

The *New York Times* bestselling
author of *Brainstorm* and *Mindsight*

Daniel J. Siegel, MD

AWAWARE

*The Science and
Practice of Presence*

THE GROUNDBREAKING
MEDITATION PRACTICE



tarcherperigee

An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC
375 Hudson Street
New York, New York 10014

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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Siegel, Daniel J., author.

Title: Aware : the science and practice of presence : the groundbreaking meditation
practice / Dr. Daniel Siegel, M.D.

Description: New York : TarcherPerigee, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references
and index. |

Identifiers: LCCN 2018016987 (print) | LCCN 2018027672 (ebook) | ISBN
9780143111788 | ISBN 9781101993040 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Self-actualization (Psychology) | Mindfulness (Psychology) |
Meditation. | BISAC: SELF-HELP / Personal Growth / General. | BODY, MIND &
SPIRIT / Meditation.

Classification: LCC BF637.S4 (ebook) | LCC BF637.S4 S54 2018 (print) | DDC 158.1/2
—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018016987>
p. cm.

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Also by Daniel J. Siegel, MD

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A mind that is stretched to a new idea never
returns to its original dimension.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

To Caroline Welch

*The magnificent mindful woman who shows me
every day the power and potential of presence in
our personal and professional lives*

and

In Memory of John O'Donohue:

*A decade
does not diminish
the
love
laughter
and
light
your life
brings to us
still
truth and
transformation
meaning and
your mind
with us
for
now
forever*

PART I

THE WHEEL OF AWARENESS: IDEA AND PRACTICE

AN INVITATION

There is an old saying that consciousness is like a container of water. If you take a tablespoon of salt and place it in a small container, say, the size of an espresso cup, the water most certainly will be too salty to drink. But if your container is much larger—say it is capable of holding many, many gallons of water—that same tablespoon of salt, now placed into this vast amount of liquid, will taste fresh. Same water, same salt; simply a different ratio, and the experience of drinking is totally different.

Consciousness is like that. When we learn to cultivate our capacity for being aware, the quality of our life and the strength of our mind are enhanced.

The skills you'll learn in this book are really quite simple: You will learn to increase the mind's capacity for being aware so that you will be able to adjust the ratio of the experience of awareness itself (the water) to the object of your awareness (the salt). You might call this cultivating consciousness; you might call it strengthening your mind. Research reveals that you would be correct in even calling this integrating your brain—growing the linkages among its different regions, strengthening the brain's ability to regulate things such as emotion, attention, thought, and behavior, learning to live a life with more flexibility and freedom.

Learning this skill of distinguishing awareness from that which you are aware of will enable you to expand the container of consciousness and empower you to “taste” so much more than just a salty glass of water. You will be able to immerse yourself fully in whatever experiences arise, regardless of how many tablespoons of salt life throws your way.

To enable these abilities to become a part of your life, this book will teach you a practice I developed called the Wheel of Awareness. As you become adept at using this tool, you may come to find that you’ll be able to weather life’s storms more easily and live life more fully, opening to whatever experiences arise, be they positive or negative. This skill of cultivating consciousness by expanding awareness, like transforming the small espresso cup into a vast container of water, will not only help you enjoy life more, it can also bring a deeper sense of connection and meaning to everyday experience, and even make you healthier.

CULTIVATING WELL-BEING BY DEVELOPING ATTENTION, AWARENESS, AND INTENTION

In the pages of this book we will dive deep into three learnable skills that have been shown in carefully conducted scientific studies to support the cultivation of well-being. When we develop *focused attention*, *open awareness*, and *kind intention*, research reveals we:

1. *Improve* **immune function** to help fight infection.
2. *Optimize* the level of the enzyme **telomerase**, which repairs and maintains the ends of your chromosomes, keeping your cells—and therefore *you*—youthful, functioning well, and healthy.

3. *Enhance* the “**epigenetic**” **regulation** of genes to help prevent life-threatening inflammation.
4. *Modify* **cardiovascular factors**, improving cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and heart function.
5. *Increase* **neural integration** in the brain, enabling more coordination and balance in both the functional and structural connectivity within the nervous system that facilitates optimal functioning, including self-regulation, problem solving, and adaptive behavior that is at the heart of well-being.

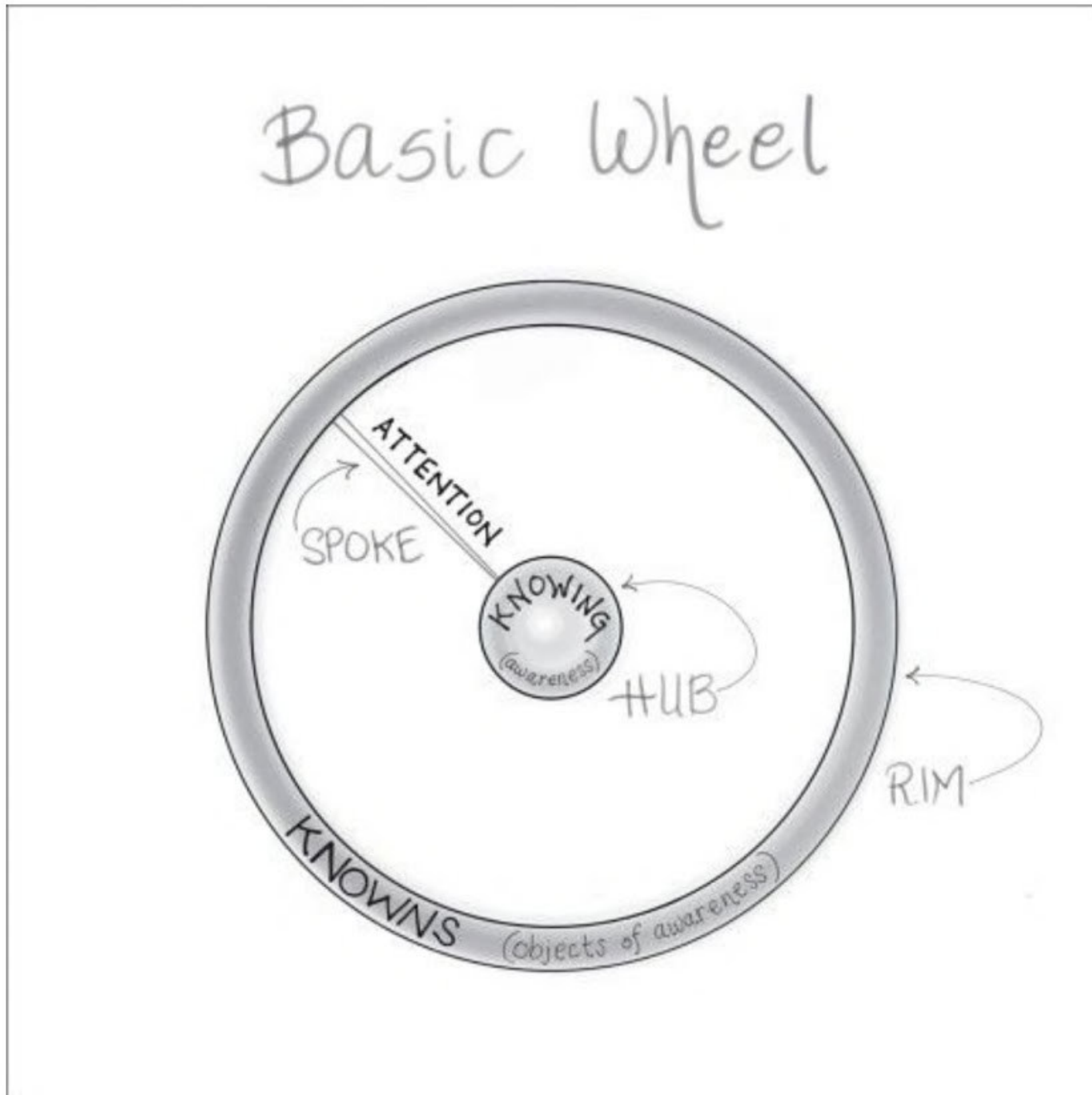
In short, the scientific findings are now in: your mind can change the health of your body and slow aging.

In addition to these concrete discoveries, we have the more subjective yet equally powerful findings that cultivating these aspects of mind—how you focus attention, open awareness, and guide intention toward kindness and caring—also increases a sense of well-being, connection to others (in the form of enhanced empathy and compassion), emotional balance, and resilience in the face of challenges. Studies reveal that as a sense of meaning and purpose increase, an overall ease of being—what some call equanimity—is nurtured by these specific practices.

These are all outcomes of strengthening your mind by expanding the container of consciousness.

The word *eudaimonia* is derived from the Greek term, and it beautifully describes the deep sense of well-being, equanimity, and happiness that comes from experiencing life as having meaning and connection to others and the world around you. Does cultivating *eudaimonia* seem like something you'd like to place on your to-do list in life? If you experience this *quality of being* already in your day-to-day living, these practices of training attention, awareness, and intention may enhance and reinforce where you already are in life. Wonderful. And if it feels

like these features of eudaimonia are distant or perhaps unfamiliar to you, and you'd like to make these more near and dear to your everyday existence, you've come to the right conversation, here in this book.



