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## **Using Visualizations for the Treatment of Trauma, and to Evoke, Embody and Empower the Wise Self** by Kathleen Dunbar, MFT, Certified Hakomi Therapist

### **Part 1: Using Visualizations in the Treatment of Trauma—Coming Home to the Wise Self and The Body**

#### **Intro.**

Many therapeutic orientations use visualizations because they engage clients deeply with imagery and symbols that are both archetypally and personally meaningful for clients. Visualizations are right brain processes which naturally draw upon metaphor, the body, sensation and empathy. The right brain is the fertile ground from which arises the Ah Ha! moments because it takes all the info from the left brain, and instead of comparing, it allows new connections to arise. New connections are the Ah Ha! creative answers and larger perspective understandings that help open doors to healing and to a larger world.

Some therapeutic orientations that use visualizations, albeit in different ways, include but are of course not limited to: Dreamwork, Energywork, Experiential Therapies, Gestalt, Hakomi, Heartmath, Hypnotherapy, Jungian, Shamanic, Somatic, Spiritual-Transpersonal and Traumawork.

Of the many helpful ways visualizations may be used, in this article I will focus on using them for Traumawork and to elicit the Wise Self. Some of the other helpful ways visualizations can be used are to assist in looking at family systems, and in working with parts and defenses. Visualizations have long been used in deepening into the sacred. They're a great way to work with dreams. They can help jumpstart creativity. They may be used to aid in help with physical healing, pain and sleep difficulties.

As you see, the subject of using visualizations is large. This is a necessarily abbreviated article to introduce the topic. My vision is for you to learn a basic framework of how to use visualizations and to take what is interesting for you to incorporate in your own unique way into your practice—and to have fun! Here is an overview of what I will cover:

- In Part One I focus on resourcing for traumawork . . .
- . . . Part Two focuses on using visualizations for diving into the Wise Self.
- I'll talk about small potent moments where visualizations are useful . . .
- . . . as well as larger, more formal visualizations.
- I'll talk about some basic ingredients:
  - Some examples of where visualizations are clinically helpful.
  - The components of a visualization, so you can make your own.
  - How to suggest it to a client.
  - One example of a protocol for how to use it.
  - How to interact with your client during the visualizations, and/or afterwards.
  - Some languaging examples.

#### **Some Important Things that Visualizations are Helpful For:**

- Trauma—grounding, resourcing.

- Identifying and integrating the Wise Self.
- Small moments to deepen into something important that is an expression of the client's Wise Self—"where the wings would be."
- Calming yourself as therapist.

## Letting Things Go, Bringing Things In, Boundaries, Connecting.

**Visualization draws from** archetypal practices of storytelling, singing, poetry, and using metaphors and symbols to support clients on their healing journeys. Visualizations can help clients ground, transform, integrate, and step into the truth of themselves in a felt sense way.

### STANDARD COMPONENTS to use in visualizations:

The following are important components of visualizations for use with both healing from trauma and finding and deepening into the Wise Self. You may use one or all of the components. The longer the visualization, the more you will weave in all of the components. All of these ***promote groundedness, calm and the stepping forth of the Wise Self.***

- Use both imagery and actual physical routes ***to let go of things.***
- Refresh with pure energy from above and below, or use imagery from archetypal realms, ***to bring goodness in.***
- ***Safety.*** Feeling safe or safe enough is vital for a visualization to work. Sometimes you may want to make safety and boundaries the focus of the visualization. Other times it is more of a given.
- Help clients ***move from isolation to connection*** with the web of life, with themselves, and with others.
- Invite feelings of ***gratefulness and appreciation.***

### A way for clients to let things go.

- A lot of clients literally don't know how to let go of things they don't want to carry, like tensions, thoughts, aches, memories, etc. They become practiced habits whose tensions shape their physical structure and affects their muscles and bones. These habits become predisposed and physicalized limiting beliefs ("I have to be invisible," "I always have to be strong," etc.). I have found many clients genuinely surprised that there is an actual way to let go of burdens, tensions, toxic thoughts, aches, and memories.
- Here are a few basic visualization metaphors for letting go:
  - Out with the tide at the beach, or off with the wind from a mountain lake.
  - Out through their body: out from the ridge below the center of the occiput, out feet, out bottom of spine.
  - Let the river take layers away as they float.

### A way to bring things in.

- The universe abhors a vacuum—the same old stuff (limiting beliefs, tensions, unhelpful thoughts, etc.) will return unless ***replaced with something new!***
- Bringing things in in a felt sense way helps create new neural pathways!
- Here are a few basic practices of bringing things in:
  - Pure gold light down from above through the top of the skull, the back of the head, and the back of the heart like a whale's blowhole.
  - Earth energy up legs from below.
  - Staying in a felt sense way with the wholesome feeling evoked that an image, color, or sensation brings.

### Safety, boundaries and natural protection.

- Many clients, especially ones with trauma, need to learn how to have appropriate boundaries, who to allow in and who not, and how to have private time even from those they love most.
- There are many boundary exercises offered by a variety of therapeutic modalities. Here is a basic exercise of discovering boundaries using some visualization and sensation that my clients love and continue to refer to. This is a very new concept to many clients, especially those with trauma:
  - **Feeling your boundary with your hands.** Invite the client to feel “where they end and the rest of the world begins.” Do this with them to show them how. I feel out in front of me with my hands, just short of arms’ length. I say something like, “I can feel that this is the edge of my boundary and inside this I feel me. When I put my hand outside (I do this and wave it around) that doesn’t feel like Kathleen anymore. Some people feel a tension or pressure at the edge of their energy field; others feel a temperature change or notice a color. What are you noticing?”

### Connecting to the “Village” or “Tribe” and Bringing Online the Social Engagement System.

- **Finding Your Village (also known as The Rings of Saturn).** Invite the client to “bring into the session” the safest, closest people who support them. They could be living people, people who have passed like a grandmother, or figures like The Dalai Lama or Quan Yin. If there are no people, invite them to come up with a protective image from nature—I have had many, many clients choose redwood trees. Or they can use someone from stories or books—I had a client who trusted Big Bird and that’s who we used. Make sure these are the **safest and easiest people with whom they can be vulnerable**. Sometimes clients feel obligated to have challenging people in their “inner ring” and if they do this, they can’t feel safe. I pointedly check in with this and suggest they arrange their village like the Rings of Saturn—in the very closest circle are the easiest people who understand and support them; the next several rings can contain family members or friends they want in their village but with whom they might not want to share as much or who aren’t a direct or easy support; on the outer rings are those friends who are good for pizza and a movie but not for going deep. I tell people how “crowded” my office is with my partner, mentors and teachers, friends and colleagues. That I wouldn’t do therapy without them, or go to the grocery without them! However, it was not always this way and I had to learn who was in my village and how to create it. This inspires hope for clients.
- **NOTE:** This is an exercise I do with all of my clients from early on in our sessions as it is so basic to our human needs. Learning to build our village helps in many ways, so it is a multipurpose tool: it helps balance the brain and nervous system and brings in the parasympathetic, it helps mend attachment wounds, it is a tool they can draw on when they are lonely, stressed, at a job interview, etc. If you’d like a fuller step by step example of how I use this visualization, you can look for the article called *It Takes a Village: A Resourcing Visualization* on the Articles page of my website: <https://kathleendunbar.net/articles>
- **NOTE:** This is a visualization that is best where you check in and work with the client at each step along the way.

### Connecting to the Web of Life.

- Loneliness and separation play prime roles in stress, anxiety, depression and trauma.
- Mindfulness brings the prefrontal cortex online and calms and balances the brain. Using imagery, which uses the right brain, connects us to empathy, others, ourselves, imagery and the body, and helps us learn to ground in a felt sense way.
- Below is a description of cranial rhythms drawn from Charles Ridley’s use of biodynamic cranial touch. Cranial rhythms are the subtle pulses of our cerebrospinal flood that bathe our nervous system. **He offers a map that shows us which cranial rhythm a client is in from the images they spontaneously report when they are mindful and inward. We can also use this map to inform the visualizations we put together for our clients.** Except for the trauma-based Cranial Rhythm, all of the rhythms are wholesome and healing. Interestingly, when we draw from the wholesome rhythms, we also become friendly with the trauma rhythm, include it, be friendly to ourselves for having it, and then it doesn’t have so much impact, or it is easier to move out of.

- Here is a description from my website **of the five cranial rhythms** which draws on Charles Ridley's work. Everyone understands the trauma rhythm. We often see our clients giving the "international signal" of waving their hand in an intense vibration as they describe the charge or activation that is plaguing them and that they are seeking help about. The "new" habit that we help them with is noticing, inviting, and cultivating the other rhythms:
  - During a session, you shift out of the "enfoldment" of an over-activated or depleted **Cranial Rhythm** which is **trauma based**, chaotic and lonely, into a way of relating filled with balance, nourishment and joy. As you naturally begin to unfold from the nervous system's way of perceiving to your heart's way of perceiving, you may experience one or more of the following:
  - **You feel connected to all beings and to nature.** The wound of separateness dissolves. You may experience **Flow**, water (river, rain, lakes, the sea, liquid), feelings, images, sensations of the natural world, animals, a billowy sensation, **a deeper sense of being in the body**, new awareness of parts of the body, a contented release from past difficulties.
  - **Luminosity** – you move into **the larger Self that Jung speaks of, finding archetypal beings and images** (the lake that holds King Arthur's sword, a holy golden sea, the River Styx), totem animals, lights, colors, a divine wind, a feeling of love, being in many places at the same time, having a sense of something being "met" in you that hasn't before been met, layers coming off, geometric shapes, expansive space, a lava-lamp, sun, sky, a cleansing hurricane, flood, earthquake, a primordial abyss, a good feeling of being "gone" which indicates the "little self" or "little me" has shifted to a larger perspective.
  - In the mysterious darkness of the universe, **you become the No-Self**. Here, in **Dynamic Stillness**, a sense of slow alive movement arises within a simultaneous and complete stillness.
  - You experience what Charles Ridley calls the **"Breath of Love – direct bodily contact with the mystery of life and death,"** within and without, **a feeling of connection to all that is**, the integration of all the above "enfoldments" at once, in the pristine safe warm love of the Mother, with the unflinching guardianship of the Father.

