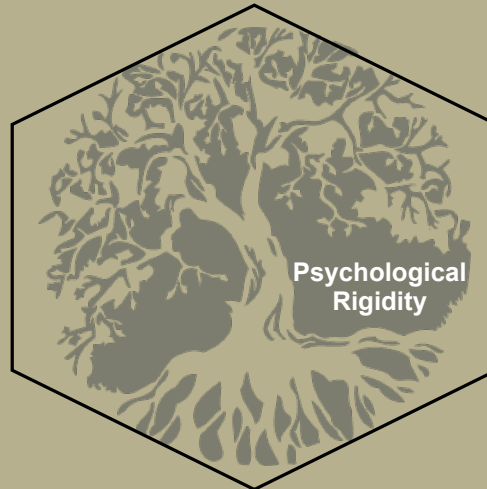


A formula for stuck, lifeless, checked out.

Lose contact with the present moment

Run away from hard thoughts and emotions

Get entangled with categorical, judgmental thought



Lose contact with what we really want to be about in our lives

Settle into inaction, impulsivity, or avoidant persistence

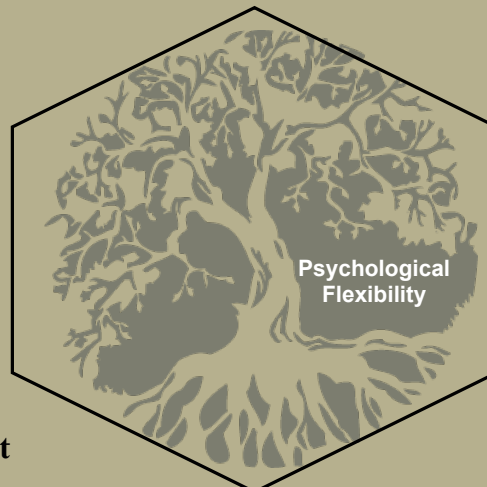
Buy into stories of who we are and what is possible for us
See from one perspective

A formula for day-by-day liberation.

Practice contact with the richness of this moment

Practice openness to our own hard thoughts and emotions

Practice holding lightly and in kindness categorical, judgmental thought



Practice actively growing patterns we really want to be about in our lives

Practice noticing inaction and violation of patterns and returning to valued patterns

Practice holding lightly and in kindness stories of who we are and what is possible for us
Practice perspective taking

8 Practices for Recovery and a Life Well-Lived

I am a father of three daughters, one from my first marriage, age 39 and two from my second, ages 20 and 21. I have been married for nearly 35 years to my wife Dianna. My life is astonishingly different than it was 30 years ago. I have traveled from alone, desperate, and strung out on drugs to being a Full Professor, a husband, father, and, I think, a good member of the communities I inhabit. It all began with a fall, and from the very hard fall, I moved into a growing evolving practice. I teach it and I practice what I preach.



From adolescence to the age of 30, I felt sad, alien, weak, and afraid. I discovered alcohol at 13 and drugs at 15 and spent the next 15 years intoxicated every single day except for a few days when I was tossed in jail for various offenses.

During this time, I was suicidally depressed much of the time and I ran hard to try to get away from that deep sense of pain and isolation. I had a few small windows of time when I got a little money together and just the right cocktail of illicit drugs, but that never lasted. No matter how hard, fast, and smart I ran, the pain ran just a little harder, faster, and smarter. In fact, the longer and harder I ran away the stronger the pain got. I had little sense that I was functioning as an elite level personal trainer for my depression. I am convinced that I was turning my depression into the equivalent of a superstar athlete.

CRASHING

At the age of 30, I crashed hard, very hard. I spent a month in a locked psychiatric hospital and a month in a drug and alcohol rehab. This occurred in 1985, so it preceded the current prescribe-for-everything frenzy that has been going on for the past 25 years. They used librium to safely detox me from the alcohol, but I left the hospital completely clear of drugs for the first time in 15 years. I spent the next month at a drug and alcohol rehab residential facility. I had a couple brief relapses over the next couple months after leaving treatment, but got sober June 1, 1985 and have been clean and sober of drugs and alcohol since that time.

