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THE INNER WORK OF PARTNERSHIP: TOOLS FOR MAKING THE PERSONAL SHIFT FROM DOMINATION TO PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract

This article highlights the importance of partnership with oneself in partnership work. Recognizing that partnership is both a process and a practice, the authors bring attention to the role of one's relationship with self in the partnership model. Ways in which domination thinking becomes internalized and how it functions in our own inner lives is demonstrated. Through a close examination of seven key ways to cultivate a relationship of respect, peace, care, and compassion with self, the authors offer a simple tool to support the practice of partnership values from the inside out.

Keywords: Partnership; domination; relationship with self; internalizing partnership principles; self-care.

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INTRODUCTION

In this busy world, in which it seems activities and demands are only accelerating rather than slowing down or becoming more manageable, it can be difficult to maintain balance and care for ourselves. In fact, it is easy to actually lose touch with ourselves and press on in unhealthy and unproductive ways.

In times of stress and pressure, when self-care is more important than ever, often the first things to go are adequate sleep and exercise, and good nutrition. It is troubling

that as we become busier and more rushed, we do not treat ourselves well, and tend to others' demands rather than honoring our needs and taking good care of ourselves.

Thomas Merton, the spiritual writer, social activist, and mystic, expressed:

The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. (Merton, 1965, p. 73)

If this is true, most people in the modern world, then, are living innately violent lives. Think about this. When we are already doing too much, the more we strive to keep up or the more we take on, the more we succumb to this version of violence—usually against ourselves. Merton went on to explain, "More than that, it is cooperation with violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys her own inner capacity for peace. It kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful" (1965, p. 73).

Overwork and exhaustion seem to have become a form of status symbol. If we are so very busy, and in much demand, surely we must be important. Allowing ourselves to be overworked and keeping ourselves overly busy are ways many of us use to feel valuable. Yet, exhaustion leads to compassion fatigue and burnout, with less satisfaction, creativity, productivity, or effectiveness as a result. The pace many of us try to maintain is not sustainable. There must be a better way.

RELATIONSHIP WITH SELF IN THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL

In her book, *The Power of Partnership: Seven Relationships That Will Change Your Life* (2002), Riane Eisler elaborates on the applications of the domination/partnership models that she first described in her groundbreaking work *The Chalice and The Blade*

(1987). The core premise of Eisler's framework is that all human relationships—and the social systems which humans create—are configured on a continuum. At one end are strong domination systems characterized by rigid hierarchies of control, and by superior/inferior rankings, which are maintained through fear and force. At the other end of the spectrum are partnership relations characterized by care, mutual respect, and peace, which are supported by equality and what Eisler terms “hierarchies of actualization” (2002, p. 70).

One of the gifts of the partnership model is that it provides a lens through which we can explore all our relations, including our relationship with ourselves. In *The Power of Partnership*, Eisler (2002) offers ideas for applying the partnership lens to a fundamental set of connection points between you and the world, including: your relationship with yourself; your intimate relations; your work and community relationships; your relationship with your national community; your relationship with the international community, your relationship with nature; and your spiritual relations. In the first chapter, entitled, "Your Relationship with Yourself: Body, Mind, and Spirit," she suggests, "If you take a look at yourself, you will probably find ways that your own relationship with yourself has been affected by the domination blueprint we've inherited" (p. 6). It makes sense that partnership begins from the inside out, yet as partnership leaders and educators, we are struck by how profound an insight this is for our students and ourselves. Indeed, we (and our students) have found that one of the most challenging aspects of partnership work to sustain is treating oneself with the same respect, peace, empathy, and care that we extend to others.

Many of those with whom we work reiterate the importance of partnership with self, and express their awareness of how it affects their intimate relations, flowing ever outward. One young mother stated, "I really began to think about what I am intentionally doing to remove those barriers to true partnership principles and what I am willing to do to stand up to dominance in my everyday life. There are subtle but

powerful ways of doing this, and it truly does begin with our relationship with ourselves and in our intimate interactions with our families."