### The Importance of Feeling Grateful.

- We want to **anchor the goodness** that is elicited in the client from their visualization. There are many ways to verbalize this. **I don't actually use the word grateful very often though that is the experience that is being invoked.** Instead I use the exact words of appreciation and wholeness that the client themselves is using to describe their experience and deepen them into it.
  - "So how about take a moment to feel the freedom of that bird that came to you on this journey, see her spread her wings, feel your own wings and the hopefulness and bigger world that you are describing, and the freedom you are learning from the bird." **Without using the word grateful, you are inviting the client into an experience of appreciation that is taken directly from their words and their experience. This is the route I usually take.**
- The feeling of gratefulness is regulating to our brain and nervous system in a number of ways. Feeling gratefulness and appreciation helps the brain release dopamine, the feel good reward chemical; increases serotonin; and can increase oxytocin the bonding chemical.
- The act of being grateful arises out of an embodied experience that involves the body, the heart, and the right brain, as well as the prefrontal cortex. Compassion towards self and others is a right brain practice because it utilizes the right brain's ability to put yourself in another's shoes, to be inclusive, to be creative. The world feels bigger and full of more possibilities. The gnarly stuff begins to lose some of its power and feels more manageable.
- The heart, as well as the brain, has neurons. The heart's wisdom and way of knowing coupled with the right brain's creativity and inclusiveness fosters healing, growth, awareness, creativity, relationship and health. Our prefrontal cortex helps us to be mindful and use discernment to employ the heart and right brain in a positive way. This partnership is the seat of our Wise Self.

- **NOTE:** Take a moment to feel grateful to your busy left brain for all of its doing-comparing-knowledge-and-facts that is a marvelously potent act. This thanking simultaneously ***arises out of the Wise Self***-right brain-heart-prefrontal cortex ***and seats us in the Wise Self even more!***
- An easy way to access gratefulness, without ever using the word, involves the following components:
  - **Awareness.**
    - **Begin with the Ow!** Recognize stressful feelings and begin to cultivate a time out. Use awareness to bring online the prefrontal cortex, slow down, and move towards pleasure and kindness—towards the goodness of a hand on the heart and a willingness to be with positive imagery (or sensations or sounds if the client is not visual). Move into the right brain and heart.
    - **Begin with the Ah!** This is what we are doing when we invite clients to deepen into the goodness they are receiving from their visualizations—what is profound, fun, meaningful, beautiful, awe-inspiring, positive, moving, etc.—whether the visualization is one of a moment or of a longer, more formal practice. This also helps cultivate recognizing positive things as a good habit.
  - **Touch and Sensation in the Heart Area.** Putting a hand on the heart and feeling that touch brings the heart area, the body and the right brain more on line. Many of the world's spiritual traditions use the touching of the heart with the hand to enhance and deepen meditation, prayer and awareness practices.
  - **Positive Imagery.** Imagery is a right brain practice, so using imagery brings the right brain online, which brings the heart and body online. We help clients deepen into all the beauty, goodness, awe, pleasure, wonder, fun, hope, etc. that have unfolded in their visualization. What is cool is that **whatever has arisen out of their depths is the exact medicine that they need.** That is the beauty and power of the right brain.

### **Result of Using Visualizations that Relieve Trauma and Promote Groundedness:**

At their own pace (which might be quite slow and incremental and require our patience!) the client begins to:

- Learn from the inside out how to return to and expand the window of tolerance in a felt sense, keepable, useable way.
- Rewire their plastic brain into health and resiliency.
- Return to the parasympathetic nervous system—cycle away from adrenalin and cortisol, slow the heart and breathing, calm and ground.
- Bring their prefrontal cortex online as a practice.
- Cultivate feeling grateful. Gratefulness helps the brain release dopamine, the feel good reward chemical; increases serotonin; and can increase oxytocin the bonding chemical.
- Discover the Wise Self because they are relaxed and feeling safer.
- Ground in the Wise Self in an embodied and repeatable way.
- Discover and deepen the sense of aliveness and joy.

### **Client must be present to begin to use visualizations:**

- Our first mandate if a client is dissociated is to drop all other therapeutic orientations and use some form of traumawork to get them back in the present.
- For clients that are revving/hyperactive: Slowing down can help them get out of the activated system. Directing them to use their felt sense helps them be in the present because we can only notice sensations in the present. These kinds of practices break the trauma spell and gets them out of the hyper system.
- For clients who have gone offline/hypo: Stretch, engage quads, look around, use felt sense because sensations are in the present, which breaks the trauma spell and gets them out of the hypo system.

## Examples.

In the examples below you will find themes that repeat—letting go, bringing in, the importance of the heart, going down into the earth, going up into the sky. Now when you read visualizations from various different sources, you can begin to notice the “bones” of how they are created, and use that to inspire your own!

### Examples of Visualizations to Use for Traumawork—Small Pieces:

You can make a longer visualization out of any of these, or use them as small pieces:

- **Letting Things Go—The Beach or Mountain Lake.** Lead the client to visualize a beach or forest lake where only the client may go (only them, so it's private and safe/safer), fill in sensory details, and invite them to let go of whatever they wish to let go of to the tide (if they are at the beach) or to the wind or the stream (if they are at a forest lake).
- **Finding Your Side Body.** Invite the client to imagine floating on a river of the just right temperature, in that place where the river slows and widens into its banks, into the reeds and birds, the river holding the client, the riverbed of the earth holding the river, and any little layer they'd like to let go of, to give to the river to take away.
- **Connecting to the Heart of the Earth.** Add this to any other visualization exercise: “. . . and like the little click of the kiss of a magnet, let your heart be connected to the heart of the earth.” (From Julie Murphy).
- **Feeling Your Bones.** “Let gravity be your friend, and just let yourself feel the weight of your bones, and how your muscles drape from your bones, and just let yourself sink into the chair/table/floor.”
- **Getting Larger In Order To Relax.** Have the client imagine being in another dimension “. . . where you are bigger and taller, in every direction—so your cells are larger and can more easily release waste and toxins and take in nourishment, your blood flows more easily through your veins and arteries, your tight muscles more easily relax, and your spine lengthens.”
- **Slowing Down With An Old Fashioned Clock.** Invite them to see an old fashioned clock with a fancy second hand . . . that . . . slows . . . doooooown, in a world where everything is sloooooower. (You must also talk more slowly!)

### Examples of Visualizations to Use for Traumawork—Longer Exercises:

I am giving abbreviated versions of the longer exercises. You will, of course, be inviting mindful attention, speaking slowly, and participating in some way yourself as you give the visualization. The client will be borrowing from your nervous system.

- **Bill Bowen, Psychophysical Therapy.**  
**Closing and Opening, The Morning-Evening Exercise.** Bill was big on how we naturally contract and expand, and the important thing is not to get stuck in one or the other but learn to flow. You verbally give directions and do this along with the client as you follow their pace. You may have to invite a pace which is mindful and not an athletic exercise if the client tends to get busy. **Exercise:** Eyes closed, the arms go up towards the sky as the sun comes up, the birds sing, the flowers open; then evening comes, the flowers close, the birds make their last calls and our arms come down and our hands rest on our laps. Repeat several times.
- **Also from Bill Bowen.**  
**Seacaves of the Skull.** In any visualization working with receiving golden light into the head and heart this is very helpful, especially for clients who tend to be doers. **Exercise:** So let golden light just pour right into your head. So often our heads are busy thinking, and our eyes are busy looking outwards. Your eyes are mostly water. Right now let your eyes sit back in the sea caves of your skull. Let your mind rest inside your skull. Let your skull be a cup and just receive the

golden light from above without having to do anything . . . and let your heart be a cup that also receives the golden light, without having to do anything.

- **From Charles Ridley, Biodynamic Cranial Practitioner, Teacher, Author.**  
**Gold Light.** Therapist does this exercise along with client. **Exercise:** Invite gold light to come down through the crown of the head and also through the back of the head as through a whale's blow hole, right into your head, (stay with that a while in silence), now let the gold light continue down and fill the cup of your heart, and the gold light can come in at your back, from behind your heart too, through another whale's blow hole, (stay with that for a while in silence), now let the light flow down all the way to your perineum, and just see on this day, at this moment, how you feel in your perineum and your relationship to the earth, as though this area is the earth at the base of a teepee, (stay with that a while in silence), now let the light rise up again to your heart and let your light shine out softly in every direction of the universe from your heart, with no effort from you, just as a star's light shines out, (stay with that a while in silence), and let the light continue up to the center of your head and gently stream out from your eyes and ears and nostrils and mouth, (stay with that a while in silence), and now, if you like, let your awareness go down, all the way through your heart and your perineum and down, down, down, down all the way deep into the earth, (stay with that for quite a *long while* in silence), and now returning your awareness up, up, up from the earth, through your perineum, through your heart and all the way into your body.
- **Julie Murphy, Certified Hakomi Trainer.**  
**Big Heart of the Earth. Exercise:** Allow yourself to turn inwards and be present with all that is here with as friendly an attitude as you can muster. When your attention wanders, keep returning to your breath, feeling the air come into your nostrils and out with each breath, the rising and falling of your chest, (stay with that a while in silence), letting your awareness come down to your heart and be with whatever is there, (stay with that a while in silence), now, let your awareness move down into your belly, (stay with that a while in silence), and now down through the bottom of your spine and your pelvis and down through both legs down into the earth—down through the grass, through the soil and pebbles, down through the earth and into the bedrock, (stay with that a while in silence), let your awareness go down another fifty feet, (stay with that a while in silence), and another fifty feet, (stay with that a while in silence), and down a hundred feet more, (stay with that a while in silence), and even further down, five hundred feet, (stay with that a while in silence), and now down into the molten core of the planet, and feel the big heart of the planet beating, and your heart beating, (stay with that a while in silence). At this point you have several options:
  1. And let yourself feel the beating of your heart, and the beating of the heartbeat of the earth, (stay with that a while in silence), and you can begin to notice all the creatures who are also on the earth whose hearts are beating also. Then do **tonglen** practice. Come back up at the end.
  2. And now start to feel the warm, **slow energy of the earth pulse back up through your feet and spine into your body** (stay with that a while in silence). Come back up at the end.
  3. Do step 2 allowing and following the earth energy up into the body, then add the following: And now allow yourself to **open the top of your head, and let your awareness rise** up a few feet, (stay with that a while in silence), and higher, (stay with that a while in silence), up into the sky, (stay with that a while in silence), and now out into the starry universe, (stay with that a while in silence). Come back down through the top of head into the body.
- **Karla McLaren, Energy Practitioner and Author.**  
**Gold light.** You will notice that there is a lot of gold light in these exercises! Here is Karla's gold light version. Take frequent silent pauses to deepen into experience. **Exercise:** Let yourself get comfortable as you sit or lay. Now let the pure gold light of the universe pour down and turn all the bones of your skull golden, and your brain becomes golden, and your eyes golden too, your mouth and jaw, and now the golden light pours down so that your neck and shoulders turn gold, and your heart gold, the light pours down into your heart turning your heart gold, your chest is gold, all of your organs are golden now, your bones gold, your blood gold, your hips and sexual

