**Awareness and Presence: Paradigms, Perceptions, and Practices**

By Deborah Brakeley for our workshop “The Power of Awareness and Presence”

The following 4 descriptions of paradigms, perceptions, and practices associated with the “dismantling” of our psychological mental self are body-centered – brain, heart, and gut. While there is a focus on different aspects of our body and ‘whole being’ described below, there is also the experience of whole body/field awareness inclusive of all the parts. As well, any of the parts described below can be a starting point and a landing for our perception and experience of dimensions of awareness and presence.

**Full Body Presence**

Reference - Reclaiming Your Body: Healing From Trauma and Awakening to Your Body’s Wisdom by Suzanne Scurlock-durana

One way to experience awareness and presence is to “*embody*” awareness. That is, encompass our body’s wisdom by developing and nurturing an intimate relationship with our body. When in full presence with the sensations and messages in our body, we can access information that provides us with moment-to-moment attunement to innate wisdom, clarity, and intuition.

Suzanne developed a map of the body including six areas: the brain, heart, gut, pelvis, bones, and legs and feet. Each part embodies has their own feelings and sensations that impart wisdom. Although dimensions of awareness include signals and information from these specific areas, we may also perceive and experience integration as ‘whole body awareness’. Either experience provides us with a navigational system with which to experience guidance, discernment, safety, vitality, and joy. As we awaken to body awareness, we have access to deeper presence, attunement, and attunement.

**Three Brains**

Reference: Three Brains: How the Heart, Brain, and Gut Influence Mental Health and Identity by Karen Jensen, N.D.

Similarly to Suzanne Scurlock-durana, Dr. Jansen describes aspects of the head, heart, gut, and brain and how they work together in an integrated fashion while also performing different mental and emotional roles.

The Head Brain:

The brain is made up of approximately 100 billion neurons and over 100 trillion synapses! The brain’s particular capacities include reasoning, logic, learning, creativity, observation, planning, feeling emotions, and empathy. The brain communicates with the other brains via the vagus nerve, spinal cord, neurotransmitters and electrical magnetic frequencies.

The Heart Brain:

The heart is made up of approximately 40,000 neurons that sense, feel, learn and remember. The heart communicates with the brain neurologically through nerve impulses, biochemically via hormones and neurotransmitters, biophysically through pressure waves, and energetically through electromagnetic field interactions. The electromagnetic field or magnetic component is 5,000x stronger than that of the brain. The heart is a powerful electromagnetic generator and receiver. It perceives information in the energy field surrounding us about 5 seconds before the brain and sends signals to the brain for analysis. The heart senses and reaches out to the world through emotions, memories, images, visions, and dreams.

The Gut Brain:

The enteric nervous system embedded in the digestive system controls digestion and it also has nerve cells similar to those in the brain. These nerve cells work independently of and in conjunction with the head’s brain. In fact, the gut has approximately 500 neurons and 40 neural transmitters. The gut communicates with the brain via the vagus nerve and micro flora. The gut brain is the seat of instinct, intuition, and immediate, direct knowing. It has a practical aspect in that it is associated with self-preservation.

Again, embodying awareness can encompass these areas of the body and understand and appreciate the sensibilities of the head, heart, and gut and the wisdom knowing they embody.

**Heart Coherence Technique**

Reference - Heartmath Institute https://www.heartmath.org/

The technique described below deepens our awareness of the heart center. This technique helps create heart-brain-body coherence, greater calm and ease, stress reduction, a balanced nervous system, enhanced cognitive functioning, access to intuitive wisdom, emotional self-regulation, greater passion and joy. Feelings that reside in and emanate from the heart allow us to experience greater intimacy and connection with all of life.

1) Bring your attention down into the heart and keep your attention there. You may place your hand on your heart to help bring and maintain your awareness of the area around the heart;

2) Breathe slowly and deeply through the heart area in the centre of your chest. Keep your focus on the heart by gently inhaling and exhaling 5 seconds in and 5 seconds out with a pause in between breaths;

3) Imagine a *sense of ease* as you inhale and exhale; or, activate and sustain a genuine feeling of *appreciation* or care for someone or something you appreciate; or, think about someone or something you feel *grateful or thankful* for in your life; or, you may focus on some one or something you feel *compassion* for; focus on the good heart feelings and positive emotions as you continue breathing through the area of your heart.

