



Spiritual Re-Parenting

Reference: Tara Brach

*We do not believe in ourselves until someone reveals that deep inside us something is valuable, worth listening to, worthy of our trust, sacred to our touch. Once we believe in ourselves we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight or any experience that reveals the human spirit. –
~ e.e. cummings*

We all emerge out of the joys and sorrows of our childhood experiences with some degree of having missed the nurturance, acceptance, appreciation and allowance to hard wire a belief in our intrinsic value. Due to these gaps in being known and cared for in the ways we most needed, we often experience a deep rumbling sense of something missing, something wrong within us.

Much of the trauma we experience in childhood has to do with severed belonging and safety, where, in some way and to varying degrees, our familial caregivers were unable to be with us in an attuned and caring way. Additionally, our experiences of our social world outside our family may have also contributed to a sense of alienation or lack of inclusiveness and acceptance. These early impressionable experiences caused us to split off from our fundamental goodness. We had few inner resources and outer guidance to befriend and tend the enormity of our emotional experiences. The hurt we felt was too painful to truly embody and metabolize.

Yet, it's never too late to retrieve our wholeness; to *reveal to ourselves our deep and abiding value* and put down roots in our ability to give and receive love, feel our belonging, and offer the world our unique gifts, with a sense of worthiness and inner goodness. We all have this capacity within us to *spiritually reparent ourselves and each other*.

Spiritual reparenting is a powerful pathway toward our becoming whole unto ourselves. Much like healing the inner child, the concept and process of spiritual reparenting assumes that we have within us the seeds of unconditional love toward ourselves; the perfect fit mending for our unique form of severed belonging.

As we allow ourselves to feel into and deeply contact the parts of ourselves which feel wanting and lacking, we are then able to offer the missing pieces, reparative experiences and new beliefs, which can heal the wound to our belonging and self-value. We can remember our wholeness and worthiness to love and be loved. We can wake up out of the trance of lack and into a deep sense of our worth and being connected to an embodied love, which does not waver or wane.

Embracing the practice of spiritual reparenting allows us to come home to our true selves and our capacity to embody equanimity and compassion. Experiences of connection and belonging are the bedrock of contentment and wellbeing through the lifespan.

Spiritual reparenting is, in essence, a process of ushering ourselves back into the living web of loving connection and belonging. Spiritual reparenting is reparative. The given is, there was severed belonging, which caused us to retreat into a small fear-based self, which then became a self-protective barrier to connecting to the feeling of being loved within us and receiving the love flowing toward us from others.

Mindful Exploration

- **Recall** a time of being in a trance of disconnection and feeling alone, not okay and hurt

. . . and then **reaching out** to someone, with whom you felt a safe connection; a healing presence, which touched that hurt in a caring way.

- **Remember** how that experience helped you reconnect to a goodness within you and come home to a sense of belonging and being a part of the loving web of life.
- **Reflect** on the qualities of that person, which made a difference for you; what did they embody and offer to you?

Those qualities of the lovingly present figure will often echo what we needed from our early caregivers. They also embody the **two wings of awareness**:

1. **Wisdom.** Seeing clearly. Understanding. A sense that we are understood, attuned to.
2. **Love.** Compassion. Care. Feeling known. Once seen, we are loved just as we are.

We all need to receive these two wings of awareness. When we do, it wakes us up to our own intrinsic nature **as being** clear seeing (wisdom) and love (caring).

When we practice spiritual reparenting, we are bringing these two qualities to our moment by moment experience. As we bring this clear seeing, gentleness and caring to our inner life we are capable of bringing it to others and our larger world.

The aspiration is to awaken these two wings of awareness as a daily practice, so that we can bring them to bear upon the wounded, isolated, exiled parts of our being in moments of emptiness and despair. As we actively awaken the two wings of awareness, they become an internal salve for the painful moments when we have the mistaken belief that we don't have a home in the human web of love and belonging.

Every one of us needs to feel loved. It is a core need biologically, psychologically and spiritually. Deep down we want to **feel within us a loving presence**, which is our true nature; our true identity beyond all the limited and fear-based identities we habitually and often unconsciously cultivate daily.

So, to find our way back to this web of belonging, we must touch into the felt-sense of being attuned to and loved - and **re-wire our brain for safety, connection and love.**

Survival of the Nurtured

We are not the survival of the fittest, we are the survival of the nurtured.
~ Louis Cozolino

Our need to communicate, collaborate and connect helped to evolve our species. Nurturance promotes intelligence, creativity, empathy, resilience, benevolence and the ability to relate to others with compassion and collaboration.

When we don't feel connected to ourselves and others, we grasp onto experiences that approximate connection and/or push away intimacy for fear we will be hurt.

