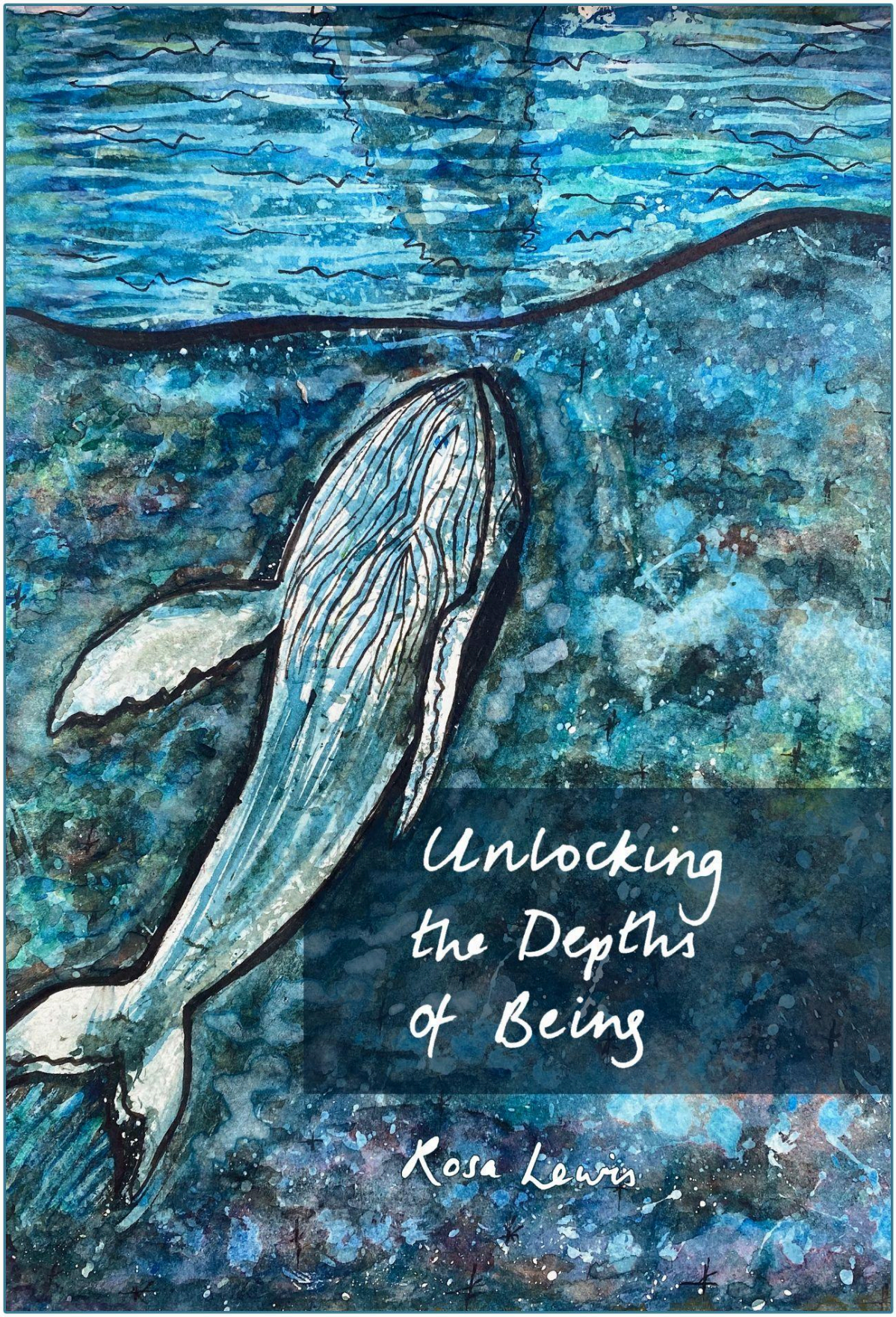
Unlocking
the Depths
of Being
Rosa Lewis

Unlocking the Depths of Being

Wholehearted Presence for a Mystical Reality

Written & Illustrated by Rosa Lewis

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Presence

A dense, luminous silence
Not entirely empty, but not loud
It has a gravity to it
Weighted with accumulated perception

There's a radiance
But it's been folded in on itself,
Had to become its own shelter
Trying to find where to pour itself

The outward seeking is futile
Unless the inward structure is in alignment
So it waits, quiet but charged
The moment before lightning

Vast and tender
Something limitless
That has been pressed
Into a human form

Hold the magnitude
Of what you carry
And learn to sit in its field
Without recoil

Introduction

This short book is something between an initiation and a practical guide. It has been written to inspire you to reach deeper into experience than the world may have told you is possible.

If experience is an ocean, many people spend their lives looking at the surface of the water and thinking that's all there is. This book will take you on a journey into the depths of being.

Through my own process and guiding many people, I have discovered seven parts of experience that, once connected to, unlock the subtler and more expansive layers of reality. Awakening these aspects of experience is not the end of a journey but opens the door to a more mystical, embodied, and whole way of being, where you can be both grounded in direct experience and connected to the transpersonal depths.

My spiritual experiences originally emerged from synthesising Jungian Depth Psychology and Buddhist practices. In my journey I was neither bypassing personal content, nor taking it at face value, but seeing all experience as a portal into Buddha Nature. From this view, every detail of life is an evocation of a deeper reality that is interdependent and already whole. You begin to experience this reality when you open your heart to the deeper layers of the present moment.

Embodiment

On any development journey, there are two levels of learning — one where you acquire knowledge and skills, and another where you are transformed as a human, implicitly and explicitly.

What you discover on an awakening path cannot be understood purely through the intellect. True transformation changes who you are as much as how you see, reaching your subconscious, your body, your heart, and your most ingrained meaning-making system.

When you are disconnected from your body and your heart, your mind collapses experience into surface-level concepts and ideas, and you are unable to connect to the depths and embodied richness of the present moment.

Welcoming the full range of experience allows for a holistic awakening that can reach every part of you and transform you to the core. The whole world becomes experienced in more direct and profound ways, from your senses, to your intimate relationships, to your metaphysics, to your broadest views about the world and your place in it.

The Fourth Turning

The fourth turning of the wheel of dharma is bringing a new way of being into the world. It comes at a time when people are disconnected from their hearts, and from the depths of life.