LIVING WITH ACCEPTANCE AND PURPOSE

In 1985, I started learning about radical acceptance, acceptance without reservation, without reason. I was bone weary, really too tired to run or fight anymore. I had reached a point of accept or die. A second piece that fell into place that year was that **if** I was going to stay around, it was going to be **for** something, for some greater purpose. I had little idea what that might be, but was sure that I needed to find something I could do that would make a difference in the world. I began a practice of radical acceptance in the service of a life worth living and I did that without knowing exactly what that meant. I have been learning and expanding that practice of acceptance in the service of meaning and purpose ever since.

HOME

Growing One Life

Feeling my way along, writing, teaching, talking, connecting with a world where I used to be an alien. But have sorted, rather late in life, that I can make this world my home and make it more habitable for others.

SEARCH POSTS

CULTIVATING DAILY PRACTICES

I am a college professor now. I went back to school in 1986....really to school, since I had dropped out of high school. I teach psychology at the [University of Mississippi](#) and what you might call the gospel of mindfulness, acceptance, and healthy living. I suspect I carry some significant genetic risk, as there is a pretty serious history of addiction and mental health problems in my family. The closest and most tragic was the loss of my eldest brother Randy to suicide in 1987.



Because I believe myself to be vulnerable, I have cultivated a broad and articulated daily practice to maintain my health, wellbeing, and sustained growth. I will write a bit more about my practice in each of these 8 areas, the science behind it, and the direction I am taking, in other posts, but for now....

My practice may not be for you, but I offer it freely as it has been offered to me by various “teachers” along the way who have influenced me and also by the science of well-being. I love science and continually attempt to inform the development of my practices in accordance with the best evidence available.

8 DAILY PRACTICES FOR RECOVERY AND A LIFE WELL-LIVED

1. I minimize my exposure to toxins, including both social and chemical toxins. I cannot do this perfectly, but I am thoughtful about my exposure. What this translates to is that I try to reduce my exposure to intoxicants, bizarre non-nutritious chemicals in my food, or in my environment. I also try to reduce my exposure to social toxins. Humans are not built to fight every day. I try to spend as much time as possible each day interacting with people who are more committed to growth, development, and propagating kindness and well-being. I do not spend a lot of my time with people spoiling for a fight. I am not a pacifist, but I am working to be more careful and thoughtful about where, when, and how I fight. It is a big world with many who are ready to fight at any moment. And, they have plenty of opposition. They don't need me. I am working to let go of gossip, vitriol, and sarcasm and finding these tough habits to kick. I am working to inhabit a more peaceful place and to influence in the direction of peace where I can. In doing so, I expect to lower my own exposure to social toxins.

2. I give myself 8 and ½ hours of sleep opportunity every night. That is, I am in bed and either sleeping or resting (usually a breathing meditation if not sleeping). Again, imperfectly. I travel about a 1/3 of every year and sometimes my road schedule is very grueling and impinges on this.

3. I eat a diet of highly nutritious foods. I eat very little sugar or foods with added sugar and pretty much no refined flours or processed food. I eat low to moderate carb diet with lots of veggies, fresh fruit, high quality protein, high quality fats, lots of fiber, and home brewed kefir and yogurt. I take some supplements, like a bit of D in winter, if I am not getting much sun. I take no supplements at high levels and am generally skeptical of supplement claims. Instead, I try to figure out how I can get all my nutrition from food and eat accordingly.

4. I move my body every day. I have a vigorous vinyasa flow yoga practice that I do 6 or 7 days per week, about 1 to 1 ½ hours each day. I have a bike and have made a couple false starts at regular riding. Who knows, I may get this going yet. I am less faithful to yoga when I am on the

road, but I keep practicing and see a steady improvement. Most recently I have added run/walk/run/walk intervals to my movement practice and this has been a real blessing. It is easy to do when I am on the road and is a great supplement to yoga. Walking is particularly nice, since it can easily be done with others.

5. I practice a bit of mindfulness meditation every day. Mostly this is built into my vinyasa flow yoga practice, but it also gets mixed into daily life and very much into the work I do in teaching and clinical practice.