A PRACTICAL TOOL

The Wheel of Awareness is a useful tool I've developed over many years to help expand the container of consciousness.

I've offered the Wheel to thousands of individuals around the world, and it's proven to be a practice that can help people develop more well-being in both their inner and interpersonal lives. The Wheel practice is based on simple steps that are easy to learn and then apply in your everyday experiences.

The Wheel is a very useful visual metaphor for the way the mind works. The concept came to me one day as I stood looking down at a circular table in my office. The tabletop consists of a clear glass center surrounded by a wooden outer rim. It occurred to me that our awareness could be seen as lying at the center of a circle—a hub, if you will—from which, at any given moment, we can choose to focus on a wide array of thoughts, images, feelings, and sensations circling us on the rim. In other words, what we could be aware of could be represented on the wooden rim; the experience of being aware we could place in the hub.

If I could teach people how to expand that container of consciousness by more freely and fully accessing the Wheel's hub of awareness, they'd be able to change the way they experienced life's tablespoons of salt, and perhaps even learn to savor life's sweetness in a more balanced and fulfilling way, even if there were a lot of salt present at the time. As I looked down at this table, I saw that the clarity of that glass hub might represent how we become aware of all of these tablespoons of life, each of the varied experiences we could become aware of, from thoughts to sensations, which we might now visualize as being placed on the circle around this hub—the table's outer wooden rim.

The central hub of that table, of what we were now calling the Wheel of Awareness, represents the experience of being aware, of *knowing* that one is surveying the knowns of life. The rim came to represent that which is known; for instance, at this moment, you are aware of the words you are reading on this page, and now perhaps you've become aware of the associations you are having with the words—the images or memories that come to mind.

Consciousness can be simply defined as our subjective sense of knowing—like your awareness now of my writing the word

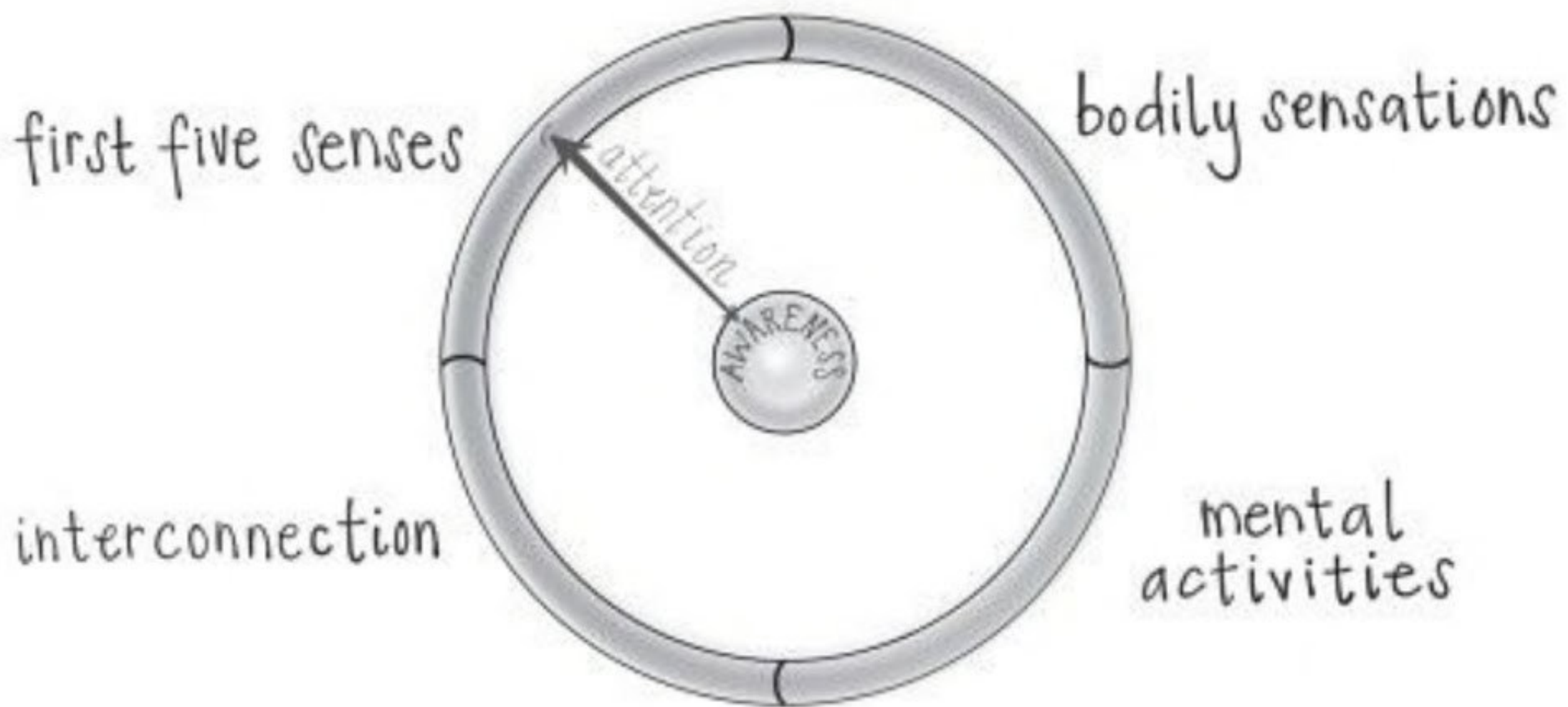
hello. In this book, we'll use a perspective that *consciousness includes both the knowing and the known*. You know I wrote *hello*. "You knowing" is awareness; "hello" is the known. The knowing is in the hub; the knowns are on the rim. When we speak of expanding the container of consciousness, we are then strengthening the experience of knowing—strengthening and opening our capacity to be aware.

Now imagine what might happen if, from the starting point of the hub, our attention were directed out to any of the various knowns on the rim, focused on one point or another—on a given thought, a perception, or a feeling; any single one of the wide range of knowns of life that rest on the rim of the wheel. Extending the metaphor of the wheel, one might envision these moments of focusing attention as a spoke on the wheel.

The spoke of attention connects the hub of knowing to the rim of the knowns.

In the practice, I have my patients or students get centered and imagine their minds to be like the Wheel. We envision next how the rim could be divided into four parts or segments, each of which contains a certain category of knowns. The first segment contains the category of knowns of our first *five senses*: hearing, sight, smell, taste, and touch; the second segment represents another category of knowns, one that includes the *interior signals of the body*, such as sensations from our muscles or from our lungs. The third segment contains the *mental activities* of feelings, thoughts, and memories, while the fourth holds our *sense of connection* to other people and to nature, our *relational sense*.

WHEEL OF AWARENESS



We slowly move that singular spoke of attention around the rim, bringing into focus, one by one, each of the elements of that segment, and then move the spoke of attention to the next segment, and review those points as well. Systematically we take in rim element by rim element, moving the spoke of attention around the rim of knowns. As the practice unfolds in a given session, and as individuals continue to practice on a regular basis, there is a common description of feeling more clarity and calm, a deeper sense of stability and even vitality, not just during the practice itself, but during the rest of the day.

The Wheel practice is a way to open awareness and cultivate a larger, more expansive container of consciousness. People who participate in the practice seem to be strengthening their minds.

The Wheel was designed as a practice that could balance our lives by integrating the experience of consciousness. How? By distinguishing the wide array of knowns on the rim from each

other and from the knowing of awareness in the hub itself, we can differentiate the components of consciousness. Then, by systematically connecting these knowns of the rim to the knowing of the hub with the movement of the spoke of attention, it becomes possible to link the differentiated parts of consciousness. This is how by differentiating and linking, the Wheel of Awareness practice integrates consciousness.

One of the fundamental emergent properties of complex systems in this reality of ours is called self-organization. That's a term you might think someone in psychology or even business might have created—but it is a mathematical term. The form or shape of the unfolding of a complex system is determined by this emergent property of self-organization. This unfolding can be optimized, or it can be constrained. When it's not optimizing, it moves toward chaos or toward rigidity. When it is optimizing, it moves toward harmony and is flexible, adaptive, coherent, energized, and stable.