The fourth turning integrates materialism and mysticism — it includes the realness of the deeply personal and the expansiveness of the transpersonal. It synthesises the individuated self and non-self through recognising that each person is a unique expression of the living cosmos.

By unlocking the seven aspects of experience described in this book, you are wholeheartedly immersing yourself in the depths of embodied experience and opening to life and beyond.

The seven aspects of experience to unlock are:

1. Sacred Sadness
2. Sensitivity
3. The Dark Night of the Soul
4. Falling in Love with Experience
5. Potency: The Kali Inside You
6. The Void
7. Relationship with the Living Cosmos

All seven aspects are vital threads that contribute to a way of being which is at once more spacious, open, intimate, real, compassionate, and alive.

The invitation is to connect with each of the aspects and stay with the truth of your present moment experience. The more radical honesty you can bring, the more meaningful the exploration becomes.

Why This Matters

We live in a fast-changing world where contemplative practices that can lead to altered states of consciousness are becoming increasingly popular. This has the potential to make the world a better place, but people need the skills to navigate paradigm-shifting experiences competently and compassionately.

The world needs people who can stay wholeheartedly with the truth of experience — people who can listen to the subtle, discern what is true, and protect what is sacred.

The world needs people who stand for what is real and meaningful rather than defer to what is easy or sounds impressive. People who can see the bigger picture and realise what matters. People who can live from their bodies, hearts, and souls, as much as from their heads.

In this book you are being invited on a journey into presence, where you will shed what is false or postured and align with what is most meaningful and organically alive.

The Keys to the Depths

This book describes the places where presence is most likely to be blocked, and interventions that unlock more wholeness.

The distillation that is shared in this book may seem deceptively simple. The content can be engaged with at a superficial level, or it can carry you into entirely new and unexpected territory; it's impossible to imagine how deep each of these aspects of experience can go.

You can read this guide as a normal book where you are taking in information, but you may get more from what's here by coming into living relationship with it. Spending time with each section and allowing life and the book to weave together can take you on a journey through what wants to be awakened and integrated.

The seven aspects build on each other, each one leading you deeper into experience, but the process isn't a linear development journey; it's a living gestalt of being that can continue to mature and grow over long periods of time. The work is cumulative — through time and focused practice you are creating capacity in your system for greater depth of presence.

Each aspect of experience opens something unique, and the first time each one is unlocked can feel especially impactful and profound.

When all the aspects are unlocked, a soul safety can click into place where you feel how every part of experience belongs.

There are exercises in each of the sections which can be repeated to reveal ever deeper layers of experience. There are also some recommended resources at the back of the book and a playlist of music for each of the aspects.

May you have a rich and meaningful exploration into the depths.



Sacred Sadness

Connecting with the infinite
tender heart of the universe

Sadness is one of the most beautiful and sacred parts of experience, and it opens a portal to love and interconnection. Many people have built a dam between themselves and sadness, which also cuts them off from the depths of experience. Releasing the dam can flood the moment with an intimacy that touches every part of you.

At its core, sacred sadness is incredibly simple and is just about letting your heart break in service to greater connection with life. The heart tells you as much about reality as the mind does and when you're cut off from your heart, you don't really know anything about life. Ignorance comes from not being able to feel as much as from a lack of knowledge.

Connecting with sacred sadness is not necessarily about processing, healing, or transmuting pain, although these can be part of it. The main objective is to directly feel the depths of what is present and be moved by the beauty and tragedy of it all — to let experience in.

Opening the heart requires equal measure of beauty and heartbreak

Connecting with the imaginal or energetic qualities of sadness can open the door for it to be experienced in profound and rich ways. Sadness can pour out of your heart as a deep blue liquid that floods life with tragic love. It can appear as a pitch-black shadow that falls across experience. Or as an infinite river of darkness that flows like a bow across a cello.

When sadness is experienced as a burden that you have to carry on your own, it can separate you from other people and from life. The sacred dimension of sacred sadness arises with the recognition that heartbreak can be a portal into the depths of experience. It opens you to the beauty and richness of Buddha Nature that can only be accessed with a tender heart that is moved by life.

When connecting to sadness on an awakening path, it is important to commit to feeling the full depths of it and to let it flow through your body and heart. This can lead to new insights, but mostly it increases your capacity to be present with an open heart.

Rather than wallowing, repeating stale stories, or feeling sorry for yourself, you are feeling the sadness that is present anew. You are opening up the constraints of reality and letting a flood of unfiltered love pour out of your heart and through experience. It usually involves having a big cry.

Sometimes heartbreak feels like cosmic whale song

Sacred sadness comes with a refusal to stop loving. You aren't responding to the cold-heartedness of the world by closing your heart; you are committing to feeling openly, even when what you find is heartbreaking.

What makes you feel most sad can be deeply personal, but it can also be collective, and these two threads often weave together, mirroring each other in experience. The sadness that you perceive in the world is a reflection of your own inner reality, and your deepest personal tragedy is an emulation of a larger collective theme.

Sadness shows you what is most important in life, because it reveals what has the power to move you. Connecting to your most painful grief and yearnings can bring you home to some of your deepest love.

Exercise

There are many beautiful ways to connect to the sadness of life. It takes being willing to be with the sorrows and let them impact you.

Men are rarely given spaces to feel their sadness deeply, and it's important that this is specifically welcomed.

The exercise for getting in touch with sacred sadness is to make a playlist of music that moves you. Give yourself some time to connect with it, feel the full emotionality of the experience, and let yourself cry wholeheartedly. Even if tears don't come, allow yourself to sink into the tender feelings as much as is available.

