

Notes from *Living in Process* by Ann Wilson Schaef

Living in Process is about spiritual remembering, about shedding old destructive patterns, beliefs, and behaviors; we live fully spiritually, physically, emotionally, and mentally in harmony with ourselves, others, and the planet; a deep spiritual commitment of being at one with one's life – that no matter what is going on within us, everything is all right. When we honestly own where we are or what is going on inside of us, we can move on.

We may have a personality; we are not our personality. When we think of ourselves as personalities, we mentally conceptualize ourselves as a static, unmoving, unchanging given. We then project this tendency onto others and our environment – to control life and to make life static. At some point in our evolution as human beings, we developed the notion that if we could just make ourselves and everything around us stay the same, we would feel safer. Unfortunately, trying to make ourselves and our world static has had just the opposite effect. We have become more and more anxious and more deadened.

There is a kindness and gentleness that develops in the way we treat ourselves when we recognize we are an evolving, emerging process, rooted in and connected to making conscious choices. We are actors in our life, not just reactors. When we do react, we recognize that the reactions are ours and take responsibility for them. We have to be able to move beyond our illusionary perception of dualism, which may be one of the most difficult – not impossible – tasks we have ever attempted.

For some, this seems like jumping off into the void, and maybe it is. We keep asking, "What's the third option? What's the third option?" The third option is always going inside and seeing what the truth is for you. Many people underestimate themselves and become satisfied with a quick fix. Once they're feeling better, they're not willing to go to the depths within themselves required to truly heal themselves at a soul level. They will feel a little better, give up some of their harmful and dysfunctional behaviors, and back off, accepting existence rather than true living as enough. In this work, there is an acceptance of wherever one is, while at the same time believing and knowing that we can have and are meant to have an abundant, fully alive life.

Giving up our illusion of control is one of the major steps we take toward our healing, developing the ability to trust the process of life, knowing that it will give us what we need while offering us opportunities to grow and heal. We may not always understand immediately why our lives are taking the turns they're taking. Yet, if we wait with openness, usually the learnings and the knowings will come to us when we are ready to receive them. Open, nonjudgmental thinking is possible only when we are willing to deal with our own feelings, do our own deep-process work.

We make up constructs about how we believe the world is and then we start living them instead of life. Often, we are living in a virtual reality of our own creation little related to the reality of our lives. When we switch to drama, we have left our lives. Going inside, praying, sitting with, doing our deep-process work, and waiting with are what will get us clear. If what we are deciding is important, it may take some time.

Our culture teaches us to disregard our own needs and to shut ourselves off from our spiritual selves. This has resulted in a deep sense of spiritual, emotional, and physical loss that permeates all that we do and are. We disregard our bodies, escape from intimacy with ourselves and others, and are always looking for

something outside ourselves to “fix” us or numb us out. The levels of adrenaline that we need just to keep going increase exponentially as we search in vain for meaning in our lives.

One of the first steps toward sanity is to confront our own dysfunctional processes. Dysfunction controls us. Also, by definition, dysfunctions are mind-altering and soul-destructive.

Process addictions have the same effect as substance addictions, *and* they are subtler and generally more integrated into the society. Process addictions teach us to become obsessed with activities such as excessive working, spending, exercising, sexing, and thinking.

There are many doors into our deep process: tears, a rising feeling, an overreaction or emotion too intense for the situation at hand, picking a fight with a spouse or others as a distraction. an urge to indulge in our favorite addictions, a fleeting thought or awareness, a song that won't get out of our mind, something entering our sphere that tries to lull us or trick us into believing we're experiencing the “good life,” pain, depression, deep happiness.

The actual process of our deep work teaches us to surrender. Only when we allow it to carry us wherever it wants to take us can we get the full meaning of deep process. Staying in the present with your deep-process work means you stay with whatever is coming up for you in the present. This can literally be anything – from any time, from any place. If we truly trust our process, we go where our deep work leads us. We do not predetermine where or what that will be.

The old therapy paradigm is an approach where someone, the therapist or the client, determines what one needs to work on – or not work on – and sets about doing it. In this work our deep processes have an inner wisdom that moves much beyond our thinking and understanding. *Being in the present* means we trust that wisdom to bring up what we are physically, emotionally, and spiritually ready to work on.

There is no such thing as just getting by. Symptom relief and adjustment are dead-end concepts. Whatever horrors come up in our deep process, if we are ready and willing to face them and go through them we can experience healing at a level beyond our wildest imagining. We must be willing to see what we see and know what we know. When we accept whatever comes up for us as possibilities for learning and healing, we can do what we need to do to heal. When we con ourselves and others, we destroy our souls.