Grasping entails seeking substitutes (false refuges) which we believe will give us a sense of love and belonging. Hence, addictions of all kinds become a circular, non-nurturing, dissatisfying hunger, which never results in gaining the connection we long for. This applies, not only to substance addictions, but also *process addictions* such as longing to feel admired, sexually desired, financial achievement, praised, body perfection, and/or being in control. We pursue whatever we can to fill the emptiness of not feeling connected to our inner goodness and a safe, deep connection to others.

Pushing away shows up as self-protection, withdrawing, defending, and shaming and blaming ourselves or others.

Yet, the more we react (*grasp or push away*) out of the wound, the less we are able to bring healing to the wound. Knowing this, we can pause when we notice we are grasping, pushing away or leaving and losing ourselves in distractions. Once we pause, we can choose to refrain from our habitual strategies to escape discomfort and actively use the practice of spiritual reparenting to love ourselves into healing.

In Buddhism, the archetype of healing (*moving from suffering and reactivity to an open heart and mind*) is the bodhisattva. The bodhisattva is described as 'listening to the cries of the world' in the image of Kuan Yin, the goddess of compassion with 10,000 arms, embracing all who suffer.

The beginning of our healing happens when we pause, attune and notice there is suffering going on within us. As we do this, we remember to bring compassionate awareness to our grasping and pushing away. This opens us to a deeper intimacy with our habits of not being present and attuned to ourselves and to others.

Once again, we do not push away nor grasp at our experience of suffering, we compassionately acknowledge there is severed belonging. When we do this, we become our own bodhisattva and lovingly listen and offer care.

PAUSE ~ NOTICE ~ LISTEN ~ OFFER CARE

While these might sound like simple instructions, the reality is, it is enormously challenging due to the vulnerability we experience when we practice being our own bodhisattva. If there were not such vulnerability and rawness to our feelings, we would never have cut off connection with our feelings in the first place. Therefore, there is a necessary courage required to the practice of deeply touching into the rawness of our vulnerability.

Where Does It Hurt?

With this first act of attuning toward ourselves and refraining from our habits of turning away from our uncomfortable experiences, we find that we naturally engage our courage, out of our deep desire to become intimate with our inner life, in each moment, so that we can offer healing.

The first question we ask in the practice of spiritual reparenting and our process of offering healing is *where does it hurt?*

With this question, our intention is to get under the thoughts and stories and notice the embodied experience of *what's going on*. Compassionately abiding with whatever is arising, we are bringing the *two wings of wisdom and love* to what is hurting.

Mindful Practice

- **Exhale** and rest in the pause at the end of the breath.
- **Relax** into the 'here-ness' of the life that is here right now in your body-being.
- **Bring** to mind a challenging situation in your life.
- **Imagine** somebody who you consider to be a caring person, whom you trust. See them looking at you with care and asking the questions *where does it hurt, what is this like for you, what's going on?*
- **Notice** what it is like to be asked. Notice what it feels like in your body. This is the beginning; the first step of spiritual reparenting. We learn to pause, attune and ask *where does it hurt* - of ourselves.

Widening the Circle

When we do this for ourselves, we can then widen the field; we can ask this of others. If we want to have a world in which we are all understanding and responding to each other, we need to continually pause and ask *where does it hurt?* We need to address this question to everyone we encounter, even if we are just getting silently curious. As we

open up our capacity to pause and listen, we find that there is always a common longing to be seen and loved even in the midst of anger and aggression within us or the other.

The two wings of awareness cultivate a deeper understanding of what is underneath the anger, aggression and reactivity; the grasping and pushing away. As humans, we are often aggressive when we are hurting, yet, with spiritual reparenting of self and other, we refrain from making ourselves or others the bad other. We intentionally pause and shift into unconditional love and ask: *where does it hurt?*

Loving Ourselves into Healing

Once we ask this question, we must stay and feel deeply into the hurt so that we can know what is needed. We must let our compassion, curiosity and courage blossom. This is where it can get challenging. When we wholeheartedly ask where it hurts, we will be more profoundly in touch with the felt-sense of loneliness, shame, feeling unworthy and unlovable. In the beginning, the muscle for hanging out with these feelings is underdeveloped; we want to quickly exit the discomfort.

This is where we ask another question: *What am I unwilling to feel?*

Again, as we get real intimate with the hurting places, we just don't want to feel the feels and so we exit. Naming and taming our exit strategies is an important step in spiritual reparenting. When we know how we are fleeing, shutting down, or acting out our anger and fear-aversion at having uncomfortable feelings and sensations, we can then teach ourselves how to stay and stick around.

