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# Insights into Survival, Trauma & Regulation

*Understanding the Language of Your Body*

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*A traumatized body is not damaged — it is deeply devoted.*



## Introduction

What follows is an introduction to The Golden Path's lens on trauma, somatics and a way of discovering safety and awakening in the body that meets the feminine heart.

There are many ways to understand and 'work' with trauma and somatics – teachings, teachers, education & studies, modalities, and lineages. This material is not meant to replace your own experiences or those studies.

The lens and teachings below are not fixed truths or conclusions. Nor are they professional advice or therapy. They are living invitations - a collection of insights, considerations, understandings, awarenesses - meant to be met with curiosity and possibility for how you might meet yourself, your body, and life itself.

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## The Survival Language Of Your Body

### The Instinctual (Survival) Language of the Body

Our animal body responds with instinctual languages of protection, safety and survival. These core languages exist in all of the natural world and are a reminder that we are nature.

**Fight** – The instinct to move toward the threat in an effort to protect, fight it or scare it off. This may show up like punching, throwing, hitting, kicking, screaming, running towards the threat, confronting head on.

**When we are stuck in Fight:** reactive, angry and tense, quick to emotional or physical aggression, regularly expressing judgements and disappointments, overwhelming feeling of being “wound up”, verbal and body cues of disgust, disappointment, withdrawal, closure, skepticism, distrust, undermining and sarcasm.

**Flight** – The instinct to move away, to create distance between yourself and the threat. This may show up as physically ejecting out of the space.



**When we are stuck in Flight:** constant thoughts/inspirations/ideas, over-scheduling, restlessness, feeling uncomfortable with quiet/stillness, overidentification with doing/being a doer, feeling bored unless entertained, checking the time/phone often, changing the subject often, avoiding confrontation, addictions and compulsions. The body and mind literally feel like it cannot slow down or stop, feeling an overwhelming need to escape or be done with a situation/conversation/experience, etc.

**Freeze (can also show up as Collapse)** – The instinct to become still, invisible. It is an immobility response. The body constricts, does not move or becomes limp and collapses to survive the threat by not provoking the threat/predator or becoming small/still it becomes invisible.

**When we are stuck in Freeze (or collapse):**

Signs may be “spacing out” or disassociating, feeling foggy and/or indecisive, feeling physically numb, unable to act or speak, feeling disoriented (not feeling the body in space and time - like a subtle anesthesia quality). \*Being stuck in Collapse as a subtype of a freeze may look like exhaustion, chronic fatigue, heaviness, depression, low motivation, emotionally numb, feeling flat, the feeling of giving up, what's the point, etc.

**Fawn (with Freeze)** – The instinct to perform and please others to gain safety.

We see fawning as a hybrid pattern - where the true self /expression becomes frozen while another part comes online to perform. In this case we hide our authentic response (which is often to fight or flee) and acquiesce to signs of “I am not a threat.” - I do not disappoint or confront and so on.

**When we are stuck in Fawn:** people pleasing as a baseline, being the “nice one”, feeling responsible for everyone, feeling exhausted from your relationship, chronic caretaking (caretaking to avoid another's distress, avoid disconnection or confrontation), soothing, appeasing and/or deferral to our “captors” (Captors can be parents, peer groups, partners, children, clients) invisibility, exhaustion. Chronically saying yes when we really are a no.



## What Is Trauma

Trauma is not the event that occurred. It is our body's response to the event that was never able, not allowed or did not know how to complete the cycle of Regulation. In this case, our body does not orient to safety, it does not realize it has survived and it does not enter into a parasympathetic state. Instead it stays in contraction, tension, vigilance.

When life overwhelms us with an experience that is too fast, too soon, too much - our bodies flood with a charge of adrenaline. When we're not able to discharge or metabolize that energy, it lodges in the body and becomes trauma.

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### When the Energy Gets Stuck

The human body is designed to feel charge and discharge it.