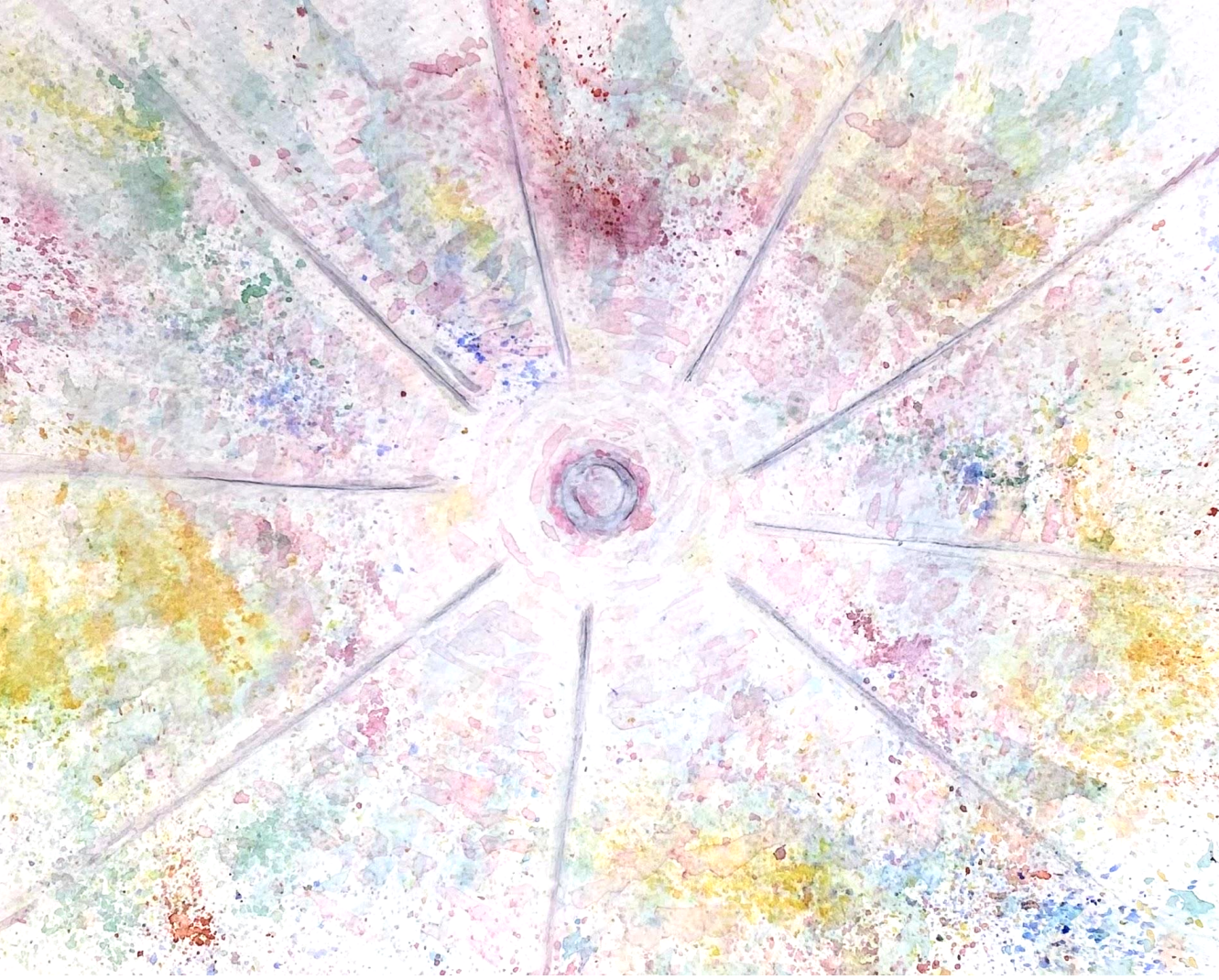
Finding Balance

At the end of each of the chapters, I describe the inflated, deflated and balanced versions of each aspect of experience.

Inflated Sadness
Wallowing and self-pity
"The world is ending, everything is terrible"

Deflated Sadness
Numbness and separation
Removed from life and feeling superior

Sacred Sadness
Moved by life and able to stay present in pain
Can feel the beauty and poetry of experience, even in what is tragic



Sensitivity

Listening to the small sentience
that already quietly knows what is true

Beneath ordinary awareness is a delicate layer of sensitivity and intuitive knowing. This part of you is a living distillation of sentience that is only here to be present. It doesn't have any judgments, it's too content with just being itself.

This sensitive receptivity is very easy to miss or run over because it communicates so quietly. It can feel the vibe of a room when you walk into it, connect with the nuance of your current emotional state, attune to someone else's being, or discern the right way forward in complex situations.

Your sensitivity is like a tuning fork that picks up on what is happening in experience. Being in touch with it comes from listening very quietly and carefully — you are in a mode of receiving rather than perceiving.

When your sensitivity is open, it's like a precision point at the centre of all the swirling forces that make up experience. It can feel the subtlety of what is present very clearly without flattening the richness of experience into concepts. Being in touch with your sensitivity is being with the delicate discernment of your truth in each moment.

Your sensitivity is also a super power — some of your highest potential can be linked to the specifics of what you notice most acutely and precisely in the world around you. How experience comes to life through your sensing is an expression of your essence.

You can experience the sensitivity in another person when they relax and their more natural side emerges. A more pure expression of their being becomes visible. The yin elements of softness, openness and peace come to the fore, alongside yang elements of directness, clarity and free-flowing expression.

Most people's sensitivity is buried or shut down because it is so vulnerable. The world often encourages or requires you to numb your sensitivity and sincerity in order to maintain the status quo and hide uncomfortable truths.

Sometimes people don't want this level of clarity to be present in themselves or others because they don't want the truth to be seen. Desires to dominate, impress and secure resources are forces that pull people out of their pure expression.

To be in touch with your sensitivity, you have to be willing to keep looking at what is directly in front of you. To not look away. It requires stepping back from the surface level story and really listening to what is true for you. You are making radical space for your sensitivity to just be as it is, and bringing forward what is undefended.

You are inviting in a quality of innocence, where the truth is welcome outside of judgement, which includes presencing challenging or difficult parts of experience, without collapsing or externalising.

A tiny free-floating spotlight that is at once the source and receptor of light

In order to maturely include such a high level of openness, you need to be able to keep the smallest part of you online while also holding it in enough spaciousness that it doesn't get overwhelmed. To develop this capacity can require reconnecting with your inner child or infant.

Any parts of you that have never been met with love will be frozen out, shut down, made invisible, or trapped in time. To unlock your sensitivity, you need to welcome these elements back into the flow of experience. It can be helpful to include any aspects of you that you feel have been part of your experience since birth.

