

# Your Internal-Compass

## *Patterns of Joy*

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## Introduction

*“Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth” – Marcus Aurelius*

*“The sorrow is the same for someone who doesn’t have salt for her gruel, as for someone who doesn’t have sugar for his coffee.” – Tamil saying.*

Joe has spent years learning beautiful old Irish songs. His friend Sam is getting married and asked Joe to sing at his wedding. Joe would love to help Sam, but says, “no” because he is afraid to perform.

Mary is careful in how she moves. She had an injury years ago and feels like she has to protect her back. She feels like she has a ‘bad back.’ She doesn’t go dancing any more.

Asha is often annoyed at her kids. Why can’t they put away their clothes or get ready on time? She feels like she’s becoming an irritated person. She knows that isn’t who she is.

Fred is full of road rage. His friends don’t want to drive with him anymore because he is always yelling at other drivers.

Cindy is nervous about her friends coming for dinner. “Is it worth it?” she thinks. She’s not sure she’ll have dinner parties anymore.

Carol feels like she and her daughter are constantly fighting. “Why can’t that girl ever say a single word with respect”, she thinks. Then she wonders if she is a bad mother.

Raj is self-conscious about dancing. He’d like to go to that party but the invite said there would be dancing. He feels weird dancing.

Martha isn’t happy in her job. She’s constantly stressed. She feels like she’s losing herself.

Hubert is always tense when he plays second trumpet in the orchestra. He wants to relax more even though in order to match the first trumpet he has to play flat.

There are many stories of people struggling in our affluent world. The scenarios above have either happened to me or to someone I have taught. While these stories may seem like different issues with different causes, there is a common thread through all. The connecting thread is the human response system and how it works.

As long as I can remember I have been interested in how things work. A love of dance focused that curiosity to a fascination with how the human body works. This curiosity about human design led me to years of exploring almost every somatic discipline from Yoga to BodyMind Centering to developmental movement to Alexander Technique.

Most somatic approaches talked about how beautiful the human system is designed and proceeded to teach all kinds of techniques to improve this system. I believed the idea of our beautiful design. Yet, the way I and others lived life was full of constant monitoring and trying to improve our bodies. It was as if there was this beautiful design and we needed to do something to get it. Lengthen my spine, tighten my abs, tuck my tail, breathe, adjust my shoulders, think tall, free my neck, pause. Even as approaches got subtler and subtler there was a flavor of mind bossing the body. We believed the human system was beautifully made, but spent our lives trying to improve it.<sup>i</sup>

My curiosity about human design also led to an interest in awareness. I spent years exploring various meditation practices from Vedic, Kundalini, Zen to mindfulness training, rolling on the floor in body awareness work, and also doing various forms of therapy from Freudian based psychiatry to transpersonal psychotherapy. An experience common to all of these explorations was having stunning, often revelatory “aha” moments of insight. Those insight moments felt so good and clear. They gave the illusion that life would be different from that moment on. It was as if the insight was the change. It kept me and others a bit addicted to “working on awareness” because the insight moments were such a reward.

As time passed, I began to ask: “Is the quality of my life really changing, true long term change, not just momentary change? Are problems actually going away? Am I happy?” What I observed in myself and others was that problems were going away at moments, but another version of the same thing would eventually pop-up. We had all sorts of explanations for these ‘back to the drawing board’ times. Despite my intellectual idea of how beautifully we are designed, the awareness work, just like the somatic work, had a tendency to keep me wanting improvement.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2000 I began to apprentice with David Gorman who articulated a holistic perspective on human design (Anatomy of Wholeness™) and a method of inquiry (LearningMethods™) that taught me how to learn from my own experience. I learned how to pinpoint questions to get to the root of the problem. Rather than focusing on an insight made by a teacher, this work taught students how to have their own insights. The anatomy and the awareness work were woven together in this approach to self-directed learning and clarity.

After years working with this material personally and as a teacher of the work,<sup>iii</sup> I have seen long term permanent change in myself and others on all levels of life. I have damaged cartilage in my knees, but no symptoms. My computer crashed and years of writing and contacts were lost. I felt calm. At that moment, I realized the clarity work was part of me. I had changed. Poverty, injury, divorce, deaths all have come and gone in recent years. Life has not always been easy, but the knowledge of how my system works has made these circumstances rich in gratitude and joy.

Over the years I have found that one of the most common reasons we have trouble making long term change is that we don't see the relevance in understanding how we work. We mistake the symptom for the cause of our distress. We just want the symptom to go away. Permanently removing a symptom happens when we remove the cause of the symptom. It is easier to find the root cause of a symptom when we understand how the system works. If our car stops moving it is useful to know cars needs gas to run. We can fill it with gas rather than trying to push it down the road.

