



**Mindfulness Practices for
Uncertain Times**

Welcome

This is a moment of collective fear and anxiety unlike anything we've experienced. Life has become messy and unpredictable in ways never imagined.

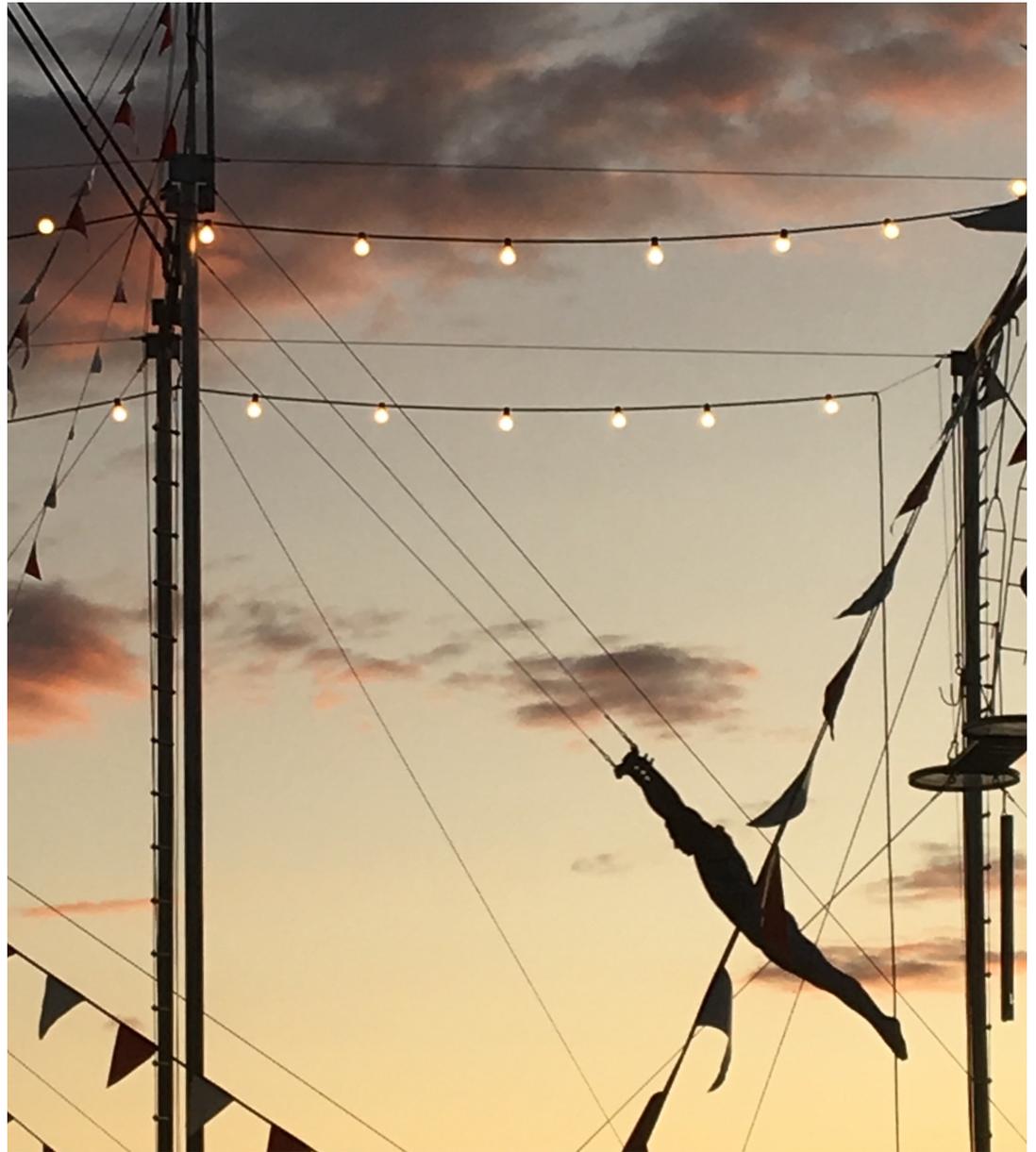
It's important to acknowledge this and the related: disruption, losses, grief, additional responsibilities and stressors, and ongoing uncertainty.

Mindfulness practices can support us in being with our personal vulnerabilities and losses with awareness and compassion.

Simplest Practice:

Practicing the pause:

Orienting toward the anchor of the body and the resource of the breath.



CORE CONCEPTS

Stress is inevitable.

Our body is a container that can only live in the present moment. Coming back to the present moment by orienting toward one's body as an anchor and/or one's breath as a resource can help us center and ground. We can engage "observing mind" and choose what we attend to. We can learn about our habits of mind or conditioned thinking.