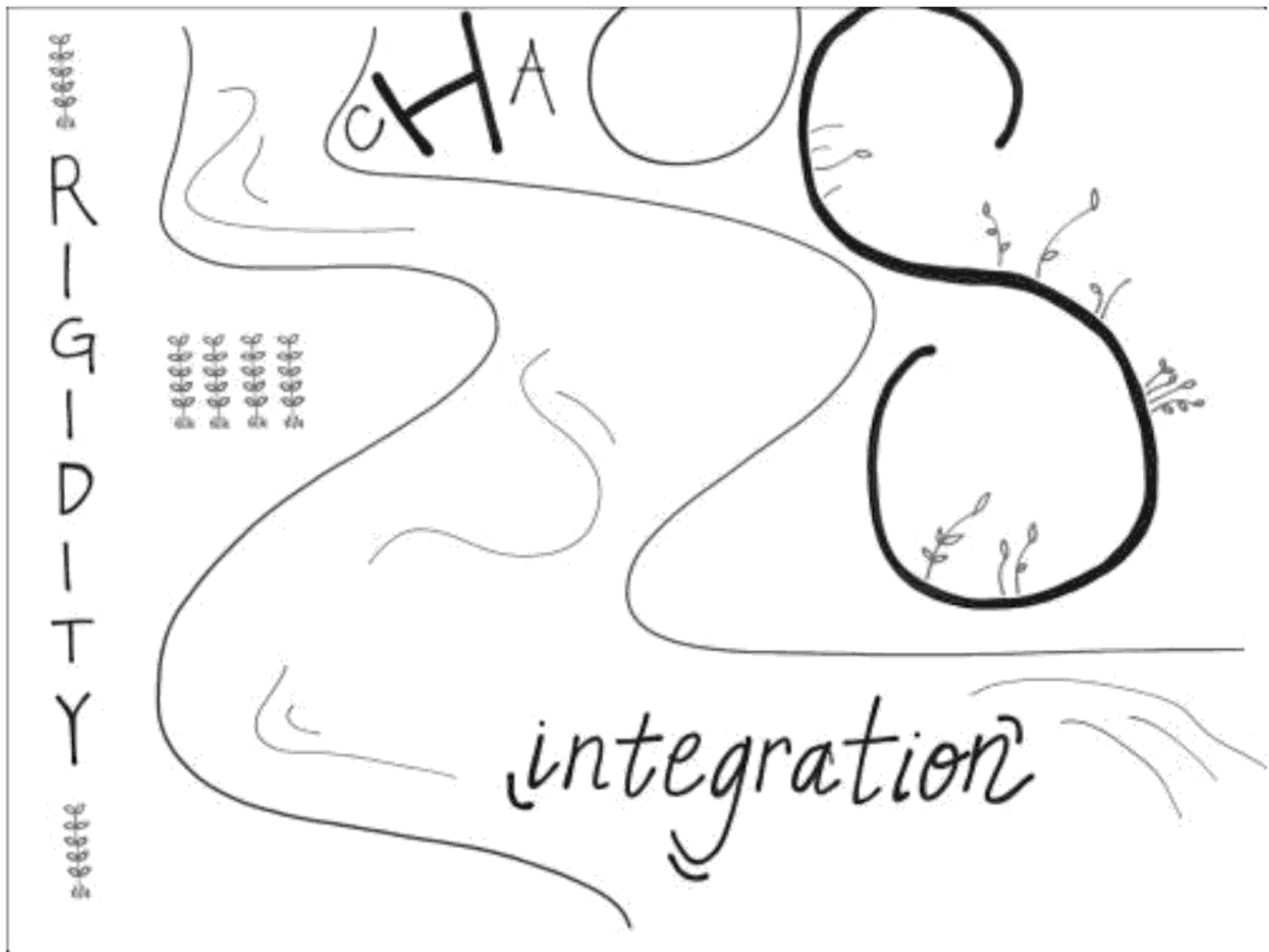
Given the experience of the chaos and rigidity I had been observing in my patients (and my friends and myself when things weren't going so well), I began to wonder if the mind might be some kind of self-organizing process. A strong mind might optimize self-organization and create an experience of harmony in life; a compromised mind might lean away from that harmony and toward chaos or rigidity. If this were true, then cultivating a strong mind might be aided by asking how optimal self-organization occurs. There is an answer to that question.

The linking of differentiated parts of a complex system is how the emergent self-organizing property that regulates how that system unfolds over time—how it self-organizes—moves toward optimal functioning. In other words, integration (as we are defining it with the balancing of differentiation and linkage)

creates optimal self-organization with its flexible and adaptive functioning.

The essential idea behind the Wheel was to expand the container of consciousness and, in effect, balance the experience of consciousness itself. *Balance* is a common term that we can understand scientifically as coming from this process that we are calling integration—the allowing of things to be different or distinct from each other on the one hand, and then connecting them to each other on the other. When we differentiate and link, we integrate. We become balanced and coordinated in life when we create integration. Various scientific disciplines may use other terminology, but the concept is the same. Integration—the balancing of differentiation and linkage—is the basis for optimal regulation that enables us to flow between chaos and rigidity, the core process that helps us flourish and thrive. Health comes from integration. It's that simple, and that important.

A system that is integrated is in a flow of harmony. Just as in a choir, with each singer's voice both differentiated from the other singers' voices but also linked, harmony emerges with integration. What is important to note is that this linkage does not remove the differences, as in the notion of blending; instead it maintains these unique contributions as it links them together. Integration is more like a fruit salad than a smoothie. This is how integration creates the synergy of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, this synergy of integration means that the many aspects of our lives, like the many points on the rim, can each be honored for their differences but then brought together in harmony.



In my own journey as a clinician, working within the framework of a multidisciplinary field called interpersonal neurobiology, reflecting on our mind as a self-organizing way we regulate energy and information flow inspired me to try and find strategies to create more integration in my patients' lives in order to create more well-being in their bodies and in their relationships. The many books I've written or cowritten have integration at their core.

When we integrated consciousness with the Wheel of Awareness, people's lives improved.

Many individuals have found the Wheel of Awareness a skill-building practice that empowers them in quite profound ways. It transformed how they came to experience their inner, mental lives—their emotions, thoughts, and memories—opened new ways of interacting with others, and even expanded a sense of connection and meaning in their lives.

A TRAVEL GUIDE TO THE MIND

My hope for our conversation in this book is that the Wheel of Awareness will become a part of your life, as both an idea and a practice, and that it will enhance well-being in your body, mind, and relationships. While this practice is inspired by science and bolstered by feedback from thousands of individuals who have explored it, you and I need to keep in mind that *you* are a particular individual with your own history, proclivities, and ways of being in the world. We are each unique. So while there are generalizations we will be discussing, your own experience of this material will be a one-of-a-kind unfolding.

Like others in the health-care profession, I try my best to build on scientific data and general findings and then apply them carefully and openly to a particular person. I aim to remain open—seeking, receiving, and responding to feedback from those who are taking in these ideas and trying out these practices. We as clinicians cannot guarantee an outcome for any specific patient or client; we can simply build on science and prior experience to offer steps that have a *high likelihood* of helping. With this perspective, our approach can be to offer the best we can and remain open to the wide ways in which any given person may in fact respond.

This is a book, not psychotherapy or even an educational workshop. Our connection here with this set of words is not a live, in-the-moment, give-and-take relationship, and so direct, real-time, ongoing feedback and exchange between you and me is naturally not possible. But as a reader you are invited to have an ongoing moment-to-moment dialogue with yourself. You as the reader can take in these ideas and try out the practices and *see how they work for you*. I, as the author, can simply share my experiences and perspectives, offering you words that cannot lead to direct feedback from you but can hopefully offer

something that is helpful. In this sense, the book can be seen as a travel guide, discussing the details of a possible journey that only you can take. The author of the guide has the responsibility to make suggestions; the travelers' role is to take these in, consider what is being offered, and then responsibly create their own journey. I can act in the role of a Sherpa, someone who supports your travels, but as the traveler, you need to take the steps and modify them as necessary along the way.

I have kept the importance of your subjective experience in the front of my mind both in creating the Wheel of Awareness itself, as well as in constructing this book that explores its conceptual ideas and its practical potentials. No offering can guarantee benefits. But please use this as, hopefully, a useful and accessible travel guide to the ideas and practices that are of potentially powerful benefit to your life.

This will *not* be a detailed, research-project-summarizing accounting of all of the fascinating and relevant fields' discoveries, but it will be a scientifically inspired, practical travel guide to the mind and mental health that offers ideas and practices as a structured framework for your specific journey ahead.

Helpful reviews of the scientific studies affirming the kinds of practices that cultivate well-being can be found in a number of publications, including a very accessible exploration of the science of meditation by Daniel Goleman and Richie Davidson, called *Altered Traits*. Another example of rigorous researchers who've taken scientific findings and carefully outlined their practical use is *The Telomere Effect* by the Nobel Laureate Elizabeth Blackburn and her scientific colleague Elissa Epel. Since I've previously published references relevant to this science in a number of books, such as *The Developing Mind* and *Mind*, here in *Aware* we will get right to the ideas and practices

that are supported by that science to offer a potential path for cultivating more resilience and well-being in your life. A listing of general references and suggested reading can be found on my website, DrDanSiegel.com, as introduced at the end of this book.

In the pages that follow, we'll be dipping into the waters and having some deep dives and fun hikes along a range of trails that explore and strengthen your mind. I'll be there with you for every step on the path ahead.

STORIES OF USING THE WHEEL OF AWARENESS: HARNESSING THE POWER OF PRESENCE

I would now like to offer some concrete examples of how the Wheel of Awareness—as an idea and as a practice—has been useful in the lives of a range of people. Here I’ll introduce you to specific individuals and how they used the Wheel to strengthen their minds and improve their lives. After you begin your own explorations of the Wheel in this first part of the book, we’ll be ready to build on your personal practice to deepen our exploration into the mechanisms of the mind in part II. We’ll next return, in part III, to these same individuals and see how we can apply these new insights in expanding our understanding of how the Wheel may have helped them, and how the mind itself might function. In part IV, we’ll harness these new notions about the mind and the Wheel as we continue to explore how you might usefully weave these ideas and practices into your own life. Perhaps you’ll come to find, as I and many others have, that utilizing these new insights into the nature of what the mind is and of what an expanded awareness is all about, and the direct experiences with how the Wheel practice integrates consciousness, may help you strengthen your own mind and cultivate more well-being in your life.