6. Social networks are critical elements in human life. We are social creatures. I pay at least a little bit of attention to my social network each day. Two questions form the center of this practice. First, "What have I done to care for my social network today, including friends, family, coworkers, and more casual social contacts?" These are often small acts that insure the health, maintenance, and growth of my social network. The second question is "What I have I put into that network today?" I can be cynical and sarcastic at times and I am trying to let go of those behaviors. Sarcasm is easy, fun, and I get a lot of laughs, but have this bad sense that it is not healthy for my network. Whatever we put into the network spreads into the social world we inhabit. From a recent movie, *Cloud Atlas*:

Our lives are not our own,

from womb to tomb

we are bound to others,

past and present.

and by each crime

and every act of kindness

we birth our future.

I think there is a lot of truth in this. In the Western tradition, we say, "you reap what you sow." In the East, the Law of Karma, suggests something very similar. And, modern sociology tells a very similar story. To a certain extent, we have a voice in shaping our social world. I am trying to make mine kinder.

7. I try to do something, however small, each day, that contributes to a purpose in life that is meaningful to me. These 7 things things overlap enormously. So, for example, if I take time to be kind to the secretary at work and acknowledge her efforts, or, if I apologize to my daughter for being sarcastic, that contributes to #6 and #1-it keeps my social network healthy and drops something healthy into it. It improves my exposure to healthy nontoxic social environment (#1) It also contributes to this one, #7, living with purpose and meaning, because I want to be that guy...that guy who takes time for kindness and acknowledgement. I am fortunate to have work that I love. I teach, do research, and clinical work. Amidst these tasks, there are tedious and stressful jobs, deadlines, paperwork, committees, and the like. And, on the worst, most, tedious and stressful day, there are opportunities to behave with meaning and purpose. I seek those opportunities.

8. OK, this was 7 practices, but there is one more to add, making 8: each day, practice making at least one small offering of self-compassion. Treat yourself with kindness, with love, with understanding and with appreciation. It was not easy to make it all this way. If it had been easy, you would not have read this far down in the blog. You have known struggle and suffering. In a certain way #8 seems redundant to me. In fact, for me, all of the things above are the ways I am working to treat myself with the same kindness and compassion I would offer to someone I love. So, really, any of the former 7 **could be** an offering of self-compassion. But it is worth stopping long enough to **fully appreciate** the ways in which these are compassionate practices. So maybe what this practice looks like is just stopping at the end of a yoga class to notice that I just did something very kind, bringing Kelly to yoga. (Even though, many days, he does not know that he is worth the effort....every bit of it.)

So that is it, that is my practice. It is what I teach. It is what I do. Very imperfectly, but then, that is why I practice:) Do not think for a moment that I am saying that I am the master of any of these things. In fact, a substantial part of my making this public is that it makes it more likely I will be faithful to these practices.

Meeting Basic Human Needs

1. Minimize exposure to toxins (physical and social)
 1. (for example, avoid things used to model disease)
2. Eat Real Food
3. Move Your Body
4. More Sleep/Rest Opportunity
5. Engage in Meaningful Activity
6. Mindfulness as a Modern World Antidote
7. Cultivate Your Social Network
8. Cultivate Acts of Self-Compassion

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Meeting Basic Human Needs

1. Can I lessen exposure to toxins in some way?
2. Can I eat one wholesome meal?
3. Can I go for a walk?
4. Can I put myself to bed just a little earlier (7-8 hours)?
5. Can I do one meaningful activity?
6. Can I take even a small amount of time today for prayer and meditation?
7. Can I cultivate my social network?
8. Can I practice one act of self-compassion?

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BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Chose one of the most difficult thought or emotion and write a short version on the line below (maybe from the Moving Towards and Away Worksheet).

(**Example:** “Whenever I think about my kids, I think about what a failure I have been as a father.” Or, maybe “Nothing ever goes right for me.”)

The trouble is that when we want to take action on some value, hard thoughts often come up. The longer we have been stuck, the harder it gets. Not only that, when one hard thought shows up, it often brings friends!

People say that birds of a feather flock together.

Usually thoughts and emotions like yours have buddies. Notice what happens when you think about taking action.

If words were birds, there would be a flock overhead!

Some of the thoughts may be something-is-wrong-with-me thoughts. Usually these thoughts sound like:

I am _____. Put a check next to each one of these that troubles you. Feel free to add more in the blank lines.