One important and misunderstood aspect of how we work is the purpose and meaning of our responses. This article is about the response aspect of human design. When you understand how the response system works for you, many troubles fall away and are replaced with access to an incredible innate guidance system.

We mistake the symptom for the cause of our distress...When we understand how the response system works many troubles fall away and are replaced with access to an incredible innate guidance system.

As you read this material I encourage you to see if the hypothesis of an inner-compass is true for YOU. Explore this material for yourself. Finding out what is true for you is the root of empowerment.

## Your Internal-Compass, Part 1

### *Your response system.*

Pretend you are reading the following advertisement:

*We offer you a fantastic new app for hassle-free fuel management for all your vehicles. Our app senses your average driving patterns and then tells you when to stop for gas in a soothing voice. You no longer need to remember to look at your fuel gauge or worry about the annoying*

*fuel gauge blink. In fact, just ignore that pesky blink. Use our app and you'll enjoy hassle-free fuel management.*

Imagine using this app. It might work when you stick to your average driving habits, but its useless in other circumstances, like one long trip or hours stuck in traffic. On these occasions you'll run out of gas if you use the app. Here's an app designed to over-ride your car's built-in gas gauge. It won't work and will cause you more hassle and distress than the original guidance system built right into your car.

Many of us live a life in which we constantly ignore the guidance system built into our bodies. It isn't even so much that we ignore this system, we don't even know it exists.

Gifted artists are unheard because of unnecessary fear. People spend more time angry and irritated at each other rather than joyful and grateful. People never meet their own expressive self because of self-consciousness and doubt. People are limiting their movement or constantly trying to improve their bodies. Others stay in unhappy jobs or burn-out in ones they used to like. The tragedy of all this self-limitation and suffering is that much of it is based on overriding our guidance systems.

Your built-in guidance system is your response system. The response system is designed to help you navigate in the world. You have a circulatory system, a digestive system, a nervous system and you have a response system. All these systems inter-relate and combine to be your

If your response system is like a built-in compass then you can use it to navigate to wholeness and joy. The system gives you a homing signal to joy.  
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whole interacting system, your Self.

## PHYSICAL SENSATIONS OF EMOTIONS – THE LANGUAGE OF THE RESPONSE SYSTEM

Can you tell when you are happy? Think of a time when you were happy. Picture the situation, the people and a few other details that come to you as you recall the time. How do you know you are happy? What's the feeling of being happy?

When I feel happy I would describe the sensations I feel like this: light, a lively feeling in my chest, spacious, buoyant and energized. I don't have a sense of density in my body, but more a sense of a lively self.

How about anxious? Recall a moment when you felt anxious. Describe the sensations of anxiety. I'd describe anxious as: tight everywhere, gripped jaw, jittery in my gut, speedy, lifted shoulders.

When you identify that you are experiencing an emotion you are also experiencing physical sensations. Many of us don't register that there is a physical sensation connected to emotion. When I ask people to describe the sensation of various emotions I am usually met with a blank stare for a few moments, especially when asking about positive emotions. So I start with: Can you tell the difference between feeling frustrated and happy? Describe the difference? Where in your body do you feel: frustration or anger or joy or peace? How do you know you are feeling it? Describe the sensations of the different emotions?

Sensations are what we experience. Jittery, tight, spacious, calm, soft, easy, open, stiff, and so many more sensation words. Emotion words like happy, sad, afraid are words we use to describe a collection of particular sensations. The emotion word is the concept. The sensations like tight, gripped, easy, open are the experience of the emotion.

Sensations are the way your response system communicates with you.

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What if your sensations were a reliable guide? What if your response system is like an inner-compass that can help you do everything from detect danger to recognizing beauty? What if you have an inner-compass that over and over again shows you your innate love and joy?

## THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE RESPONSE SYSTEM

### *Rainy Day Story – Misattributing our Sensations*

Three people are standing in the park talking. It begins to rain. One person smiles and dances for joy. Another shrieks “Oh no!” and pulls her shirt up over her head to cover her hair as she runs for cover. The third person dives under the nearby bench, freezes in a fetal position in terror. Three people in the same situation, rain starting in the park, with three completely different responses.