BILLY AND HIS RETURN TO THE HUB

Billy, a five-year-old boy expelled from one school for beating up another kindergarten student on the playground, was transferred to Ms. Smith's class in a new elementary school. This teacher had learned about the Wheel from my books. In her class she asks her students to draw a wheel figure with a large outer circle and a smaller inner circle connected with a line as the spoke. She then describes how the hub is our awareness, the rim is the various things that we are aware of, and the spoke is how the children could determine where their attention could go. A few days after learning the Wheel as a drawing, Billy came to her and said the following, which she quoted in an email she wrote to me: "Ms. Smith! I need to take a break—I am about to punch Joey because he took my block out on the yard. I'm stuck on the rim, I need to get back to my hub!" Billy took the time he needed to distance himself from the impulse to hit—something he undoubtedly had learned earlier as a rigid response with chaotic results—and with the Wheel image, he was able to articulate what he needed and then develop an alternative, more integrated way of responding. He could respect another child's behavior and acknowledge his own impulse but choose not to react impulsively. Weeks later, Ms. Smith wrote back to me that Billy had become a welcome addition to her class.

JONATHAN'S RESPITE FROM HIS EMOTIONAL ROLLER COASTER

And consider this example of someone using the Wheel not only as an *idea* in the form of a visual metaphor, as with Billy, but also as a practice that offers an *experience* that can transform attention, awareness, and intention. If you've read my book *Mindsight*, you may recall that a sixteen-year-old patient, a

young man I call Jonathan, used the Wheel practice to deal with severe mood swings that were creating great suffering in his life. With the intentional creation of a particular *state*, practicing the Wheel over time, Jonathan was able to cultivate a new *trait* of emotional equilibrium in his life. In his own words, “I just don’t take all those feelings and thoughts so seriously—and they don’t take me on such a wild ride anymore.” What the ideas and practices of the Wheel did for Jonathan was enable him to intentionally apply the learned concepts and the skills he developed to regularly create a state of mind that likely involved a particular set of brain firings. This repeated pattern of *functional* neural activation can then become a change in *structural* neural connection. This is a concrete example of how we can transform an intentionally created state into a healthy trait in our lives.

MONA AND THE SANCTUARY OF THE HUB

Mona was a forty-year-old mother of three children, each of them under the age of ten, who often found herself at the end of her rope. She was raising her children without much help from her spouse or family and friends, and was becoming easily irritated with her children, and then irate with herself for feeling this way.

Mona came to one of my workshops and began to implement the Wheel of Awareness as a regular practice. She found that over time, her ability to access the hub of awareness gave her both the experience of choice in her behavior and more resilience in facing the day-to-day challenges of raising three kids. Integrating her consciousness transformed Mona’s parenting from being repeatedly *reactive* to becoming reliably *receptive*. In reactivity she’d become chaotic or rigid in her

inner life or outer behavior; with receptivity she could be flexible in creating a more integrated way of being with her children, and herself. Mona could now be more present and loving with her children, and kinder and more caring toward herself as well.

TERESA, TRAUMA, AND HEALING WITH THE INTEGRATION OF THE WHEEL

Developmental trauma is a term we use for significantly stressful events happening early in life; for instance, abuse or neglect of young children. Some people use a related term for a broader set of early challenges in life: *adverse childhood experiences*, or ACEs. The overall impact of such developmental trauma, and likely even less intense adverse childhood stress, is to impair the growth of integration in the brain—an effect that, fortunately, can usually be healed. Integration in the brain, what we are calling neural integration, is needed to give us balance in life in the form of a range of executive functions that regulate things like emotion and mood, thinking and attention, and even relationships and behavior. Teresa struggled with each of these areas and came to me for help. Her experiences as a twenty-five-year-old struggling with the aftermath of a traumatic childhood exemplify this important principle of chaos or rigidity in relationships leading to compromised neural integration. After she slowly connected with me, building the trust to open up about what being vulnerable as a child with abusive parents was like for her, I introduced her to the ideas and practice of the Wheel.

For many who've experienced overwhelming and terrifying events, especially at the hands of people who should have protected and cared for them, the experience of distinguishing

being aware (in the hub) from what we are aware of (on the rim) can be both new and upsetting at first. Why? One reason may be that when we enter the state of being aware of our own awareness, the metaphoric hub of the Wheel, we can experience a state of openness and expanded possibility that can be quite different from the feeling of certainty that arises when we are aware of only the metaphoric rim of the knowns of life. Getting “lost in familiar places” on the rim—even if these sensations or thoughts or feelings arise from trauma and receiving suboptimal care—can ironically be more reassuring than entering a state of uncertainty and freedom, the experience of the hub. This pattern of being drawn to the abused state of mind, those repeated rim elements, may involve what for some is a passive victim stance and for others may be an active angrily fighting back state. These states reveal how we can become *reactive* in response to threat. For Teresa, being reactive meant sometimes being frightened and in the state of mind to flee from challenges, while at other times it meant fighting even those who were hoping to connect with and be supportive of her. What Teresa needed was to shift from being reactive to becoming *receptive*. Being open and available to connect is not a passive stance, but for a traumatized person, it can seem like giving up and being even more at risk of being hurt and let down. Put in Wheel terms, Teresa’s reactivity could be seen as a set of the familiar knowns of fighting, fleeing, freezing, and even fainting, the legacy of repeated reactive states of her childhood that had now become traits or automatic tendencies of her adulthood.

This is an important general principle. What is practiced repeatedly strengthens brain firing clusters or patterns. With repetition, neural structure is literally altered. This is how repeated states become enduring traits.

You may have noted that in each of these examples, a simple scientific reality is revealed. I summarize this fundamental principle of mind integration in this way:

Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows.

For Teresa, as with many others, the Wheel offered a chance to get out of autopilot states of reactivity and awaken her mind to new possibilities of being and doing. Having an awakened mind means using the mental processes of attention, awareness, and intention to activate new states of mind that, with repeated practice, can become intentionally sculpted traits in a person's life. When that trait is an integrated mind, this means that we can move from automatic reactivity without choice to the freedom of responsiveness with choice. This is how integrating consciousness could transform Teresa's life: With repeated practice, she could shape her attention, awareness, and intention to create a more integrated way of living—the basis of eudaimonia.

The hub of the Wheel represents the knowing of awareness and is the source of receptive consciousness, of being open and available to connect to anything arising on the rim and not becoming lost or stuck on that rim, consumed by the knowns of life. In this way, the metaphor of the Wheel, both as an idea and, for Teresa, as a practice she'd soon learn, could help her become aware of the prison her own mind had been trained to become. If experience could teach her to exist as if in a prison, an intentional and repeated integrative experience—such as the Wheel practice—might teach her how to free herself from that prison.

Ideas are wonderful, but sometimes, in fact quite often, practice is also needed to begin experiencing new ways of being and behaving and to build these liberating ideas deeply into us as we live their meaning in our day-to-day lives.

When Teresa experienced a state of panic when she first explored the Wheel's hub in part of the practice we will discuss later, we spent time pausing and reflecting on what that experience of fear was all about. As with many other people who've experienced some form of trauma, the initial focus on the body, on emotions in general, or on the hub by itself can sometimes be distressing. That upsetting experience, taken in with patience and support, can be simply "grist for the mill," meaning it is an uncomfortable feeling, yes, but an invitation to further explore what may be going on. Every challenging feeling or image can be an opportunity to learn and grow. That is ultimately a lesson the Wheel offers as it strengthens the mind and frees us from the prisons of the past.

With repeated practice, Teresa learned many things from these experiences. One lesson was that what initially created anxiety, such as focusing on parts of her body that had been hurt by her parents, could be shifted and she'd come to feel at ease with such a focus of her attention. Remember that where attention goes, neural firing flows and neural connection grows: Teresa could now shift more nimbly between focusing on one or another point along the rim versus her previous reactive focus on the same points of pain or the active strategies to avoid them. She developed an integrated state of hub-based receptivity. Her memories and prior traits of reactivity could be experienced now simply as rim points as her hub became a source of reflection, awareness, choice, and ultimately change.

Another important lesson for Teresa was in the realization that her hub had been inhabited by such a sense of not being in

control of what was going on that she initially viewed the hub itself with fear. As her practice continued, that fear shifted first into a more moderate cautionary stance, and then into one that developed to the point that she could view her hub with curiosity—a true relief for her after so many years of guarding herself against her own receptive awareness. In her life, Teresa had never been allowed to simply rest in the spaciousness of *being present* and open to whatever arose, and instead as a child had to be on guard for the next onslaught of unpredictable and terrifying behaviors from her parents. As she came to enjoy a new state of being present, one in which she was wide open to the vast terrain in front of her, she felt more and more at peace and joyful.