Certainly, all of the seven partnership relationships in our lives need tending, and all have their challenges. We hear regularly from people engaged in partnership work that there are times when they feel helpless and powerless. One can become paralyzed, with no idea of where or how to begin. This can occur in any of our relationships: with our intimate others, in our workplace, in our local communities, in our national and international communities, and in our efforts to protect the natural world. However, most of us like to think that we have agency, and at least a modicum of control over our personal lives and how we each treat ourselves individually.

Perhaps it is this contrast between our feelings of helplessness and our expectation of control and agency that creates extra frustration when busyness and stress get the best of us. When our self-care practices fall by the wayside, we can be very hard on ourselves. After all, those of us who strive to live with partnership values should really know better and do better—right? As one student reflected recently, "Right now my focus is on being a better partner with myself. I beat myself up for feeling stressed out which only adds to my stress! Not a healthy way to treat myself."

Another challenge in nurturing partnership with self is that, to some, this inner work may seem self-indulgent and even selfish. Some raise the concern that if we "get stuck" on perfecting this first relationship, we may never move on to contribute to the important work of creating the shift toward partnership in the other six relationship areas. However, because so many of us do for others before doing for ourselves, turning the Golden Rule around and applying it to ourselves is the first step to becoming more sensitive to and a better partner with ourselves (Eisler, 2002, p. 10). Just as we are instructed on an airplane to put on our own oxygen masks first, before helping those who may need assistance, so we need to cultivate partnership with and within ourselves to support and bolster the work moving outward and going forward. If we tend to ourselves, become our own best partner, and then apply our best (and

supported) selves to the other relationships in the partnership model, all relationships grow stronger. We can become better partners in all areas and instances.

Though Eisler's continuum model invites us to envision partnership as a desired endpoint on a spectrum of human relations, it is also useful to think of partnership as a process and as a practice. We can practice partnership by bringing intention to our daily interactions in all of our relationships, and by considering how the challenges we inevitably face might be improved, mitigated, or solved in partnership-oriented ways. When we embody partnership as an ongoing practice, it becomes clear that our goal is not to perfect ourselves first, and then engage in partnership work "out there" in the world. Rather, we begin to see that the daily practices of partnering with self is how we construct an inner template for what partnership feels like, a template we can simultaneously carry into our relationships with others. Through the practice of partnership with ourselves, we gradually embed the felt sense of our own value deep in the core of our inner lives. As we come to know what it feels like in our bodies and our spirits when our needs to be heard, cared for and respected are fulfilled, every encounter with the world becomes an opportunity to creatively negotiate the distances—sometimes small, sometimes vast—between the grounded compassion we carry within and the lingering domination tendencies of the systems through which we travel.

BEING YOUR OWN BEST P-A-R-T-N-E-R

To assist in strengthening this relationship and to encourage greater partnership with ourselves, we have developed a simple tool. We consider each of the seven letters in the word "partner" as an opportunity to undertake thoughtful reflection on some of the core practices of partnership with self. We hope these reflections will offer inspiration and spark your own deeper thinking about cultivating your own practices of self-partnership. We hope that the seven practices are presented in a way that encourages you to revisit them over time, perhaps selecting a letter that especially resonates at a particular moment on your partnership path.

P = Pause and Be Still

A = Appreciate

R = Rest

T = Take Your Time

N = Nourish

E = Enjoy

R = Restart

P is for Pause and Be Still

“Only the person who is still can hear, and whoever is not still, cannot hear.” (Pieper, 1948, p. 31)

- Josef Pieper (1904-1997), German philosopher

In our action-obsessed world, stillness is often experienced as a deeply uncomfortable and even morally-suspect form of inactivity. We are conditioned to run away from stillness, fearing what we will encounter there; if action is what convinces us that we are alive, surely, stillness must be a kind of death, a ceasing to exist.