We ask each person about his or her reaction. Number one says, “The rain is great! I am so happy. I have been in a drought area and haven't seen life-giving rain for years!” Number two says, “The rain is so frustrating. I just got my hair dyed. It cost me a fortune. I have to keep it dry for 24 hours.” The third person can barely talk. But given time, the story comes out that the last time he had been in rain a friend had been struck by lightning and was killed. Faster than thought his system says, “Rain is DANGEROUS! You may die now!” In summary:

1. Rain is good, life-giving.
2. Rain is frustrating, wrecks my hair.
3. Rain is life-threatening, very dangerous.

Let's look closely at what is going on here. A person feels a certain way in a particular situation and attributes the feeling to the situation. People literally attribute feelings, responses to the object/situation they believe is causing them to feel a certain way. Rain is good; rain is frustrating; rain is dangerous.

Rain is just rain being rain. Rain doesn't possess an attribute like good or bad or frustrating or terrifying. You are feeling the physical sensations of good, bad, frustrating or terrifying rain in your body. You feel the good, bad, frustrating, terrifying response in *you*.

It is common to misattribute *feelings* to the objects/situations being *experienced*. You might say “good dog”, “annoying driver” or “rude waiter”. These are all examples of misattributing a feeling you have to an object: the dog, driver or waiter. You feel the good, annoyed, rude feeling in your body. The dog, driver or waiter don't feel good, annoyed or rude.

It is useful for you to have the feelings to tell you about what you like or don't like in the world around you. Your response system is showing you what you do or don't value. But, if you attribute those qualities to others you will miss the point of your response system, at best, or blame the world for your troubles, at worst.

*Beauty's definition is not a democratic experience; we are all czars in this realm. If there is a bee in your hand, what's in your eye? Beauty. Because beauty is in the eye of the bee holder. See, I think that joke is beautiful. You are entitled to think otherwise. From greenProfit, Nov 2011 p.34 The Age of Beauty, and Vice-Versa by John Friel*

## WHAT RESPONSES TELL YOU

If your feelings aren't showing you an attribute of situations, people or objects, what do they tell you about? Let's go back to the rain in the park scenario. There is the situation – the rain. There is the feeling/response of each person – happy, frustrated, terrified. You can see the rain and you can see the different responses. These parts of the response system are visible.

<i>Visible</i>	<i>Visible</i>
Situation	Feeling/response
Rain-----	-->Happy
Rain-----	-->Frustrated
Rain-----	-->Terrified

Rain means something different to each person. The people in the park don't respond to the rain. What they each feel is their individual interpretation of the rain.

Look at the chart below:

<i>Visible</i>	<i>Invisible</i>	<i>Visible</i>
Situation	Interpretation/meaning/construct	Feeling/response
Rain	Rain gives life ----- -	--->Happy
Rain	Rain will wreck my hair -	--->Frustration
Rain	Rain kills me -----	--->Terrifying

Can you see that the feeling/response each person had was caused by each person's individual interpretation?

The invisible column, the interpretation/meaning/construct, is literally invisible to each person. They don't even know they made meaning or have an interpretation or a construct because meaning-making/interpreting life happens in the other-than-conscious processes. No wonder people get confused about what feelings are telling them.

If rain created the feeling then everyone would feel the same in the rain. It can NOT be the rain that caused the feeling. Each person FELT the feeling of his or her specific INTERPRETATION of rain based on the meaning s/he had made or constructed about rain throughout life up to that moment.

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In living life you automatically, unconsciously, search for meaning. It isn't a verbal process. It isn't intellectual. The meaning that you form becomes the way you understand the world and yourself in it. It is how you: construct your Self, construct your story of the world, construct your understanding of the world, and construct your values.

You **feel** the meaning you've made; you feel your understanding. Responses tell you about your **interpretation** of the world, not about the world. Another person's response to something tells you about how she interprets the experience. It tells you about her life, her way of seeing, her perspective, her point of view, her values. Her feeling is **true for her**. Her current construct is true



for her, even if it isn't true for you. Responses/feelings are part of an internal compass designed to help each individual navigate their own particular life.

Sometimes the meaning made at a particular time of life is no longer useful. It might have been perfect to survive a particular situation. But, now the interpretation is no longer accurate and is getting in the way of living life.

For example, if like the person in our rainy day story, you are afraid of the rain then the tense feeling of fear would be a negative message. You don't like the feeling of fear. Your intellect says "I want to get over my fear of rain. I know this rain isn't dangerous and I want to go to my kid's soccer game." But the fear sensation of the inaccurate interpretation is strong and gets in the way of living your life.

In this situation the common reaction is to try to relax, to change the feeling. So you try to relax, calm down; you try to change the feeling directly. "I don't like this feeling, I want a better feeling." This approach can help temporarily but doesn't change the root problem. The root of the 'bad' feeling is the no-longer-accurate construct you have of rain based on the terrible experience in a storm. Remember, you feel your construct – the construct is what feels 'bad' – not the rain. Changing a feeling is mistaking the symptom for the cause. When you try to change the feeling

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If, instead of shooting the messenger, you recognize and stop to understand the significance of your symptom in the moment it is occurring you can bring your 'invisible' construct to conscious awareness. When the invisible construct becomes visible, you have options.