What Teresa's transformation tells us is that it is never too late in life to develop, grow, and transform. Through the Wheel of Awareness and other meditation and mindfulness practices, it is possible to develop the state of receptive presence that can form the basis for a deep sense of well-being and a greater ease in connecting compassionately with others. Sadly, many of us learn to be wary of others, and even of our own inner life, and the resulting prison of our own mental adaptations to survive creates a belief that we are helpless to make a change. In contrast, when we are present for life, we are open to deeply joining others, and even joining with our inner experience. Teresa's courage to immerse herself in the ideas and practices of the Wheel helped her develop an inner strength and resilience that will last the rest of her life.

ZACHARY: FINDING MEANING, CONNECTION, AND RELIEF FROM PAIN

Zachary was a participant who chose to dive into the Wheel practice at a workshop his brother had invited him to attend. Though Zachary's business was thriving and his family life was busy and full, he felt at fifty-five that something wasn't quite right, something was missing that he couldn't name. During the Wheel practice, he reported that a pain in his hip that he had experienced almost constantly for over ten years somehow seemed to dissolve away. As we repeated the Wheel practice several times throughout the weekend, each time he noticed where the pain had been, and the soreness that had before been a sharp, distracting painful sensation would lessen and lessen. By the fifth and final Wheel immersion that weekend, the feelings from his hip felt like just one of a large set of sensations he could dip into and let go.

Zachary described the relief from the physical pain at that meeting with a sense of joy and mastery. I invited him to keep in touch with me by email and let me know how it went following the workshop. I heard from him only once during that year, with the very positive news that, with continued practice, the pain had not returned.

Surprisingly, this finding of the release from chronic pain was something very common in the Wheel workshops around the world. Studies using meditative interventions had found that training the mind in these ways of focused attention, open awareness, and kind intention could have many benefits, among them not only the reduction of the subjective experience of pain but also an objective diminishment of the representation of pain within the brain.

One way to understand this phenomenon is to return to our analogy of consciousness as a container of water. In this case, physical pain is the salt that in too small a vessel can become much too salty to comfortably drink, even undrinkable

altogether. But if we increase the amount of water from a cup to one hundred gallons, then that new, expanded container can hold the tablespoon of salt and the huge quantity of water will dilute it so much that it remains fresh to the taste. Doing a mind-training practice can be seen as expanding the hub of our metaphoric Wheel of Awareness, making the container of awareness, the receptive knowing of consciousness, so much larger. With this expanded container, this expanded hub, the same tablespoon of pain—a single point on the rim—becomes diluted as merely one of an infinite number of points along the whole rim of knowns. We experience relief from what before was a singular focus on the pain. In Wheel terms, we'd say that Zachary's experience was to free himself from a rim point that had become excessively differentiated and dominated his hub. If the brain studies of meditation apply, we'd suggest that even Zachary's brain was having much less neural firing in the region that represents pain and our awareness of it. This view of water and salt helps explain the efficacy of the Wheel as visual image, idea, and practice, and perhaps of mind-training practices in general, to help alleviate the suffering of chronic pain.

Beyond helping with physical pain, the Wheel experience invites other changes in how life unfolds. I was pleasantly surprised to find Zachary at a lunch the following year (the same organization had asked me to come back and do another three-day Wheel workshop). Beyond the diminishment of physical pain, Zachary also experienced another kind of relief. He told me, as a small group gathered before the meeting began, that the experience of the Wheel at the first workshop had opened his mind to a new way of experiencing meaning in his life, helping him feel a richer connection to himself, to others, and to the larger world around him. Beyond just feeling grateful to have his physical pain reduced, he had been introduced to a new

sense of meaning and purpose in his life. He told us at the lunch about his experience with focusing the spoke of attention on the hub of awareness in the more advanced Wheel practice. He said that when he had first “bent the spoke of attention around and back into the hub, the sense of being wide open and filled with joy and love” gave him a new sense of being “real and alive,” an experience that came to change his life and the direction of his professional and personal path. It was, he said, what had been missing that he could never quite name—a sense of meaning, purpose, and connection. His brother, also at the lunch, joked with me that Zachary’s wife was going to send me a bill for the meditation-training program that he was now enrolled in. Zachary quickly added, “It’s your fault—I now have a sense of being alive that I’d like to learn how to share with others, not just keep to myself.” He said that he was even considering becoming a minister in his faith or a mental health practitioner. Zachary’s choice was to pivot away from the world of his particular business, in which he felt these new visions of what mattered to him could not find a home; he now wanted to develop his own mind and learn how he might be of service to others.

PREPARING YOUR MIND FOR THE WHEEL OF AWARENESS: FOCUSED ATTENTION

As you prepare to experience the Wheel firsthand, let's now explore some basic practices and ideas that will help ready your mind for what lies ahead. As I have mentioned, in the Wheel practice you'll be learning basic skills that enable you to integrate consciousness and strengthen your mind. Integration is the linking of different elements—and the Wheel supports this integration by differentiating elements of the rim as the knowns of consciousness from one another and from the knowing of the hub, and then systematically linking these to each other with the movement of the spoke of attention around the wheel. With practice, you'll be enriching not only your attentional skills, but your experience of consciousness and of the mind itself.

BUILDING THE REGULATORY ASPECT OF THE MIND

The mind can be seen as having one facet that is a *regulatory process* engaged in the business of determining how energy and information flow in our lives. A process is a verblike unfolding, and so the mind in this way is more like a verb than a noun. Regulation has two aspects. One is monitoring. The other is

modifying. Developing a mind-strengthening practice such as the Wheel of Awareness enables you to build your mind's regulatory facet and become better able to optimize its functioning. Before we try out the Wheel in the next section, here we'll begin with stabilizing the monitoring function of the mind as we build the skill of focused attention—the first pillar of mind training.

When you ride a bicycle, you watch where you are going, feel the balance of the bike, and listen for oncoming traffic. Watching, feeling, and listening are how you soak in various forms of energy within perception. That's all *monitoring*. And then you also *modify* by pedaling, steering, and braking. This is how you change the position and motion of the bicycle by altering energy flow, the movement of the bike in space. In order to become a better, more capable cyclist, you sharpen these monitoring and modifying skills. In the same way that you can hone your bike-riding skills, you can cultivate a stronger mind by honing how you monitor and modify energy and information flow—the essence of the system of the mind.

monitoring
+ MODIFYING

REGULATING

One way to strengthen how we monitor energy flow is to stabilize the lens with which we sense that flow. A practice that teaches us how to stabilize attention exercises how we aim attention like the beam of a flashlight on a chosen focus. A very useful focus for this practice, one found in many cultures around the world, is the breath. When we do a basic breath-awareness practice, we are strengthening the monitoring capacity of the mind so that we stabilize attention. With the extension of the more elaborate Wheel practice itself, as we'll soon see, we will be furthering that stabilizing of attention and then also adding other aspects of strengthening to both the monitoring and the modifying of that energy flow.

What you are about to learn is how to stabilize *monitoring* so that you can sense energy and information flow with more focus, depth, clarity, and detail. Once you can stabilize the monitoring function of the mind, you can learn to *modify* toward integration.

