

# attuned

---

Practicing Interdependence to  
Heal Our Trauma—and Our World

---

**THOMAS HÜBL**

with Julie Jordan Avritt



# Contents

Introduction	1
--------------	---

## **Part One**

1. Ancient Principles, Evolutionary Insights	11
Practice: Mapping the Inner-Body Landscape	23
2. Essential Principles of Human Development	27
Practice: Stress Assessment and Reduction	43
3. The Art of Attunement	45
Practice: Inner-Body Attunement	48
Practice: The Three-Sync Technique	58
4. The Art of Transparent Communication	63
Practice: Relational Attunement	76
5. Presencing the Shadow	79
Practice: Processing the Karma of the Day	89
6. Trauma's Impact	95

## **Part Two**

7. The Power of Healing Relation	115
8. Guidance for Facilitators of Healing	131

## CONTENTS

9. Ancestral Healing	159
Practice: A Simple Ancestral Healing	176
10. Healing for the Collective	179
Practice: Global Social Witnessing	187
Epilogue	199
Acknowledgments	203
Notes	205
Resources	215
About the Author	219
About the Co-author	221

# Introduction

*This is a dark time, filled with suffering and uncertainty. Like living cells in a larger body, it is natural that we feel the trauma of our world. So, don't be afraid of the anguish you feel, or the anger or fear, because these responses arise from the depth of your caring and the truth of your interconnectedness with all beings.*

—JOANNA MACY AND SAM MOWE

**W**e live in stark times. Across the world, nations are colored by intensifying rancor and hostility. A sharp tableau of deepening division and civic unrest rises against a backdrop of mounting political authoritarianism. Even long-standing democracies are proving vulnerable to threat or dissolution. Political, racial, ethnic, religious, and sectarian conflicts are waged again or anew, while global arms traders, regional drug cartels, and every platform for local and international organized crime continue to profit. War refugees, climate migrants, and weary travelers of all stripes face outright persecution and hidden indignities. In many places, the poor grow poorer, while indigenous peoples experience continued suppression and denigration, if not protracted extermination. Tribal lands are newly stolen, occupied, or spoiled; ancient rites are desecrated and lifeways dishonored; and ancestors are disrespected or forgotten—all while our planet's life-giving forests burn unmitigated and its rivers and oceans grow steadily more toxic. Traumatized persons haunt traumatized landscapes.

Yet, however dire, these realities need not be read as signs of certain apocalypse. We belong to a living planetary system—a living,

thriving cosmos—that is self-organizing and self-healing. Humans are not apart from nature; we are *of* nature. Regardless of humanity’s current condition, we are never truly separate or even solely individual; we are members of a radical, co-evolving whole. Pearls in Indra’s net, we belong to and arise from the “great distributive lattice,”<sup>1</sup> the elegant, cosmic web of causal interdependence.

Consider these things: the impossibly delicate watermeal, a flowering aquatic plant smaller than a grain of rice, is rootless and free floating. Yet, it can locate and connect with just one or even thousands of its own kind, as well as with tiny plants of other species, to form life-sustaining mats across the surface of a placid duck pond. And this: the simple, humble mushroom, which sends its delicate fibers (mycelium) deep into the ground in a widely arcing radius. By casting a net from these tiny probing filaments, the fungus links itself to the roots of nearby plants, trees, and other fungi—and in the process connects each to the others. This organic “internet” produces a symbiotic mechanism for communication, water location, nutrient exchange, and mutual defense against infection, infestation, and disease. The presence of fungal mycelia allows nearby trees to communicate across distances, alerting other trees, even those of different species, to the presence of invading insects, thereby signaling the production of biochemical-repellent defenses. Almost magically, trees use mycelia to transfer essential nitrogen, carbon, and phosphorous, sustaining the life and health of not only those trees but the entire local ecosystem of plants, insects, animals, and even humans.

Perhaps more astonishingly, fungal mycelia have proven to be cheap, abundant, and powerful natural remediators of many types of toxins left behind in soil and wastewater: heavy metals, petroleum fuels, pesticides, herbicides, pharmaceuticals, personal-care products, dyes, and even plastics.<sup>2</sup> Fungal mycelia naturally break down offending pollutants, creating cleaner, safer, *healthier* land and water.