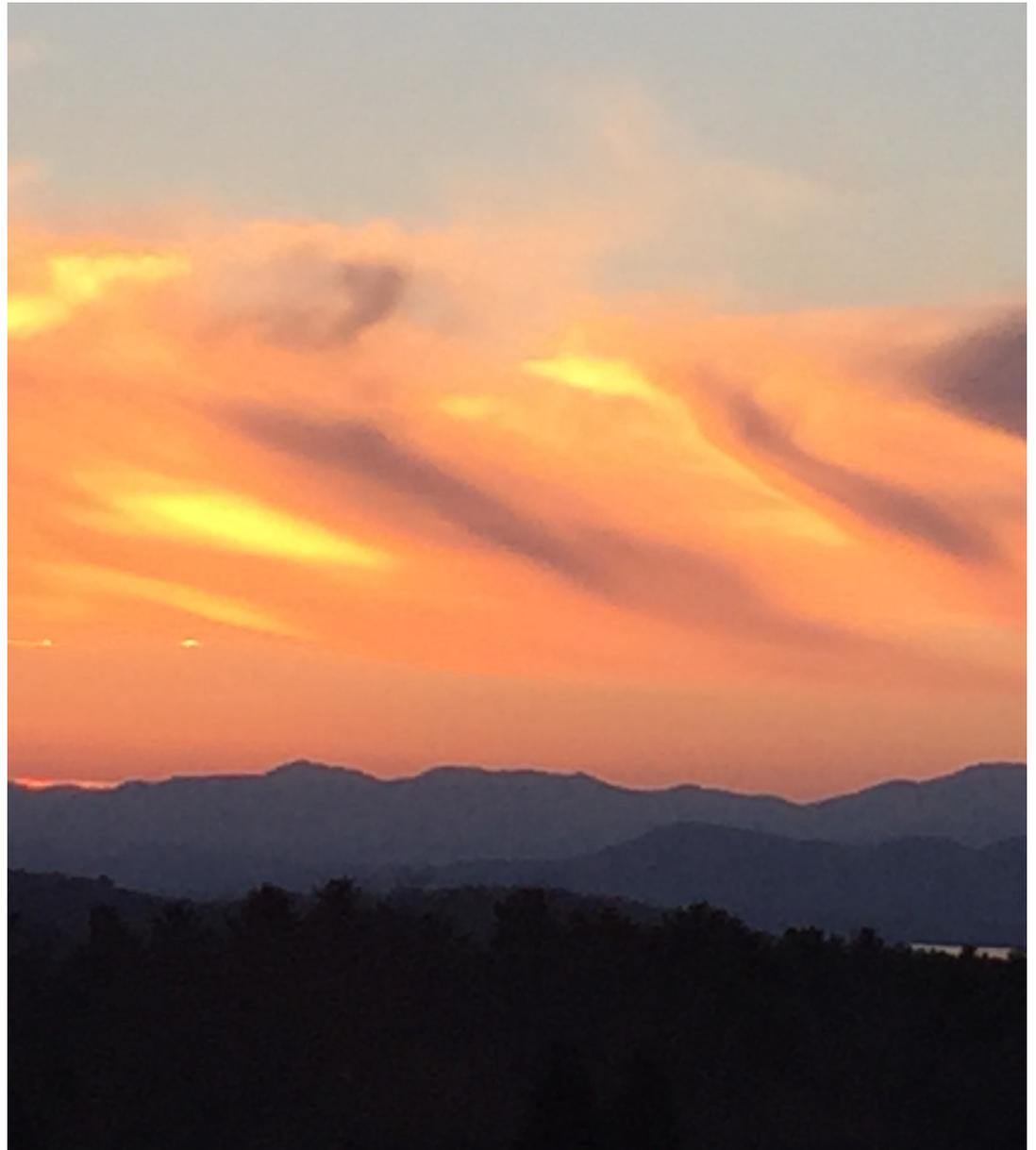
Whatever we practice grows (aka neuroplasticity.) ***When we practice mindfulness skills, we expand our capacities for self-regulation and coping.***

Cultivating compassion for ourselves and others helps build resiliency. "Be kind. Be kind. Be kind."

"Everything that has come before is done." We only have to meet or manage the present moment.

Connection to self and others is an essential resource and builds resiliency.

It's okay to take mini-breaks to 'just be.' Give yourself permission to take breaks from coping, healing, and caretaking.



Stress Response Basics

Our first response is *social engagement*.

Our second response is *fight or flight*, which is the activation of the sympathetic nervous system.

