

At any given moment we are in an emotional state which consists of some combination of emotions: happy, content, afraid, angry, hurt, sad, excited, or passionate. This is true whether we are consciously aware or unaware of our emotional state. Either way, we are in an emotional state, and that emotional state cannot be separated from life.

- Our emotional and feeling bodies enable us to connect to ourselves and/or others.
- Our emotional and feeling bodies are sources of information about our current reality / situation.

We are continually gathering information and assessing our relationship to our environment, i.e. people, places, and things. This information is vital to our survival and our capacity to be in relationship to others. Our emotional sensing ability enables us to advocate for ourselves in stressful situations and to feel safe in other situations. I believe that everything we do is in relationship to *something*. In every situation there is a relationship to something.

How We Assign Value to Information We Take in Through Our Emotional and Feeling Bodies

Emotions are neutral in that they simply convey information. Our individual perception, which is an accumulation of our individual experience, assigns value to this emotional information in the form of a judgment – good, bad, safe, dangerous, friend, foe. This information about our unique perceptions and experiences is filtered through our RAS allowing us to interact with life in a timely manner and in a fulfilling way.

All of the information about our individual experience impacts our decision-making process. This includes both real-time information from the present moment and information from our past experiences — regardless of whether that information is objectively "correct" or simply our interpretations and assumptions about our current reality and past experiences.

I was taught that I was my emotional state. For instance, I was pegged as “an angry man,” and I believed I was “an angry man.” The word “angry” describes an emotion.

There have been many books written to try to figure out what emotions are. I don’t think anyone really knows.

Here’s what I believe about my emotional body:

- My emotions are not my behaviors.
- My emotions simply offer me information about my current reality.
- From the sense of these emotions, I choose to take an action.

Emotion is a wave of information that informs me about my environment. When I feel it, I name it: anger, sadness, fear, etc. Emotion is the prompt to act. The action is then described as my behavior. It can be either reactive or proactive.

If I experience a threat I can attack, retreat, freeze, or fawn (disappear). These are all actions that arise as a result of the information provided by the prompt of my emotion. The emotion is not the behavior.

If a person is throwing something, others might call him “angry.” But it’s impossible to know what his emotion is unless we ask him.

Anger, the emotion, is not a behavior. I have come to realize:

- Without the ability to connect to my emotional body, I built up a huge amount of resentment, bitterness, and contempt.
- I exhibited violent behaviors, which included rage and yelling, as a result of my feelings of resentment, bitterness, and contempt.
- When I acknowledge resentment, bitterness, and contempt, and feel the anger, it is validated and released.

How I've been able to express my anger sounds like this:

- “How dare they – it was not ok for my caregivers to abuse me as a child.”
- “It was not ok for me to not receive love and nurturing.”
- “It was not ok for me to be abused in the name of discipline.”

In this expression of my anger, I validate that little boy who received abuse. In my ability to simply express this anger, the trauma is released. I am then able to choose the response I want to give instead of reacting in a compulsive and destructive manner.

My anger is now expressed in my motivation to do my personal work, to heal, and to give the knowledge of how I was able to heal to as many people as possible.

The Way Out

The first step is to identify where you find yourself, state the truth without blame or judgment, and feel the body sensation that arises. This brings you into the present moment.

I found my way out of dysfunction by continually asking myself:

- Who am I?
- Where am I?
- What do I want?

Knowing who we are, where we are, and what we want establishes us in the present moment! An exercise to find out “who” you are is on page 26 – “Defining Your Authentic Self.”

Owning the underlying, subconscious motivations for my behaviors was the first step in finding resolution to my relational dilemmas.

We can identify our motivating experiences (trauma) by identifying and owning the results (current reality). This process usually starts with owning our character defects.

Which of these character defects are true for you?

- arrogant
- entitled
- mean
- controlling
- needy

These and many more of my character defects are the end results of my accumulated memories that motivate my choices and my behaviors.