<input type="checkbox"/> I am bad	<input type="checkbox"/> Boring	<input type="checkbox"/> Uncaring	<input type="checkbox"/> Unattractive	<input type="checkbox"/> Broken	<input type="checkbox"/> Too much	<input type="checkbox"/> Awkward
<input type="checkbox"/> Mean	<input type="checkbox"/> Inconsistent	<input type="checkbox"/> Cold	<input type="checkbox"/> Jealous	<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate	<input type="checkbox"/> Not enough	<input type="checkbox"/> Unlovable
<input type="checkbox"/> Repulsive	<input type="checkbox"/> Clueless	<input type="checkbox"/> Weak	<input type="checkbox"/> Defective	<input type="checkbox"/> Lazy	<input type="checkbox"/> Dumb	<input type="checkbox"/> Unimportant
<input type="checkbox"/> Unreliable	<input type="checkbox"/> Unstable	<input type="checkbox"/> Crazy	<input type="checkbox"/> Needy	<input type="checkbox"/> Jealous	<input type="checkbox"/> Ugly	<input type="checkbox"/> Stuck
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

These thoughts often hang out with other thoughts. Check any that trouble you.

<input type="checkbox"/> I Should	<input type="checkbox"/> I Always	<input type="checkbox"/> It's impossible	<input type="checkbox"/> It's too late	<input type="checkbox"/> I always fail
<input type="checkbox"/> I Shouldn't	<input type="checkbox"/> I Never	<input type="checkbox"/> It's unfair	<input type="checkbox"/> It's too hard	<input type="checkbox"/> I've tried before
<input type="checkbox"/> I must	<input type="checkbox"/> Everything	<input type="checkbox"/> Everyone but me	<input type="checkbox"/> It's too painful	<input type="checkbox"/> I never follow through
<input type="checkbox"/> Right/Wrong	<input type="checkbox"/> Nothing	<input type="checkbox"/> No one but me	<input type="checkbox"/> It's too much	<input type="checkbox"/> I have to
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

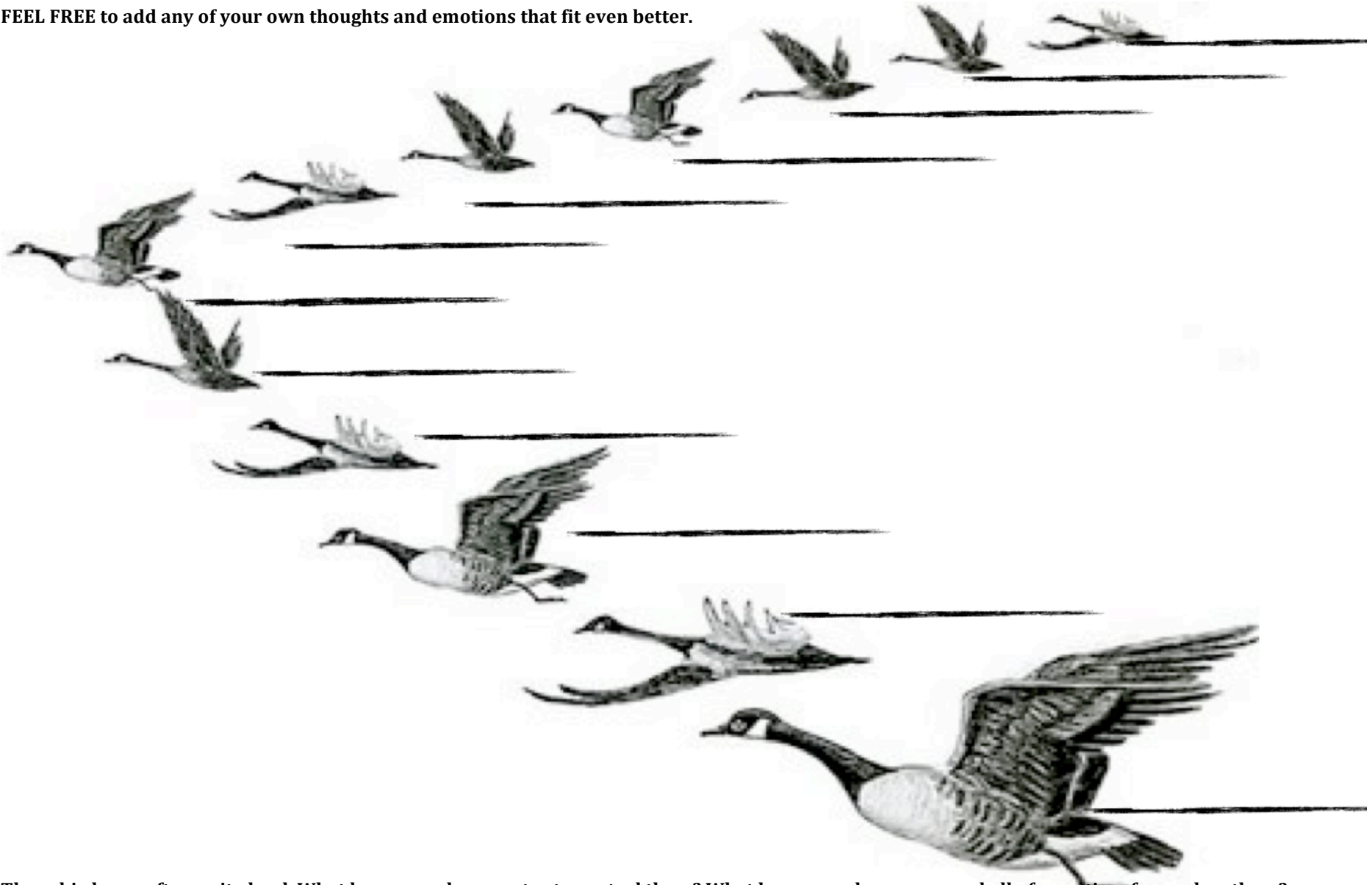
These words also often come with emotions. Check any that trouble you.