organs gold, the gold flowing down through the big bones of your thighs, so that your thighs are gold, the bones and muscles gold, your blood flowing gold, your skin gold, now your knees, and your lower legs are golden, and your feet. And let the excess gold flow out through the bottom of your feet. (This last is quite important as people can feel stuck, uncomfortable, try to hold onto the feeling, or feel confused if they aren't directed how to manage the flow). Bring client's awareness back to the room to end.

- **Also from Karla McLaren.**

**Aura Cleanse. Exercise:** Let yourself feel your awareness in "the room in your head where only you may go" (you can do an entire visualization about that room), and let your awareness go down through your heart and body and legs and feet and the bottom of your spine and connect to the earth with a ribbon, or root, or beam of light, whatever you'd like, see what color it is today, and now feel your aura around you, about arm's length, and for right now widen the ribbon or root coming out of your spine and feet so it's about two feet wide, just for now, and when you're ready, see and feel your aura squeezing right into your body just like you'd wring out a towel, and squeeze out anything you want to let go of in a whoosh! as it gets vacuumed down the big tube below your feet and spine, and now let your aura get big again, all fluffy and clean, see what color it is, and let the vacuum tube get smaller and go back to being your root or ribbon-sized connection to the earth. Bring client back to awareness.

## **Protocol to Use for Trauma Resourcing or for Inviting Wise Self.**

See an **OPPORTUNITY**.

Propose using **VISUALIZATION** and get client's agreement.

Set up **MINDFULNESS**.

Use the **PRESENT TENSE**.

Set up **TYPE OF COMMUNICATION**.

Do the **VISUALIZATION**.

Get a **REPORT/DEBRIEF** and **EMBODY WHAT IS LEARNED** with the **WISE SELF**

**See an OPPORTUNITY to help the client to do one of the following:**

1. Learn to **calm and ground** and be embodied in a safe way and resource.
2. See a small moment of opportunity where **client is speaking positively about themselves**.
3. See a small moment of opportunity where **client is speaking positively about another person, creature, etc.**
4. Offer a metaphor **to help them shift out of contracting**, for example, to something more opening or flowing or hopeful.
5. Use a **longer visualization** to help client become more seated in their Wise Self.

**Offer a VISUALIZATION:**

1. **TO CALM AND GROUND.** Use awareness, tripod, stretch and yawn, anchor, breathe, pick an exercise, celebrate a no if it comes up.
  - T: **"I notice that you went away a little bit there. Are you noticing that?"** (You are the "auxiliary brain" for the client, helping them to become **AWARE**, which also helps them learn to bring their prefrontal cortex online, which helps them calm. You're always modeling this).
  - T: "How about we take a moment here. How about you bring your **feet flat on the floor** and **find your sitsbones**. Yeah, just wiggle your sitsbones a bit like this." (Therapist do this to show them).
  - T: "Let yourself find the **TRIPOD** of your sitsbones and your two feet. Yeah, and just let your spine rise up out of your pelvis. And no, don't try to sit up straight, that's exhausting—it's fine to use the back of the chair to support your back. You might notice



how you naturally lengthen when you feel your feet and sitsbones and back lightly supporting you. (NOTE: Simply sitting up straighter in a relaxed way and not collapsed gives the lungs more room to expand thus giving more oxygen to the brain. The brain interprets less oxygen as threat—the brain doesn't know the reason why you are slumping—you may be bummed out, or may just be working at your computer—it just knows “less oxygen” and feels “threat!” and goes into fear mode. Simply sitting up straighter calms down the brain! I explain this to clients as part of psychoeducation).

- T: “Let’s **STRETCH AND YAWN**” Therapist do this with client. This is an incredibly easy “medicine” to break a trance state and is available in any situation! It works because it focuses on present-and-pleasant *sensations* rather than *thoughts* or *emotions*. The danger of thoughts and emotions when there is dissociation is that they are negative and that they are past-future constructs—“That was bad then and will be bad again/always, oh my god!” Sensations can really only be experienced IN THE PRESENT. With trauma, we want to unbind the sensations from the thoughts and emotions. Sensations unbound and separated from thoughts and emotions are safer to work with, help bring the client back, break the past-future “OMG!” trance, and help the client gain a sense of mastery.
- (Client will usually **come back more into the present moment with the stretch and yawn, so use this to ANCHOR good feelings!**)
- T: “So what feels good about that stretch? I’m feeling a nice little flow/release there. What are you feeling?”
- C: “Yeah, I feel a warmth.”
- T: “That warmth feels good?”
- C: “Yeah!” (Surprised there’s a good feeling).
- T: “Surprised huh?”
- C: “Yeah!”
- T: “So just let yourself feel that warmth, and that bit of nice surprise and possibility.”
- C: (Does so).
- T: “**Now take three BREATHS** in through your nose and out through your mouth with an audible sound, *Ahhhhh*—we’ll do it together and I’ll follow you.” (An *audible sigh* brings the parasympathetic nervous system online and flushes away adrenalin and cortisol. I explain this to clients as part of the psychoeducation of the helpfulness of audible sighs).
- **Then CONTINUE with any sort of grounding exercise that seems interesting**, first getting client’s approval.
- If client says, “No,” **at any point** stop and **celebrate the NO!**

## 2. FOR A SMALL MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY WHERE CLIENT IS SPEAKING POSITIVELY ABOUT *THEMSELVES*.

- C: “I remember hiking and I feel so connected to the trees and everything right now.”
- T: “So how about you turn inward to explore this. Would you like to do that? That’s right, close your eyes and see the trees and how tall they are, hear the wind passing through their leaves, feel the roots reaching out to one another. And feel yourself connected to the trees, and not only to the trees, but to everything. Notice what happens with your breath as you are connected to everything—that’s right, you just took a big breath there!—so just feel yourself taking that bigger breath and (giving menu:) notice your rhythm right now, your pace, what you’re seeing, your connection to yourself (etc).”
- C: (Client does so).
- T: “Really take your time.”
- **Go for meaning. The three gold standard meaning questions**, which work *only after the client is immersed in the experience* elicit the new felt sense meaning from the client and help them embody it:
  - T: “What are you learning here?”
  - T: “What are you discovering here?”
  - T: “What’s important about this?”

3. **FOR A SMALL MOMENT OF OPPORTUNITY WHERE CLIENT IS SPEAKING ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON, CREATURE, ETC.**

- C: "I love to watch my dog jump for joy. She is so spontaneous!"
- T: "So how about you turn inward. And see how joyful your dog is, wiggling and wagging her tail, so spontaneous (use the **exact words!** the client just used to describe dog's happiness).
- C: (Client does so).
- T (Keep them steeping in this). "Yeah, so feel that big breath you're taking now and that smile that's coming now."
- C: (Client does so).
- T: "And now, if you want, feel your own longing (*longing* is a word I use often as it a major key to the Wise Self!) to feel joy and be spontaneous."
- C: "Oh but I can't," (Client stops process and opens eyes).
- T: "Would you **like** to feel that joy?"
- C: "Yes, but I don't know how."
- T: "Even though you don't know how, does it seem like it's a good idea to feel that joy?"
- C: (Nods).
- T: "You know what, if you'd like (I ask for lots of permission, but at the same time sheepdog them into what they are longing for), go back inside and just feel how it's a good idea to feel that joy even though you don't know how."
- C: (Turns inside).
- T: "That's right. And see your dog and how joyful your dog is, and how you'd like to feel that too. And I'm wondering, **are you feeling joy along with your dog one-tenth of a percent?**" (**One Tenth of a Percent is VITAL.** Clients think they have to have it 100% or nothing. One tenth of a percent is a new concept to a lot of clients, and one that I find that most clients are not only willing and able to experience, but gives them a keepable sense of ability, and with that little bite size, also a LITTLE FELT SENSE EXPERIENCE OF MASTERY, which then becomes a new neural path).
- C: "Oh, yeah, actually I can feel 30 percent joy!"
- T: "Great! So feel that 30 percent! And how that joy is showing up (and give menu:)—in your heart or belly—I see you take a bigger breath." (Then keep deepening into that).

4. **TO OFFER A METAPHOR TO HELP THEM SHIFT FROM CONTRACTING**, for example, to something more opening or flowing or hopeful.

- T: (To client with tight shoulders), "I notice how tight your shoulders are right now. I wonder if you want to, you could feel between your shoulder blades, in the place where the wings would be."