We gently stay and keep asking, *what is it I am unwilling to feel* and then opening the door just a crack, bit to bit, to feeling that which we fear to feel. Yes, it is often difficult to open that door, even a little bit, due to past traumas of feeling abandoned, harmed, shamed, rejected, etc. It's natural that we don't want to stay with the places of rawness, hurt and fear. Yet, with the practice of spiritual reparenting we can learn to increasingly stay with these feelings without re-traumatizing ourselves, without increasing the painful experiences.

This is a very gentle process. Again, think of a loving parent with a frightened child or a kind human to a traumatized animal. We don't force anything. We simply identify more with the benevolent, caring, compassionately attuned part of us. We focus on creating trust by stabilizing, calming, soothing and offering a loving experience to our traumatized parts.

Yet, even with all of this loving presence, we can still get triggered in the midst of our spiritual reparenting process. We do have to ride the waves of contraction and fear, by applying the two wings of awareness (*wisdom and love*) to our hurts. We refrain from reacting to our fears, shutting down in overwhelm. Instead we sense the trauma, stay and stay and stay until there is enough calming to offer the nurturance and healing.

As we do this, we increasingly find some success and we notice that the waves of triggering can rise and fall when we abide with patience and comforting. We send our scared selves the message • *I'm here, I'm not going away, what do you need, what's going on, whatever it is I can be with that.*

No Judgement Zone

It is essential to remember, we are in the presence of great tenderness as we deepen into our experiences of vulnerability, fear and severed belonging. We are opening to places and experiences within us, which we have long walled off or exiled in order to feel safe. This is why we must return again and again to the intention of offering understanding and acceptance and wait until the scared part of us is able to feel safe enough to share what is going on (*what hurts*).

We remain patient and abide lovingly.

This gentle approach helps us to guide ourselves back to a safe place where healing can happen. We are both the holder and the held, with more identification with the curious, compassionate, patient holder of the fear-based part of us. We also maintain zero judgment or self-aggression about what we are feeling and our fear of feeling what we are feeling.

Healing only happens in the zero-judgment zone.

Judging and shaming ourselves never brings change. Yet judgment might be the zone we are in when we pause to ask ourselves *where is the hurt?* So, that's where we begin. We feel the anger, shame, judgment or self aggression; we let it be, we open to it and notice the deepest experience or belief that is buried beneath it. We keep deepening into the experience and as we do, it begins to bring us back to our longing to be seen, heard, cared for, connected, accepted, valued and in loving communion with ourselves and others.

With this turning toward our hurt with care, we get in touch with the place that longs for connection. We then feel compassion for that place that longs to feel connected. In this way, we are working from a place of caring about our lives instead of aggression or judgment toward ourselves. We are intentionally caring about the parts that are having trouble or discomfort; the parts we usually reject, judge and exile.

Redemptive Anger

That said, there is redemptive anger. We often feel the energy of anger because we sense an opposition to what is healthy, healing and good. This surge of anger can inspire us to make changes or engage in spiritual reparenting in order to heal instead of continue the harm. This is working with anger skillfully instead of getting locked into anger. When we escalate the storyline of our anger, it digs in and becomes toxic; we stay in the cycle of blaming, shaming and making ourselves and others bad and wrong.

To utilize redemptive anger in service of spiritual reparenting (and in widening the circle of healing and repair) we must *remember what we love and what is loving*. The anger is there because there is something, which is blocking the love. So, to work skillfully with anger, we pause and remember to use the waves of anger to go deeper into what we love, value and aspire toward. This paves our path for acting from a place of love with whatever we are experiencing. This is part of the bodhisattva vow: *May ALL that I experience serve to open this heart of mine*.

As we practice this approach to our triggers and woundedness around feeling whole and beloved, we eventually become more able to allow the experiences of fear and disconnection, from our inner love and safety, without shutting down, pushing away or self-attacking. The more we feel that we can befriend and tend the waves of fear and hurt, then, gradually and with diligent practice, whatever we are experiencing no longer feels too big to lean into and offer love.

This is the practice of spiritual reparenting. This is a way out of the wasteland of separation and back into the web of connection, belonging and love.

Quick Look at Spiritual Reparenting

- Pause when you notice you are feeling discomfort or distress.
- Offer the first wing of listening (**WISDOM**) by asking: *What is going on right now, what hurts?*
- Offer the second wing of caring and gentleness (**LOVE**) by staying close in, breath by breath, listening deeply for what needs befriending and tending.
- Stay with the embodied experience gently, without judgment or aversion.
- Deepen into the felt-sense that you have a benevolence within you, which can offer what is needed to *heal what hurts*.
- Allow yourself to deeply take in this attunement, love and nurturance. With each round of this practice, moment by moment, we are actively replacing the core belief that we don't belong and are not loved with a deeply rooted core belief that we are loved and we belong.