A normal healthy survival cycle:

**Activation** — The nervous system becomes alert and prepares to respond

**Response** — The energy moves into one of the instinctual pathways: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn

**Regulation** — The body discharges the energy and the body returns to rest, safety, and integration

However, when the step of regulation is interrupted, the intense charge of energy remains trapped inside the body as it continues to believe it is unsafe. Traumatization occurs when the survival energy has nowhere to go, becoming a loop inside the nervous system rather than a movement through it.

From this place it stays chronically “on the look out” for anything and everything that can be a possible threat. This state of being shapes our being - we begin to make life choices, create an identity, behave, believe and express from a place of survival.

Please also note:

We hold our survival response as a natural mechanism to threat or potential harm/invasion..just like a sneeze, coughing, blinking.

There are many experiences and environments that can bring about a Survival Response while also thwarting our ability to regulate.



### Generally Speaking:

- ◆ Event-Based: a single moment or experience of threat or overwhelm
- ◆ Developmental: prolonged or repeated exposure to unsafe conditions, especially in childhood
- ◆ Intergenerational: inherited imprints of our ancestors' unprocessed experiences—literally woven into our nervous system and DNA.

### Please also note:

We also hold that trauma doesn't even have to be "an event" - we can be traumatized by our own thoughts, memories, concepts or beliefs.

### A few examples:

- ◆ Not being able to fight/flight as a child
- ◆ Natural disasters or uncontrollable events (a tornado devastates your town, a school shooting, a car accident, witnessing a living being be harmed or killed, having to take another's life, not being able to save another's life, an emergency surgery, losing our home etc)
- ◆ Covert daily experiences - (stuck in a situation where someone more powerful is overwhelming/abusing or controlling outcomes, the experience of having to take care of our parents emotions, health, wellbeing with no room for our needs as a child, sibling bullying or competition, having to protect yourself at school because you're different, etc)
- ◆ Domestic violence or unsafe family systems where fight/flight makes something worse
- ◆ Medical procedures that chemically induce freeze (think surgeries that require anesthesia, numbing, epidurals) OR fawning to be the "good patient"
- ◆ Chronic illness, pain, or conditions within the body that you cannot get away from because its your body and/or its mysterious
- ◆ Patterns of survival inside family/cultural/societal systems (for example, people-pleasing, high achievement, controlling, perfectionism to stay safe and receive love/acceptance/attention)
- ◆ Systems of oppression, discrimination, powerlessness - a domination too big/vast to fight or escape and too large to address on your own



## The Body As Benevolent And Sovereign

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### The Benevolent Body

A traumatized body is not damaged—it is deeply devoted. It has worked overtime to protect you through real and imagined threats, often for decades.

To honor this devotion, we now take the steps to teach our body (and retrain our brain) to know how/when the danger has passed.

We do not need (nor do we really want) to eliminate our survival responses.

We simply need to help them rest once they have done their job.

The question is not: “What’s wrong with me?”

The question is: “Is my body’s response still congruent with my current reality?”

This takes presence and attunement to all the subtle ways the body will respond from survival.

Let us learn to move slowly enough inside that we can pause to speak safety into the body, to acknowledge ‘the danger has passed,’ - so She may rest, repair, and unfold naturally back into aliveness

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### The Sovereign Body

Not only is our body benevolent, but She is also Sovereign. She is not something to control, fix or lord over. She is a living intelligent being that deserves honor, respect, gratitude and admiration.

She digests, dreams, repairs, grows, and regulates without our conscious command, every single day. She is the very embodiment of being ALIVE.

Our role is not to dominate Her but to partner with Her. To listen to her subtle (and not so subtle) cues, to attune and even lovingly anticipate what She might need or want to feel safe, to honor Her innate wisdom...wise well beyond our mind...this body has existed in many different shapes and forms over not just this lifetime, but many lifetimes.

When we begin relating to our bodies rather than trying to dominate or lord over Her, our trauma (trapped energy) unwinds through the power of respect, curiosity, and tenderness - there you will find She reciprocates well beyond anything you would have imagined.



Desire belongs to the mind—it dreams without limit.

Capacity belongs to the body—it has seasons, rhythms, and needs. We can stretch, reach and strive into more capacity, however if we wish for sustainable expansion, a place where we can receive and give more, this expansion takes respect, gentleness, attunement and time.