5. **FOR A LONGER VISUALIZATION TO HELP CLIENT BECOME MORE SEATED IN THEIR WISE SELF.**

- Choose a visualization based on your intuition, inkling, or desire to try something out! Go ahead! Fly by the seat of your pants!
- T: "Are you interested in exploring \_\_\_\_?"
- C: "Yes!"
- T: "I have an idea. I could lead you in a visualization/meditation to explore that/deepen into that/etc."
- C: "I'd like that."
- T: (Then proceed with visualization).

**The importance of SETTING UP MINDFULNESS:**

Once you propose the experiment, you'll have to invite some sort of mindfulness in order for the visualization to work. In the above examples, the client either already knows how to become mindful

because you've taught them, or the mindfulness is built into what the therapist is saying in the examples and how they are saying it—already slowing down. etc. **DON'T SKIP setting up mindfulness OTHERWISE IT WON'T WORK.** At first you will have to teach most clients how to be mindful. It's best not to even use the word mindful, which is a more left brain word and can take a lot of people into analyzing what it is and away from their experience which is exactly what you don't want. You also want to help them welcome all of their experiences, rather than figuring things out. Once you more "formally" establish mindfulness a couple of times in a more detailed way, then clients are usually able to do it in subsequent therapy sessions without a lot of guidance because they know how to do it. You will only need to remind them, or give just a little help. To set up mindfulness, you can say things like:

- "How about you turn inside and close your eyes, or soften your gaze?" (Therapist can model this. Some clients don't want to close their eyes, that is why there is the option of softening and lowering the gaze and turning the attention inside that way).
- "Just let yourself take the elevator down out of your head and into your experience. That's right, closing your eyes."
  - **NOTE:** I use the phrase "take the elevator down" frequently. Remember—you can use the same phrases over and over again and it's actually helpful to create consistency with clients. They like and need this consistency—you *won't* be boring them! Pretty soon they will be using the phrase too!
- "Remember not to sensor anything, just welcome all that is happening."
  - **NOTE:** One important aspect of learning to calm and ground is to learn not only to be comfortable with, but to *welcome and include* what is difficult. It's allowing the full mandala and finding our strength in that ability to allow. Some clients will try to stuff away the discomfort; others are fixers so they will focus on only what is good and how to keep it and keep the bad out; others won't be able to include the good if the bad thing isn't named. You will often have to teach clients *how* to let everything be there.
- "Now let yourself turn inward. You might close your eyes, or soften your gaze. And welcome yourself just as you are—room for all of you, not sensoring anything. Let yourself be playful, irrational, spontaneous. There's no right or wrong way to do this. I'll help you."
- For a long visualization: I often do a VERY ABBREVIATED form of TRIPOD-STRETCH-YAWN-BREATHE—I'm not using it in this case to treat trauma, but instead to shift into a more internal awareness.
- If client is laying down: Put a cushion under their knees or have them bend their knees and put their feet flat on the floor so their pelvis and back can relax. For clients laying down I begin with Finding Your Side Body, Connecting to the Heart of the Earth, and Slowing Down with an Old Fashioned Clock.

## Use the PRESENT TENSE

**Invite the client to talk in the present tense** as you lead the client in a visualization, and as you debrief and invite them to embody their new learnings. Present tense helps invoke right brain processing, felt sense experience, and elicits new meaning from clients naturally without analyzing. Remember, GATHERER LEFT BRAIN must RELINQUISH its gathered info to the CREATOR RIGHT BRAIN. We JUMP START and DEEPEN this process by talking in the PRESENT TENSE. Transformation happens most powerfully when working with a felt sense of the present tense. Transformation rewires neural circuits in a keepable, practiceable way.

So in your languaging, **it's important that BOTH yourself and the client use the PRESENT TENSE. This is vital.** You have to teach them this—it's part of doing a visualization. And at first, at least, you will have to remind them of this, and catch them when they forget. When clients are interested in using visualizations, I have found that they have no problem using the present tense—it's part of the exercise—and they don't mind being reminded. It's okay and important to keep reminding them, and you might even give an example by rewording their sentence. Example, client opens eyes and says, "I felt joy as I saw that big tree." And you could say, "So how about you turn back inside, and use the present tense, so how about saying, 'I feel so much joy as I see that big tree.'"

Present tense speaking and live experience go hand in hand and are vital and potent for creating new beliefs and repairs. If people use the past tense they tend to fall into rehashing and recirculating old worn out stuck meanings—the ones they are tired of and want to change in therapy. Once the client starts using past tense, they have fallen into left brain processing, telling a story *about* what happened, and are likely to expend effort in trying to figure out or fix. Trying kills creativity and easily turns into rehashing of already-known information. Remember, the brain that is **reporting** (more **left** brain) is not the same brain that is **experiencing** (more **right** brain). We want the client to stay in the experiencing.

## Set up TYPE OF COMMUNICATION AND REPORTING STYLE

Will you have clients respond verbally as you go along, or just nod when they are at the cue that you are suggesting, or will you take them all the way through without interaction? This is important to establish before you begin.

- **For new clients, especially clients new to therapy or mindfulness** it is safer to get reports as you go along when you begin to offer longer visualizations.
  - It's important to determine if the client understands the directions.
  - You may want to change the metaphor—they'd rather imagine a mountain lake than a beach.
  - Make sure you are matching their style—are they visual or more kinesthetic? Change your use of languaging to match that.
  - Make sure they are truly interested and you have assessed their interests properly.
  - Assess for dissociation.
  - Get to know the kind of help they need.
- **Over time** you will determine which clients like longer visualizations and which ones don't need any checking in with along the way and you will do your debrief and getting a report to explore at the end.
- Some clients **may always do better** with some checking in along the way.
- And in other situations with whatever type of client, it may be **clinically relevant to verbally explore what is happening at each step**—either mindfully/eyes closed or mindfully/with eyes open—as in the **Finding Your Village/Rings of Saturn exercise**. **You want to assist them, troubleshoot, and direct them to deepen into the goodness all through the exercise.**
- **Set up Reporting Style:**
  - **Client Reports as You Go Along:** “So I'll lead you in and you can tell me your experience as we go along. Please use the present tense.”
  - **Nonverbal but Use Nods, Debrief and Get A Report Later:** “So I'll be leading you, and you can give me a nod as we go along. So like when I ask you to find a path into the woods, you give me a nod when you have it, so I know you have it. And if you need some help, ask me, that's what I'm here for.” Then debrief at the end of the visualization, using present tense as much as possible to anchor the new learnings.
  - **Nonverbal and No Nods, Debrief and Get A Report Later:** “If you have any questions or you need help, tell me. Otherwise I'll lead you in this dive/meditation/visualization.” Debrief after, using present tense as much as possible to anchor the new learnings.

## DO THE VISUALIZATION (mini, short, medium or long!)

Use any ones you find here, or make up new ones!

## GET A REPORT/DEBRIEF and EMBODY WHAT IS LEARNED in THE PRESENT TENSE with the WISE SELF

### Shifting Beliefs, Shifting Selves

A client might be able to cognitively know, “I am loved.” However, if their felt sense experience is that they are unloveable, they won't be able to embody feeling loveable until they *experience* being loved. As Frieda Fromm Reichman says, “The client needs an experience, not an explanation.” Explanations are cognitive and as such don't help clients shift deeply seated beliefs about themselves. Experiences, on the

other hand, are those Ah Ha! moments where clients' beliefs about themselves change in a profound and keepable way. Their brain rewires. There are many ways to elicit these experiences. Visualizations and using the present tense are one way to help clients actually have **a lived, transformed, healing experience**. So when they have a felt sense shift from limiting beliefs to nourishing beliefs, **that is a vein of gold and we want to mine it!** We can do this by:

- Using the present tense.
- Immersing the client in the new belief.
- Helping them to feel that new belief as a natural property of their Wise Self.

#### **ONE: Get a report of the new meaning:**

Whether your visualization is a mini-one (client spends a moment turned inside to feel into the goodness of the space they created when they said no in an experiment) or a long one (client meets a power animal who teaches them about freedom), we want to help the client anchor in any new meaning so they can keep coming from and returning to that expanded experience. We do this by asking some version of one of our three golden questions **after the client is immersed in their experience/right brain processing**:

“What are you learning here?”

“What’s important about that?”

“What are you discovering here?”

#### **TWO: But that’s not the end!**

- **Whatever the client answers, we turn them back inside . . .**
- **. . . and have them fill in more nuances of the experience . . .**
- **. . . with present tense language.**
- C: “I feel calm and trusting as I sit with the mother tree.”
- T: “So just **stay with** that feeling of calm and trust. See the mother trees arms above you waving in the evening breeze (language used from *exactly* what client was just saying) and feel her at your back, and feel all the nuances of that calm and trust . . . all that’s coming with that bigger breath you are taking now, and the loosening of your shoulders, and the wetness of your tears, and how you feel towards yourself inside, and how the trust is affecting your heart and your belly, and your energy . . .”

#### **THREE: And that’s not the end either! Seat the client in their Wise Self:**

- “. . . and just notice **who** is feeling this trust, how that’s your Wise Self.”
- Using the present tense with new meanings is a function of the Wise Self. It’s important to help the client not only feel the new experience, but to help them feel **who it is that is feeling it!**

On my first long vacation after getting licensed as an MFT, I met a Diné healer who boiled down all healing work to a wonderful diagram. He drew two parallel lines in the dust of his Hogan floor and pointed at them with his stick. He connected the two lines and said, “We want to do anything and everything we can to move the patient from here to here.” Ultimately, nourishing beliefs are what is felt by the Wise Self, and limiting beliefs are those held by Parts/Defenses. A lot of our work as healers is to take all of our presence, our tools and techniques, our patience and creativity to help our clients make the leap from what limits them, to the embodied truth of their unique selves—to help them move from Part/Defense to being seated in and coming from their Wise Self.