If a life-form the size of a pinhead (the watermeal) or one seemingly as simple as a mushroom can reach out to other species to do any or all of these things—self-organize, connect, communicate, assist,

protect, defend, heal, and *restore*—why couldn't humans? After all, we, too, belong to nature. Perhaps each of these qualities (and many more) are imbued in us—inbuilt characteristics of what it means to be alive on this particular planet, orbiting this particular star, in this particular galaxy. Perhaps intelligent interdependence is our natural, even sacred, endowment, one we can lean into, enhance, and strengthen in service of our own species, and all others.

After all, the refusal to honor our interdependence and enact healthy and sustained relations has caused no end of suffering. If the underlying challenge of climate change (or any other wicked or systemic social problem) can be traced to human disrelation—a state of being *out of accord* with nature, ourselves, and other humans—then I propose it to be a fundamentally *spiritual* problem, as much as an environmental, scientific, technological, cultural, psychological, economic, or historical one. To construct an adequate or sufficiently innovative response to the challenge, we must think holistically. It is time to bridge East and West, to marry the wisdom of our ancient and long-standing spiritual traditions to the revelations of contemporary science. As we bring the power of scientific insight to bear on our understanding of modern social ills, we may amplify our capacity to integrate that information with the rich awakening practices of consciousness offered by our world's mystical traditions. In this way, we may awaken to and further develop our most intrinsic biological gifts: the powers to self-organize, connect, communicate, assist, protect, defend, heal, and restore.

And more.

Perhaps, instead of finding ourselves alive in a time of exponential, unstoppable decline, we will discover the power to awaken and initiate newer, higher, evolutionary gifts. Though, to accomplish any or all of these things, I believe we must do them together—not separately, but in relation.

In her 1997 book, *God's Ecstasy: The Creation of a Self-Creating World*, mathematician, philosopher, and contemplative theologian Beatrice Bruteau described the divine order of the cosmos—what she saw as the original imprint of creation, as an expression of “symbiotic unity”<sup>3</sup> (a

pattern observed in our fungal mycelia). Author, theologian, and Episcopal priest Cynthia Bourgeault has termed this quality “holographic reciprocity,” where “the whole and the part exist in an interabiding unity.” The whole, Bourgeault writes, is “not a substance, but a *field of action*,” generated by the dynamic and ceaseless exchange of what Catalan Catholic priest and interfaith advocate Raimon Panikkar describes as “pure relationality.”<sup>4</sup>

In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen, the German Benedictine abbess and mystic visionary wrote: “O Holy Spirit, you are the mighty way in which everything that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness.”<sup>5</sup> More than eight centuries later, Thomas Berry captured the same: “The universe is a communion of subjects, rather than a collection of objects.”<sup>6</sup>

These thinkers articulated a profoundly mystical vision of the nature of reality. When taken together with the intimately relational nature of the quantum universe, or as the late theoretical physicist John Wheeler termed it, the “participatory universe,” we arrive at fundamentally compatible ontologies.

Brigid Brophy, the novelist and social reformer, wrote in 1968 about the strange and incomparable genius of nineteenth-century English illustrator, Aubrey Beardsley. Remarking on Beardsley’s unique talent, Brophy wrote: “. . . he is dramatizing not the relationships between personalities, but the pure, geometric essence of relationship.”<sup>7</sup> And that is our aim, precisely: *the pure, geometric essence of relationship*.

Like the most refined alchemical distillate or some primary source code, the architecture of true human connection somehow includes yet transcends the personal; interdependence is at once deeply intimate and utterly universal. Pure moments of relating reach us at the root, touching who we truly are, while simultaneously elevating what it is possible for us to become. The sacred geometry of active interrelation is both a portal to everything we have ever been, individually and ancestrally, and a gateway to the greater future potential of our species. To collocate this future experientially is a sacred act of communion and a natural rite of “symbiotic unity.”