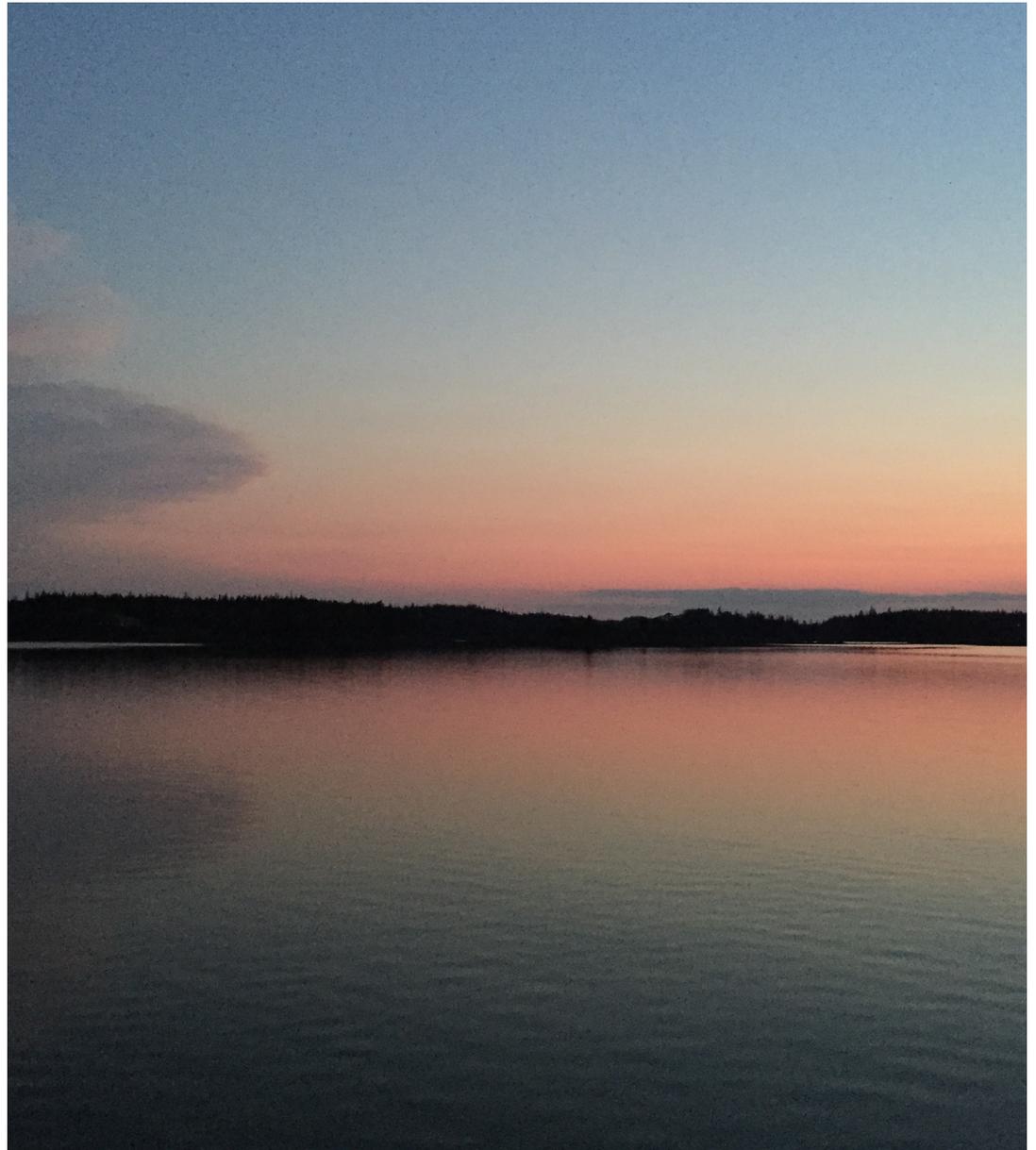
Our third response is *freeze or collapse*, if we are not able to get away or fight back. This is not a cognitive choice; it happens at the level of the brain stem and nervous system.

These are *adaptive responses* to stress, threat, or trauma.

Chronic stress decreases prefrontal cortex functioning and increases sensitivity to stress in the emotion centers of the brain, specifically the amygdala.

People with a *history of trauma*, may feel more vulnerable during this time and experience some reactivation.

Mindfulness practices can help us to come “back online” or re-engage PFC functioning through activation of the parasympathetic nervous system by engaging calming and soothing skills.



Macro self-regulation

BASICS

Creating Rhythms and Routines:

The ***predictable and consistent structures*** that are fundamental supports for us have been greatly disrupted. Re-establishing these in the current reality, will support us and our families, especially children/teens.

Co-regulation. Understand that anxiety can be/is shared in family systems or between individuals. ***Taking a pause*** when you are dysregulated and/or asking others to pause (or helping children to calm/soothe) can become a basic practice of self/family care.

Basic rhythms that support self-regulation are: adequate, consistent sleep rhythms, nutrition, movement/exercise, connection to nature/outdoors, connection to loved ones, creative/spiritual pursuits.