So it isn’t only the new meaning elicited from an exercise that we are helping clients anchor into—**it is the Wise Self that is experiencing the nourishing meaning that they must anchor into**. To a client who is feeling loveable as part of a visualization of being encircled by members of their true village, I might say, “The love isn’t just weather passing through. It’s what your Wise Self just knows is your birthright! Like a rose gives off beautiful scent, your Wise Self just naturally feels love without working at it. **So feel into WHO is feeling the love in your village!**” Typical client response, “Oh! Well, it’s ME!” To which I

reply, “So just go back inside and feel YOU! I bet there’s just a sense of rightness, huh?” Client nods. “So just feel that rightness and the you that feels love . . .”

This is rewiring the plastic brain for more resiliency, creativity, groundedness and joy. Essentially, as I tell clients, this is “waking up their birthright that has always been there.” They like this phrase as it speaks to their dignity and aliveness. The Wise Self lives from their birthright, from nourishing beliefs.

**Practice Being in the Wise Self. Establish Wise Self then have them look at a pertinent issue that they’ve brought into therapy that day.**

**This is a really important exercise to:**

- Further anchor and embody the client in their Wise Self.
- Give client a sense of mastery over previously difficult situations.
- Give the client coached practice—therapist can trouble shoot along the way as you do the exercise together.

Clients often come in with day to day problems, but their difficulties usually arise because they have become triggered into a defensive Part from their early lives and have left their Wise Selves. For example, whatever their boss or partner or friend did or said isn’t usually the real problem. The client has become triggered and shifts into a Part to deal with the situation like they did growing up. The client is then back reacting in the system from their family of origin. They have lost options and no longer have access to their wisdom. Parts either talk too much or can’t talk at all. The Wise Self says what is necessary, and doesn’t even need much coaching on “communication skills” from us. From the Wise Self, the client just knows what to say and how to say it! So one of our main jobs as therapists is to help them return to their Wise Self!

Visualizations are one of many ways we help the client come home to the Wise Self. Once the client has returned to some piece of the untarnishable gold of their Wise Self, there are a number of ways to practice. And practice is essential! If we don’t help the client practice, we have missed a “golden” opportunity to help them further deepen into and practice being truly them. After all, we all “practice” limiting habits—so we need to learn to “practice” wholesome habits and be us! The following is an exercise **I constantly do with all clients and over the whole course of therapy**. It is drawn from Jon Eisman’s Re-Creation of the Self model.

**Exercise—From the Eyes of the Wise Self.**

- Therapist watch the clock so you have a bit of time at the end of the session, after the client is seated in their Wise Self, to do this.
- Offer the option of two exercises—continue to deepen into the Wise Self, or practice looking at a difficult situation from their Wise Self.
- Sometimes clients just want to spend time in the goodness and we finish with that. I let them decide.
- Often, however, they want to practice. Watch out as they may already have started to practice while you are still proposing the experiment! Slow it down and set it up so they can really have the sense of mastery. Here is an example of a client who presented at the beginning of the session with a difficulty with a friend. There are many routes we could have taken to arrive at their Wise Self, but we happened to do a visualization today. Whatever route you take, you can use this exercise:  
T: “We have a choice how we can use the time here at the end of the session. You can keep deepening into what you are learning, and the goodness of being You. Or, from the eyes of your Wise Self here, you could look at that difficult situation we started with today.”  
C: (You can see their eyes moving under their closed lids, and their body shifts slightly to look to the left).  
T: “You’re already doing the exercise, huh!”  
C: “Yes!” (Opens eyes).

T: "So is this what you'd like to do now, some practice?"

C: "Yes, I'd like to practice."

T: "Okay, so go back inside. (Client closes eyes). This is what we'll do. First, let go of seeing your friend for a minute. We'll start with you really feeling your Wise Self. Then when you're ready, tell me, 'I'm ready.' And I'll say 'Start,' and I'll count silently for five seconds. When you hear, 'Start,' with your eyes closed go ahead and look at your friend and notice what you see from these eyes, from the eyes of your Wise Self!"

C: "Okay."

T: (Draw from the *exact* wording the client has been using during the session). "So really feel your confidence, and how your chin lifts, and your heart is more open, and how you know deep down it's okay for you to take up space. Really feel *who* it is that just naturally takes up space."

C: (Client nods and smiles).

T: "That's right, feel that smile, and feel your Wise Self."

C: (Client does so).

T: "So take your time, and tell me when you're ready."

C: "I'm ready."

T: "So . . . Start." (Therapist silently counts five seconds). "And . . . stop."

NOTE: After saying, "Stop," sometimes clients keep their eyes closed and report. Fairly often they open their eyes at this point. This is okay now. They may even ask if they can open their eyes, and I say fine. It may be that they want to see me—to be witnessed—in their success and their truth, things that often were missed in their family.

C: (Opens eyes). "Can I open my eyes?"

T: "Sure. What's your experience?"

C: "Well, I see how my friend just has her stuff going on. But that's her stuff, it's not mine. I don't have to take care of her like I did my mom. And I think I could actually tell her I can't go with her to that concert because I need to rest and need my space, but that I care about her and I'll want to do something with her when I'm more rested. (This is the opposite of the fear of saying this that was present at the beginning of the session). I feel so relieved."

T: "Wow, you said that so well! You could just take some time to feel that relief, and if you want, say that out loud to her. It looks like she's over there, where you've turned to."

C: "Ha ha! Yes, I see her over there. Okay, yes, I want to practice!" (Client does so).

## The Wise Self and Parts Map

From the very first session, in a kind, acknowledging way, I offer a map for clients of their Wise Self and the Parts-Defenses-"Security Team" that has protected them.

I have a whole little spiel I do illustrated with stuffed animals. I walk the reader through it at the end of this section. Typically clients are both laughing and crying at the end of this spiel. They are used to believing that they **are** their defenses, critics, unconscious actions, security guard protectors, etc. It is a profoundly hopeful experience and a great relief to know that their defenses are a security team that they hired when that was their only choice as kids and young people, and that we can treat those security guards kindly, but that ultimately they **do** have a true self that they can return to and must learn to dwell in to find their aliveness. It is a map that we use over and over. One of my clients called it, "The breadcrumbs back home." In therapy we use the map as they become aware of "who" is having an experience—a Part or their Wise Self. Sometimes our work involves exploring and healing the Part. Over the course of therapy we are more and more engaged in work that integrates their Wise Self. (The term Wise Self is only a jumping off name—I ask clients what they want to call this self. Common names clients use are: Wise Self (the most common), True Self, Core Self, The One Jane/client name, The Sturdy Core).

Being in the Wise Self is the state when brain function is balanced, and when we have access to our resiliency, creativity, compassion, aliveness and presence. The Wise Self allows intimacy, compassion, vulnerability and love. It is not, however, a spiritual bypass clinging "only to the positive." The Wise Self makes boundaries including using anger wisely. In our Wise Self we have enough grounding to let our hearts mourn and to be pierced by sorrow, not turning away from the ache, but neither succumbing to it

nor numbing. The Wise Self allows the entire polaroid snapshot mandala of a given moment to be present—the mud and flowers, the demons and angels, our critical selves and our compassion, our experiences of fun, joy, sadness, death, and mystery. Our Wise Self knows sometimes we will go down a rabbit hole of self deprecation or unhelpful habits, and also knows we can say Oops! and return. One main function of the somatic and experiential therapy I offer is to help clients have a **felt sense knowing of when they are in the Wise Self and when they are in a Part, and how to return to their Wise Self**. During sessions I offer interventions that help clients increase awareness, self compassion, have felt sense, keepable healing for old wounds, and practice in returning and being their Wise Self. I want them to walk out of the door of every session with a felt sense of how to come home and stay home in their own unique being.

I offer my new clients—both individuals and couples—the following “map” of Wise Self-Parts at the beginning of therapy, often in our first session, but certainly by the third. This allows us both to begin to name out loud and then work with what state of consciousness/part they are in. I give the following spiel, illustrated with a basket of animals that I have. I use this model as it is playful and not a grim and dry explanation of the dreaded psychological word “Defenses.” It is a human way to explain the difficulties of growing up and the very human path of healing and transformation.

Most therapeutic orientations include clinical maps of defenses and healthy self. In my work, I have particularly drawn from Jon Eisman’s RcS or ReCreation of the Self, Ron Kurtz’ Hakomi and its character maps, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy (traumawork), and Psychodrama. Hakomi and RcS parts work is both similar and different to their cousin, Dick Schwartz’ Internal Family Systems or IFS. Ron and Dick were friends. The Parts I name below are drawn from basic characterological missing experiences of basic needs. Clients recognize them because they are part of the human experience. It’s only a jumping off place—as our exploration evolves, we find out a lot of specifics about how their security team got hired and how they protect. Hakomi does a lot of acknowledging of the Parts as the best way the child self could cope, then works with helping clients receive the exact “missing experience” and nourishment that is needed to form nourishing beliefs and shift the client into the Wise Self. For example, shifting from being self reliant and not asking for help, to being able to appropriately ask for and receive help from reliable people. Further, this work helps clients embrace who they have always been, even though that got put on the shelf long ago. In your own work I encourage you to adapt the following model to your interests and orientations:

#### Example of Offering a Client the Wise Self-Parts Map in a Session:

- **I begin on the resource—the Wise Self.** So, first I ask, “Do you know that sense of engaging in something that just brings you alive where there is a feeling of ‘rightness’ unto your bones, where you may be giving **energy** but it is not **effort**. It could be a passion or hobby, or even a just right sense of choosing which path to take as you go for a walk in the woods.” Most people say yes. For those few who say no, I ask if they **long** to feel that sense of rightness, and they agree to that.
- For the next step, I have a large white bear who sits up above a basket of animals that are lower down. I ask if bears are okay with the client. (Once in a while somebody is scared of bears, so best to ask and use another animal instead!) I say, “**So for right now, let’s let the white bear be a stand in for your Wise Self**—whatever name you’re going to come up with for your Wise Self.”
- “Now, everyone is born with a True Self or Wise Self. **We are born with it and it’s our birth right**. And if we have enough of the right things go on, we grow up in a way that we live a lot from that self . . .”
- “**. . . BUT, we have these things called families (use some humor), mean teachers, bullies at school, a loved one dies . . .**”
- . . . Now I pull out a small white bear from the basket of animals and I say, “And here’s this kid who got hurt. **Now, kids can’t handle getting hurt. They’ll die or go crazy!—they’ll die or go crazy! . . .**”
- “**. . . but, as humans we have a third option! We don’t think about it, we just hire guys!**”  
Now I begin to pull animals out of the basket and place them in front of the small bear.