**Mula Bandha**

Reference Dr. Sue Morter: drsuemorter.com

Everything is energy, we are energy beings, so it important to manage the energy. When we are attached to the thinking mind which is usually spinning so fast, it is difficult to be attuned to our true essence as well as our body’s innate wisdom. The body vibrates at a slower rhythm than the brain and as we learn body-centered practices such as the Mula Bunda ‘meditation’, the mind slows down and becomes a tool with which we can better access our true essence. This enables the mind and body to function more naturally in full collaboration with each other.

Breakdown on how to do Mula Bandha from a blog by Mariliyn Suttle:

1. Sit or stand comfortably away from distractions. (Set a timer for five minutes.)
2. Take one deep breath to the count of five. While breathing in, gently lift and hold your pelvic floor muscles up a little higher with each count (like rising one floor at a time on an imaginary elevator.)
   * Count 1: Start breathing in and lift the pelvic floor just a bit.
   * Count 2: Continue breathing in and lift the pelvic floor a bit higher.
   * Count 3: Continue breathing in and lift to the third floor of your imaginary elevator.
   * Count 4: Continue breathing in and lift the pelvic floor up another level.
   * Count 5: Complete your inhale deep into the lower lobes of your lungs while lifting the pelvic floor muscles to its highest position.
3. Breathe out to the count of five. With each count from one to five, release your pelvic floor just a bit (like going down a floor of an elevator with each count) until your pelvic floor is back at its regular position by the count of five at which time you will have completely exhaled.
4. Repeat for five minutes twice a day. (It only takes five minutes. Longer isn't better. However frequency and consistency does matter.)

**Wheel of Awareness**

Reference - Aware: The Science and Practice of Presence by Dan Siegel

The wheel is a visual and experiential metaphor for perceiving, experiencing, and staying within the open, receptive hub of the wheel by presenting a visual of the aspects of attention and consciousness. The ‘wheel’ provides us with a map of how we can sense any mental activities arising from the rim without being swept away by them. The open awareness of the hub extends to ‘rim’ aspects of our everyday life.

HUB

Represents the depth of our mind with descriptors such as: spacious, openness, luminous, curiosity, tranquility, safety, energy, presence, subjective state of being, connected, empathic, receptive, engaged, harmonious, noetic, and emergent. From the hub we can enter a compassionate state of connection with others and ourselves.

RIM

Rim has 4 sectors:

1. 5 senses: touch taste, smell, hearing, sight – outside world
2. Interior of the body:sensations in our limbs, facial muscles, organs, o lungs, heart, intestines
3. Mental activities:thoughts, feelings, memories, perceptions, hopes, dreams – aspects of our mind
4. Relationships: with others and the larger world

SPOKE

Spoke: represents where and how we direct, attune to, or notice our attention and to which point on the rim

Basic steps for Wheel of Awareness Exercise:

1. Let the body settle into its natural state, invite sounds of the room to fill our awareness, sense from the whole body
2. Let the breath find its natural rhythm, let awareness ride the wave of the breaths in and out
3. Track each sector of the rim and its activities and link to the spacious awareness in the hub, go from sensation to observation and from differentiation to integration
4. Let awareness focus on the awareness of the hub with its sense of wide open possibility
5. Notice the space between mental activities, this is the subjective sense of our mind where there is no mental activity and where possibilities lie

This can be a formal skill exercise similar to a mindfulness exercise whereby we notice and are aware of the rim sectors or we can simply envision the hub and then invite whatever is unfolding to enter the spaciousness of hub awareness. We can also imagine the totality of the whole wheel with unified awareness and non-separation of the parts.

For Wheel of Awareness Chart

https://ahangoverfreelife.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/wheelofawareness-guided-meditation.pdf