Making small choices/practicing agency. Having the capacity to make small choices reminds us of our agency and reconnects us with our capacity to act and manage. When overwhelmed, a helpful question can be: ***“What’s one thing I can do right now to support myself?”*** (From Trauma-sensitive Yoga)



Breathing Techniques

1) **Observe the natural rhythm of your breath.** Find the inhale, the natural pause/transition, and watch the exhale. Just by observing natural breath flow, it will begin to slow down.

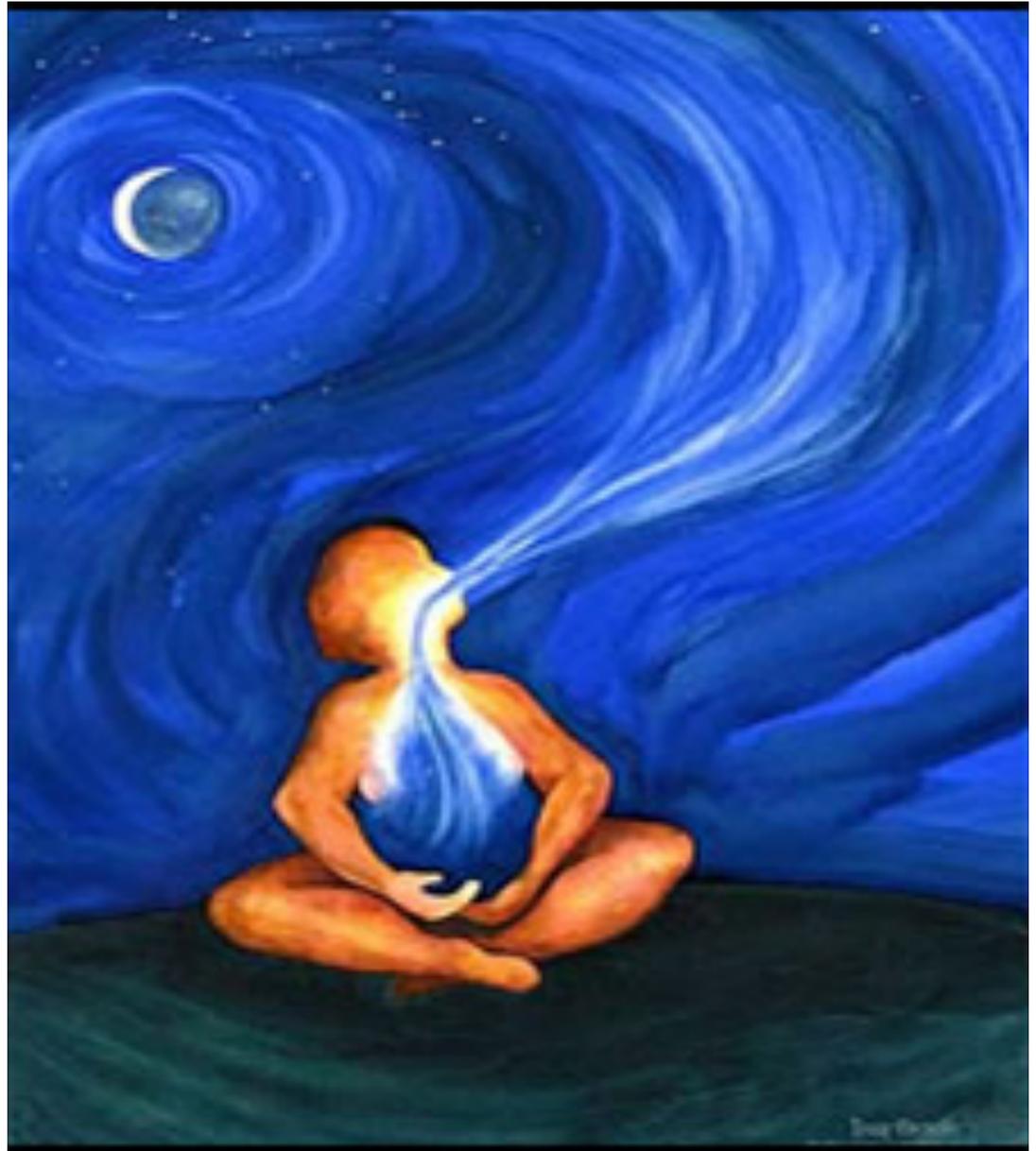
2) **Add-a-little breath Technique** (from Trauma-sensitive Yoga)

- Find natural breath flow as noted above.
- Begin to increase the length of the inhale (to a comfortable amount) and let the exhale relax out. Imagine the *fresh breath* flowing in and releasing on the exhale *stress, tension, and worry*.

3) **Extending the Exhale:**

- Observe natural rhythm.
- Even the length of the inhale and exhale (counting 1,000-1, 1,000-2).
- Begin to extend the exhale by one to two counts based upon comfort. This soothes anxiety.