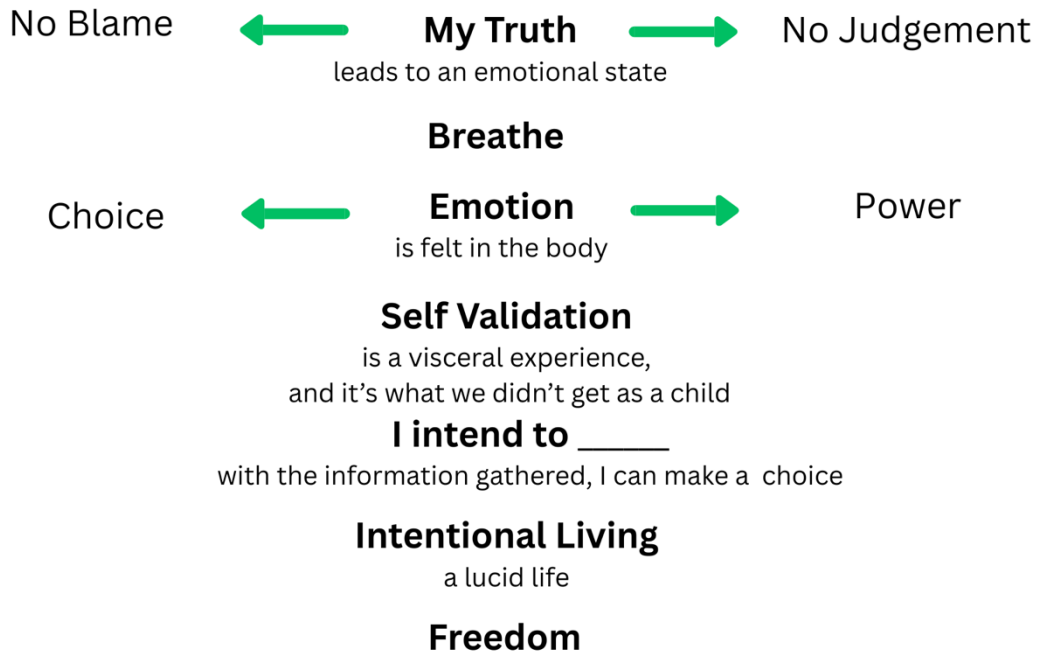
When I am not aware of these defects and/or when I do not take ownership of them, I am left with the impression that my behaviors are the direct result of something that another person has done or is doing.

If I think others are responsible for my choices and my behaviors, I will do one of the following:

1. deny my behaviors outright
2. blame circumstances for my behaviors
3. minimize my behaviors

This is the rationalization behind the never-ending argument that I found myself having in my relationships.

The Accountability Tree



The Accountability Tree diagram is the centerpiece of this practice. The accountability process outlined in the diagram is the action that begins the process of letting go of old patterns that are no longer useful. This is a practical tool to implement awareness -- to "know thyself."

When I state my truth without blame or judgment, that truth resonates throughout my body.

When you name **without blame or judgment** the irrational and sometimes destructive behaviors that have perplexed you and allow the emotions and feelings to come up from within your body, you can now create an intent (your focus).

In this process we give ourselves the compassion and validation we wanted and did not get as children.

Speaking for myself, it was a revelation to realize that the compassion and validation I wanted from my caregivers and others came from a source I had not expected: me.



Accountability Tree Example

Truth: “My name is John, and I am an alcoholic.”

You can substitute any behavior or trait that is your truth. Examples include I am arrogant. I am entitled. I am mean. I am a bigot. I am a classist. I procrastinate. I am a bad parent.

Stating my truth activates an emotion, a feeling that gathers information that is pertinent to the statement.

Emotion: The gathering of information, past and present.

That information is assimilated and evaluated and affords me the resolution (or clarity) I need in that moment to afford me options that are specific to the statement.

I intend: State what you want now in the form of an intention. For example: I intend to keep coming back to 12-step meetings. I intend to heal. I intend to be kind.

Stating an intention gives me a direction because I have accepted the present moment.

Self-validation: A feeling of relief, belonging, peace (you decide what the feeling is for you).

Living intentionally: Through the Accountability Tree process, I move from “reactor” to “actor.”

Freedom: I am now able to own my power, and I have options in the present moment. I have choice.



The Five Constants of Relationships

The five constants of relationships are fundamental to co-operative communication. They assist in bringing clarity to our behaviors. The five fundamentals are:

1. **Focus – pay attention:** Your subconscious has a focus, and it has brought you to where you find yourself in dysfunction. When you make an intention, which is a conscious focus, you change the outcome.

*“Until you make the unconscious conscious,
it will direct your life and you will call it fate.”*

– Carl Jung

2. **Own my projection:** Whatever you project onto another person, circumstance, or event is fodder for the accountability tree truth statement. For example, if someone cuts you off in traffic and you think “that person is arrogant,” you would own that truth in the accountability tree by stating “I am arrogant” –**without blame or judgement**. Breathe. Feel the body sensation. State the intent that arises from within. If additional clarity is needed, please see John.

“You don’t see the world as it is, you see the world as you are.”

– Anaïs Nin

3. **Move toward my pain:** Avoidance of pain is the cause of all dysfunctional behavior. Another way to say this is move toward your discomfort. Discomfort holds the resolution you seek.
4. **Question / change my story:** The story you tell about your pain has created the life / circumstances you find yourself in. When you change the story, you change your life. Your story has creative power.
5. **Today I Intend to:** This constant leads you back up to number one – if you don’t have a conscious focus / intent, your subconscious is running the show. It has created the life and circumstances that you want relief from.

Expression of the Authentic Self

Exercise: Love Equals

This exercise will uncover how you understand what love means to you at a deep level. Once we understand what love equals for us, we can clearly see how we manifest love.

Your beliefs manifest in action, attitude, and behavior.

If this statement is true then you can start where you are, current reality, and back track to the originating belief or intent, which has created your current situation.

When asked “*What is love?*” people respond with what they believe to be true of love. Typical responses include *unconditional, persevering, kind, caring, giving, and forgiving*.

The question is not “*Can I love?*” The question is “*How do I love?*”

We cannot not love!!!

We love according to our awareness and consciousness. We are manifesting love, but we have gotten love mixed up with something other than love.