These things should not be taken as Pollyanna-ish ideals. To arrive even at the furthest glimmer of the distant edge of our becoming, we have crossed an historic dark night. We have come face to face with the abyss, and in it, we must now reckon with the possibility of our own extinction. To survive, much less to flourish, we must make conscious our essential interdependence and awaken into new forms of vibrant, sustained relation.

I have taken on a vocation around spiritual practice, dedicating my life and work to what I call the *inner science of consciousness*. The territory of consciousness can be explored and understood through practices like meditation, study, prayer, movement, stillness, and through contemplation of self and nature—as well as in contemplation of the relational dynamics that exist between ourselves and others in the ordinary course of modern life (or what I call the *market-place*). In my years of personal practice and professional facilitation, I have seen the many and profound ways that such practices grow and evolve us, enriching our lives and enlivening our understanding. And it is the translucing power of relational practices to transform us that has captivated me most.

In part I of this book, I propose a core, awareness-based practice, one I call *transparent communication*. This practice is not just intended to improve our communications skills, though it does that. As a contemplative exercise, transparent communication is designed to bring us deeper into pure relationality. As a practical tool, the work enlarges our sense of relation to self, coheres our sense of connection to and belonging with others, and enhances the ways we exist in family and community. It can even advance the ways we participate in and co-create culture by bringing us into a higher level of social awareness and engagement, which is the foundation for resilient democracies. Indeed, the purpose of transparent communication is to deepen our relationship to life itself.

In part II of this book, we will apply the essentials of transparent communication to the therapeutic context for individual, ancestral, and collective healing. Transparent communication is not a stand-alone practice exclusive to one-to-one relationships, but it is at the



heart of conscious relating—with ourselves, in our families, with our ancestors, and with one another in ever larger groups.

In the more challenging moments of modern life, our sense of awareness often becomes constricted and limited. In times of difficulty and stress, we tend to lose perception of the greater field as our awareness clusters tightly within us. We become compactly self-focused by default. As a result, we are less available; we lose access to those resources that allow us to feel with and for others. Whether we're in the middle of difficult family or relationship disagreements or embroiled in the heat of workplace conflict, a sense of separation becomes heightened, and it is difficult to be present. This is not wrong; it is simply an evolutionary function that promotes survival—an adaptation to biological utility.

Deep in our nervous systems, we carry these ancient survival patterns, most of which are millions of years old, borne to us by our mammalian forebears. By contrast, transparent communication offers an evolutionary opening in consciousness. It arrives alongside similar practices at a time of deep global division and struggle, offering us tools for better navigating difficulty, enhancing our availability to be present, and expanding our awareness to include the space, energy, and subtle structures operating within and around us.

This *relational field* is a vast matrix of energy—information in motion—which exists within, around, and between us. Transparent communication helps us to bear witness to this field. It is about *relating* more than it is about relationship. It is a verb, not a noun; a process, not a thing. The more we practice, the more our awareness grows so that we begin to observe and distinguish not only aspects of the relational field that are fluid and clear but also those that are rigid, frozen, stuck, dissociated, and in shadow. And we learn to perceive the impact of individual and collective trauma upon the field. The effect of transparent communication is the power to illuminate that field, infusing its byways and interstices with the light and lucidity of awareness, to bring healing and repair to the collective.

When I speak to groups or before an audience at an event, it is not enough that I show up knowing what I wish to say. To be effective, I must be in dialogue with the whole and, therefore, aware of the group or the audience as a dynamic system. Only noticing what is happening for me is not enough; I must be able to accurately feel and adapt to the needs of my listeners. I need to clearly sense my participants' degree of availability and curiosity. I also need to perceive whether and when I am being heard and received—or what else might be needed or present. The clarifying of the relational matrix comes with expanded awareness and offers an acceleration of our coming-into-relation. This is the leading edge of communication and leadership, and it requires deeper awareness of the intersubjective space from all.

Throughout this book, you will find an exploration of mystical and scientific theory alongside opportunities for guided contemplation. A committed practice to any artistic or other endeavor eventually delivers competence, perhaps even excellence. As an engaged contemplative practice, the art of transparent communication is no different. Dedication rewards mastery.