Doing a practice like the Ideal Parent Figure Protocol or a Shadow Work™ process with an Ideal Support Figure can be an important step in this process. The intention is to hold an entirely safe space for your sensitivity to emerge and heal.

As your sensitivity is more fully welcomed, you begin to realise this smallest part of you isn't helpless, it's actually incredibly insightful — it becomes a source of clarity, precision, and power. Mature sensitivity is attuned, bright, alert, and awake in the middle of both beauty and challenge, and serves as an essential guide as you navigate life.

Exercise

In this exercise you are getting in touch with your sensitivity. There are three steps to the exercise and you can listen to a recorded version.

The first step is a meditation to increase the felt sense of trust in your experience. Say these messages to yourself, either internally or out loud.

Body: *'your experience is welcome as it is'*
Heart: *'it is safe for you to see the truth'*
Mind: *'shadows and dissonance are welcome'*
Soul: *'there is a deeper layer of meaningfulness'*

The second step is to leave space for your experience to just be. Connect with what is present in your body and inner world. Sensations, emotions, images, moods, memories, or more, may arise.

The third step is to ask yourself, what is a way of seeing or feeling that has been there since you were a child? What is something that you are highly sensitive to? Keep listening quietly until you hit on something resonant. It may take some time for an insight to emerge.

The magic comes from being specific and attuning to the detail of what is present. What are some of the precise qualities of your unique sensitivity?

Finding Balance

Inflated Sensitivity

Entitled and fragile

Wanting all needs perfectly provided for

Deflated Sensitivity

Numb and armoured

Disconnected from or devaluing the importance of what is felt

Healthy Sensitivity

Attuned to intimate details of experience

Can hold space for truth to be felt and spoken



The Dark Night of the Soul

Opening fully to the
dark and painful corners of experience

Wisdom born without suffering is very rare and often shallow. An embodied and soulful path needs to wholeheartedly welcome the full range of experience, including everything you don't want to face.

As you open to deeper layers of reality, you will naturally encounter new dimensions of both joy and agony. The natural human response is to cling to joy and certainty, and to resist and struggle against pain, discomfort, shadow, and the dissolution of the known. But by allowing the challenging parts of experience in, you open more deeply to love, clear-seeing, and equanimity.

Embracing shadow on the path means consciously walking through the fire and letting it transmute resistance into love. The process can be deeply personal, unearthing the thing you find most terrifying; or very transpersonal, hitting you with a maelstrom of existential dread and cosmic forces that the mind can't make sense of.

The dark night can stir up your biggest existential fear and pain, or manifest through your most challenging life experiences. It can be physically painful or emotionally overwhelming. It can feel like total obliteration where you lose sight of which way is up, on the way through to having your whole world turned upside down.

The sensation of reality collapse is like nothing else

The depths to which the dark night goes, and the flavours of darkness you will have to face, are different for everyone. Whatever depths of awakening you are wanting to embody, you will need to feel and integrate the dark side of it. Shadow work is the gatekeeper to depth, and when you avoid parts of experience, you remain stuck in shallow ways of being and seeing.

A few approaches that include the dark night are Jungian Shadow Work, the Stages of Insight from Theravada Buddhism, and the shamanic life-death-rebirth cycle. Deeply recognising that the dark night is an intrinsic part of the path allows the darkness to be seen as essential rather than something to avoid.

You will often experience the dark night as intense bursts of challenging content arising in experience. The integration process may take minutes or years, depending on the size of what needs to be processed. Darkness can keep going deeper than you can possibly imagine.

Opening to the dark night is about committing to realness, including uncertainty and challenges, and knowing that love is more important than image. It takes a brave spirit to stay clear-eyed and open-hearted in the face of pain and darkness. It includes dismantling projections you have about others or the world, as it is more comfortable to project your shadows out than it is to be present with them.

The darkness also contains juiciness, richness, and creativity. Reclaiming rejected and abandoned parts through creative expression can create an inner spaciousness and sense of wholeness.

The key to welcoming the dark night is to stay with your inner experience, not get lost in projection or story, and not worry too much about what the darkness means. Let the direct experience flow through. Open the heart. Be awake and present to your inner world. Let the resistance dissolve and the underlying feelings come home.

It is possible to get stuck looping in a dark night that you don't have the capacity to integrate. If you're not willing to have your heart broken or to feel the vulnerability in what is present, you can end up stuck in avoidant habit pathways that keep you away from the truth and depths of life. Avoidance can manifest as trying to stay in the light, or as stewing in irresolvable darkness, fear, anger, or blame.

Going through the integration process takes discernment to know what needs to be felt open-heartedly, and that may require the support of a friend or facilitator. Love creates a container for the purification, recognition, or release that wants to happen, and you may need someone else to hold a space of love for you, or to suggest some counterintuitive moves.

For some people positive emotions, such as joy, are more likely to be in shadow and feel more confronting to open to than painful emotions. The key is to fully welcome what has previously been buried, to let go of what you think you should or shouldn't feel, and simply welcome what is.

The more shadows that can be integrated, transmuted and released, the more space there is for depth, clarity, realness, love, and joy. You can still have painful experiences but your system doesn't resist them in the same way — they can arise in a space of inclusion and equanimity.

An impossibly deep, dark ocean that reflects a night sky full of stars

Exercise

There are three steps to this exercise. You can also listen to a recorded version.

Death is an important part of the dark night. By going through the death process and releasing stuck energy, you are creating space for fresh emergence. Your capacity to let go of control and go through the life-death-rebirth cycle is shaped by what you imagine lies beyond death.

The first step of the exercise is to connect with something that is bigger than human consciousness that feels benevolent, peaceful, intelligent and lively. This could be Buddha Nature, the mystery of life, or another higher power.

Let these benevolent qualities soak into your heart and body, especially if there is fear about death.

The second step is to imagine what lies beyond death. This is a chance for you to lean into your imaginal experience and listen deeply to what is evoked in your body, heart, and mind.

- What emotional tone is present? For example, is it ominous, peaceful, or something else?
- What colour is it? If it's a void, is it black, clear, or white?
- If it's something intelligent, what does it know?
- If it's something you can experience individually, how does that feel?
- If it's something transpersonal, what shape is it?
- What is the transition like when you go into it?
- Where is it in relation to this universe?
- What sensations arise in the body when you're connected to it?
- How does this connect to experiences you've had of being around death or to people you know who have died?