Yet practicing stillness is precisely how we can best stay in relationship with our most authentic and creative selves—the version of ourselves with whom we most crave true partnership. When our inner ocean is storm-blown and white-capped with relentless action, the reflection we see of ourselves in the waves is similarly tumultuous and fragmented. However, when we stop and allow ourselves to still the waters of our minds, we set the stage for clearer self-reflection and allow for the awareness that something genuinely new is beginning to surface.

We can choose to think of stillness not as a terrifying void, but simply as a time in-between, a transition from one state to another, a time when what-used-to-be has

fallen away, but what-will-be has not yet arrived. More than just a break in the action, we can think of stillness as a different kind of action, a “generative idleness” that is an essential part of the cycles of living and creating. Indeed, models for stillness as an essential aspect of generative life are everywhere in nature. Stillness is built into the rhythm of a day in the form of nighttime, when we sleep and dream. Stillness is also built into the rhythm of seasons in the form of winter, when we break from planting and harvesting to pull up the covers, light a candle, and allow the seeds of the plants of next spring to do their work, incubating deep under the earth, without our intervention. Our ancestors took care to echo these rhythms in their rules for living, building stillness-practice into each day in the form of daily prayer or meditation, and into each week in the form of a Sabbath day, a day of rest.

Even a quick peek at the world around us today reveals that many of us now live in a land far, far away from nature’s basic rhythms. We live in cities that never sleep, we drive away winter’s invitation to stillness with aggressive lights and relentless gatherings, we harness ourselves to devices which render us available and “on call” everywhere and all the time.

Yet, we can choose to honor the wisdom of nature’s rhythms in our own lives. We can resist the tyranny of unremitting activity and allow ourselves moments, minutes, even hours of stillness, knowing we will not disappear and trusting that something far more interesting and fresh waits just on the other side.

Performance artist and teacher Nina Wise (2002) beautifully articulates the deeper connections between stillness, courage, and creativity:

So what does being silent for a few minutes have to do with creative freedom? By practicing stillness, we cultivate the courage to face the void. By practicing stillness, we touch the ground of being. Out of silence all creativity emerges...By touching silence, we prepare the ground for all creative

expression. By touching silence, we discover that the freedom we long for is at the heart of who we already are. (p. 226)

A is for Appreciate

"...Enough is equal to a Feast." (Fielding, 1734, p. 22)

- Henry Fielding (1707-1754), English novelist and dramatist

Those of us who strive to create a better world often find ourselves firmly at odds with the tendency of our consumer-driven economy to equate happiness and selfhood with an endless "more." We pride ourselves on seeing through the lie that accumulating more and more stuff will somehow lead to a better life.

To be in partnership with ourselves, however, we must also consider what "enough" means in terms of our striving for a better world. Many of us who understand ourselves to be difference-makers do not ask ourselves how much we can sustainably accomplish or how much difference is enough. How much peace? How much justice? How much fairness? How much education? How healthy a planet? If there can never be enough of these things, then when do we feast?

If we do not remember to appreciate the gains that have been made; if we do not take time to feel enormously, powerfully grateful to the change-makers who have come before us, and the better world they have already created; if we do not ever acknowledge that things do change and have changed; then we are no different from those who are trapped in the logic of the mall—one more purchase and then I will have enough. We can fall into the belief that our happiness, our wholeness, our peace will be right on the other side of the next legal battle, or community action, or political campaign, or healed family.

To partner with reality means to be in deep appreciation of things exactly as they are in this moment, with no demand for change and no expectation of improvement. This

does not mean that we abandon our efforts. However, it is important to remember that every time we access the experience of gratitude for all that is now, we fill up our wells of courage and determination to take the next steps of the journey.