- I say, picking up an animal, “In no particular order, let’s just start at the top here: (Porcupine) ‘Oh, drugs, binging on Netflix, whatever—I’m just going to zone out.’ (Giraffe) ‘This is too scary, I’m just going to run away!’ (Baby Seal with big eyes) ‘If I’m really cute they might like me!’ (Meercat standing up very straight) ‘Nothing will get done unless I do it myself, and no one helps me, and I don’t ask!’ (Pterodactyl) ‘If I’m the biggest badass, no one will hurt me!’ (Bull) ‘I can’t say no directly . . . but I will find a way to do it my way—but sideways.’ (Beaver) ‘I have to work hard in order to be loved.’ (Octopus) ‘Maybe if I tell lots of stories all the time people will pay attention to me.’”
- “. . . Now, do you know what the first thing we do with these parts is? **The first thing we do is say, ‘Thank you, Thank you, Thank you.’ Because their job is to say, ‘I’m never fucking going to get hurt like that again—I’m going to do my thing!’**” Because they were the only thing that this kid could do to survive. They helped this kid survive!”
- Then I give a few more examples, “You know those big boxes of crayons with all of the colors and the sharpener? Well, if you get hurt as a kid you don’t have that big box with all those colors, you only have a couple of things you can do to survive, so you do them, like these parts right here. And thank goodness you did them to make sense of your world! You can’t tell your family, ‘I’m tired of you, I’m going to Hawaii and get a new family!’ And it’s even more complicated the more you love the people who you get hurt by. So, you don’t think about it, you just hire these guys!”
- Then I ask, “Do you recognize anyone?” Some clients will point out several and many respond that they recognize all of them. I say, “Yes! This is the human condition, this is what we do when we hurt and don’t know how to get back home to our Wise Self as kids, or when it’s not even safe to be in our Wise Self.”
- Now at this point, especially for clients new to therapy, or new to somatic and experiential therapy (they may have done lots of prior talk therapy) **typically clients are both laughing and crying right now. And this is why:** People think they are **only** their critics/defenses/parts and can feel really ashamed, anxious, depressed and trapped by them. The map I offer is a reframe. It shows that they **really do have a Wise Self** because we started with that. Then we **thank** the Parts which is an entirely new activity of self compassion for a lot of people. And they begin to have some **relief** that they **aren’t only** their Parts—their Parts are what they used to protect themselves. The Security Team is protecting the Treasure—their True Self, and now it’s an actual reality to be who they always were! So the tears and laughter are relief that having a Wise Self is really possible. As one client says, “Now the hope is real!”
- I go on, **“So these Parts are your Security Team!** They’ve kept you safe. However, it’s like if you put on a pair of pink sunglasses, everything looks pink. So if you look through the eyes of a Part, you can only see, ‘I have to do it myself and no one will help me,’ or ‘I can’t say no directly.’ **They kept you safe but they make your world really, really small.** They keep you back in time, back when you picked up that message, and that’s what you had to do to survive. But they don’t let you see other options, they keep you trapped.”
- **“So, it’s like if you are on a path in the forest and you get to a fork in the path.** What’s cool is that it’s **already your Wise Self** when you say, ‘I don’t really want to do that again.’ One path goes to your Parts (I point to all of the animals protecting the baby white bear) and over that path there’s a sign that says, ‘Path to Hell’ and you go down there anyway, because it’s what you know, it’s habit. It’s a well worn path. But meanwhile, there’s another way, (I point to the large white bear up high on the table), a path to your Wise Self! At first there might not be much of a path and you have to bushwack—to create a path there. And then it’s like the forest—the more you go to your Wise Self and learn to live from there, the less you’ll go to your Parts—the path to the Parts will get grassy and grown over.”
- **“Everyone under stress goes to their Parts,** even the Dalai Lama, who admits he has a temper. It’s the human condition to have Parts. **However, we can learn that when we end up in our Parts:**
  - We spend less time there.
  - It’s not such a big deal.
  - We get out of them and back to our Wise Self quicker—‘Oops! I fell off the horse, better get back on!’
  - We learn to live more and more from our Wise Self.

- **“So what we’ll do here in our work together:**
  - We’ll notice when you’re in a Part and we might work with the Part to bring some healing.
  - And when you’re in your Wise Self we’ll help you deepen into that.
  - We’ll look at it like **what is the engine driving what you’re doing?** Is it a Part that protects you—a member of your Security Team? **Is there a vehemence** in your reaction to someone or something that’s beyond what the situation warrants? Does it feel ‘old.’ Parts usually either **talk too much in an unhelpful way or can’t talk at all**—that indicates you are in a Part.
  - We’ll also help you **actively cultivate and deepen** into your Wise Self.
  - **A reminder**—your Wise Self appropriately can feel anger and make a boundary, feel a piercing of the heart sadness at a friend’s grave illness, feel great joy and aliveness. The Wise Self is not a spiritual bypass ticket—it’s a living in the moment, conscious way of life. We’ll help you do that.”

## Some Things to Remember.

- **“One tenth of a percent”** is a bite sized way that helps the client begin to feel a bit of mastery.
- **“Take the elevator down”** is a fun, metaphorical invitation for the client to move from head to trunk—where experience and feelings are.
- **“So just follow that \_\_\_\_\_, really take your time, if you need help let me know, but just keep following that, taking your time, and eventually let me know your experience.”** This phrase helps keep them in their experience, and primes them for giving a report.
- **Keep reminding the client to talk in the present tense.**
- Visualizations are strongest with **a somatic component and complete sensory use.**
- **What if a client isn’t visual?** Find that out beforehand and use sensation, sound, smell, etc. instead of visual wording.
- **If they fall asleep and snore.** Take that as a compliment! You will have to normalize and name that as in, “You really went deep there! You were snoring a bit! That’s really great!”
- **Every positive symbol, image, or visual that clients are drawn to are THEM—it’s a mirror of themselves.** You can tell them that. If they say, “I’m just making this up,” you can respond with, “So are you willing to trust what comes up for you, that it’s coming from somewhere inside *you*?”
- **Some BASIC COMPONENTS:**
  - Letting things go.
  - Bringing things in.
  - Safety.
  - Move from isolation to connection with self, others, planet.
  - Gratefulness.
- **Helpful wording to use to help the client come back to the room after a deep or long journey:**
  - “Keep with you anything you want from this journey . . . and let your awareness come all the way back . . . hear the sound of my voice, the traffic, the birds singing outside the window today, notice the light in the room through your eyelids . . .”
  - People almost *a/ways* want to stretch afterwards, and they will do this automatically if they have been laying down. You can do this too!
  - Begin the debrief very slowly and simply so that they don’t just jump into regular mode: “Let’s begin with one word or sound or gesture that would like to be named from this journey.”
- **A little rhyme:**  
**Visualization long or short,**  
**Always ask for a report!**  
**Have client speak in present tense**  
**To celebrate the Wise Self sense!**  
**Take the learning that is new,**  
**And to deepen what is true**  
**Turn them back inside to savor**

Every nuance of that flavor!  
—by Kathleen Dunbar

## Part 2: Using Visualizations to Evoke, Embody and Empower the Wise Self

### Following the Heart and the Right Brain to an Embodied Expression of the Wise Self.

- **The right brain** is connected to the heart, to physical sensation, to empathy (understanding and including others rather than comparing and judging), to music, to food, to sex. There are more neurons in the right than the left brain.
- **The left brain** is about comparing accumulated facts, which we need to do to know that we are ourselves and not someone else, that we are ourselves and not the chair we are sitting in. One of the functions of the left brain is its importance in gathering information. However, endlessly comparing is a down side of left brain function if we get stuck there. We all know the experience of being on the endless gerbil wheel of overthinking and trying to force an answer. *Being on the gerbil wheel is an activity in which we find no answers but only more and endless comparing.* We must get off of the gerbil wheel of the left brain's comparing. There literally are no answers in the left brain! The left brain must offer its information to the right brain.
- **Having the Ah Ha!** The right brain is able to make new synaptic connections when we are relaxed. This is where **new answers come from**. When we shift out of analyzing into experience and feel safe and relaxed, we are priming ourselves for an Ah Ha! moment from which creativity arises.
- Have you ever been focusing on a problem and going over and over the same thing, then you step into the shower, forget about the problem, enjoy the hot water, and suddenly . . . your answer arrives! That is the relaxed right brain! We can jump start this process as therapists. Some ways to do this include:
  - **Using metaphor**—which is a right brain process (doesn't happen in the left).
  - **Visualizations that include lots of sensory cues**, which are the domain of the right brain.
  - Guiding and helping the client **"take the elevator down"** in a safe way into their physical experience—also right brain.
  - Deepening a client into **metaphors and images of well being**.
    - A metaphor they come up with spontaneously in the session about themselves.
    - One they express they are valuing about another person or creature—bring it home to them.
    - One we intuit might help them.
    - Have them pick a sand tray figure that represents a quality they would like to live from more.
  - Carl Jung famously said, **"Mankind heals through symbols."** He was one of the early therapists who recognized the importance of imagery and that images are offered up from clients' intuition and deep unconscious processes as exactly the right beacons for their healing and growth. We learn to listen for and use the symbols and imagery clients come up with whether they have come from a visualization, from a movie or book, are embodied by a friend or pet, or the client is advertising them on their T-shirt without even consciously knowing it!

