

### ADVANCED LEVEL RITUAL: INTEROCEPTION—BEYOND SENSATION

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#### Advanced Level Ritual: Interoception—Beyond Sensation

Sensation is the first of five dimensions of body awareness. You can build on the interoception ritual by incorporating awareness of the four other dimensions: image, actions/behavior, emotions/affect and meaning.

In the quest to liberate myself and my clients from fear and chronic stress, there are few therapeutic modalities I've found as powerful as Somatic Experiencing®, the pioneering work of Dr. Peter Levine. Dr. Levine identified five dimensions of awareness—sensation, image, behavior, affect and meaning, adapted, and simplified here from his original work noted in his book, *In an Unspoken Voice*:

**1. Sensation:** The essential awareness of internal sensations, including pulse, colors, varying weights and temperatures. For example:

- *I notice the temperature of my breath coming into my nostrils or throat.*
- *I notice a warm, gooey red blob in my heart space.*
- *I notice the pull of gravity in my sit bones and thighs.*
- *I notice my heart beating in my chest.*
- *I can feel lunch moving through my belly (peristalsis)!*

**2. Image:** Using what you already know from your senses (sight, sound, smell, touch, taste) see if you can access the image of something pleasant arising from within you. This is a tricky one to explain (easier to experience) but here are a few examples:

- *(Sight) I can feel the lower half of my body settling when I imagine seeing my dog napping.*
- *(Sound) I notice a settling inside my chest when I imagine the sound of a bird chirping.*
- *(Smell) I feel more calm in my belly when I imagine the smell of a pine forest.*
- *(Touch) I notice my back relaxing when I imagine being held by a warm blanket.*
- *(Taste) I notice laughter arising from my belly when I imagine the sweet taste of my mother's blueberry pie.*

**3. Behavior:** Any observable changes, including skin temperature, breath rate, pace of

speech or actual movements like rocking, reaching, foot-tapping, yawning, and so on.

- *I notice the movement of my calves, swinging up and back, just like when I was a kid!*
- *I notice my shoulders shrugging and shaking off the experience.*
- *I notice that I'm yawning in this moment.*

4. **Affect:** Emotions and emotional experiences becoming more available, such as calm, settled, peaceful, restful, spacious, open and irritability, agitation, anger.

- *I am noticing contentment and gratitude in my heart space.*
- *I feel open and spacious inside, right in my chest and belly.*
- *I am noticing anger in my gut and it's energizing!*

5. **Meaning:** Verbal narrative of self, other or an event as well as any form of abstracted relationship.

- *I'm noticing this feeling of being safe means I can be more expressive, more alive, or more connected to others.*
- *I'm noticing I'm much calmer after recognizing that I'm not responsible for other people's reactions.*
- *I'm noticing that when I let go of trying to control my partner, I can relax and be vulnerable with her.*

Begin your ritual of interoception with a warmup. Then move into the interoception ritual using mindful breathwork. Over time, as you become more comfortable with the ritual, see if you can be more descriptive of your internal experience by noticing some of the other dimensions of body awareness beyond the sensation of your breath. For the sake of ease, I've repeated the mindfulness ritual here:

### **Interoception Using Mindful Breathwork**

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Place one hand on your heart space and the other on your belly. This contact will help anchor your awareness in the body. As you breathe, begin to pay attention to what you notice inside, right underneath your hands.

Now *slowly* begin taking a long, effortless in-breath through your nose, followed by a long, slow out-breath through your mouth. Support the settling in your body by putting space between the top and bottom teeth and softening your tongue to rest on the lower palette of your mouth (doing the opposite increases anxiety and stress). Make this dance between the in-breath and out-breath effortless—just the right amount of inhaling so that you begin to slowly go deeper into your long out-breaths and notice more spaciousness inside.

Stay with this ritual for at least three minutes.

In addition to sensation, what other dimensions of body awareness (image, behavior, affect, meaning) do you notice?...



## REFLECTIONS

### WHAT'S DIFFERENT?



#### Advanced Level Somatic Dimensions Noticing Inner Experience

*Refer to the examples here to describe your inner experience (aka, interoception),  
use the Glossaries of Somatic Dimensions and Emotions  
(see appendix), or add your own:*

Airy	Emotion(s)	Image(s)	Softening
Breath	Expansive	Lukewarm	Softer
Brisk	Fluid	Melting	Smooth
Buzzing	Glowing	Oblong	Snug
Calmer	Grounded	Pulsing	Spacious
Comfy	Heart Beating	Relaxed	Tepid
Cooler	Heavier	Round	Tingling
Color(s)	Held	Settled	Vibrating
Dense	Hotter	Slower	Warmer