R is for Rest

“Think what a better world it would be if we all—the whole world—had cookies and milk about three o'clock every afternoon and then lay down with our blankies for a nap.” (Fulghum, 1986)¹

- Robert Fulghum, American Author

In 1987, the indomitable civil rights activist and Texas congressional representative Barbara Jordan delivered a commencement address Middlebury College in which she shared this Robert Fulghum quote about the virtues of naptime. Why would this seemingly tireless advocate for justice speak to a group of graduates about taking naps? The theme of Jordan’s address was the need for the governing class—likely those with an elite education—to go into public life with a shared set of fundamental values including truth, tolerance, respect, and community. Invoking Fulghum’s sweet vision of a universal naptime at the conclusion of her speech was Jordan’s way of reminding the assembled graduates that their ability to lead from shared values is connected to their ability to honor their own vulnerable humanity.

Jordan’s selection of the Fulghum quote invited listeners to recognize the enormity of the contrast between the sweetness and vulnerability of the image of sleeping children with bellies full of comfort, and the reality of the culture of a place like the U.S. Congress, where the appearance of invulnerability and vigilant protection of one’s status and power are the norm. The image of a room full of mostly white, mostly male politicians curled up on their nap mats in their suits and ties is hilarious in its absurdity. Regardless of one’s standing in a domination system, being an adult, being in charge, being powerful, all require “sleeping with one eye open.” Lack of

¹ Quote by Robert Fulghum appeared in an essay in the Kansas City *Star Times* on September 17, 1986, and was shared by congressional Barbara Jordan in her 1987 commencement address at Middlebury College. It was later published in Fulghum's blockbuster book, *All I Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (1988, 2003, p. 3).

trust and a need to maintain control over one's emotions and physical needs at all times are results of the fear-based logic of domination. These attitudes toward sleep and other domination-driven approaches to our bodies' fundamental needs are embedded deeply within the culture of all those who, like the Middlebury graduates, understand themselves to be charged with making the world a better place.

Indeed, the realm of sleep is nothing short of a battleground within a domination culture, and a place of deeply internalized struggle. We are, all of us, at the mercy of a physical being that requires us to relinquish control for many hours of every day. With our primal, animalistic need for sleep, our bodies seem to want to dominate us. Following the core logic of a domination culture—"dominate or be dominated"—we meet this demand with resistance. We fight back, seeking to regain control and prove our self-mastery by ignoring our own basic needs.

No wonder our metaphors around sleep are so riddled with violent imagery: we speak of tiredness as being "wiped out"; to fall asleep is to "crash"; we "push through" sleepy afternoons with stimulants; when we just can't fight it any more, sleep "overtakes" us; and when we finally succumb, we are "dead to the world." In our efforts to stay vigilant in the competitive hierarchies of the domination culture, we "burn the candle at both ends," forgetting, of course, that we are the candle, and we are, many of us, on our way to being fully "burned out"—a devastating experience of hollow emptiness, a state in which we can no longer feel anything but our own sad exhaustion, a state in which we have nothing left to offer ourselves or the world.

In his poem "A Blessing for One Who Is Exhausted," John O'Donohue (2008) captures the essence of this burned-out end-point of our battles against our own natures:

The light in the mind becomes dim.
Things you could take in your stride before
Now become laborious events of will.

Weariness invades your spirit.
Gravity begins falling inside you,
Dragging down every bone.
The tide you never valued has gone out.
And you are marooned on unsure ground.
Something within you has closed down;
And you cannot push yourself back to life. (p. 125)

Partnership with ourselves means embodying practices that keep us open, alive and lively, the opposite of the exhausted state that O'Donohue captures so well. Staying on the side of our own lives, and all life, requires a very different orientation to our bodies, including our need for rest.

Within the partnership frame, we begin from a basic acceptance of our animal natures. We accept that we are not machines, but living organisms who thrive on cycles of wakefulness and sleep. We practice a gentle and respectful relationship with our own bodies, listening attentively to our bodies' signals rather than ignoring them. Rather than seeing sleep as a kind of hostile takeover of our "real" self, we view sleep as a nurturing partner or healing friend, a way of being that complements and fuels our wakeful lives. We stop trying to slam ourselves abruptly from one state to another, but rather, as O'Donohue urges later in his poem, we "imitate the habit of twilight," (p. 126) embracing a gradual transition between wakefulness and sleep. We practice letting go gently, allowing ourselves to shift gracefully into sleep, trusting that the world will continue to spin, without our intervention or efforts to control.