For the third step, you will go through a mini life-death-rebirth cycle. Find a part of you that wants experience to be different from how it is right now. Bring it to the center of your awareness. First, meet it with honesty and allow it to be present. Thank it for being there, then let death absorb it and notice what happens. Feel the impact in your body and heart.

How does it feel to be present now?

Finding Balance

Inflated Dark Night
Stuck in the drama triangle
Everything needs endless hard work

Deflated Dark Night
Spiritual bypassing and platitudes
Avoidance of what is real

Welcoming the Darkness
Open to the death process
Able to be present with wholeness



Falling in Love with Experience

Discovering joy and belonging
in the beauty of the present moment

Love is one of the most powerful forces in the universe. It can inspire you, transform you, and turn you completely inside out. Falling in love with experience allows you to be deeply moved by a much greater spectrum of life.

Love connects you to the musicality and the poetry of existence, inviting you into a romantic way of being that can infuse and suffuse your whole being, energising you and inspiring you.

Something can be so beautiful that the entirety of reality melts

When you love something you aren't judging it as good or bad, you're welcoming it in its fullness. Love can activate beauty, depth, and longing. It connects you to the tragedies and wakes you up to the biggest absurdities of life. Love makes it meaningful to stay with experience, whatever life brings.

When you love someone you don't just want their nice, presentable parts, you want the whole of them. Love can be the fuel on the fire of being with the truth of experience in its full spectrum — you are connecting with something that makes even the challenging parts of life feel beautiful and meaningful. You are letting love live through you in all its facets.

An important part of falling in love with experience is recognising what the specific details of what you fall in love with are. What inspires a real, sincere, open-hearted love that connects you to true vulnerability and nourishment?

Paying attention to the people, places, and experiences you are drawn to and what exactly inspires you about them can help you discover what is most meaningful for you.

Once you've recognised some aspects of experience that inspire a real sense of love — whether it's a person, a part of life or a mode of being — the question then becomes: how can that be a portal into the depths of life?

Falling in love with experience also doesn't just have to be sappy. Dark joy is often missed in spiritual practice and it can be an important key for unlocking wholeheartedness. Falling in love with experience can include dark desires.

When held in a spacious way, eros can have a wildness and an intensity to it that inspires you to open more fully. And it can bring aspects of experience to life in a much richer and sexier way.

Open-hearted sexual tension arises in a moment when all the normal anxieties or distractions of life stop and you really feel the depth of another's presence. There is a resonance that stops everything and allows you to feel the beauty of life.

You can also have this with experience itself.

You are welcoming in the textures of love, joy, beauty, desire, meaning, and presence, and using these as a portal to raw aliveness. You are dropping into the ocean of intimacy that is already present in experience and saturating yourself in the ecstatic, erotic meeting of magic and energetic flow that is life.

You are opening to the most beautiful qualities of Buddha Nature — jhanic embodiment, heart flows, spaciousness, luminosity, inspiration — enjoying them and letting them grow through your entire being and your expression in the world.

This practice is not just about pleasure (although that's a big part of it); it's also about noticing that soulful eros is inspired by what is deeply meaningful to you. You are connecting with the richness and aliveness of your eros and creating a healthy, integrated relationship with it.

Meeting a soul mate can bring this to life in an incredibly intense way. A soul mate is not necessarily someone you're meant to be with romantically, but a portal to some of the deepest parts of you. Soul mates can often create a limerent-style love where you feel a very inspiring connection but not necessarily in a very practical context.

A deep appreciation for another person can be part of a soul mate relationship, but it is also important to recognise that the desire or affinity is especially strong because it's activating your own aliveness. The connection doesn't have to feel romantic or sexual, it can be more familial, friendly, or creative in nature. A lot of eros is platonic or childlike.

Whatever type of love it is, to cultivate it free from fear, you want to lean into the eros that is present in your inner world without needing it to mean anything in the outer world. The aliveness inspired by a love connection is a part of you that is meaningful to explore, without needing it to manifest in any particular way.

The purpose of consciously falling in love on the path is to stay connected to your own heart and your deepest aliveness. You are welcoming the power of eros to transform you and inspire you forward in your explorations.

Exercise

When you're falling in love, you're not worried about other people's opinions, you're too busy enjoying what is deeply felt. For this exercise you want to completely let go of what other people might think about you or any validation you are seeking and connect with a wholehearted, embodied, present moment experience of something you find beautiful.

Remember a moment when you felt alive and everything in experience was singing together. A moment when you were able to fully enjoy the moment. This could be a connection with a person, a place, or a mystical experience.

Let the felt sense of being in love live through you. Let everything else fall away. Feel how this connection ignites something important in the depths of you.

Feel the experience in your body and heart. Notice any energies, emotions, images, or sensations that arise. If you're holding back, turn the sensations up ten times stronger. Notice how the imaginal experience of the person or place is an expression of your inner world — you are connecting to one of the most important parts of yourself.

Who are you when you're connected to this love? What would it mean to live from this heart-connected place?

Journal about this experience or create an imaginal memory that you can come back to. Evoking this experience will allow you to return to the felt sense of love, depth, and inspiration.

Finding Balance

Inflated Love

Blending and dissolving with others, limerence

Romantic love as the solution to all problems

Deflated Love

Life is mechanical or nihilistic, avoidance

Life is not worth living

Falling in Love

In touch with your eros and life force

Connection is meaningful and nourishing



Potency: The Kali Inside You

Standing in clarity and fearlessness

Unleashing your potency requires being in contact with the deepest and most fearless part of you. You are connected to your heart and willing to be a voice for what is true without being judgemental or confined by social norms.

Kali is the universal force of liberation that is willing to destroy in order to be in integrity. Connecting with Kali means you can speak from your direct experience without apologising or manipulating. This capacity arises from trusting the truth and letting it flow through you.

Potency requires a willingness to let go of what you want experience to be in order to align with what is true. It often requires overcoming a barrier of discomfort or fear, and facing conflict.

A desire for social acceptance or control will keep you from being honest. When you get in touch with Kali energy, there is a deeper moral code that is activated, which aligns with integrity rather than ego and is loyal to the truth rather than social pressures. It is not about domination but about clarity of expression.