<input type="checkbox"/> Sad	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/> Moody	<input type="checkbox"/> Depressed	<input type="checkbox"/> Terrified
<input type="checkbox"/> Angry	<input type="checkbox"/> Nervous	<input type="checkbox"/> Lonely	<input type="checkbox"/> Panicked	<input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious	<input type="checkbox"/> Numb	<input type="checkbox"/> Afraid	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilty	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritable
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

BELOW YOU WILL FIND a flock of birds. Put the name of your hardest thought or emotion next to the leading bird. Name some of the other birds that often fly along with this bird. Write the words next to some of the birds.

FEEL FREE to add any of your own thoughts and emotions that fit even better.



These birds are often quite loud. What happens when you try to control them? What happens when you spend all of your time focused on them?

The One Life Garden: Part 1, if we had to choose

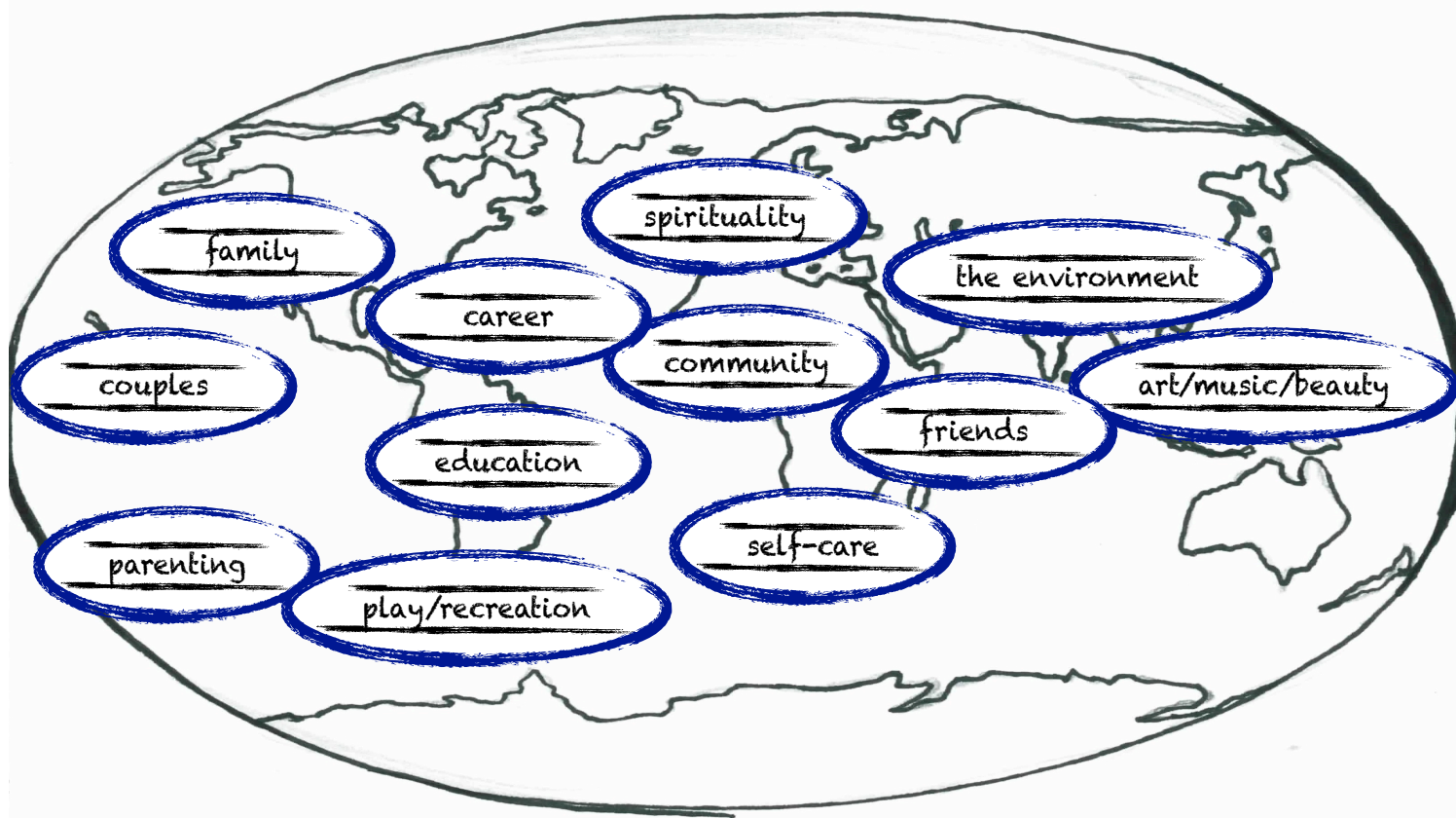
Gardens can be big or small, for now, let's think about your Whole Life Garden as stretching out across your own personal world. Imagine that you could only care for parts of this Whole Life Garden and let others parts go. Just to be very, very clear, I am not asking you to give up on any area of life. But as a way to change our perspective, I ask that you imagine a world in which you had to choose to give up different areas in four steps. Pause and take six slow mindful breaths between each of the four steps.

First, imagine you had to let go of half of these areas. Put an X through half of the areas.

Eyes closed and Pause for Six Breaths on Purpose....