O'Donohue closes his poem with these lines, which offer the promise of the qualitative shift in our experience that follows when we heal our exhaustion and partner respectfully with our own needs:

Gradually, you will return to yourself,
Having learned a new respect for your heart

And the joy that dwells far within slow time. (p. 126)

T is for Take Your Time

"Still—in a way—nobody sees a flower—really—it is so small—we haven't time—and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time." (O'Keeffe [1939], as cited in B. B. Lynes, 1999, p. 1099)

- Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986), American artist

Have you ever noticed that some people seem to have an inner metronome that ticks just a bit faster than yours? Or encountered someone whose slower, more deliberate pace of moving and speaking drives you a little crazy? In a culture that glorifies speed, it seems that each of us has a pace that is just right for us—if only we can recognize it, and find a way to honor it.

Partnering with ourselves means not only moving at our own speed, but also being willing to question speed itself as a value. Poet and organizational speaker David Whyte (2001) eloquently describes the collateral damage created by our valorization of speed:

The great tragedy of speed as an answer to the complexities and responsibilities of existence is that very soon we cannot recognize anything or anyone who is not traveling at the same velocity as we are. We see only those moving in the same whirling orbit and only those moving with the same urgency. Soon we begin to suffer a form of amnesia, caused by the blurred vision of velocity itself, where those things germane to our humanity are dropped from our minds one by one....On the personal side, as slaves to speed, we start to lose sight of family members, especially children, or those who are ill or infirm, who are not flying through the world as quickly and determinedly as we are. Just as seriously, we begin to leave behind the parts of our own

selves that limp a little, the vulnerabilities that actually give us color and character. (p. 118)

If partnership is fundamentally about becoming better allies with humanity, nature, and spirit, then surely slowing down must be a core partnership practice. Yet resisting speed, slowing ourselves to a pace at which our children and our own thoughts and vulnerabilities become visible to us again, is a profoundly humbling process. Indeed, the root of the word “humility” is humus, or soil. When we take our time, we strip away the illusion of flight and are forced to reckon with the earth-boundedness of human experience. It is a humbling practice to walk on the earth, step by step, slowing deliberately to allow the young or old to walk beside us. It is a humbling practice to stop saying to ourselves, “If I just work later, or faster, or through the weekend...” and instead say, “I have done enough for today; it is time now to care, to listen, to reflect, so that I may move things forward tomorrow.”

Remaining in partnership with ourselves requires patience with our own pace of growth and change. Sometimes we do not heal as quickly as we would like; our learning process can seem agonizingly slow; and the impact we hoped to have on the world does not materialize instantly. Writer and teacher Natalie Goldberg (1986) reminds us that our personal generativity is enriched and expanded when we allow time to process the fullness of our experience. We not only practice humility when we slow down, we acknowledge that we, ourselves, are humus-factories—our inner lives are the ground we walk on and the soil we count on to give life to our ideas, plans, and dreams. Goldberg offers the metaphor of the compost pile to help us imagine the slow process through which we make sense of our experiences:

Our senses by themselves are dumb. They take in experience, but they need the richness of sifting for a while through our consciousness and through our whole bodies. I call this ‘composting.’ Our bodies are garbage heaps: we collect experience, and from the decomposition of the thrown-out eggshells, spinach leaves, coffee grinds, and old steak bones of our minds come nitrogen,

heat and very fertile soil...But this does not come all at once. It takes time...we must continue to work the compost pile, enriching it and making it fertile so that something beautiful may bloom. (p. 14)

N is for Nourish

“Where is your water? Know your garden.”