Learning to honor capacity over desire is what keeps us in right relationship with our energy, our growth, and our healing.

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## Regulation & Safety

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### What is the difference between Regulation and Modulation

Regulation happens when the nervous system comes down from activation— this might look like trembling, crying, roaring, shaking, deep breathing — the body completing its natural "discharge" cycle that it could not before or has not yet.

Modulation is the ability to move between the states of the cycle (Activation, Survival Response, Regulation) easily and fluidly, without getting stuck. We will always have (and want) our

Nervous System cycle of protection, safety and survival to stay intact - we aim however to modulate well, so we do not become stuck in an exhausting state of survival looping behaviors and thinking.

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### What is the difference between Capacity and Desire

Our success with somatic work depends on our ability to identify the difference between capacity and desire.

Desire is of the mind. It's what you want or what you think you should be experiencing. Desire is infinite.

Capacity, however, is finite. Our bodies have limitations and these limitations are always changing based on seasons, hormone cycles, quality of sleep, what we're eating, what we're navigating in life at that moment.

Learning how to respect our limitations and work with our current capacity, instead of orienting to desire, can keep us in reciprocity with what we think we want & need vs what is actually

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possible for our body to give and receive in the now.

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### Building Capacity

Capacity is a term that simply means the amount of room inside oneself to handle high sensation.

A body that has built resilience and capacity, is one with more space, more ease, and less constriction.

This means when high sensations enter the body they're able to move freely through us instead of getting stuck inside of us and stored somewhere.

Life is inherently activating and stressful. There's no avoiding it. Activation and stress is everywhere.

We can brace against it or we can expand into it. When a regulated body meets a stressful situation it can release the stress and trauma much more quickly and build resilience to experience future stressors with greater ease.

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### Safety Within

Safety is not a place outside of you. It does not exist in another being, experience or environment.

This doesn't mean a particular environment or person doesn't have an effect. It certainly can, but the most profound shift comes from your body trusting and connecting with its own capacity to meet what is.

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### Some Helpful Cues of Regulation

Biological: a more settled heartrate, blood pressure reduces, inflammation and pain decrease, breath becomes deeper, relaxed digestion

Behavioral: kindness, responsive vs reactive, discernment, curious, grateful, clear boundaries, slower speech, restful sleep, nourishing choices, eating balanced meals, nourishing habits and relationships, stressful situations become less appealing, addictions become uninteresting.

Physical: the chest is more open, shoulders relax, eye contact is easier, body stretches and moves intuitively, facial muscles relax, posture adjusts.

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Energetic/Spiritual: felt sense of Oneness, a sense of something beyond the Self, feeling a sense of All is Well, a sense of trust in the mystery and in the emergence of being human, softness, ease, peace, joyfulness

Please remember you are a multidimensional, multilayered being.

Your regulated Self and your dysregulated parts can coexist – both are welcome, both are holy.

There is nothing to fix here. Only attunement and care. More of you to Love.

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## Considerations & Inquiries

We all have access to the full range of survival responses - fight, flight, freeze, fawn - depending on the threat and our belief about our capacity to meet that threat, we will draw upon different responses.

1) Do you have a survival response that seems most familiar (perhaps even most comfortable or safe?)

If so, where does this familiar response typically show up? Is there a person, situation or environment that calls forth this response?

2) How often do you track your body in a survival response? Do you ever notice your body in a survival response during “regular” life - for example during conversations, family gatherings, shopping, upon waking / trying to fall asleep, while eating, while watching a movie or scrolling social media, at work, in your thoughts about life, love, relating, your body, etc?

3) When you do notice your body is in survival, what is your response? Do you push through it, do you feel overwhelmed/disappointed/annoyed/embarrassed by it, do you feel grateful for it, etc.

4) When have you been really grateful for your survival response? What was the situation and why were you grateful?

5) When do you feel regulated? What does a “regulated you” look and feel like? What cues do you notice (energetic, spiritual, emotional, physical, biological) How do you move, breathe, think, express?

