

Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction: Restoring the Somatically Sacred

Shannon Michael Pater

M.A.R., M.Div., Psy.D. | E-RYT 500

Spiritual Directors International: Engage 2022

13 May 2022 | Santa Fe, NM

Shannon Michael Pater

M.A.R., M.Div., Psy.D. | Yoga Alliance E-RYT 500

Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction,
Supervision, Consultation & Apprenticeship

smpater@noticethejourney.com

NoticeTheJourney.com | @NoticeJourney

[Education & Training](#) ([red underscore](#) is a link)



Micro-Practice: Entering a Space

Orienting & Attuning, Witnessing (naming & taming), & Resourcing

- ❖ What do you notice about this space and your relationship with it?
- ❖ Is there something you want to wait outside?
- ❖ Is there something you want to bring or invite inside?

4 June: A Little a Lot: Elements of a Micro-Practice

Briefly Me

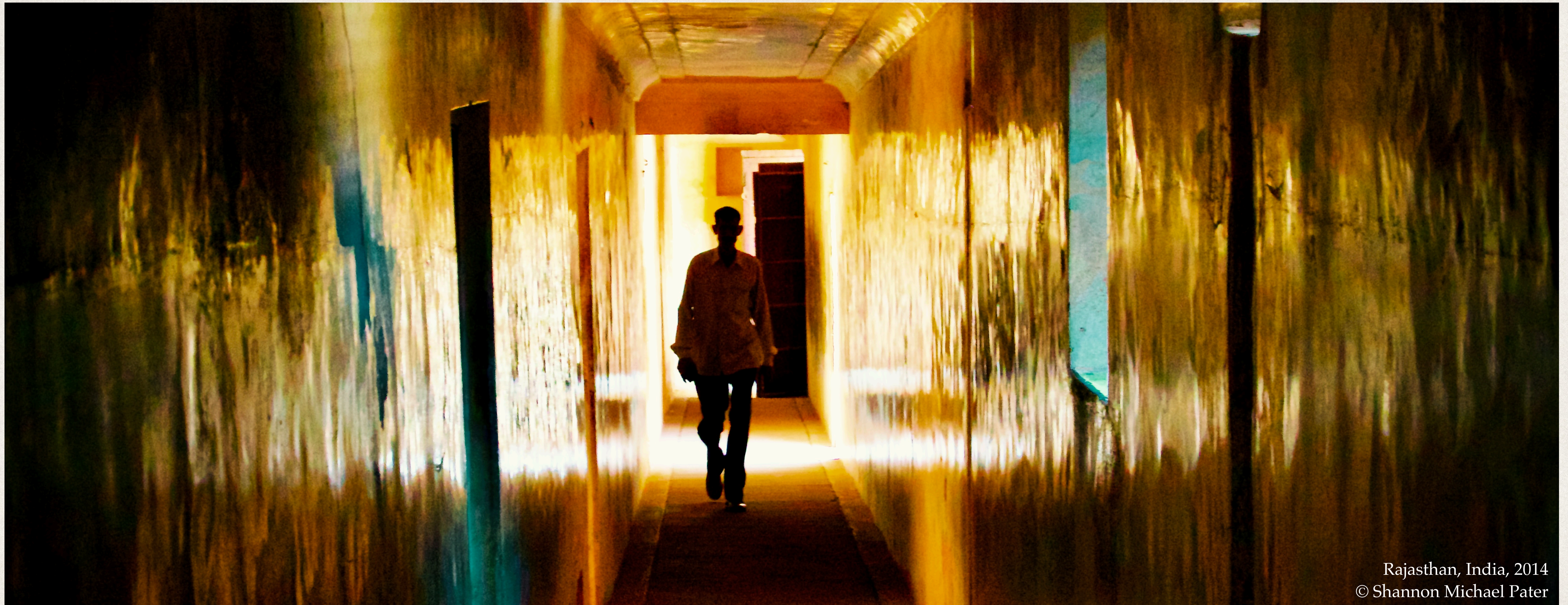
- ❖ **Complexities of privilege and oppression:** white-bodied, cisgender male, gay, genderqueer (he / they)
- ❖ **Trauma Complexities:** *intergenerational & developmental* trauma
- ❖ **Toxic Theology:** a (per)version of Christianity was killing me — *dissociation* from Love
- ❖ **Spiritual Abuse:** *spiritual bypassing* and spiritual practices were performative

[More About Me](#)



Our Time Together

- ❖ Complexities: hybrid meeting, diverse learning desires, & trauma as a topic
- ❖ My goal: manage & navigate the messiness with a grace that seeks balance
- ❖ Follow-Up: Saturday, 21 May 11am EDT / 10am CDT / 9am MDT / 8am PDT
- ❖ Additional learning opportunities.