Some examples include clearly sharing your desires or feelings, staying with conflict and difference rather than disappearing or people-pleasing, saying 'no' more often, not taking responsibility for a partner's emotions, not allowing yourself to be manipulated by family members, or being more honest at work.

Life force often gets trapped in strictly coded reason and morals. These can be a necessary part of a functioning society, but being connected to your potency runs deeper than being polite or presenting an appealing image. To step into your power, you often have to be willing to take a social risk or disappoint people.

Activating your inner Kali gives you the determination to stay present with whatever arises and allows you to not be pulled around by nervous system fight or flight, making it possible to stay in the moment wholeheartedly, even in an intense storm.

A connection to your potency can take you out of the very human urge to be chasing highs and avoiding lows, and into something much more direct. When you are able to stay with challenging experiences without either internalising or externalising, you become a force of groundedness and sanity.

Facing experience head-on requires integrating your shadows and facing your inner demons. Imaginal practice, shadow work, and relational containers can help release contraction. By recognising that no energy is fundamentally bad and everything has the quality of Buddha Nature behind or beneath it, your inner world can become a playground where it's safe to explore and express the full range of your experience.

The purpose of this approach is to liberate unconscious contractions that trap truth and aliveness, and allow a more organic, wild and potentially chaotic expression of your being to emerge. You are leaving politeness behind and going on an adventure of discovery that will likely include conflict or intensity, en route to spaciousness, freedom, and acceptance.

In some cases, when the quality of Buddha Nature is touched and clean connection is available, contraction naturally falls away. You let go of distortions and allow things to flow as they are in the ocean of beingness.

With enough practice, it becomes possible to be relaxed, open, clear, and direct with the full spectrum of truth. You develop the elegance and style to be able to gracefully presence the depths of truth, even when it is challenging.

This mode isn't about winning or gaining anything, but about being willing to let the truth speak for itself. You are accepting things as they are and allowing your boundaries to express themselves organically, without manipulation. The sword of truth falls where it naturally falls.

Exercise

In this exercise you are committing to following the thread of aliveness as it emerges in each moment, whatever it brings.

Find something juicy and alive in your present moment experience. It could be a thought, a feeling, or a bodily sensation. Perhaps something you don't normally consciously acknowledge, but that feels potent.

Write down the experience. Draw an arrow and then write down the next thing you notice when you bring this into conscious experience. It could be a feeling, thought, sensation, or action. And then do this 6 - 10 times.

e.g. I notice that I have the feeling/ thought/ sensation of.....

↳ and then I .....

↳ and then I .....

x 6 - 10 steps

The purpose is to try to stay as close to your thread of authenticity and realness as possible; feeling and witnessing the unfolding.

If distraction, avoidance, numbness, or other experiences that take you away from authentic presence arise, include those in what you are acknowledging and writing down.

You can bring this practice into your meditations or life to develop the skill of staying with your potency.