Second, imagine a world where you had to cross out half of the ones that are left. Cross out three more.

Eyes closed and Pause for six mindful breaths



Third, imagine a world where you had to cross out one more, leaving only two. Cross out one more.

Eyes closed and Pause for six mindful breaths....

Fourth, and finally, imagine you had to cross out one more, leaving only one. Cross out one more.

Eyes closed and Pause for six mindful breaths....

The One Life Garden: Part 2, sometimes we miss the choice

IMAGINE IF YOUR LIFE WERE LIKE A PITCHER OF WATER. Each day, each month, each year, you pour out a certain portion of your life. Like watering a garden, it is worth taking a moment to review what has been watered and what has not been watered, or only watered a bit.

Looking back over the past year, make a mark next to areas where you have poured a lot of you life or just a small amount. Don't let it be just time. Also consider attention, care, and effort.

Before you begin let your eyes go closed, pause for six mindful breaths, then place an X on the line in each area of living. Put it right in the middle if you feel that you are pouring just the right amount of your life into this area. Place the X to the left on the line if you have been pouring a little less or all the way to the left if you have been pouring a lot less than you would like into the area. Do the same to the right depending upon whether you have been putting a little or a lot more of your life into this area than you would like.



The One Life Garden: Part 3, values feeding values

SOMETIMES VALUES SEEM TO CONFLICT WITH ONE ANOTHER. Time devoted to one value may take time away from another value. But values can also enhance and support each other. Learning to do this takes a bit of effort and a shift in perspective.