Rajasthan, India, 2014
© Shannon Michael Pater

A Little on Perspective

I. *My* Perspective

- ❖ This is *my* perspective of Spiritual Direction and *my* trauma-informed lens: there are others!
- ❖ I use “direction / director / directee” and not “companionship / companion” — simply as preference, *not* a corrective.

II. Traumatology & Spiritual Direction: Mutually Influencing

- ❖ *Traumatology* is the study of trauma, its effects, and methods to modify the effects. The study of trauma not only helps to repair ruptures, but can also strengthen us against trauma and significant stress.
- ❖ Traumatology and spiritual direction *both* have something to *contribute* and occasional *cautions & correctives* to offer each other.
- ❖ *The Minister as Diagnostician*, Paul Pruyser (1976)

III. Spiritual Direction *is* a powerful response to trauma

- ❖ The director is an empathic witness;
- ❖ The director is a co-regulating, safe, centered, & contemplative other;
- ❖ “Direction” is helping to establish, cultivate, restore the directee with:
 - ❖ their inner wisdom
 - ❖ their spiritual resources
 - ❖ their spiritual practices.

IV. Scope of Practice

The professional range of what
you currently “do *and* don’t do”
as shaped by your knowledge, skills, experience, and choices.

V. A Continual Reflection on Your Scope of Practice

Levels of a Trauma-Informed Scope of Practice:

- ❖ **Limits:** knowing *enough* to better recognize limitations.
- ❖ **Reverse Engineering:** increasing skillful practice of support for *each* directee.
- ❖ **Focus:** skillful practice of support *focused* on the spiritual wounds of trauma.

What is your current Scope of Practice?



Ganges River, Varanasi, 2014
© Shannon Michael Pater

A Few Practice Words

An Important Word Choice

Trigger

Activate: “turned on, turned up; turned down, turned off”