4) **Three-part Breath** (Dirga in Yoga)
(See addended instruction sheet from Amy Wientraub's work.)



Mindfulness Concepts

-Mindfulness helps us notice what we are attending to; ***attention is a form of care.***

-Cultivating awareness and practicing ***observing mind.*** When we can observe our thinking and/or emotions, this is called the ***wedge of freedom,*** as we can choose how to respond versus react.

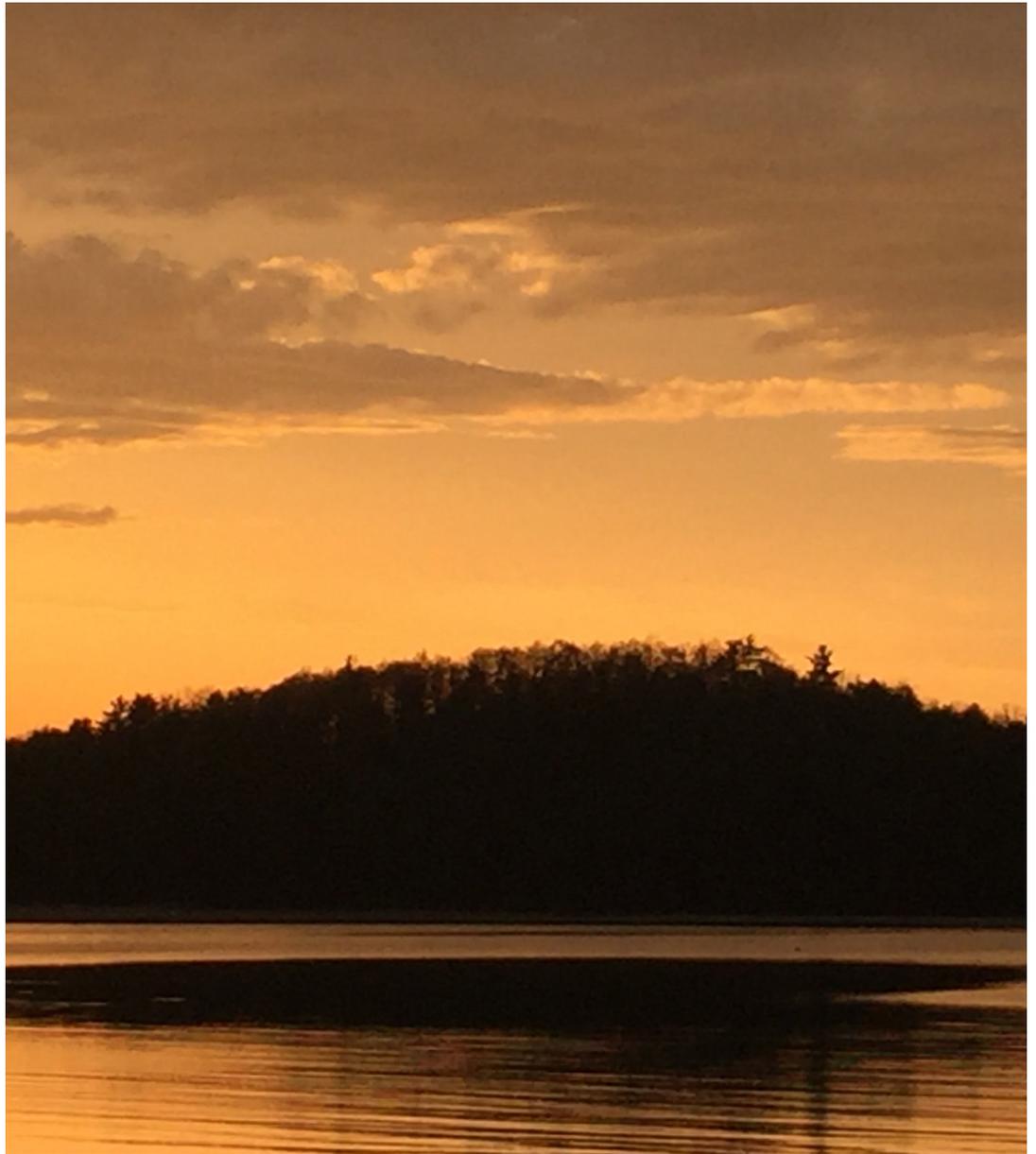
-We all experience '***conditioned thinking***' or '***thought tracks***' based on life experiences, beliefs, and/or narratives we have been given or created. Mindfulness helps us to observe: "***What are we practicing now?***" and to discern what serves us. ***Non-identification helps us know that our thinking is not our core self, but arising energy.***

-Negative or painful thought tracks can be substituted with positive, compassionate ones (and overwritten through practice ***creating new neuropathways.***)

-***Felt sense.*** Experience begins at the sensory level, travels to the emotion centers of the brain and thinking is attached. Working with arising sensations allows us to work with the root of experience.