We can shape our daily lives into a deep and steady practice for accessing higher relational skills, working toward mastery in our ability to:

- embrace the qualities of stillness and movement
- recognize the functions and forms of perception
- transcend outmoded habits
- illuminate the relational field, filling it with awareness
- learn the arts of attunement, sensing, and presencing

Facing the complexity, uncertainty, volatility, and ambiguity of our time with wisdom requires our coming into clearer alignment, deeper coherence, and truer connection—with ourselves and one another, with nature, and with the cosmos. To prepare the way, we must study and practice. I offer this book in service of the path.

# part one

In part I of this book, we will explore the mystical principles behind human development and human connection: how each soul embodies and grows through the expression of the will and with the support of present and attuned caregivers and loved ones. This growth is led ever forward by the universal drives of being and becoming, autonomy and belonging—the ballast and the sail—which offers both stability and direction. At the center of these is the fulcrum of relationship: nearly everything in the human story depends on the quality of our connections to one another.

So, in a book about attunement, connection, and awakened interdependence, we must necessarily confront the sand in the engine, the inhibitory effect of unwitnessed, unhealed trauma on development and its fracturing impact on our capacity to relate with self and others. Yet, as they say, the medicine is in the wound. Though trauma disrupts the act of relation, conscious attunement can help us create internal and external coherence, consciously regulate the nervous system, process toxic stress, and feel more embodied and more connected with others. Attunement practices are healing tools for dealing with the effects of trauma—whether in people or across communities—and transparent communication is one such practice.

## Ancient Principles, Evolutionary Insights

*The universe and the observer exist as a pair. I cannot imagine  
a consistent theory of the universe that ignores consciousness.*

—ANDREI LINDE

*Care of the soul begins with observance of how the  
soul manifests itself and how it operates.*

—THOMAS MOORE

**F**amed physicist John Wheeler once said: “No phenomenon is a real phenomenon unless it is an observed phenomenon.”<sup>1</sup> He wasn’t being cheeky; he meant it literally. Wheeler’s strange observation was not immediately greeted with universal applause, of course. Truly radical ideas are often difficult to grok, and one prevailing order takes time to give way to the next.

In classical physics, objects exist. Planets, asteroids, and molecules have established properties and discernable characteristics, and they generally do as expected. If a classical tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it, the tree doesn’t care; it produces a riot of sound waves when it hits the ground. But in the strange world of quantum mechanics, our

“tree” is a subatomic particle, and paradoxically *a particle is a wave is a particle*. The particle/wave exists everywhere and nowhere at once, so to speak, as a probabilistic phenomenon. Stranger still, a quantum tree only pops into existence as a discrete entity with discernable characteristics, a location, and behavior when there is someone to observe its efforts—i.e., it does not even *show up* in the forest until someone is present to hear it fall.

According to the new quantum story (as described by John Wheeler), consciousness is required for anything much to happen at all. Strange, indeed. “The farther we peer into space,” writes scientist Robert Lanza, “the more we realize that the nature of the universe cannot be understood fully by inspecting spiral galaxies or watching distant supernovas. It lies deeper. It involves our very selves.”<sup>2</sup>

After the Enlightenment got going (i.e., somewhere between the lifetimes of René Descartes and Werner Heisenberg), physicists and most otherwise rational people accepted what has become the prevailing belief: namely, that ours is an objective universe, material and insensate, existing “out there.” Somehow, experts surmised, the great big physical cosmos banged into existence and lumbered along more or less steadily for billions of years before anything like the trilobite or triceratops or wolf or human called it home. This is the general cosmological story that is now largely taken for granted.

In five vastly abridged steps, that story goes more or less like so:

1. First, by some unknowable accident, *stuff* showed up—such as stars and gases and rocks and minerals and mountains.
2. Much later, and likewise inexplicably, *life* appeared. Initially, life was terribly simple, though nonetheless strange, given the otherwise inanimate order of things.
3. By and by, life inadvertently complexified by way of many random mutations. It learned to consume sunlight and laid down a green carpet across the planet—mosses, ferns, flowers, trees, etcetera.