In the circle on the left, write in a value. Write some of the patterns you would like to cultivate in this area. Also write in some specific practices you could develop in this area.

Close your eyes and imagine that you could be wildly successful in this area. Try to picture yourself engaged in this area of living. Allow yourself to imagine hard work, difficult days, and finally real growth and development. See if there are patterns and practices that could transfer directly or be translated in some altered way to other areas of living.

Write some possible practices and qualities that might enhance the other areas of living. (P.S. If any birds show up while doing this sheet, there is a place for them too!)

Value: _____

Effect: _____

Value: _____

Effect: _____

Value: _____

Effect: _____

Value: _____

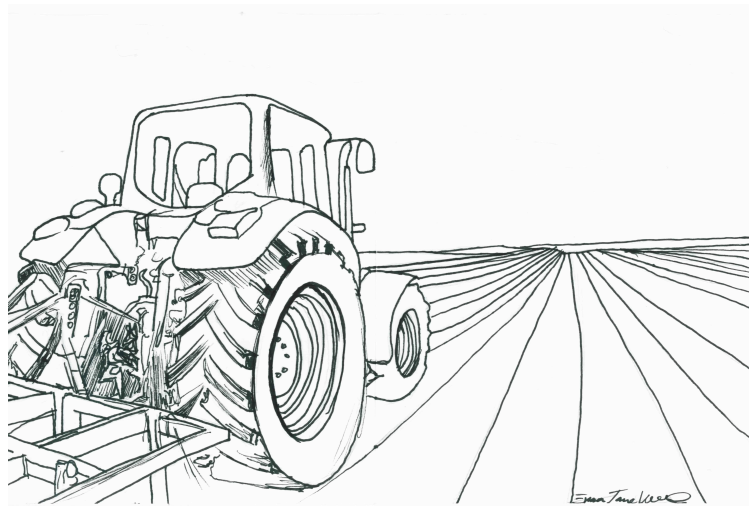
Patterns: _____

Practices: _____

HOW DOES YOUR GARDEN GROW?

IMAGINE that your values are a garden that you tend. Notice that when you are busy staring up at that flock of birds, it is hard to tend the garden. You might accidentally pull up flowers instead of weeds! You might miss pests! It would definitely be harder to tend your garden. And, almost impossible to really appreciate your garden.

Just as a warning, if you have been staring up for a long time, things might not look great when you focus on your garden again. And. The birds are likely to get extra loud!



Imagine these are some of the rows in your garden. Write some **values** that you would like to grow, like being a father, mother, or friend. You can also use ones like self-care. You could put exercise, play, or spirituality. Also put some of the **patterns** that you would like to grow that are connected to each of these.

For example: **Values:** Being a good father **Patterns:** patient, reliable, kind

Feel free to plant more than one row in this garden.

(Special Hint: If the impossible, can't, always, never birds start squawking--see if you can look up, give them a wave, and come gently back to your garden.)

A hand-drawn illustration of a shovel on the left side of the page, with several horizontal lines representing rows in a garden. The lines are intended for writing values and patterns.

PUT A VALUE HERE—

PUT SOME PATTERNS HERE—

THE PANTRY OF MY LIFE: STOCKING THE SHELVES

WHEN I was a child my grandmother has a pantry full of lots of good things to eat. She had small things, like crackers and she had things you would need for a big holiday meal.

Imagine that you could stock a pantry for your values. In the pantry of your life, you could keep things large and small that would be part of a valued life.

In the jars below, write different actions you could take that would be part of the pattern we talked about in the values garden.

Let each jar contain a **specific action** that you could take that would be part of the pattern. **Remember, to think small. Sometimes very small things can be very important and meaningful!**



Public World

things done (and not done) to ease unwanted experience?



something bold



coming back



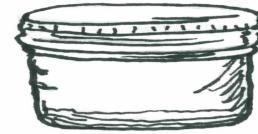
patterns of valued acts

the smallest steps

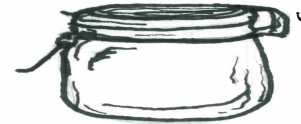


assume possibility

something kind



including stillness



preparing for success



something brave



another chance



Away ←

→ Towards

unwanted inner experience?

what is most important to you?

Emma Jane Wilson

World Within