An Important Concept Shift

~~Comfort Zone~~

Window of Tolerance

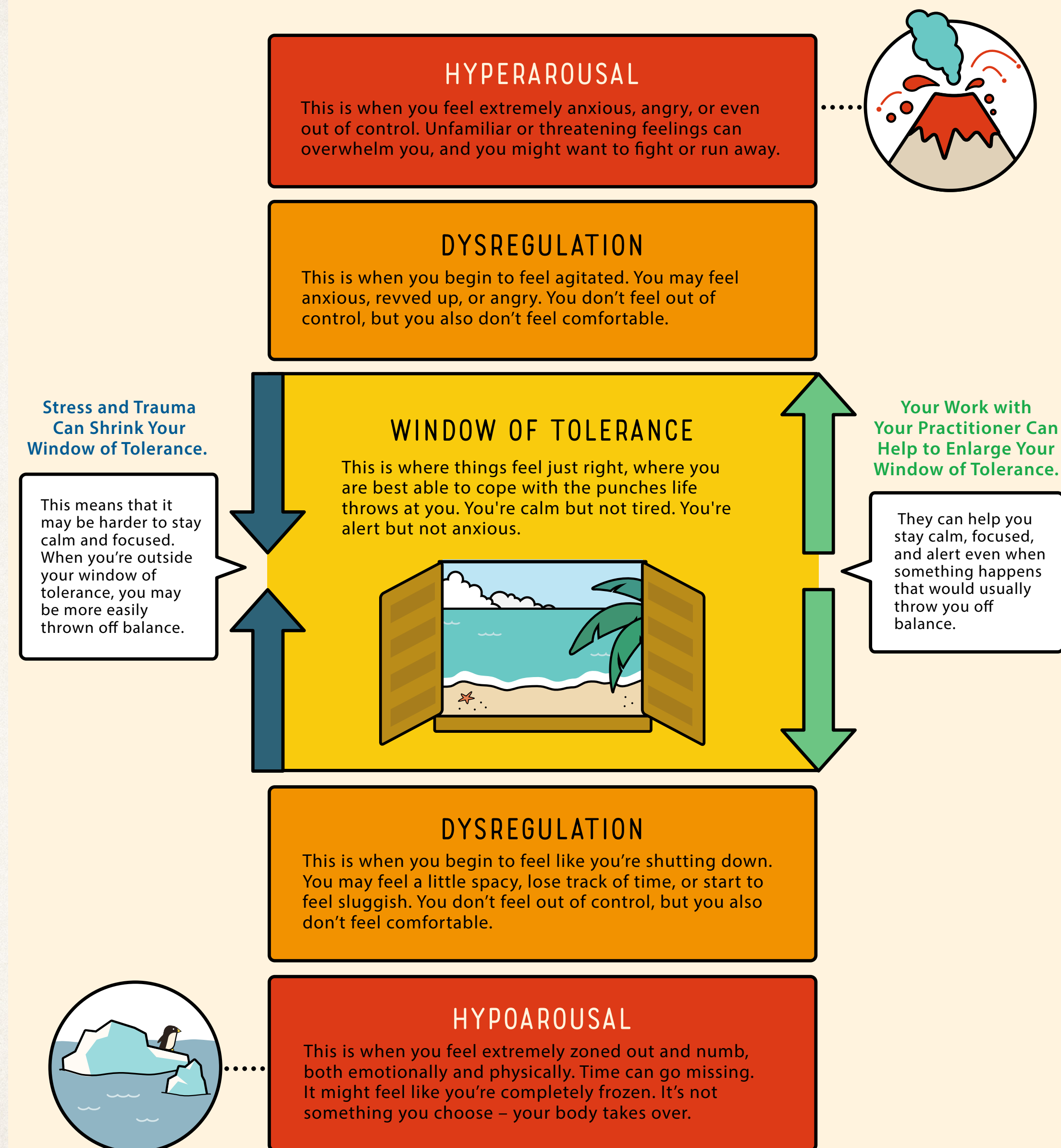
The Window of Tolerance

- ❖ Regulation
- ❖ Dysregulation
- ❖ Co-regulation
- ❖ The Threshold of Transformation
 - ❖ The edges of the panes, the edges of our pain
 - ❖ Relationally calling in, not calling out.

Being dysregulated is *not* a moral failing.

18 June: The Window of Tolerance for Spiritual Directors

How Trauma Can Affect Your Window of Tolerance



Resourcing

The ability to internally or externally identify and attune to sensations of safety and goodness,

Resourcing

The ability to internally or externally identify and attune to
sensations of safety and goodness,
no matter how “small,”

Resourcing

The ability to internally or externally identify and attune to sensations of safety and goodness, no matter how “small,” and to use these resources for self-regulation, self-soothing, self-care,

Resourcing

The ability to internally or externally identify and attune to sensations of safety and goodness, no matter how “small,” and to use these resources for self-regulation, self-soothing, self-care, for present-moment grounding, and

Resourcing

The ability to internally or externally identify and attune to sensations of safety and goodness, no matter how “small,” and to use these resources for self-regulation, self-soothing, self-care, for present-moment grounding, and to restore safety, connection, and social engagement.

Two Terms/Skills: Peter Levine

- ❖ **Pendulation:** the natural pulsation between states of expansion and contraction in the Soma. The flow allows the polarities to be integrated into a non-dualistic whole, like the ebb and flow of the tide. (Hoberman Sphere)
- ❖ **Titration:** an intentional slowing down of processing traumatic story-telling in order to allow for the integration from pendulation. (“Glancing at Grief”)

What is your heartbeat doing right now?

What is its location, quality, and texture?

Questions & Responses

Questions

Clarifications

Comments

Rebuttals

Send them: email or chat box (Zoom).
Content or practice skills; not consultation.





Triund, Dhauladhar Range, 2014 | © Shannon Michael Pater

Five Core Concepts

Discoveries in Definitions

- ❖ Spirituality
- ❖ Spiritual Direction
- ❖ Trauma
- ❖ Trauma-Informed
- ❖ Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction

“What is Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction?”

Spirituality

The felt sense
of safe and nurturing **connections**
within and among the Somas of
Self,
others,
Spirit,
and the planet.

A Decolonizing Caution

Our language & practices may create the very separation we are seeking to remedy.

A Decolonizing Caution

Our language & practices may create the very separation we are seeking to remedy.

soma: body

Soma: the whole being — individuals *and* groups have a Soma

Body politic, body of work, body of water ...

Avoiding “mind-body” (dis)connection

A binary too easily creates separation & hierarchy

A caution to [Pierre Teilhard de Chardin](#)

Decolonizing Correctives

Increase our capacity to hold, tolerate, and embrace complexities.