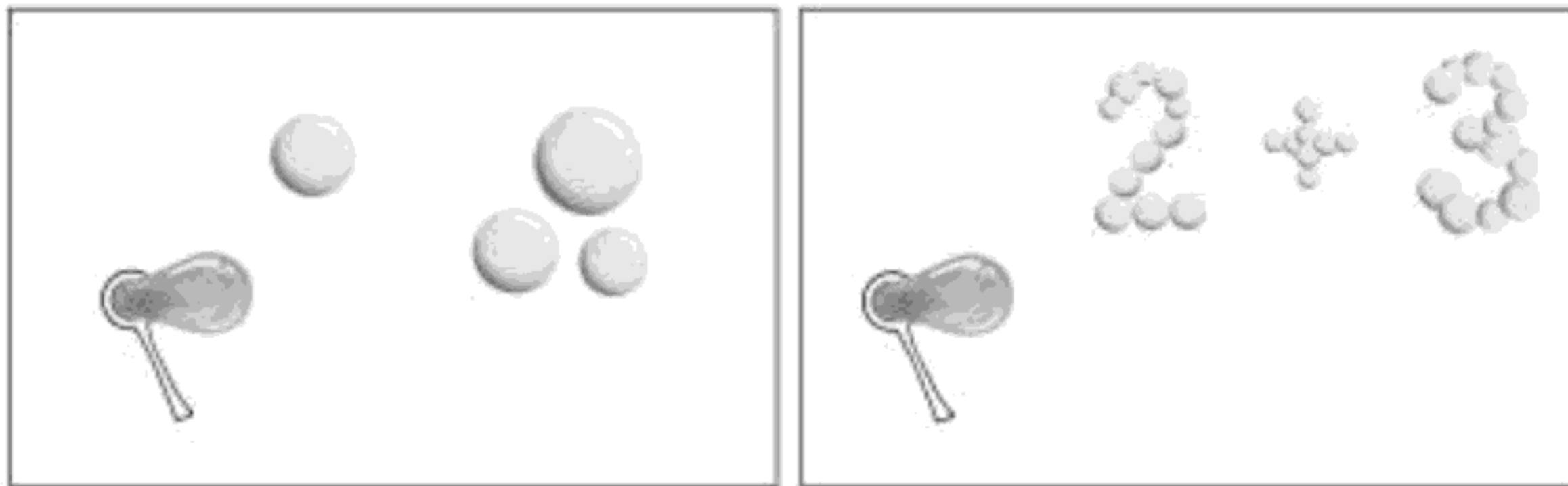
SOME STARTING TIPS

Before we do our Wheel practice in the next section, it is important to have some experience with stabilizing attention. If you've done a lot of reflective practices or "meditation," a term that essentially means practices that train the mind that come in many forms, you've likely had some experience with a breath-awareness practice and may choose to skip over this initial section and go directly to the Basic Wheel practice in the next section. But if you haven't done much inner reflection, then doing this breath practice to stabilize attention can be quite useful. For instance, in our Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA, our first study of a MAP (a mindful awareness practice) was to explore how mindfulness practice based on the breath as a focus might support adults and adolescents with challenges in their tendency to focus and sustain their attention. Our pilot study revealed that the participants achieved more improvements in these attentional skills with their mindfulness practice than individuals on medications for attention deficit issues (see Lidia Zylowska's summary of that work in *The Mindful Prescription for Adult ADHD*).

Here are a few starting ideas.

First, try to stay awake. When you reflect inwardly, such as focusing on the breath as a sensation of the body, you are letting go of attention directed toward the outside world. For some, this inward focus is so different from an outward focus that it can feel unfamiliar, awkward, or even uncomfortable. Some people find this inner focus dull and boring. The tendency in this situation can be to lose focus, become less alert, get sleepy, and to even fall asleep. While napping is perhaps one of the most underrated of human activities, staying awake for the practice may be something you want to do to gain its benefits. Staying alert is in fact part of learning to strengthen the mind's focus of

Conduit & Constructor



Observation is a gateway to being a witness and then becoming the narrator of an experience. If you like acronyms, as I do, this is how you OWN an experience: observe, witness, and narrate. These are all forms of construction in that there is an observer, a witness, and a narrator, each contributing to the construction of an experience in that moment. This construction can be quite distinct from the sensing flow of being a conduit of experience, of what we can call *conduition*.

The key to starting this reflective breath-awareness practice is to let sensation of the breath be the focus of attention, and let it fill awareness. That is quite different from being invited to observe the breath, or witness it, or narrate the experience of breathing: “I am now breathing.” This may perhaps sound like a subtle difference, but as you may come to see, distinguishing the difference between sensing and observing is a fundamental part of integrating your experience and empowering your mind.

A fifth point: Be kind to yourself. These may be simple practices, but that does not make them easy ones. In many ways, reflecting inwardly is one of the biggest challenges we face as human beings. As the French mathematician Blaise Pascal said, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to

sit quietly in a room alone.” Indeed, our ability to *reflect* lies at the very heart of emotional and social intelligence, skills many people have not learned. These are tools that will empower you to know your inner mind and connect with the inner, mental life of others.

We are so accustomed to focusing outwardly that such reflective practice is often quite new for many people. To sit quietly for any length of time feels unbearable for some. We love to be distracted by external stimuli or to speak and fill the gaps of silence in our lives. And so it is quite important to be gentle with yourself and realize that much of your life may have been focused on the external world and filled with input from your surroundings—from people, gadgets, and other things out in the environment around you. Now you are enriching your life’s journey by learning to reflect on your inner life.

It can be frustrating at first to get comfortable with these reflective practices. Again, I invite you to be kind to yourself. This is hard work, and there is no way to do this “perfectly.” Remember that your mind has a mind of its own. Part of your task is to realize that energy and information simply flow. Sometimes you can direct them well, guiding attention; sometimes they just take on a life of their own, as attention is pulled this way and that. Being open to whatever happens is the first step. Being kind to yourself as you travel through this guide will assist in that.

• • •

At the heart of training the mind is how we learn to focus attention. As William James, the father of modern psychology, once stated, the training of attention allows one to become a master of oneself. As James wrote, “The faculty of voluntarily

bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character, and will. No one is *compos sui* (master of himself) if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education *par excellence*. But it is easier to define this ideal than to give practical instructions for bringing it about.”*

James clearly was not familiar with the meditative practice of training focused attention that we’ll explore in this next section, a simple practice of mindfulness of the breath that can help you become a master of your own mind. In our research center, a pilot study revealed that such a basic meditation can greatly improve the components of focused attention and help people become more in charge of their lives. Meditation is mind training in action.

A MINDSIGHT LENS

Mindsight is a term both for how we see our own minds and the minds of others, and for our ability to honor our differentiated natures at the same time as we link with one another. This means that mindsight is all about insight, empathy, and integration. To sense the flow of energy and information, we can use a mindsight monitoring skill that is like a perceptual lens focusing that flow into our awareness, enabling us to achieve a clear focus in sensing the mind within and the mind of others. There is a *tripod* of this mindsight lens that will be helpful to remember here. This is a three-legged set of *O*’s: *openness*, *observation*, and *objectivity*. When you develop these three skills over time, with practice, you stabilize your ability to monitor what is happening in the moment more clearly.



Being *open* to whatever arises means letting go of expectations and being more receptive to and accepting of what is actually occurring at the moment. Since perception is shaped by expectation, being more open and letting go of judgment and anticipation expands our awareness of all the vicissitudes of life.

Observation is the capacity to distance ourselves a bit from an experience, to take note of the contours of all that is unfolding without becoming flooded by it. This is a more constructed form of perception than the conduit function of pure sensation. With observation we can avoid being on automatic pilot when we become lost in a thought or feeling or sensation. Sometimes letting go of observation is important so we can feel the flow of sensation, but other times we gain a broader perspective with the wider view of observation. Both are good; they are simply different from each other. Observation encourages us to become widely aware and active observers of

our lives—it enables us to be more centered in our *knowing* in the hub without being swept away by the knowns of the rim that may at times overwhelm our capacity for a more integrated experience of being aware.

Objectivity takes this capacity of observation one step further, as we sense that the knowns of our experience are objects of the mind, not the totality of our identity or equivalent to absolute reality. We maintain an objective stance as we sense and perceive the knowns as simply elements of experience that arise and fall, coming and going in the field of awareness that is our home base. That is objectivity.

Openness, observation, and objectivity stabilize the mindsight lens and enable us to sense energy and information flow with more clarity, depth, and detail. Each of these mind-strengthening legs of the tripod is developed in the practices that we will begin exploring now. Learning how to harness these *O*'s of our mindsight lens in different situations is the skill of learning to live a full and integrated life.

BREATH AWARENESS TO STABILIZE ATTENTION

Let's begin with a basic breath-awareness practice that is found throughout the world.

If possible, find a quiet space free of interruptions. Take a moment to find a comfortable position—you can be seated, lying down, or standing. Turn off any gadgets that might disturb your five-minute practice. If you have a timer, set it to sound a gentle alarm at five minutes. If you are sitting on a chair, uncross your legs, have your back straight but comfortable, and have both feet flat on the floor. If you are sitting on the floor, legs folded underneath you, let your back be straight and your body in a comfortable position that you can maintain for a few minutes. If

Continue to focus on the breath for a few cycles, refocusing on it whenever a distraction has taken your focus away from the breath, and see how this goes. If you are reading these instructions as you practice, you may like to close your eyes for a few cycles of breath before continuing to read.

In and out, in and out, ride the wave of the breath, in and out.

How was that for you? Take a moment now to reflect on your experience with your breath so far.

Now let's try adding one more component. For some people, finding a general word that represents the distraction that pulled attention away from the breath can be helpful. If a thought took your attention away from streaming the sensation of the breath into awareness, especially if it was a thought that came back repeatedly, you might like to try saying quietly in your inner mind, "Thinking, thinking, thinking." For some, this naming of a distraction helps to let it go and eases the ability to redirect attention to the sensation of the breath. Similarly, if a memory takes over awareness and replaces the breath, then saying internally, "Remembering, remembering, remembering," can be helpful to redirect attention away from the memory and return it to the sensation of the breath. For others, this naming process is itself too distracting and not really helpful. For them, it is more straightforward to simply take note of the distraction without naming it, and then redirect attention to the sensation of the breath.

In addition to labeling or noting distractions—then returning to the breath—remember to try to bring kindness to this experience. It may be helpful to consider this perspective: The breath practice is like contracting and relaxing a muscle during exercise. Focusing on the breath is contracting the

muscle; the inevitable distraction is relaxing the muscle. You don't need to create the distractions—they will happen naturally, as the mind has a mind of its own! But you can intentionally create a kind attitude when these distractions come, being *open* to whatever arises, *observing* the distraction, realizing it is an *object* or activity of the mind, and then returning the focus of attention back to the breath—allowing your kindness to frame this process with a gentle, nonjudgmental attitude. This is how you can use kindness with the mindsight tripod of openness, observation, and objectivity.