- Hopi teaching

Just as our relationship to sleep becomes a source of tension within our domination culture, our fundamental need for food creates an opportunity for the insanity of domination to take grim hold of our inner lives. In painfully huge numbers, we quite literally “buy into” the narrative of an epic battle to conquer and tame our own hungers and appetites: We scarf up faddish foods, subject ourselves to dangerous diets and cleanses, and absorb absurd food beliefs, giving up this or that major food group or ingredient in an effort to “be good.” We allow ourselves to remain locked in a struggle between “will power” and “won’t power,” believing that self-denial is the ticket to some moral high ground. We resolve over and over again to master our appetites, hoping to “whip ourselves into shape” once and for all. We disrespect and ridicule people with larger bodies, using them to invoke the specter of gluttony and slothfulness, and the example of what will befall us if we “lose control.”

Practicing partnership with ourselves begins by shifting away from the domination-system frame in which an appetite is either “good” or “bad,” in which we are either “in control” or “out of control” of ourselves. We begin to think instead in terms of nourishment, replacing the question “How can I better control myself?” with the question, “What am I really hungry for?” We cultivate a loving and respectful relationship with our own bodies and appetites, allowing ourselves to get curious about the array of real needs that speak to us in the voice of hunger. We accept and

respect the full, complex array of appetites that drive us, and we devote ourselves to nourishing our whole beings—body, mind, and spirit.

What we really hunger for is deceptively simple. Starting with food, we hunger for wholesome foods that sustain us with clean energy. We hunger for food grown without poisons, without cruelty, and without doing violence to the earth. We hunger for food that is prepared with love and care, and even a little artfulness now and then. We hunger for the experience of communion with our families and friends with whom we gather to break bread.

Of course, we have other hungers, too: for play, for affection, for color, for awe, for beauty and pleasure, for sex, for truth, for freedom, for comfort, for peace, for creative expression, for movement, and for time outdoors. Perhaps most of all, we hunger for self-acceptance; for unconditional love, regard, and appreciation; and for recognition of our own worth, our own beauty, and the perfection of who we already are. Partnership with ourselves means steadfastly refusing any punitive and violent demands that we “master ourselves,” and honoring instead the full array of our real hungers, quietly and steadily watering and tending our own gardens so that we may thrive.

E is for Enjoy

“If the world were merely seductive, that would be easy. If it were merely challenging, that would be no problem. But I arise in the morning torn between a desire to improve (or save) the world and a desire to enjoy (or savor) the world. This makes it hard to plan the day.” (E. B. White, as cited in Shenker, 1969)

- E.B. White (1889-1985), American writer

For those of us oriented to saving, or at least helping or serving, the world, the pull between saving and savoring, which White articulates with such crisp wit, can indeed feel like a genuine source of tension. If this tension is not meant to be resolved, we can at least imagine a kind of healthy balancing point at which our efforts to create

change and our ability to enjoy the pleasures of life both have their due place and time. However, for many of us, the legacy of the profoundly domination-based Puritan tradition still exerts itself forcefully in our cultural and personal DNA, weighing heavily against the “savoring” side of the equation. Many of us have internalized the beliefs that hard work and constant effort are the surest path to God, and that self-denial in the face of the world’s seductions somehow makes one a better person. We have been taught to equate suffering with morality, and assured that the rewards for all our toil will come to us at a later time, in a better place.

Over time, this puritanical self-domination system has become inexorably intertwined with the twisted logic of our consumer culture; we are taught that we can buy back the joy and delight that we have leached from our work lives by purchasing more and better things and by “entertaining” ourselves with compulsively compelling virtual worlds like video games and “reality” television. Advertising culture tells us that joy is contained within the things we can buy and the vicarious experiences we can temporarily inhabit, and that enjoyment can be “ours” through their ownership. Yet, of course, once we have them, we find that no joy has rubbed off on us and we feel emptier and hollower than before.