Finding Balance

Inflated Potency

Wanting to be in control of everything

Rigid boundaries

Deflated Potency

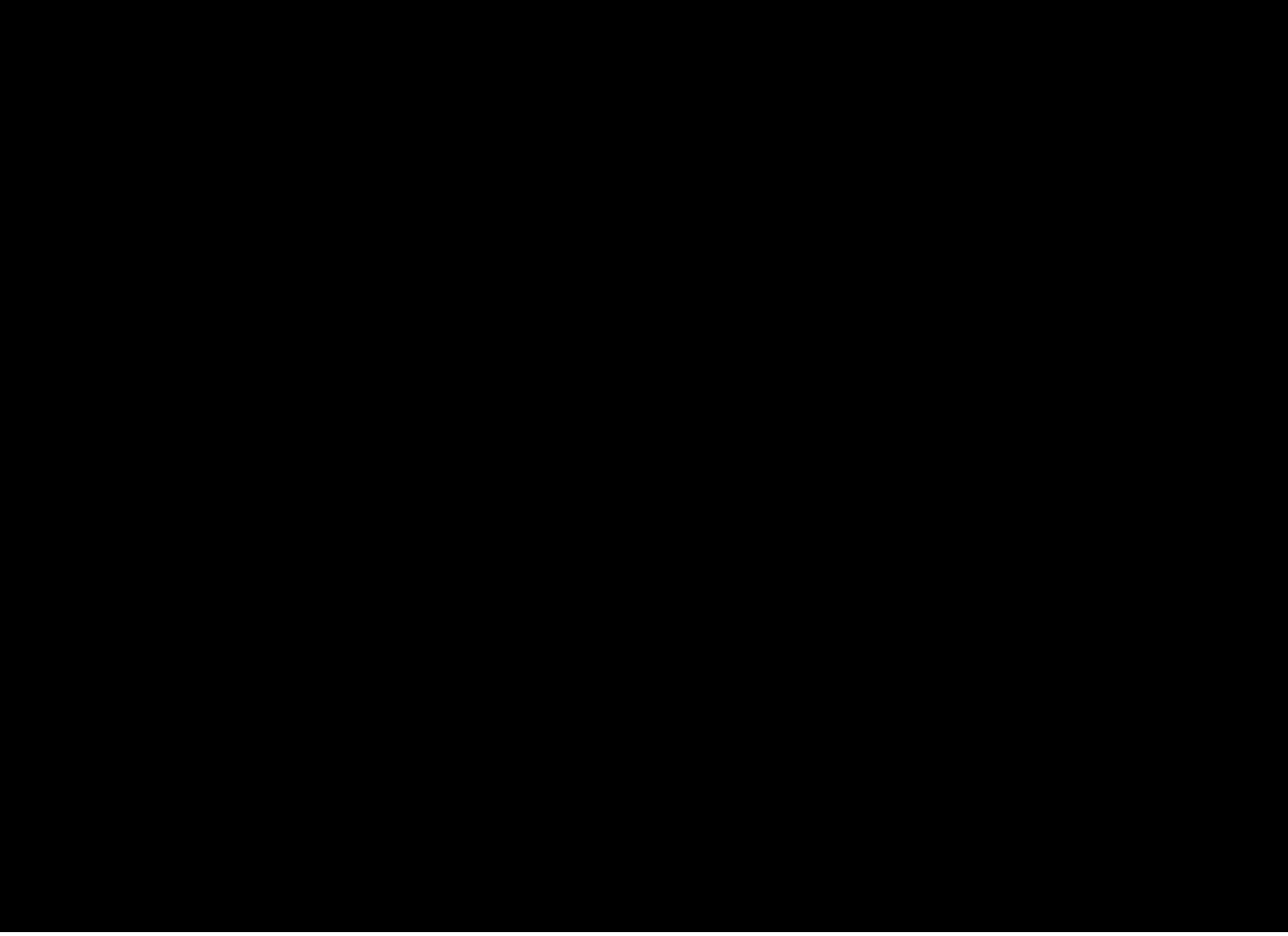
Dissociating from self and desires

People-pleasing and collapse

Balanced Potency

Standing in empowered self and meeting the power of others

Speaking the truth without fear or control



The Void

The space around reality

On the other side of all the fullness of experience is a nothingness, a deep void that is as real as everything else in the universe.

Opening to the void, you are plunged into a pitch-black unknowing that penetrates every corner of existence. An endless process of death, everything arising out of and returning to the abyss. Everything you care about and hold dear gets shoved through the cosmic paper shredder.

Collapsing in on itself and falling away. Meaning is lost, and time is no longer necessary. A sudden spooky realisation that there is nothing really there behind the mask. Fear and despair. Relief and freedom.

The flame is out, and whenever you think you have found somewhere to land, the orbits shift and you're back on the dark side of the moon.

Dropping into the mystery of the heart and the body, you connect with the love that can't really be given or received. There is nowhere where it has come from, and there is nowhere for it to go, so you let it be felt with no resolution.

Paradoxically, connecting with the void creates more space for things to just be as they are.

There is no object and no subject, experience is just an emergent quality of the system. Perpetually arising and disappearing.

The void is not just dead, empty space but is living in its own right. A sea of pure potential and intuition that hasn't yet been actualised. An infinite, overflowing, unmanifested fullness that can be galvanised into expression.

The void doesn't nullify experience — that would make it a something that replaces the everything.

It enriches life. It is the space around the solid. The emptiness around the essence.

Like the soil that the plants grow from.

The universe is practicing through you, holding its breath to see what will be revealed in the next moment.

Presence suffused with emotions, perceptions, energies, and experiences, freshly unfolding, before it all disappears. Newly arriving. Transforming itself through you. And you through it. A vehicle for essence to express before everything dissolves again.

The void helps you engage with difficult emotions and leave behind addictive patterns and unhealthy loops.

Release that which is being held up by control. Allow what is ready to go to disintegrate.

Endlessness. Emptiness.

The void as a negative experience.
The void as a positive experience.
The void as

Exercise

The first step of this exercise is to connect to a sense of the void in a meditation.

Below are some examples of what this might feel like. Choose something that resonates and feels natural for you to connect with. Set a timer for 3 - 10 minutes and sit with your experience of it in meditation.

- Impossibly still depths
- Aliveness that moves so fast it can't be contained by anything
- The space that exists before and after sensations
- Whatever exists inside and between atoms
- The background that experience is arising in
- The vastness of the cosmos, including empty space and black holes
- A pitch-black liquid flowing through your body
- Everything that lives outside of what it is possible for you to think about
- Whatever would be left behind if there was a switch that could turn the whole universe off

For the second step of the exercise, bring up a sensation, thought, emotion, or energy that is neutral for you. Allow it to be present and then feel how the void qualities are also inside and around this aspect of experience.

Notice how including the void impacts your experience.

Repeat this with a challenging aspect of experience and a positive aspect of experience.

Finding Balance

Inflated Void

Emptiness as a spiritual bypass

Disconnected from essence and reality

Deflated Void

Self-seriousness

Fused with stories and views

Balanced Void

Comfort in uncertainty and the unknown

At home in the dark, epic emptiness



Relationship with the Living Cosmos

What is the story that wants to be told through you?

The journey into the depths of life unfolds in mysterious and unexpected ways, and the process of coming into alignment with the universe can be both breathtakingly beautiful and heartbreakingly tragic.

As you open to the dimensions of experience explored above, you may find yourself spontaneously coming into a sense of flow with life, where you are moved in ways that seem mysterious and profound, or perhaps quite ordinary.

You have always been an expression of the cosmos, and now this truth becomes a part of your lived experience. There is a sense of being guided by life. This stage of the journey requires looking past what is on the surface and feeling the deeper potential that wants to emerge in each moment.

This way of being is not about being in control but about flowing with the deepest nature of experience. It requires a steadfast attunement and deep listening to what is present and wanted from you in the unfolding of this moment. This means not taking your conscious perspective of reality as truth — everything is alive and intelligent in its own right, and you are opening to this.

One example is how the heart and body have their own intelligence, logic, and memory. By asking the body what is happening in experience and letting it speak for itself, a more distributed and fluid mode can emerge. This can open up new perspectives that are normally subconscious and allow energy to move in surprising and fresh ways. The aim is to let the intelligence speak for itself and show you the currents of life that run much deeper than your mind can hold.

Another example is the imaginal dimension of experience — the world carries an imaginal blueprint that doesn't fit within mechanical or rational reality. It comes to life through meaning, resonance, energy, metaphor, symbolism, and emotionality. The imaginal and the ineffable are infused in the physical, and the two weave together through entanglement and synchronicity.

When you open to this more resonant reality, you are interacting with life at a deeper level. Experience becomes a continual conversation between you and the depths of life. Every moment, every detail, becomes an expression of the richness of the mystery. You are continuously receiving something new and fresh that weaves another layer of richness into the tapestry of life. Nothing exists outside of the interconnected intelligence of the universe.

Life is a living, breathing biosphere of meaning, emotionality and energy

A relationship with the living cosmos creates an embodied sense of trust that decentres the self, softens your fixed ideas about what reality is, and opens you to something more fluid. This doesn't mean that the pressure isn't on sometimes, it means that you are inspired to connect with the depths of your truth, whatever you are experiencing.

The spiritual journey is lived — you have to stay in the present moment and express your realisation through your way of being as much as through what you understand conceptually. What creates your experience of life, as much as any grand spiritual insight, is hard work, patience, and just getting things done.