If you were to only be in the conduit flow of whatever was happening in sensation, then getting lost in a distraction would just be your flowing sensory experience. In this case, you'd only be harnessing the *O* of openness of your mindsight lens. Instead, stabilizing attention enables us to be in the flow of the sensation of the breath—open to the conduction flow—and then use the construction tools of the mind's capacity for observation and objectivity so we note the new thought or memory as a distraction and do not just flow with it, then construct the redirecting process to get attention back to the sensation of the breath. In broad terms, this simple breath-awareness practice invites us to be open to the flow of the breath, observe when that focus of attention has wandered, and objectively move the object of attention back to the breath. That's the integration of differentiating openness, observation, and objectivity and linking them together as we stabilize attention.

So let's try this basic breath-awareness practice again, this time with the invitation to either label or simply take note of distractions and kindly return, again and again, to the breath. Remember, if you'd like to hear my voice guide you through this breath practice, please go to our website (DrDanSiegel.com/resources/everyday_mindsight_tools/).

If you're doing this on your own steam and this is the first time doing this mindfulness of the breath practice, set a timer for three minutes. You may like to consider what type of sound the timer is set to make—one that might be different from what you use to awaken from sleep in the morning. If you've done this before, give five minutes or more a try. Once your timer is set, let yourself sense the breath, refocusing when a distraction has filled awareness with something other than the breath, and then continue to ride the wave of the breath, in and out, until the timer lets you know it is time to stop. Before starting the timer for any reflective practice, find a comfortable position, back straight, in a space in which you will not be interrupted.

Ready? Enjoy the ride!

After the sound signals it is time to stop, you may feel calm or energized, refreshed or tired. If you are having a challenging period in your life, you may even feel more anxious or tense, as spending time dwelling on our interior can also make us more aware of the difficulties we are facing. Recall that this is an exercise. Doing an exercise does not mean we have to feel a certain way afterward, or even that we will feel the same way each time we try it. Why is this considered an exercise? It is an exercise because you are strengthening your capacity to *focus* attention, to *notice* a distraction that is not salient or relevant to the task at hand—a noticing scientists call “salience monitoring”—and then to *redirect* attention intentionally. There are different brain circuits for each of these facets of attention—sustaining focus, noticing, and redirecting—and you are training each of them.

Keep in mind our basic statement: Where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows. You've been activating several important parts of your brain in just a few short minutes of practice!

In other reflective exercises that will be part of our Wheel practice, we will explore and expand the capacity for *open*

awareness, or *open monitoring*—meaning letting things simply arise, and being in an open, receptive state. This open awareness, along with the fundamental elements of attention practice—sustaining, noticing, and redirecting—will each grow stronger as your practice deepens.

If you've never done reflective practices before, it can be helpful to repeat this breath exercise for a while, on a daily basis if possible, before we begin to try out the Wheel practice in the next sections.

After doing the breath practice for a week or more, some feel ready to try out the basic Wheel practice, while others simply like to dive in right away and see how it goes. You may also like to bring this breath-awareness practice into a number of situations in your life, such as waiting in line, resting at home, or when you wake up. It's simple, but powerful. Over time, you'll not only strengthen attention, but you'll stabilize the mind and create more clarity in the experience of being aware.

There's a certain internal coherence that breath awareness creates, which is likely due to the repeating pattern of the inhalation and the exhalation, the in-breath and the out-breath, as anticipating something and then that something arriving is deeply satisfying and grounding. It can give life a sense of being predictable and reliable. For many, focusing on the breath in this way creates coherence in the physiological balance of the heart as well as the clarity of the mind that can continue long after the practice period itself. Letting this practice of focusing on the breath and returning the focus to it when the mind becomes distracted become part of your daily reflection is a way of giving yourself a gift that keeps on giving.

Before we dive into the Wheel practice in the next section, let's explore some of the aspects of your mind that may have emerged with this empowering breath-awareness practice.

WHAT IS THE MIND?

Let's state from the very beginning that this term does not have a shared definition—in fact, short of saying it is a synonym for *brain activity*, there often is no definition of *mind* at all. Yes, we have descriptions of the activities of the mind, including feelings, thoughts, memories, and attention, but what these mental activities actually are is not clearly defined.

In some settings, the word *mind* is used to indicate thoughts rather than feelings—as in mind versus heart. In my work I don't use it in quite this way. Instead, in my teachings and here on this journey we are using the term *mind* to mean the core of our experience of being alive, from feelings and intuition to thinking, memory, attention, awareness, intention, and the initiation of behavior. Some scientists focus on the neural origins of mind; others focus on the social nature of our mental lives. But what system of the mind might embrace both its embodied and its relational origins?

Broadly speaking, a *relationship can be seen as the sharing of energy and information flow*. For an anthropologist or sociologist or linguist, our mental lives are happening between us. *The brain can be seen as an embodied mechanism of energy and information flow*. And so we have a *within-mind*, within the skin-encased body including the skull-encased brain—what we can simply call our “embodied brain.” And we have *between-minds* that happen in our relationships. These can also be called our inner and our inter minds, the within and between origins of our self, of who we are. The mind happens within and between.

I know that this view of mind as being beyond the boundaries of the skull, and even of the skin, may be new for many, and perhaps different from what is often spoken about.

3. **Information processing** is how we take flows of energy—in the brain, in the body, and in our relationships with each other—and make meaning. Information is a pattern of energy with symbolic value; it represents something other than the energy pattern itself. Information processing is sometimes in awareness, but much of the energy and information flow of the mind occurs *without* involving consciousness.

For example, if I write “Golden Gate Bridge,” this is a pattern of light (or sound if you and I are connecting via spoken words) that comes to you in a pattern of energy that has symbolic meaning. The term stands for something—it is a symbol of something; the words are not the thing itself. The bridge is not the set of letters or the sound waves forming words—but the words *signify* the bridge. They symbolize or “represent” the actual bridge as a linguistic representation. We can say that this symbolism is “energy in-formation” because it forms symbolic representations, common elements of our inner and interpersonal lives we are simply going to call *information*. And given that information as a pattern of energy is in a continual state of change, we signify this movement, this transformation, with the terms *processing* and *flow*.

And now, our fourth facet of mind . . .

4. **Self-organization** *regulates* the flow of energy and information. It is an emergent property of complex systems. A brief focus on this regulatory process may help illuminate this important fourth facet of mind. In a very counterintuitive way, this emergent property arises from the flow of a complex system’s elements and then turns back onto its origins and shapes that from which it arose. How odd is that? Yet the math of complex systems is quite clear—in our universe, complex systems have the emergent property of self-organization. This process recursively regulates its own

origins, shaping its own becoming, and then further shaping its own emergence. Odd, but a part of our reality.

Self-organization is why clouds don't just line up in a straight, orderly fashion and why they are not random. Self-organization optimizes the system's unfolding by differentiating and linking. The math behind this emergent property of complex systems is, well, complex, but it may be intuitively understood this way. The probability of how the system flows is maximized by differentiating and linking—and this maximizing of complexity actually reinforces its own becoming.

Now, you can block that innate process by shutting down differentiation or linkage, or both, and then the system will not move in harmony but, as we've seen, will go toward chaos or rigidity. But when you release those impediments to self-organization, the natural drive of a complex system is to create the harmony of integration. This may be how the Wheel of Awareness helps us to develop well-being in our lives.

We can propose that beyond consciousness, subjective experience, and information processing, the mind might also include this definition of “the embodied and relational, emergent self-organizing process that regulates the flow of energy and information.” As we'll see, this allows us to say what a healthy mind might be, and then shows us steps to cultivate a strong mind that creates integration within and between.

An integrated flow creates harmony. In math terms, we've seen that this flow of optimal self-organization has five features, which spell out the word **FACES**: Flexibility, Adaptability, Coherence (functioning well over time, or resilience), Energy (a sense of vitality), and Stability.

Studies of well-being have found that the best predictor of health and happiness is having an integrated brain, what the

researchers call an “interconnected connectome.” This means that having the differentiated areas of the brain linked to each other, a process that enables coordination and balance of the brain as a whole, is likely the mechanism enabling regulation to be optimized—how we regulate attention, emotion, thought, behavior, and our relationships. In meditation studies, too, increases in well-being are associated with the growth of integrative regions of the brain—the prefrontal cortex, corpus callosum, hippocampus, and connectome.

A regulatory process, as we’ve seen, both monitors what it regulates and modifies what it is regulating—like when you ride a bike or drive a car. By offering this fourth facet of mind as the self-organizing regulatory process, we can see how a natural implication is to stabilize monitoring and then learn to modify toward integration. What is being monitored and then modified? Energy and information flow. Where is this? Within the body, and between the body and other people and the world around, the planet.

The Wheel of Awareness as idea and practice was inspired by this view of mind. To cultivate a healthy mind, stabilize the capacity to monitor energy and information flow within and between. And then once monitoring is strengthened, learn to modulate energy and information flow toward integration by differentiating and linking that now clearly sensed flow.