The partnership model helps us stay grounded in a truer, simpler story of who we are and why we are here. If, as the partnership model suggests, our truest selves are not spoiled by sin, but rather our deepest programming tells us to learn, to connect, and to create, then the people, the things, and the experiences that light us up and bring us the greatest pleasure are not dangerous temptations, but rather brightly-lit signposts guiding us to the places where we will be the most fully ourselves, and where we will have the most to give to others. In partnership with ourselves, we actively tune into the true experiences of joy that come from satisfying, stimulating, and nourishing relationships with ourselves, our work, each other, and life itself. We value life’s pleasures, and actually insist that our lives here on earth are best lived when we express love, empathy, and compassion through all that we do.

As partnership practitioners, we search for people, ideas, things, and experiences in whose presence we feel most awake and alive. Our orientation to noticing what awakens us allows us to see through the false separation between enjoyment and work that is a beloved fiction in our culture of fragmentation and an outgrowth of workplaces organized as domination systems. When we follow the trail of what we love, we discover that it leads to a life's work that is devoted to solving the kinds of problems our particular brains, hearts, and hands are wired to solve.

In fact, when we are joyfully engaged in grappling with the particular kinds of challenges that most “turn us on,” our work becomes impossible to distinguish from play. Author Stephen Nachmanovich (1990) put it this way:

When the most challenging labors are undertaken from the joyous work spirit, they are play. In play we manifest fresh, interactive ways of relating with people, animals, things, ideas, images, ourselves. It flies in the face of social hierarchies...To play is to free ourselves from arbitrary restrictions and expand our field of action. Our play fosters richness of response and adaptive flexibility...Play is the free spirit of exploration, doing and being for its own pure joy. (p. 43)

In other words, by following the path of our enjoyment, we discover that it does not lead us to the temptations of vacant idleness nor towards the relentless stimulation of aimless action; real joy comes from engaging wholeheartedly and playfully with the challenges of meaningful work and meaningful relationships. Perhaps the resolution to White's conundrum between “savoring” and “saving” the world is simply this: if we approach our work of change with a commitment to playfully enjoying it as a creative process, we can simultaneously expand our experience of joy and increase the power of our impact.

Author D.H. Lawrence (1984) adds one more element worth noting to this discussion of enjoyment as partnership practice. He reminds us that while pleasure can, of

course, be connected to our creative work in the world, it is also derived from sustaining a sense of groundedness in one's essential being. In a letter to a friend, Lawrence mused: "I *don't* think that to work is to live. Work is all right in proportion: but one wants to have a certain richness and satisfaction in oneself, which is more than anything produced. One wants to *be*" (p. 215).

R is for Restart

"Life...is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity..." (Radner, 2009, p. 254)

- Gilda Radner (1946-1989), American comedian and actor

Domination systems, with their aggressive need for control, thrive on stasis. As long as things remain the same, relationships of domination can be sustained through belief systems that make domination appear normal and natural, or "just the way things are." In addition, the longer things are kept the same, the more difficult and threatening any change becomes. Domination configurations take advantage of this tendency, shoring up the system by amplifying people's fears of the unknown with the implicit message, "If we give up the old ways, who knows what chaos will ensue?"

As practitioners of partnership who celebrate life and growth, we must find ways to expand our ability to embrace change. We must be willing to shed old ways of thinking and acting, release our limiting identities and roles, and soften our fierce resistance to the unknown, opening to transformation. We must be willing to start again, and again, and again.

Of course, getting comfortable with discomfort is just as difficult and oxymoronic as it sounds. Great courage is required. For all the parts of us that thrive on novelty and crave improvement, we have parts that just as firmly demand security and despise endings and loss. We love our comforts and our familiar ruts—they are so wonderfully comfortable and familiar! In addition, there is the fear that what is coming may be no better than before. What if nothing good comes at all? Are there really no guarantees?