Healing is most effectively and powerfully done in a community setting. And, healing the soul demands a community context for complete healing. *We have to do it ourselves. We don't have to do it alone.* We not only need support, we need to hear from one another and learn about ourselves from hearing from one another. Often, as others share their stories, their struggles, and their experiences we are able to learn about ourselves in ways that we never previously considered. The isolation of dysfunction and self-obsessed thinking takes us out of our awareness that we are a part of a whole therefore connected with all things.

There is no goal in living our process, except to live it. Our processes can change. Our lives can change as we participate in the process. Our only requirement is to trust the process and live in faith. Remember, depression and other feelings just *are*. They are there for a reason. If we can welcome them as possibilities for healing and learning, we will get the lesson. Whenever we fight a feeling or awareness, it just gets bigger. Sometimes our inner process can get depressed if we don't listen to it.

Being with ourselves, trusting our process, and doing our deep-process work result in levels of self-intimacy rarely imagined. As we do our work and explore ourselves, we may not always like what we see and what we learn. Yet, in learning truly who we are, the good and the bad, the acceptable and the unacceptable, we come to the *what is* and that's what is important. It's only from *what is* that we're able to move to *what can be*. If we will not or cannot explore and accept the *what is*, we are doomed to be stuck. Paradoxically, it's only as we accept our truth, who we are, that we have the possibility of changing. Often, we believe we are intimate when it is just our image, our façade – how we believe others want to see us or who we would like to be. This is not intimacy. This is dancing with a shadow. Many believe we find out who we are in relationships. Not true! We must have a self to bring to the relationship. If we are looking to the relationship to define us, we're simply using it as a quick fix and it is doomed to fail. Relationships aren't meant to tell us who we are. Relationships can add to who we are; they can never define who we are.

If the meaning of life is to live it, and that implies moving along our spiritual journey, then our primary relationship is with our spirituality. All other relationships exist to augment and enhance that relationship. When our primary relationship is with our spirituality, we are responsible for and to the gifts of the relationships we have in our lives, and able to open ourselves to the sometimes frightening depth of intimacy available to us. We do not let our spousal relationships or familial relationships dictate our lives. We must also remember that everyone's primary relationship is with their spirituality, and an important aspect of intimate relationships is respecting, supporting, and facilitating, where possible, this spiritual journey.

Mask relationships are made up of my mask relating to your mask and are the hallmarks of dysfunctional relationships. There are some marriages and other relationships that are built entirely on mask relationships, and one feels a progressive deadness. The real relationship may never be present in some lives, *and* it is always a blessing when it is. This relationship is the one that mirrors, reflects, and augments our primary relationship with our living process. When experienced with another human being, this relationship is very precious. This relationship is a process, not a "thing." To foster this relationship:

1. We are centered in ourselves, but not self-centered.
2. We're honest about what we want and need; we own our own behaviors and leave it to the other person to find out and own their issues.
3. We take responsibility for doing our own deep-process work and never "puke our process" on others to distract ourselves when we have something come up.
4. We recognize that when we have a strong reaction to something our spouse or friend is saying or doing, it may have nothing to do with the situation at hand. It may very well be triggering an old deep process in us that is now ready to be worked out.
5. We exist separately from our relationships – each person has to find her/his own way.
6. As we respect our own and others' processes, we begin to experience the many ways of letting go.
7. We remind ourselves that expectations are illusions of control and will become premeditated resentments.
8. We remember that love cannot be controlled. Love is a gift. We have it only to give. We cannot force others to give love to us.
9. When we have feelings, we don't need to control them, and we don't want to dump them on others. We need to go into them and do our deep process work. No one ever died from feelings, *and* many people have died from *not* feeling them.
10. As we respect our process we learn to respect the processes of others.

11. We don't need to set boundaries or work on "the relationship." When we work on the relationship, we're seeing it as static and trying to control it. We only need to do our own work and the relationship will follow, if it is right for us.
12. When we are truly *in* our relationships we are *living the process* of them. If we find ourselves looking around for something better, we have left.
13. We cannot treat a living relationship mechanically and still have a good relationship—"if I do this, then this," and so forth.
14. We are open to where our paths will lead even if that's in different directions.
15. No drama is good drama.
16. Compassion and caring are essential.
17. When we're not present in our bodies, and others are not present in their bodies, it's useless to try to carry on a conversation. We need to check out with ourselves what we need, see what is going on inside us, if possible share that information – without judgment and do what we need to do.
18. A "process pause" is essential before responding to any situation, especially if a situation is heated. Even when it's not it's wise to stop, wait, get clear, and do our own work if necessary before responding.
19. It is dishonest and disrespectful to ourselves and others to try to connect with someone who is not truly present.