People who can't pay attention to detail, who don't care about doing things well, or who can't stay with discomfort can be good at performing spiritual realisation but are rarely deep or wise.

It takes heart to break the cycle of ignorance. Depth and honesty require putting down the weapons of self-interest and the armour of self-protection and being real. Sometimes this needs to be done in connection with others, and a lot of it needs to be done in your own inner experience.

The journey into the depths is also not entirely renunciative — it requires you to be in the world to some degree. What this looks like will be different for everyone. Life is understood through your experience of living it rather than your ideas about it. Staying engaged with the world can at times be harder and more complex than being a renunciate, but it can also be exciting and meaningful.

In this mode of being, the full spectrum of your lived experience — your work, your relationships, and your creativity — are an embodied expression of your dharma as much as your practice.

Everything in your life is an expression of the living cosmos.

Exercise

Part of the fourth turning is recognising the uniqueness and specificity of every person's awake expression. This is exemplified by the archetype of the Artist.

From this perspective, the universe is a cosmic art piece that is expressing itself through you. Aligning with the artistry of experience can break down the duality between being and doing, because everything is part of the creative unfolding of life.

The Artist archetype can be present with the depths of life and compost suffering into meaning. Artists are everyday magicians who transmute and evoke fresh ways of being, feeling, and seeing.

They are aware that much of their purpose is getting out of the way of something bigger that wants to come through. They are also conscious that practical skills are needed to create something meaningful.

"Great things are done by a series of small things brought together"
-Van Gogh

The Artist is happy to live an unconventional life fuelled by deep feeling, joy, inspiration, devotion, and poetics. They aren't disconnected from life, but they aren't defined by society's rules either. They are willing to stand apart to move from the most meaningful depths.

Artists express a generosity of spirit that has the power to elevate people out of competition and lack and into resonance, inspiration, and wholehearted presence.

To embody the Artist archetype you don't need to be a literal artist who is painting or creating music. Connecting with the Artist archetype is about seeing the way you interact with the world as a living piece of art — your practice, your state of consciousness, your views, your relationships, your subtle body, your work, your values, your emotions, your desires, your struggles, and your joys — these are all an expression of life.

Your Artist archetype could be highly technical, relational, or practical. You could be a teacher, an engineer, a musician, a project manager, a caregiver, a lover, a friend. Your expression could be introverted and introspective or highly expressive. The most important thing is that you feel the aliveness in what you are doing and are moved by the growth journey of engaging with it.

For this exercise, you are connecting with the Artist archetype and feeling what your unique version of it is. Remember or imagine a time when you felt connected to some of the deepest and most meaningful parts of yourself, using the questions below as prompts. Either draw an image or do an imaginal practice with what emerges.

- What do you find most meaningful, moving, or inspiring in life?
- What are the aspects of life you find most beautiful or evocative?
- What flavours of experience are present when you're deeply connected to yourself?
- What has always been there at the heart of your being?
- What is something that you do from love rather than obligation?
- Describe the details of what you see. Does this reveal anything more specific to you about your unique expression?
- If you gave yourself permission to feel ten times more deeply, how would that change the image?

Part of the Artist archetype is the recognition that you are not in control of your art. You are being created by a living cosmos, as much as you are creating anything. The universe expresses itself in synchronous and mysterious ways, and immersing yourself in this dimension of experience opens you to more aliveness and peace.

Finding Balance

Inflated Relationship with Cosmos
Submitting to a single source of truth
Needing to be special

Deflated Relationship with Cosmos
No intuition or sense of greater meaning
Total personal responsibility

Balanced Relationship with Cosmos
Aware of being a node in something bigger than you
Being an expression of your truth

Depths II

A body that tells the truth
Simply by being alive
Identity breaks down
Into something richer

Allow the atmosphere to swallow you
With your senses wide open
An act of devotion
To a world more vivid

Supporting Practices

The more meditational and relational skills you develop, the more you are able to engage fully with the content in this book.

Capacities like staying with direct present moment experience without going into projection and communicating authentically outside of codependent patterns require practice and will allow you to sink further into the depths of being.

Here are some resources I have created that may support you on your journey into the depths and beyond:

- Music Playlist: A song for each of the seven aspects of experience
- Practice Guides: practices and tools that will help you develop presence
- Recommendations for practice modalities: The modalities that I recommend and how they fit into a holistic approach to awakening
- What is the Soul?: An essay on the soul and soulfulness and how it fits into awakening

Below I share some more complementary meditations created by Joost Vervoort.

A Complementary Perspective

My dialogues with Joost Vervoort over the last 5 years have helped bring words to many of the elements of this book. The guided meditations he has created throughout this time offer complementary portals into the seven aspects of experience:

1. Sacred Sadness: The Tear That Hangs Inside My Soul Forever
2. Sensitivity: Tiny Tenderness — Becoming Surgical Self Compassion
3. Dark Night: The Heartbreaking Parody of Unity and Separateness
4. Falling in Love: Experiencing the Beauty of Your Inner Reality as an Act of Societal Resistance
5. Potency: Being a Heartful Demon
6. The Void: Dropping Practice Frames and Embodying Mystery
7. Relationship with the Cosmos: Letting Your Wisdom Flourish

Joost and I also record a podcast together — Nouveau Shamanic Cinema — where we watch films as if they are portals into the depths of being. In each episode we discuss the resonance and ways of looking that the movie opens up. Here are some episodes that offer immersive perspectives related to the themes in this book:

- Event Horizon: Integrating Hell
- Moulin Rouge: Falling in Love With Experience
- The Last Samurai: Being a Warrior Poet
- Animal Well: An Alive Universe

Finally, you may be inspired to read Joost's writing on how 'everyone is a mystic poet' and the impact that embracing this paradigm can have on societal transformation.

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About the Author

Rosa is here to invite people into a new way of being. She hangs out in the cosmic energy soup of atemporal distributed intelligence and is passionate about wholeness and realness in awakening.

She is currently writing two books, one called “Being Buddha Nature", which brings her awakening framework to life, and another called "The Living Imaginal Realm", which describes how the shamanic and mystical are integral parts of everyday reality.

Sign up to receive an email when these books are released.

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