-***Skillful means*** relates to developing the capacity to choose a practice that can support us in the present moment.

-***Loving-kindness/compassion practices.*** We can develop skills and capacities to hold ourselves and others with kindness and care.



Practices

-*Practicing the pause.*

-*Choose a breathing practice.*

-**On the Spot** (out in the community, stressful moment):

-Find your feet. Notice your breath. Settle the gaze and then look around noticing details and expanding peripheral vision. Positive thought track: **Present moment, safe moment.**

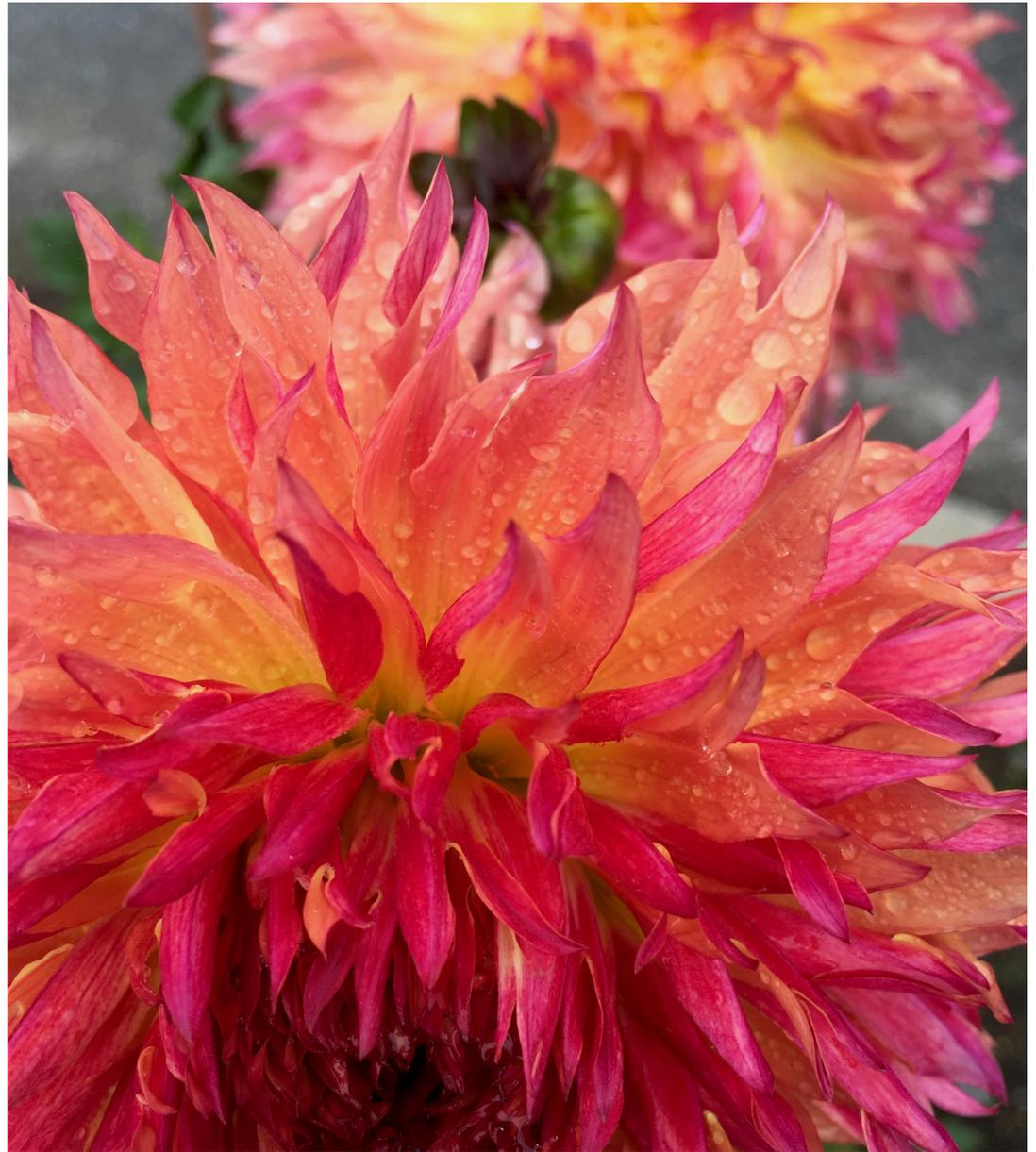
-**Nervous System Reset** (5-10 minutes daily) Settle in a chair or lie down on a mat, bed, or floor. Invite the body to briefly stretch and then to settle and soften. Observe natural breath or engage Add-a-little breath technique. Engage light body scan inviting **progressive relaxation**. Then invite the mind to follow the body in relaxing. Engage **observing mind** to watch persistent thinking or when thinking arises. Choose to return attention to the breath or some neutral or comfortable part of the body.