Your system isn't broken or wrong because you feel a bad symptom. It is working beautifully to wake you up to your interpretation. The fear, feels bad and alerts you. It is like your inner-compass says "Hey, Are you sure this is true?" If it is a dangerous situation you can take action. If it isn't, you can investigate your interpretation.

Interpretations can be changed! In fact, it is often easier to change an interpretation than external reality.

## THE HEART OF THE RESPONSE SYSTEM YOUR THREAT/BENEFIT ANALYZER

The most fundamental purpose of this meaning-making ability is the need to stay alive, to stay safe. To serve this fundamental need your response system works as a built-in threat-benefit analyzer or value-register.<sup>iv</sup> Essentially your system is evaluating your experiences for threat or benefit. It is like a compass pointing you toward safe and warning you of danger. When your

system interprets a situation as a benefit, you just carry on without any impulse to make a change; when your system interprets an experience as threatening, you get a loud signal to wake up and watch out.

In our rain in the park scenario, the meaning each person's system makes of the rain, (the interpretation s/he has of rain) is what s/he is responding to. Each person feels the feeling of the meaning s/he has of the rain. Every similar experience and the meaning made in those past moments contributes to the interpretation being made at this particular, specific moment.

In our scenario the threat-benefit analysis of Person One who dances is one of benefit, Person Two who covers her head is one of mild threat, and Person Three who panics is one of life-and-death threat. The compass of each person tells each person how to deal with the rain based on what the rain means to each person. The compass is personal.

The compass is personal.

Our third person experienced a friend dying in rain by lightning; he had a traumatic experience associated with rain. On the simplest level trauma is the threat/benefit analyzer carving a fast and powerful interpretation into our systems to protect us. It makes total sense that our system is designed to quickly and faster-than-thought alert us to danger. Not only do we have a threat-benefit analyzer, but it is biased toward giving us a loud signal/strong sensation when it detects threat.

Think of this evolutionarily. A tribe walks by a cave and a saber-tooth tiger eats someone. From then on everyone who was there gets strong fear signals when near similar environments to warn them of possible saber-tooth tiger haunts. Fear, anxiety is a fundamental survival mechanism. This survival demand even helps explain why we attribute our feelings to the object. It is a survival shortcut to simply label tiger as bad, dangerous, terrifying.

The same kind of fear/stress response and misattribution of feelings that we used to need to survive living with life-threatening saber-tooth tigers, we now apply to modern worries like: being late, serving the less-than-perfect meal for someone, believing you know what another person 'should' do or performing for an audience. It is as if our compass was perfectly designed for another era. It still works beautifully but to keep it from killing us we need to know how to interpret

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## *Interfering Interpretations and First Steps to Change*

The rainy day scenario lays out the architecture of the response system on the whole continuum of threat to benefit. When all appears well, happy, beneficial or neutral you don't need to understand your interpretation. But, when you don't like what you are feeling or when what you are feeling interferes with living your life, updating your interpretation of your experience is the key to change.

In the rain example you would not want to train the system not to fear rain at all times because some rain situations are dangerous. It would be smart to be afraid enough to go take cover. You don't want to stop feeling fear in case the current situation is actually a dangerous one. Instead, when you feel fear in the rain, stop and assess the current reality. Is there danger? If yes, the fear is a perfect signal to take action. Find shelter now! If no, there are processes to learn to teach the system a new construct. You would NOT want to be rid of signals. That would be like dismantling your gas gauge because you ran out of gas.

When you don't like what you are feeling, understanding how your response system works can be a powerful tool for making change where change can be made, at the level of you and your interpretation of your experience.

How to change interpretations starts with recognizing that what you are feeling, is the feeling of an interpretation of reality. *You feel your construct.*

A challenging but crucial step to working with your guidance system is to remember that your negative sensations aren't the problem. The feeling of fear isn't the problem. "This feeling of fear, that I don't like, is a signal my system is sending me. Fear is the feeling of an interpretation I am having." How to change interpretations starts with recognizing that *what* you are feeling is the feeling of an interpretation of reality. *You feel your construct.* So next time you feel something is 'bad', 'good' 'frustrating' see if you can test this out. "What is the interpretation of the experience that would explain the feeling I am having?"