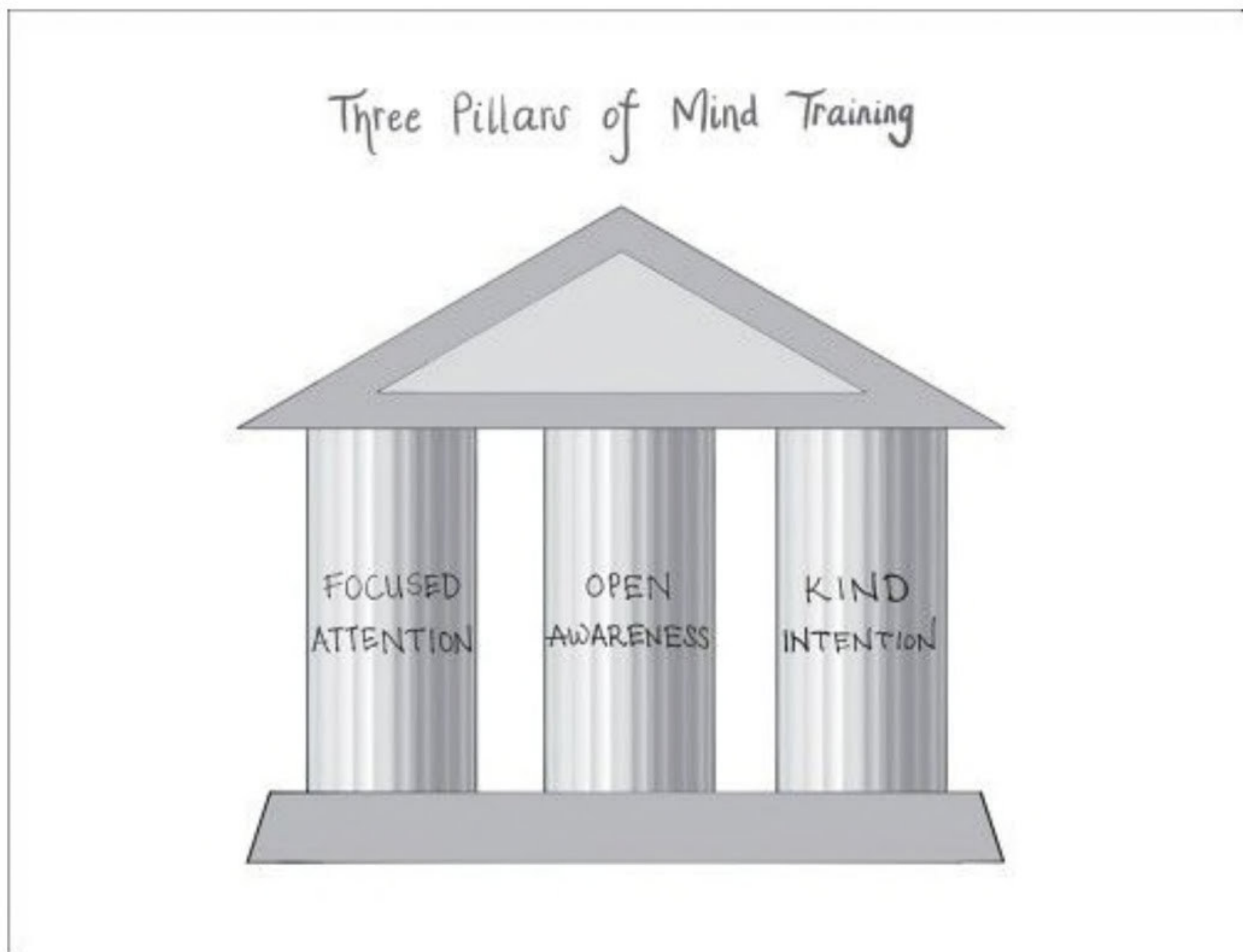
In summary, our fourth facet of mind defines the mind as, in part, a regulatory process. And so strengthening the mind is simply building these two steps of regulation.

1. *Stabilize monitoring* so you can sense with more depth, clarity, and detail.
2. *Modulate toward integration* so you can shape with differentiation and linkage.

From this perspective, we can see what the fundamental elements of training a stronger mind might actually be.

THREE PILLARS OF MIND TRAINING

Reviews of research on mind training suggest that the three factors we discussed—focused attention, open awareness, and the training of compassion, or what we are calling *kind intention*—are three of the core ingredients of how we create well-being and happiness in our lives. In the future, other core elements may be discovered for how we can also support the training of our minds to move our lives toward well-being.



Three aspects of research-proven elements of mind training include:

1. **Focused attention:** the capacity to sustain one's concentration, ignore distractions or let go of them when they arise, and refocus attention on the intended object of attention
2. **Open awareness:** the experience of presence of mind in which a state of being receptive to objects within awareness but not getting attached to them or lost in them is sustained
3. **Kind intention:** the ability to have a state of mind with positive regard, compassion, and love internally (what is sometimes called "self" compassion, which we are calling "inner compassion") and interpersonally (what is sometimes termed "other"-directed compassion, which we are calling "inter compassion")

Research on focused attention, open awareness, and kind intention trainings suggests they each complement each other and support the movement toward well-being in the body and its brain, our relationships with self and other, and our mental life of attention, feelings, thoughts, and memory.

Taken as a whole, these mind training results may reveal the mechanism we've described earlier—that where attention goes, neural firing flows, and neural connection grows.

One way that we can develop more presence in our lives, how we can become more mindful in our day-to-day living so that we are aware of what is happening as it is happening, as well as cultivating kind regard within that open awareness, is to do a regular practice that trains the mind in these three interrelated ways. That training of the mind is sometimes called meditation. When we learn to strengthen focused attention, we are essentially harnessing the power of our spoke to direct attention toward different points along our rim. We learn to direct, sustain, and detect deviations in our focus, and then to redirect attention. With open awareness we learn to strengthen

exciting part of this expanded curiosity is that people seem interested in exploring how they might cultivate more presence in their lives so they can be healthier, happier, and kinder to themselves and to others. Each of these can be seen as a way of sensing the mind itself, a process with various names that I call *mindsight*. *Mindsight* enables us to have insight, empathy, and integration.

Amazingly, we develop these important skills of the mind by the focus of attention. You may have noticed in our first practice on breath awareness that your mind's focus would regularly wander from its intended focus. Let's explore what these different features of attention may be at the heart of a practice as simple as focusing on the sensation of the breath.

FOCAL AND NON-FOCAL ATTENTION

One important way to distinguish different forms of attention is to determine whether the stream of energy that is the focus of our attention enters awareness. If the focus of attention involves consciousness, it is called *focal attention*; if it does not, it is *non-focal attention*. In order to better understand this difference, take a moment to try the following short activity: Simply move around the room you are presently in. As you do so, notice what you are aware of as you sense and observe what is in front of your eyes, what you feel with your feet, or hands if you are moving in a wheelchair, or, if you are blind, what you feel with your cane or your hands as you move around. Take in as many of the signals from the outside world as you can and bring them into the awareness of your consciousness. This is the knowing of being aware, and the knowns are what you are aware of. In other words, be as *aware* as you possibly can of your surroundings. Place the "spotlight of attention," like the beam of

a flashlight along a dark pathway, on whatever you can as you move around the room.



The spotlight of focal attention aims your mental ability to focus energy flow into awareness. That is *focal* attention filling consciousness with certain aspects of your moving-around-the-room experience. At the very same time, studies reveal, your mind is also focusing a perhaps broader spotlight of attention on many aspects of your experience that never enter awareness. We call this *non-focal* attention. For example, on this journey you were attending non-focally to your balance so you would not fall over, and you were attending to the space around you so you wouldn't bump into something as you moved around the room. You may have found that during this exercise you became absorbed in some thought or memory. At this moment, your focal attention was on these mental processes and no longer on your surroundings. But you didn't fall down or bump into

something because your non-focal attention was taking care of attending to those potentially hazardous obstacles and keeping you safe—even without your awareness. Our nonconscious mind has profound impacts on what we do with our behavior, and on how we feel and think even when we are not aware of these influences of non-focal attention on our mental lives.

Reflecting on this exercise, think about other scenarios in which you are both aware and not aware of your surroundings. For example, if you are walking along a hiking trail, you may pay attention to the rocks on the path ahead, disregarding the stones you've already passed by. Attention helps you survive; it helps you navigate the world in which you live. If you didn't pay attention, focal or non-focal, you could trip and fall. If you do pay attention, you're more likely to survive and thrive.

Attention, whether focal or non-focal—with or without awareness—helps you navigate through a world of energy.

By bringing important energy patterns into awareness, we can discern what meaning they have; we can create and interpret “energy in-formation,” so that we unravel the information in front of us and determine its significance for our journey ahead. As we've seen, information is simply a pattern of energy with symbolic value. When that information is in awareness, we can then reflect on its meaning and choose how to respond to it. That's one way consciousness gives us choice and enables us to create change. With this consciousness, we can make choices about how to proceed, where to step, what to avoid, which direction to take—both physically and emotionally. We can pause and reflect on various choices and then select which ones best suit our situation and preferences.

Consciousness gives us the opportunity for choice and change.