### Metaphors, Images and Stories as Visualizations.

Visualizations can be created on the spot from what the client is talking about or wearing. Learn to track for important metaphors the client is using, or important experiences they are reporting.

- **Listen for spontaneous metaphors that the client is expressing verbally**, then have the client turn inward and deepen into the felt sense of it. Help them become mindful and repeatedly use “Stay with that,” and “Just let yourself follow that,” to deepen the client in the feeling.
  - C: “When I hear that song, I just feel so good.”
  - T: “So how about you turn inside and hear that song . . . let yourself just feel that good . . . and just stay with that . . . and the breath that’s coming now, and that little smile.”
- Listen for **positive qualities that the client is attributing to other people or to animals** but which is harder for them to own and claim for themselves. This is a piece of their work—to embody those qualities in themselves.
  - C: “She’s just so kind to herself!”
  - T: “You really like that!”
  - C: (Touched expression). “Yes.”
  - T: “That touches you. Would you like to explore this a little?”
  - C: (Nods).
  - T: “So how about you turn inside, and feel how touched you are by her kindness to herself. That’s right, there’s that little tear there. And if you want, feel your own kindness to yourself.”
  - C: “But I don’t know how.”
  - T: “Well, I bet even if you don’t know how, you’d like to feel that!”
  - C: (Nods).
  - T: “Yeah, there’s that longing there, huh, that even though you don’t know how, you want to feel that.”
  - C: “Yeah.”
  - T: “So let’s start there, just feel the longing, because that’s right there. Just feel that longing and where it is—is it in your heart or belly?”
  - C: “My heart.”
  - T: “So how about be with your heart, and the longing in your heart, and how much you’d like to be kind to yourself and you’re wanting to know how. Just follow that.”
  - **NOTE:** The session could go a couple of ways—towards the root of how the client learned not to be kind to themselves/the limiting belief; or they could begin to feel kinder and you can explore that.
- **Read a poem or tell a teaching story** that you feel might help inspire a client regarding a particular issue they are struggling with. Ensure that the client turns inside and is mindful before beginning. Some therapists have a folder of poems handy and pull one out as an experiment. Poetry and stories are a form of visualization where the client’s imagery and feelings come alive as they listen.
  - T: “I know, I have a poem I think might be really meaningful for you. Would you like to hear it?”
  - A few favorites: Mary Oliver’s *Wild Geese*. Rumi’s *This Being Human is a Guest House*, Derek Walcott’s *Love after Love*, David Whyte’s *Imagine my Surprise* and *Sweet Darkness*.
- **Offer the client a metaphor that your intuition prompts you to:**
  - To client with tight shoulders, “I wonder if you want to, you could feel into your shoulders, in the place **where the wings would be**.” The feeling of having wings is very profound for many people, and especially for folks with trauma as it is an expression of freedom. Help them become mindful and repeatedly use “Stay with that” to deepen the client in the unfolding of the hope and opening.
  - **“Where does the smile come from?”** When a client has a true smile (of pleasure, satisfaction, joy, etc.) you can offer, “You are smiling as you talk about (fill in the blank). How about you notice the smile on your mouth like it is the flower—and where does the

flower grow from inside? Your heart or belly?” Help them become mindful and repeatedly use “Stay with that” to deepen the client in the unfolding good feelings.

- What image is the client **advertising to you by what they are wearing?** These are often aspects of their Wise Self and can be turned into spontaneous visualizations. **Jewelry:** Special necklace given by great aunt; big heart earrings; sword earrings. **Clothing:** An article of very colorful clothing worn by a client who in general dresses in a more subdued way. It is common for many people to express a freer part of themselves through their socks. **Image or words on T-Shirts:** A phoenix rising from the ashes, the words “I’m a Good Guy,” hearts; a unicorn, Matisse’s figure dancing in the stars.
  - **Example to integrate what the client has been learning.** T: “So you’ve been talking about how resilient you’re becoming, and right there you have a phoenix rising on your T-shirt! How about let yourself become that phoenix and feel what this experience is!?” Continue with visualization to expand.
  - **Example to offer a resource to traumatized client.** A new client wanted my help in feeling back into her “real self.” Client arrived very collapsed and hopeless. She was wearing a T-shirt with Matisse’s birdlike-human figure opening its arms and dancing among stars. T: “I know this might sound a little crazy, but just go with me on this. (I stand up). Come on and let’s take on the posture of that figure on your T-shirt. What happens when you open your arms like this?” The client really loved the exercise and it began a new process of practicing the shift from the collapsed offline part to the resourced “real self.” **NOTE:** Of course we don’t want to force our clients into anything, and if they say no we celebrate it. But if want to use some movement, our enthusiasm often can be contagious enough in a good way to help the client participate. Think of a somewhat shy child who wants to try something but they have to feel the adult offering it to them is confident and enthused about what they’re offering, and then they can do it too.
  - **Example to explore being grounded.** Client specifically asked for help getting out of her head, to be embodied and grounded. She came in with a detailed drawing of mycelium, the fungus that spreads through the earth and connects and nourishes the forest. I proposed an experiment—a visualization—so that she became the mycelium and connected the entire forest. Once she was deeply in the experience, we went for meaning. She deepened into an essential quality of herself that she names as “communion.”

## A Variety of Visualizations Drawn from Various Orientations.

Here are a variety of visualization exercises for you to use. You can see how varied the use of visualizations is across methodologies, because it is such a powerful and deeply human practice. I’ve just listed them in alphabetical order.

**A Hand On The Heart à la Hakomi.** Many spiritual traditions employ prayer (which can be a form of visualization) by putting a hand on the heart. Different traditions offer different hand positions, but using the hand upon the heart is very common. It is a very effective way to move from thoughts to being embodied and bringing the heart and body online. It’s great for working with trauma, and also for returning to the Wise Self.

- I simply invite the client to put a hand on their heart. I often put a hand on my own heart too, at least for a while.
- Once the client has closed their eyes and put a hand on their heart, I say something like, “Isn’t it amazing. Hands know just where to go! Just take your time and feel your hand there.”
- To deepen the client into the experience, I offer a little menu, “And what do you like best about your hand on your heart? Is it the warmth, the pressure, the presence? What is it for you?” Then I use whatever the client answers, “Oh, so it’s the warmth. So just really feel the warmth of your hand, and just keep following that.”
- I’ll then track for any relaxation or breaths the client is taking and contact that, “And you take a

- little breath there, so just feel that breath, and what's coming along with that breath, and tell me."
- After the client is fully immersed—and you must immerse them so that they are more fully in their right brain experience—I use the classic ***“going for meaning”*** question from Hakomi, “And if hands could talk, ***what is your hand saying to your heart?***” This will be a Wise Self statement that is naturally elicited from the client's experience and very, very meaningful for the client. It is a statement you will want to write in your notes in the exact words of the client, and which you will use again and again! Common things clients say include: “I’m here for you,” “It will be okay,” (which I may turn into the present tense “It’s okay right now” in the next step), “I’ve got you,” “It’s okay to relax.”
- Then I offer to say the words to the client. “Would you like to hear those words?” Client says yes. “So go ahead and feel the warmth of your hand (whatever quality the client just stated that they best liked about their hand on their heart), and notice what happens when you hear the words (use what they said) ‘I’m here for you.’”

**Heartmath Freeze-Frame.** This is one of the standard tools from the Heartmath folks that is out of their book, *The Heartmath Solution*. It is very, very similar to Re-Creation of the Self work I do. You can adapt it to your therapeutic orientation. The book is ***The Heartmath Solution – by Doc Lew Childre, Howard Martin and Donna Beach***. The Heartmath folks offer their techniques complete with lots of research as to why certain practices of gratitude and awareness work. This can be helpful language for some techie types.

#### **“The Five Steps of Freeze-Frame**

1. Recognize the stressful feeling and Freeze-Frame it! Take a time-out.
2. Make a sincere effort to shift your focus away from the racing mind or disturbed emotions to the area around your heart. Pretend you’re breathing through your heart to help focus your energy in this area. Keep your focus there for ten seconds or more.
3. Recall a positive, fun feeling or time you’ve had in life and try to re-experience it.
4. Now, using your intuition, common sense, and sincerity, ask your heart, “What would be a more efficient response to the situation, one that would minimize future stress?”
5. Listen to what your heart says in answer to your question. It’s an effective way to put your reactive mind and emotions in check and an in-house source of commonsense solutions.”

**Family Genogram—Right Brain Style Family Picnic, and The Blinking Exercise.** This is a wonderful way to help clients see and understand family systems. I was introduced to it at an Hakomi training by Senior Hakomi Trainer Devi Records. Since it is a right brain activity, it doesn’t use figuring-it-out modalities. Rather, the visualization and invitation of the questions allows meaning, connections, and new understanding to arise spontaneously.

- After you get the client’s interest and agreement, make sure you have some paper and crayons handy to work with once the visualization is over.
- Then establish mindfulness and begin by inviting the client to close their eyes and imagine they are attending a family picnic.
- “This is a special picnic, where everyone important to your family is invited.”
- “So just imagine a clearing in a forest or meadow where everyone will be coming in a few moments.”
- “At this picnic, invite everyone important. That means not only the living, but those who have passed will be coming, and any figures close to the family like friends, priests, nannies, etc. Also include people who have been scapegoated or who have left the family.”
- “You can watch at the side, unseen, as everyone arrives. Notice who sits with whom and how everyone is configured.”
- Therapist, make sure you leave plenty of time for everyone to get there.
- “Is everyone here?”
- The order of the following questions isn’t important. However, be sure to give plenty of silent time in between the questions. You can add other questions if you like.