-**Narrow gaze; expanded gaze.**

-**Shake it off; flow.** Big energies like anger, rage, and high anxiety want to MOVE. Shaking it off, simple flowing movements paired with breath or not can discharge energies and provide relief.

-**Working with discomfort or chronic pain.** Observe sensations of comfort, neutrality, and discomfort. Notice attached emotions and/or thinking/narratives. Return to the '**workable edge of sensation**' or focus on neutral body part. Draw on breath as a resource, comforting touch, comforting words, recitations (mantras in yoga.)

-Befriending or meeting the experience that is arising. No good no; no bad. **Cultivating a felt sense of comfort and safety.** Drawing on **compassion practice** when self-judgment arises.



Practices Continued

RAIN Compassion Practice

Recognize what is arising.

Allow it to be exactly what it is.

Investigate with kindness and curiosity.

Non-identification

Modified for trauma or overwhelm:

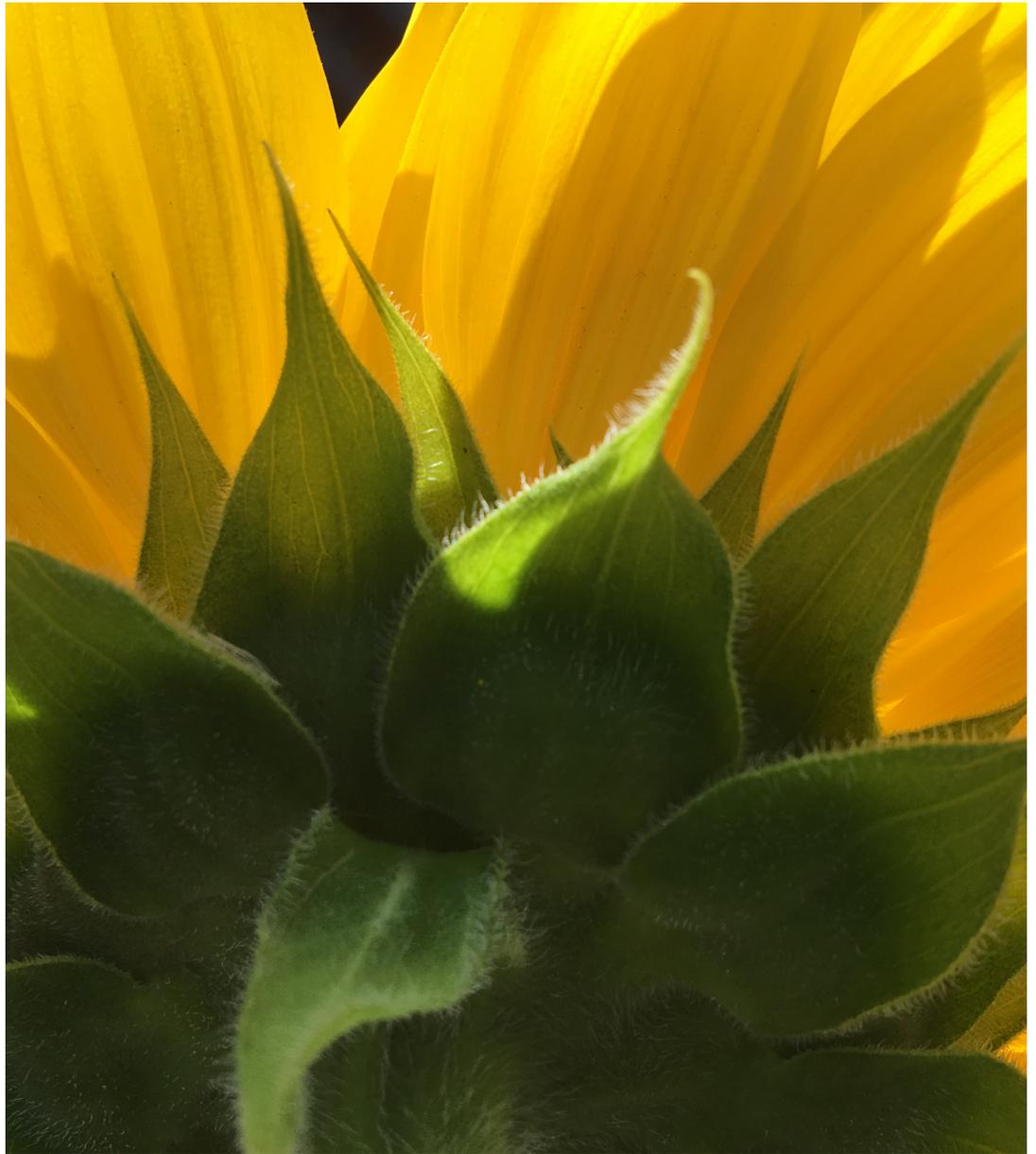
Recognize what is arising.

