

Growing Whole: Exploring the Wilderness Within

By Molly Young Brown

Study Guide

Welcome to an MP3 and study guide designed to facilitate several of the exercises found in my book, *Growing Whole: Self-Realization for the Great Turning*, which is based in the transpersonal psychology of psychosynthesis. This study guide will suggest ways for working with the MP3, but it is best used along with the book, which more fully describes the theory and purpose behind the exercises.

You may find in listening that you need more time to consider each prompt, so keep your controls handy to stop and restart the recording as needed.

I recommend you keep a journal at hand to write or draw your responses to the exercises. Some people have trouble writing about their feelings and thoughts, after being criticized in childhood, or even as an adult. Just start writing and drawing anyway and trust whatever comes, images or words or combinations of both, whether or not they seem to “make sense” at the time.

Both “free” writing and drawing can tap into the unconscious, which often communicates through direct and simple words as well as images, sounds, sensations, and other non-verbal sensory impressions. You may be surprised at the wisdom that emerges from within.

Contents

1. Checking In
2. Who Is Aware?
3. Acceptance
4. Self-Identification
5. The Wilderness Within
6. The Wise Being
7. Seeking a Loyal Soldier
8. Receptive Meditation on Good Will

9. An Experience of Transpersonal Will
10. Letter from Self

Study Guide for Exercises

1. Checking In

Becoming more aware of what we are experiencing moment-to-moment helps us respond more appropriately to whatever is happening. We need information about what is happening around us and also how we feel and think about it. Without self-awareness, we can only react out of habit and conditioning.

“Checking In” is basic awareness practice, focused on how you experience your body, feelings, thoughts, and the environment around you at any given moment.

Questions to consider in your journaling after the exercise:

- a. What is the over-all experience of checking in?
- b. What do you notice in your body? Your feelings and emotions? Your thinking mind?
- c. What parts are easy to observe? Which parts are difficult?
- d. What (if any) self-criticism, fears, or planning came up as you observed your inner experience?
- e. Record any discoveries or insights.

2. Who is Aware?

This exercise continues our exploration of awareness, suggesting ways we can direct, expand, and focus our awareness while sensing its source within. After you listen to the exercise, you may want to describe or draw your experience of *who is aware*.

3. Acceptance

As we recognize our existential situation now, we must also accept it, even if we don't like it. It can be challenging to accept ourselves exactly as we are, without

judgment or blame, and it can be equally hard to accept whatever is going on in our families, communities, and in the world. Acceptance does not mean resignation or even approval; we do not have to give up hope for change. Acceptance means simply recognizing things the way they are and being willing to work from there. Acceptance can be the first step in healing, as paradoxical as that may seem. We need to work with ourselves and with others starting from where we actually are now, not from where we would like to be.

You can use the sentences below as prompts for your journaling after the exercise.

- a. I feel or have felt grateful for:
- b. I would like to avoid:
- c. How my habitual strategy of non-acceptance works in my body, feelings, and mind:
- d. What might be the message contained in this undesired situation or event?
- e. What is it like to acknowledge this unpleasant situation with an accepting attitude?

4. **Self-identification**

Imagine yourself as a wagon wheel, with the spokes representing your various aspects and capacities. If you are operating from the edge of your wheel, you have access only to the spokes nearby. If, on the other hand, you operate from the center of the wheel, all the spokes are equally available to you.

To operate from the hub of the wheel changes our sense of who we are, our basic *identification*. Do I think of myself as only this or that characteristic or role, this or that spoke? Or do I think of myself as the hub, or as the whole wheel?

How we identify ourselves may either limit us or challenge us to expand our capacities. When we identify with one or another aspect of ourselves, with a point of view, an emotion, or a bodily sensation, we are limited in how well we

can respond to the inevitable shifts and changes of our lives. We may believe we can think, feel, and act in only one way, sometimes saying to others, and ourselves “That’s just the way I am.”

In this exercise, you can explore the subtleties of *identification* and perhaps discover a more inclusive and enduring sense of identity, of who and what you really are. The questions below may guide you in your journaling afterwards.

- a. Which parts of this exercise were easy or difficult?
- b. Are my sensations, feelings, or thoughts who I am? When any of these change, do “I” change, too?
- c. Who is the “I” that can affect my sensations, feelings, and thoughts? Who am I in relation to each and all of these?

5. The Wilderness Within

On our journey toward Self-realization, the next step is to recognize our inborn talents and gifts. To do that, we must first accept the possibility that such potentials exist, beyond what we now know about ourselves. If we don’t think something is possible, we are less likely to spend any time trying it out.

This guided journey into our unconscious inner world, where hidden talents lie, makes use of archetypal symbols, images that tend to have similar meanings for everyone, even in different cultures. This is not to say there are no individual or cultural differences; your experience is valid, no matter how similar or different it may be from others’.

Some questions for your journaling:

- a. What did you find in the meadow, the forest, the caves, the mountains?
- b. Often people find “primitive” images in the caves and “spiritual” images on the mountain. How are your images similar or different from that pattern?