- “Now I’m going to ask some questions, and you just notice what naturally arises when you hear them and watch your family at this picnic. Who is talking to whom? Who isn’t talking to whom? Who is comfortable in the family? Who isn’t? What are this family’s strengths and treasures? What are this family’s secrets? Who has power? Who is the scapegoat? What is the message of this family? How does this family show love? How does this family show anger? Is it okay to be vulnerable in this family? What does this family need to learn? What are this family’s blind spots? Where are you in this picture?”
- “Okay, when you’re ready, open your eyes and draw a picture of your family. You don’t have to be fancy, you can even use your nondominant hand if you like,” (if client is anxious about their artistic ability).
- Give plenty of time for client to draw. Most people draw from a bird’s eye view, but sometimes from other perspectives.
- **The Blinking Exercise.** Then process with the client. At first the client describes the scene. I then invite them to do a very cool Hakomi right-brain exercise. This exercise keeps them in the creative and curious mode rather than shifting to figuring it out mode. What is very vital to them will present itself to them with no effort in just 3-4 blinks. It kind of appears from under the radar because this method isn’t using the usual often-told family stories. I demonstrate the method and then the client does it: “You mostly keep your eyes closed, closed, closed and then really quickly blink. Then close your eyes, closed, closed, closed, blink. You’ll blink about three or four times really quickly. When you blink, just notice what “pops” for you—it could be something you see, something that’s not there, a pattern, whatever.”
- Continue to work with what pops and what is important for the client. This visualization exercise helps illustrate for the client their family systems of coalitions, who’s on the outs, who has the power and who doesn’t, who speaks from beyond the grave, etc. Talk about where the client is in the picture. How does the client feel about their place? It can also be very powerful to use a scarf, hands, Kleenex, or torn paper to obscure part of the system—certain figures—and see what happens if that certain element isn’t there, then what happens when that element is added back.

**Ho’oponopono:** This is an ancient powerful Hawaiian healing practice. One of the ways it became more well known in popular culture is by the work of now-retired Ihaleakala Hew Len PhD, a Hawaiian psychologist and shamanic practitioner, and via him to Joe Vitale. It can be used as a visualization prayer. It is also an interesting exercise for a client to spontaneously write what comes from each of the four steps with their dominant hand, and once the four steps are completed, **to then write what comes with their non-dominant/other hand.** Something quite different will come with each hand. Here are the four steps, in order:

I love you.  
I’m sorry.  
Please forgive me.  
Thank you.

**Kathleen’s Visualization Exercises:** I offer articles on how to use various kinds of visualizations (like the two below) on my website. I occasionally add to them, so that you may find new ones from time to time. You can check in at this link on the Articles page of my website: <https://kathleendunbar.net/articles>

**Mandala Exercise.** I often use the image of a mandala to help clients include all aspects of themselves in a more friendly way. As we become friendly towards our edges and quirks, they have less power over us and we come naturally into our Wise Selves. Using the mandala helps clients let go of their shame over feelings and actions, uncover their strengths, and naturally find the “next step” in their healing process. I talk to them about mandalas, and how they include *all* elements of life—the demons and the angels, the lotus and the mud. Including it *all* is in itself a right brain activity, because it is inclusive, and it brings the prefrontal cortex online, uses the right brain, and balances brain function.

When we recognize all the parts of us, then we are less likely to be pulled down the rabbit hole with the demons only—our quirks and defensive actions. When we honor all that is, the difficulty of our journey, our edges and our treasures and strengths, we become more grounded. We learn to respond rather than to react. If you’d like a fuller step by step example of how I use this visualization, you can look for the

article called **A Mandala Exercise** on the Articles page of my website: <https://kathleendunbar.net/articles>

- I pull a small tray table up in front of the client and give the client a large necklace to lay out in a circle on the table.
- Then I have a collection of stones I offer them to use—you can use any handy collection of objects—to represent the different aspects of themselves and also their various challenges. I keep in mind their strengths and defenses, the qualities of both their Wise Selves and their Parts. Clients will routinely “forget” or try not to include all of themselves. Often they don’t want to include their gifts. Sometimes they don’t want to look at parts of their shadow. I gently remind them of what we both know about them in our work together and ask them to pick a stone for that quality.
- I draw a map of their mandala as we go along: as they pick up a stone and name a quality I write its name down and it’s position in the circle. Sometimes they move things around.
- Once they have finished I have them do the Blinking Exercise (described in The Family Genogram) so that they can creatively see what “pops” rather than “figuring it out.”
- We work with what comes up.
- Clients often like to take a picture with their phones. I give them the map I’ve made for them.

**My Name Is, a Visualization by Kathleen Dunbar.** I love offering this visualization to my clients. **I use it specifically when a client keeps projecting a quality they want on another person or animal, and aren’t owning it for themselves.** I list the steps below. If you’d like an in-depth description of how to use this exercise, look for the article called **My Name Is—An Exercise to Invoke the True Self** on the Articles page of my website: <https://kathleendunbar.net/articles>

- **Step One**  
My name is \_\_\_\_\_ (client’s full name) and I am/have \_\_\_\_\_ (a wholesome quality they have been projecting onto others).
- **Step Two (with three ways to say it)**  
This \_\_\_\_\_ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **is a mirror of my own** \_\_\_\_\_ (name quality again).  
This \_\_\_\_\_ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **is a mirror reflecting my own** \_\_\_\_\_ (name quality again).  
This \_\_\_\_\_ (object, person, landscape, animal they are projecting onto) **reflects my own** \_\_\_\_\_ (name quality again).
- **Step Three**  
And my new story is \_\_\_\_\_. (At this point, after having proclaimed steps one and two, and being mindful, the client’s longing will spill over into a declaration of their truth).

**The Path to the Gift or the Helping Spirit or Animal.** This is a classic used by various visualization schools. Establish your client’s intention and question for this journey. Avoid “why” questions like the plague as that is the left brain realm and will derail the whole process (and the spirits will play tricks on them with why questions). You may have to help the client reformulate the question. Begin questions with the words “what” and “how.” Examples, “What gift will help me decide about \_\_\_\_.” “What will help me be kinder to myself?” “How can I bring art more into my life?”

- After establishing their interest and agreement, invite them to turn inside. This is an exercise where you might establish that they’ll give you a nod once they have arrived at the various cues you are giving. Invite them to ask you if they need help. **Invite the client to fill in the sensory details themselves rather than you choosing for them.** You do this by offering a menu, as in, “So when you arrive at the door, give me a nod.” Client nods. “So see what color the door is, what it’s made of, how does it feel to your hand.”
- To begin, lead them down a path with a bend; past the bend to a door; see the doorknob and what the door is made of; open the door; find the clearing; enter the clearing; what trees are



here? what flowers? how does it feel here? Then invite a magic animal or spirit figure to come to help them, "And when it arrives, give me a nod, and if you need any help, just let me know." Give plenty of time here and once the client nods, "Great, so notice how it is to be with this animal/spirit/whatever client decided before you began. Does it talk in words? Or more in movements or does it intuit to you?" Then, "When you're ready, ask your question of the animal/spirit." Then give them plenty of time, or establish an agreed upon time like ten minutes for them to be together.

- When it is time, bring them back. You bring them back quickly, not doing all the pausing you did when you began, because you are bringing them back to normal consciousness. "So thank the animal, and now leave the clearing, pass through the door, close the door, and come back up the path and right back into this room."
- Debrief with what they learned, sending them back inside to savor their learning. Ask them how they will continue to practice what they've learned this coming week in between sessions.

**Shamanic Work.** This is a practice of healing that is as old as humanity. The source of all the parts of the visualizations in this article are seeded in our archetypal human practices of honoring the earth below, the sky above, our energy, our hearts, the web of life and connection to all creatures, stones, plants, and spirits, the work of healing, transformation, service, and gratitude. There are many books and classes on how to offer a shamanic journey. If you are interested, you can get started with the books, and then it is important to find someone to teach you. (And you can ask the spirits for help too!) You can refer to the Resource section at the end of this article for books and teacher suggestions. I feel the many lineages I have learned from at my back helping me when I offer this type of work to my clients. This work includes:

- Calling the directions and sacred space.
- Discovering power animals and spirit guides.
- Performing soul retrievals.
- Releasing old energies.
- Energy work, and working with chakras.

## Resources.

### Books

- ***Experiential Psychotherapy with Couples – Rob Fisher*** This is a must-have book for therapists wishing to do experiential work. It is much more than just about couples. You will learn how to use all the techniques of Hakomi with couples and the very same techniques apply to individuals. Rob also explains how to employ a variety of clinical orientations in an experiential method. His writing and instructions are clear, kind, wise and with an uplifting dose of humor. He illustrates what he's teaching with numerous examples.
- ***The Hero with a Thousand Faces – Joseph Campbell*** The classic book laying out the steps of the hero and heroine's journey that is found in the stories of all cultures.
- ***The Master and His Emissary – Iain McGilchrist*** Incredible read about the relationship of the right brain and left brain in culture, history, art and politics and the implications for our time. One of the most important books I've read.
- ***The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers – Christopher Vogler*** Not just for writers! This is an explanation in detail of the hero's journey from start to finish drawn from Joseph Campbell, complete with explanations of archetypal characters, and full of examples from the movies.

### Books on Shamanism

- ***Your Aura & Your Chakras, The Owner's Manual – Karla McLaren*** Great book with many exercises in grounding, and how to understand and work with your chakras.
- ***The Book of Shamanic Healing – Kristin Madden***
- ***The Four-Fold Way – Angeles Arrien***

- *Shaman, Healer, Sage* – Alberto Villodo
- *The Way of the Shaman* – Michael Harner

#### **People Who Offer Visualizations**

- Reggie Rey <https://www.soundstrue.com/store/affiliates/cbdharmf.html?dir=asc&order=position>
- Belleruth Naparstek <https://www.healthjourneys.com>

#### **Other Resources**

- Charles Ridley, biodynamic cranial practitioner, author <https://www.dynamicstillness.com>
- Shaman Jon Rasmussen <http://shamanjon.com>