In an interview about his creative process, songwriter Dan Wilson summed up the lesson he has had to learn repeatedly in order to continue as a creative person:

Every time I finish a song, I get the feeling that it's the last one I'll ever write. It's like suffering from a creative hangover. One of the things I've had to keep learning is the art of starting over. I've had to tell myself, 'There will always be another song.' Which is hard to believe during that post-writing hangover. (as cited in *Vortex*, 2007)

As partnership practitioners, we are wise to nurture our faith in the same creative forces that Wilson invokes. We must help one another to take courage, reminding each other and ourselves: "There will always be another song." What comes next may be good in a new and different way, and no one knows exactly what that way will be. We may no longer recognize ourselves, or the world, but we will continue to learn and care and create, because that is what practicing partnership requires. Life will find a way of regenerating itself, and if we want to stay on the side of life, we must be willing to withstand the painful throes of rebirth, waiting as patiently and courageously as we know how for our new song to emerge.

CONCLUSION

The partnership model sees our relationship with ourselves as inextricably linked to our relationships to others. As the philosopher James Carse (1986) reminds us, "One cannot be human by oneself. There is no selfhood when there is no community. We do not relate to others as the persons we are; we are who we are in relating to others" (p. 45).

If we envision ourselves as interdependent and interconnected cells in a larger social organism, it is clear that we have a profound responsibility to be good stewards of the health and vitality of our cell, not only as an end in itself, but because the quality of

our participation and contribution to the whole matters deeply. The work we do to partner more lovingly with ourselves is not separate from any of our other work in the world.

In her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, Jill Bolte Taylor (2006) offers a moving example of the ways in which our personal energies have the power to either support or inhibit healing in others. When neuroscientist Bolte Taylor suffered a major stroke that incapacitated the analytical and verbal parts of her brain, she was able to access ways of knowing that had been always been present in her, but which she had largely ignored as she gave preference to the analytical, logical ways of knowing so prized in her scientific career. From her hospital bed, she saw clearly for the first time the ways in which each person who walked through the door of her hospital room carried with her or him an energy, and her non-verbal self understood clearly that it was this energy—far more than any technical expertise or verbal displays—that determined whether an encounter was healing or destructive to her well-being. That experience led her to express the need for people to take responsibility for the energy they brought her (p. 116). She even made a sign for visitors that said, "Please take responsibility for the energy you bring into this space."

Bolte Taylor's story reminds us that practicing partnership with self is fundamentally about accepting responsibility for bringing our authentic loving energies to our partnership work with others and the world. Stepping into responsibility for stewardship of our own energies does not mean we should require ourselves to slap a mask of cheerfulness and optimism over an inner world that is struggling and wounded. Instead, accepting the responsibility for the energies we bring forward requires us to catch ourselves when we "succumb to violence" by subjecting ourselves to the domination system habits and self-talk that we have internalized. When we find ourselves expecting constant effort without the balance of rest; when we ignore or shame the inner voices trying to signal that we should stop or slow down; when we postpone indefinitely the creative and playful activities that bring us peace and joy; when we neglect our needs for solitude and stillness; when we demand of ourselves a

constant public display of strength without embracing our vulnerabilities, we become agents of domination and begin undermining all of our espoused good and noble intentions as healers and change agents in the world. However, when we partner with our own rhythms and nourish our minds, bodies, and spirits, we are able to contribute a positive presence. Rather than beaming out energetic or verbal signals of anxiety, crankiness, anger, or frustration—which research shows are wickedly contagious—we are able to embody a way of being that heals and supports growth in the larger system.

Finally, accepting responsibility for nurturing our own inner lives does not mean we demand perfection of ourselves, or that we require inner perfection before committing to outward actions. It means practicing the extension of our compassion equally within and without, not only when we treat ourselves with the utmost care and respect, but also when we fall short of our ideals. The simple practice of greeting our inevitably partial and imperfect efforts with a knowing chuckle rather than with a stern inner “talking to” is a wonderful step toward partnering with our full, fallible, humanity. The next step is always this: we remind ourselves of our intrinsic worthiness, we connect with our deeper values, we renew our intentions, and we begin again.

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