Below is the scaffold for the basic process of updating an interpretation:

- Perceive Sensation – Wake up in a moment of the response, identify the sensations of the feelings. *I am terrified. I can't breathe and am gripped and shaking...*
- Discern – Separate the response from the stimulus. *I am terrified but, it isn't the rain that is terrifying.*
- Clarify – What is my interpretation of the moment that is causing my feeling. *I am interpreting the rain as dangerous. Is this true?*

- Assess & confirm or update – Is this interpretation accurate to the current, exact felt moment of life. *“Am I safe in this moment when it is raining? Yes, I am. Feel the feeling in your body of how safe you actually are. I can feel the ground and my breath and hear the kids on the field. I am not in any danger. At this moment – there is no thunder and lightning. I know how dangerous lightning can be so I’ll keep a watch out to see if it starts. But, for now I can enjoy this day as it is.”* If when you assess, you discover your fear response is appropriate to the situation, I am in danger. Then you take cover or do whatever else is necessary to stay safe.

This work is not about always having happy feelings. It is about the happiness that comes from the clarity you feel when working intelligently with your internal-compass. It warns you of real threats and guides you toward benefit. As you understand how your compass works you can navigate your life toward joy and peace, and if you so choose, toward suffering if that is what you want.

*“You don’t need to look any further than yourself to see a miracle every day.”*

I wrote that line to my mentor David Gorman after exploring this material through LearningMethods™ and suddenly “getting it”, suddenly feeling the significance of being able to transform my wellbeing myself. I was feeling my very own inner-compass and it seemed to be guiding me to health, to joy, to my wholeness with the universe.

This work is not about always having happy feelings. It is about the happiness that comes from the clarity you feel when working intelligently with your internal compass.

I didn’t have to “breathe”, “calm down” or try to change my symptoms. Symptoms didn’t really exist in this response system perspective. I didn’t have to improve myself; I just met my system as it was. What had felt like problems, stresses, confusion, feeling lost, were actually signals to wake up, look more closely at the moment and see clearly how I was interpreting my experience. I was waking up to life. In harnessing the beauty of this system I was literally awestruck. My system was whole and in kinship with all that was around me. <sup>vi</sup>

When you can utilize this system you have the key to freedom from being trapped in patterns of pain. When you can navigate using your inner-compass you experience the miracle of your own being. When you harness the beauty of your response system, you will be led toward wholeness,

When you can utilize this system you have the key to freedom from being trapped in patterns of pain. When you can navigate using your inner-compass you experience the miracle of your own being. When you harness the beauty of your response system, you will be led toward wholeness, peace, and joy.

peace, and joy.

## SUMMARY

1. Sensations are the language of the response system. Notice the physicality of your emotions.
2. Blaming the situation or another person for what you are feeling is an indicator of misunderstanding your response system. Good dog, annoying driver, terrifying rain. This is misattributing your sensation to the situation.
3. Your response system is an interpreting, meaning making system. It is how you self-construct.
4. You feel the meaning your system has made, not the situation or the person/object that seems to stimulate the feeling.
5. To change a feeling you don't like or is interfering with your life, you need to update the interpretation.

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## COMING SOON - PART 2 - USING YOUR COMPASS – DISHES IN THE SINK & OTHER ADVENTURES IN APPLYING THE RESPONSE SYSTEM INFORMATION TO LIFE'S CHALLENGES.

Part 2 will have stories of applying this material to specific situations like:

Performance Anxiety

Blaming others

Irritation at another person

Burn-out

Frustration

Learning a skill

Teaching

Part 3 will be the Patterns of Joy™ movement practice for grounding in healthy perspectives.

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<sup>i</sup> For more on this fundamental question of human design see David Gorman's articles:

<http://www.learningmethods.com/lost.and.found.htm> and

<http://www.learningmethods.com/question.htm>. The article that started my journey questioning improvement was: <http://www.learningmethods.com/circular.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> See my article the Coordination of Bliss: <http://www.learningmethods.com/bliss.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> For more information about ways to work with me see: [www.stonesinwater.com](http://www.stonesinwater.com) or contact me at [babette@stonesinwater.com](mailto:babette@stonesinwater.com) or 612.729.7127

<sup>iv</sup> See Dr. Leon Thurman at [www.leonthurman.com](http://www.leonthurman.com)

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<sup>vi</sup> For more information about my work please contact me: [babette@stonesinwater.com](mailto:babette@stonesinwater.com) or 612.729.712 or [www.stonesinwater.com](http://www.stonesinwater.com). I apply this material to music education through The Center for Sound Music Education™ – A Pedagogy of Empowerment. Sound Music Education™ is trademark of Jen Moir & Babette Lightner, all rights reserved. Patterns of Joy™ is a trademark of Babette Lightner, all rights reserved.