Allow calming, soothing breath practice or noticing a part of the body that has sensations of comfort or neutrality.

Non-identification

Link for Tara Brach's RAIN practice in resource addendum.

Loving-kindness Meditations resources included in end slides.



Family Resources



- Family members will be supported by consistent rhythms, routines, expectations and engagement in nature, humor, quiet, creative pursuits, and selective screen time.
- Children and teens will benefit from adults practicing mindfulness and/or other self-care activities. This serves everyone.
- Children and teens can be taught belly-breathing with a stuffed animal on their belly, feeling the breath move it gently and/or Add-a-little breath technique, etc. for teens, respectively.
- Answer questions honestly at a developmentally appropriate level.
- Share vulnerability at a developmentally appropriate level.
- Model that resiliency is fortified by healthy, safe connections and honest sharing.
- Give people permission to state when they are overwhelmed and need support.

Resource Addendum:

Books:

Wherever You Go, There You are, Jon Kabat-Zinn

Comfortable With Uncertainty, Pema Chodrun

Radical Acceptance, Tara Brach

Overcoming Trauma through Yoga, Dave Emerson and Elizabeth Hopper

Websites:

www.debsherrer.com (fuller resource list here for healing and trauma)

www.tarabrach.com (lots of free mindfulness practices)

www.laughingriver.com (yoga and mindfulness offerings)

APPs:

Calm

Headspace

10% Happier

Links:

RAIN Compassion practice with Tara Brach:

[Youtube.com/watch?v=wm1t5FyK5Ek&feature=youtu.be](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wm1t5FyK5Ek&feature=youtu.be)

On my blog, if this link does not work.

Yogic Three-Part Breath (*Dirga Pranayama*)

This breath creates a state of mental alertness, even as it activates the parasympathetic nervous system so that the body-mind is calm. An even inhalation and exhalation is best when your mood is depressed. When you lengthen your exhalation you will enhance the calming effect, which helps if you suffer from anxiety or an anxiety-based depression like I did. The ideal ratio for calming and cooling is 1:2, although to learn it, start with a 1:1 ratio, or equal inhalation and exhalation.

There are two methods of practicing Yogic Three-Part Breath. In the traditional method, taught in most lineages, the inhalation is directed to the bottom of the lungs, the midsection, and then the top. The exhalation moves from top to bottom. In some yoga traditions, the breath is drawn in and then exhaled in exactly the opposite direction. From a psychophysical perspective both methods have the same effect. I practice and teach the more traditional method. However, if you have been taught and practice the method that favors inhaling from top to bottom of the lungs, please feel free to continue to practice Yogic Three-Part Breath that way. Remember that both the inhalation and the exhalation are done through the nose.

1. Begin in a comfortable seated position with the spine erect. Inhale the breath through the nose into the bottom of the lungs so the belly expands. It can help to place the right hand on the abdomen so the extension can be easily felt. Practice this first part at least three times or until the breath is smooth and you can see your client's abdomen rising with the inhalation and falling with the exhalation.
2. Inhale the first third of the breath into the bottom of the lungs as above, and then inhale the second third into the midsection of the lungs so that the ribcage expands. Practice this three times or until there is a sense of ease with the breath.
3. Place the left hand on your upper chest, and inhale as above with the final third of the breath moving up into the top of the lungs, and feel your upper chest lift.
4. Slowly release the breath and feel the upper chest lowering first. As you complete the exhale, draw your abdomen up and back toward your spine, completely emptying the bottom of your lungs.
5. To begin, practice Yogic Three-Part Breath for 3 to 5 minutes.

Excerpt From Amy Weintraub's article: Beat Depression with a Yogic Breath

Loving-kindness Practice

Thich Nhat Hanh



May we be safe.

May we be free of
suffering.

May we be healed.

May we be at peace.

Loving-kindness Practice



- May we be held in loving-kindness; May we hold others in loving-kindness.
- May we be free of inner and outer harm.
- May we remember our essential goodness, irrespective of arising conditions.
- May we be free of suffering.
- May we be healed.
- May we be at peace.



twilight sky

Breathing in, I return to the island of just this moment.

Here is where the sky, the ground, and the air hold me up,
comforting me.

Breathing out, I begin again.

Recitation from Spirituality and Health



fresh dawn (photo by Celia Cadwell)

“Wholeness is never lost, it is only forgotten...Wholeness includes all of our wounds, all of our vulnerabilities. It is our authentic self and it doesn't sit in judgment of our wounds... Integrity simply means what is true. To live from the place in you that has the greatest truth.”

“Sometimes all that is needed is a sense of possibility.”

Rachel Naomi Remen

Q & A





~getting to the heart of it

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