How were you loved by your father and mother (or your primary caregivers)?

- How did they treat you?
- How did they speak to you?
- How did they relate to you?

They related to you through their filters, and how they treated you, spoke to you, and related to you is how you came to see love.

Universal Fears

- abandonment/separation
- worthlessness
- surrender/trust

Which of these words resonates with you? One of these words from the list of universal fears may fit for you. If not, fear of rejection, fear of pain, belief that you're a burden or belief that you need to produce to be loved will likely resonate. Words like these will take you straight back to one of the universal fears. If the word *rejection* resonates with you that will work for the purpose of this exercise.

When you have discovered how you see love, your whole life will make sense to you. Every decision you have ever made will make sense to you based on how you experienced love.

Now, create an intent to change how you wish to experience love. To me now, love = acceptance, trustworthiness, compassion, honesty, etc...

Love =
rejection

becomes

Love =



Exercise: Defining Your Authentic Self

Pick three words from the “Essence Words” list below that describe your essence. If this is difficult, choose the three words that you believe you absolutely **do not** possess.

Put the words in this sentence:

I am a _____, _____, _____ man / woman.

Essence Words

Loving	Powerful	Gentle
Forgiving	Grateful	Spiritual
Trusting	Beautiful	Honest
Empowering	Peaceful	Passionate
Willing	Open	Wise
Nurturing	Kind	Creative
Caring	Humble	Authentic
Giving	Compassionate	Free
Trustworthy	Worthy	Tenacious
Courageous	Confident	Whole
Gracious	Genuine	Pure
Spontaneous	Humorous	

Create a “**Statement of Intent**” using the format below.

- Through my ...
- it is my intent to....
- creating a world of

“Through my” refers to the assets you bring to your purpose. Examples include:

- Through my open, gentle, loving nature...
- Through my gracious, creative, genuine spirit...

“It is my intent to” refers to something you love or hate. This is what we usually pay attention to and/or are drawn to. Examples include:

- it is my intent to teach, heal, unify, and serve, by being who I am...
- it is my intent to walk with an open courageous heart, mentoring inner strength...

“Creating a world of” refers to the type of world you want to live in. The qualities of this world could come from your wounding. What was the significant hurt or reoccurring issue in your life? What do you want instead? Examples include:

- creating a world of acceptance, harmony and unity.
- creating a world of nurturing, loving beings.
- creating a world of unconditional love and acceptance.

All together it looks like this:

Through my open, gentle, loving nature, **it is my intent to** teach, heal, unify, and serve, by being who I am, **creating a world of** acceptance, harmony and unity.

Through my gracious, creative, genuine spirit, **it is my intent to** walk with an open courageous heart, mentoring inner strength, **creating a world of** nurturing, loving beings.

Appendix

Some ways in which men have been abused:

(adapted from the "Seattle Men's Group," circa 1990)

- Men are taken advantage of because they need their jobs.
- Men hurt the people they love and regret it afterwards.
- Men are valued by how much money they earn.
- Men are denied their feelings and thus the healing process.
- Men are taught that talking without fixing a problem is seen as weak.
- Men are expendable (women and children first).
- Men are as inherently compulsive in their sexuality.
- Men are told that males are aggressive and violent by nature.
- Men are told to be tough and not to cry.
- Men are treated differently than females.
- Men are expected to kill for country and family.
- Men are denied the healing process, thereby carrying all their wounds from childhood to present.
- Men are trained to feel responsible for everything.
- Men can be / have been sexually abused.
- Men are burdened with unreasonable expectations.
- Men are seen as inhuman.
- Men are kept apart from their children.
- Men are seen as weak if they ask for help.

Some ways in which women have been similarly diminished, demeaned, and hindered from being their authentic selves:

- Women are seen as weak.
- Women are emotional.
- Women are seen as less than.
- Women are seen as ever-flowing breasts.
- Women are seen as Barbie dolls.
- Women are seen as objects.
- Women are seen as property.
- Women are blamed for the fall from the Garden of Eden.
- Women are not seen as equal.
- Women are burdened with unreasonable expectations.
- Women are taken advantage of because men need their jobs.
- Women are not valued for their emotional intelligence.
- Women are denied authority over their bodies.
- Women are expected to be caregivers.

Three types of rescue:

- I do something for you I didn't want to do – I become the victim.
- I do something for you that you don't want me to do – you become the victim.
- I do something for you that you don't want me to do and that I didn't want to do either – World War III.

Exercise: Community Building

Discuss how having a supportive community of like-minded people contributes to your ability to live a stable life.

Discuss resources that are available to you in the community in which you live.

Discuss how your old beliefs have hindered your ability to ask for help and assistance from your loved ones and your community.

Discuss how the concept of “being in service to others” is a necessary part of a healthy vital life.

Discuss the concept “Give that which you wish to receive.”

Adult Children of Alcoholics & Dysfunctional Families (ACA):

<https://adultchildren.org>

ACA *The Problem*:

<https://adultchildren.org/problem/>

ACA *The Laundry List*:

<https://adultchildren.org/laundry-lists/>

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