6. The Wise Being

How can we open the doors to our reservoirs of potential? How can we actively seek out capacities and energies we need in our daily lives? We each have within us a vast store of unconscious wisdom that is available to us for guidance. The skills of awareness, self-observation, and self-identification may have already helped you gain access to this guidance. This guided meditation will take you on a journey to visit the *Wise Being* who resides in you, as in all of us.

Some questions for your journaling:

- a. In what form did the Wise Being appear to you?
- b. What question did you ask and what was the reply?
- c. What other messages did the Wise Being have for you?
- d. How did your life look from this perspective?
- e. Did you make any choices?

7. Seeking a Loyal Soldier

Subpersonality is a term for our habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and feelings that often react unconsciously to events and people in our lives. Subpersonalities form out of difficult life situations, often in childhood. We discover that a certain way of behaving seems to help us survive emotionally, sometimes physically, so we habituate to it.

Unfortunately, we tend to keep acting in these ways even as adults, when our circumstances may be quite different. A scowl on the face of a stranger may unconsciously remind us of an angry, abusive father, and suddenly, without knowing why, we feel and act like a frightened child again.

It may help to think of subpersonalities as loyal soldiers following orders issued long ago in a war that has long since ended. They are like the Japanese soldier who was found on a remote Pacific island years after the end of World War II. Not knowing that the war was over, he had maintained his fortified post

faithfully, prepared for any attack. He was brought home with full military honors because he had remained faithful to his orders, no matter that the war had ended long before.

This exercise can help you befriend and work with one of your loyal subpersonalities. After the guided process, you may find the following questions helpful for recalling your experience and for further exploration.

- a. What time or times did you recall when you felt anxious or afraid or constricted in some way?
- b. What were your feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, and responses in reliving that time?
- c. How did the world look from that perspective?
- d. What actions were you tempted to take?
- e. When you stepped back and observed this part of you without judgment, what did you observe? You might want to sketch an image of this subpersonality.
- f. What did you understand this subpersonality is trying to do for you and how might you express your gratitude for its attempts, however misguided?
- g. How does this subpersonality limit you when it's in charge? What are its blinders, its limiting beliefs about you or the world?
- h. What do you sense that it really needs? How might you give it what it needs?
- i. What gifts or qualities does this subpersonality have to offer you?
- j. Are there any agreements you need to make to better integrate this "loyal soldier" into your life?

8. Receptive Meditation on Good Will

In psychosynthesis, we understand the will to have three dimensions: strong will, skillful will, and good will. Willing is not simply bulldozing our way along; we can skillfully move over, under and around obstacles in our path, or change

course altogether. Good will assures that our choices are in harmony with others and with the larger world in which we live. Good will supplies the sensitivity we need.

The guided meditation will help you reflect on *good will* and its function in your life, and open to new insights. The following questions repeat what was asked in the meditation, to help you make notes.

- a. What is your sense of “good will”? When you read or hear that someone is “a person of good will,” what does that mean to you? How do you experience feeling “good will” towards someone?
- b. What is the meaning and importance of good will in your life? What enables you to have good will, to act from good will?
- c. Allow an image to emerge for “good will” and draw it.
- d. What changes, if any, occurred when you held your container up to the sunlight? What wisdom did you find?

9. An Experience of Transpersonal Will

Sometimes we feel a call or inner prompting to act that seems to come from a source beyond our personal will. We feel directed by a “higher will,” and we choose a whole new direction or act purely for the benefit of others, even at the expense of personal comfort.

Perhaps you can recall making a decision beyond your “comfort zone”—a decision to go back to school, change careers, take on a difficult task, join an activist group or cause, take up a creative endeavor such as painting, dance, or learning a musical instrument. Such decisions may be accompanied by inner turmoil and doubt; they may require considerable adjustment in our lifestyle and routine. Yet something within demands that we take that course, no matter what. That “something” may be Transpersonal Will, the Will of Self.

In this exercise, you are invited to explore one or more of these decisions, to clarify what Transpersonal Will is in your own experience. And it is very

important to rely on your own experience when working with concepts like Self and Transpersonal Will.

Here are some questions to consider in your journaling after the exercise.

- a. What was the important life decision you recalled? What were the circumstances surrounding it?
- b. When did you first start considering this choice and what prompted you to do so? Did the idea come to you suddenly or recurrently over time?
- c. How did you react to this idea initially? If you felt some resistance, what form did it take? How did you deal with it?
- d. What strengthened your resolve to make this decision? What rational arguments did you muster? What role did your emotions play? Your intuition?

10. Letter from Self

Growing whole is ultimately a spiritual endeavor. When we expand our awareness, strengthen our center, explore subpersonalities, and develop our will, we are moving toward a deeper connection with our spiritual Self or Spirit—however we name it. Wholeness and spirituality are intertwined. This exercise may help you find and express wisdom you didn't know you had. You will need a pen, a piece of paper (stationery if possible), and an envelope, because you will be guided to write a letter to yourself. Now listen...and write.

When you finish your letter, put it in the envelope, seal it, and address it to yourself. Give it to a trusted friend to mail some time later when the friend feels moved to do so. It will return to you at a moment when you need to read these words again.