Western models tend to:

- ❖ Elevate the individual to the diminishment of the community;
- ❖ Create a disconnection from ancestors and landscape;
- ❖ Pathologize resistance and resilience to situational and societal trauma.

The Somatically Sacred (Wholeness of Holiness) is found in the margins of complexity.

23 July: Our Somas: Decolonizing Cautions and Corrections in Spiritual Direction

Soma Divina

A spiritual perspective and practices
that centers the Somatically Sacred,
the Wholeness of Holiness,
the radical relationship of everything to everything,
the complexities of our connections.

Spiritual Direction

A specialized and supportive relationship of
compassionate, contemplative, and skillful listening
between a spiritual director and spiritual directee

Spiritual Direction

A specialized and supportive relationship of
compassionate, contemplative, and skillful listening
between a spiritual director and spiritual directee
with the *sankalpa* (sacred intention) of
growing safe and nurturing connections

Spiritual Direction

A specialized and supportive relationship of
compassionate, contemplative, and skillful listening
between a spiritual director and spiritual directee
with the *sankalpa* (sacred intention) of
growing safe and nurturing connections
within and among the Somas
of the Self, others, Spirit, & the planet.

Spiritual Direction

A specialized and supportive relationship of
compassionate, contemplative, and skillful listening
between a spiritual director and spiritual directee
with the *sankalpa* (sacred intention) of
growing safe and nurturing connections
within and among the Somas
of the Self, others, Spirit, & the planet.

Sign-Posts

What happens when you take three intentional breaths?

What happens to your breath?

What sensations are in your soma (body)?

What happens to your sense of the space you are in (Soma)?

Trauma: What is Trauma?

- ❖ A chronic state of **disconnection** (Stephen Porges).
- ❖ Indigenous communities: separation from ancestors and land / environment.
- ❖ Trauma is what happens *in us* when faced with an overwhelming event(s) in **the absence of an empathic witness** (Peter Levine / Gabor Maté).
- ❖ Too fast, too soon, too much; too slow, too late, too little / absent (Esther Perel).
- ❖ The fracture that keeps us from running the race as we would wish (Paul Valent).

Trauma often separates us from our inner wisdom.

“Trauma is not a flaw or a weakness.
It is a highly effective tool of safety and survival.

Trauma is also not an event.
Trauma is the body’s **protective response** to an event —
or a series of events —
that it perceives as potentially dangerous.”

–Resmaa Menakem

*Whatever else trauma might be, it is
a spiritual wound.*

Trauma: Common Categories

- ❖ **Acute:** sudden shock trauma (accident), one-time event
- ❖ **Chronic:** ongoing, developmental, attachment wounds
- ❖ **Complex:** mix of varied events, intergenerational, communal

Trauma: My Three Foci

- ❖ Persistent, Invasive, Chronic Stress (PICS) from social location
Notice the Journey: Three Special Foci (Shannon Michael Pater)
- ❖ Toxic Theology and Spiritual Abuse
Training date coming: **sign-up for my newsletter of updates**
- ❖ Moral Injury
Moral Injury and the Pilgrimage of Moral Restoration (Shannon Michael Pater)

What sensations do you have in your Soma right now?

Do you feel places of expansion/openness or constriction/closed?

What is your sense of connection or disconnection?

Is there a place that needs support?

Questions & Responses

Questions

Clarifications

Comments

Rebuttals

Send them: email or chat box (Zoom).
Content or practice skills; not consultation.



Trauma-Informed

To center issues of safety, connection, and social engagement and to intentionally attend to the challenges of rupture and repair.

Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction

A specialized method of spiritual direction
that seeks to **establish**, **cultivate**, and **restore**
the felt sense
of safe and nurturing connections
within and among our Somas
of the Self, others, Spirit, and the planet.

Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction

- ❖ It is grounded in the Wisdom Traditions and modern neuroscience.
- ❖ It uses trauma-informed spiritual practices to support
 - ❖ contemplative curiosity,
 - ❖ an increased capacity to hold, tolerate, and embrace complexity, and
 - ❖ heart-courageous compassion, a turning toward our suffering, not away.

Hoped-for Outcomes of TISD

- ❖ **Agency:** connection to inner Wisdom
- ❖ **Agency — Authenticity — Attachment:** balanced, without apology or aggression
- ❖ **Post-Traumatic Wisdom:** alchemy, kintsugi, composting
- ❖ **Redemptive Empathy**
- ❖ **Disruption of Intergenerational Trauma**

“Aspirations” of Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction

Support Options

- ❖ Trauma-Informed Spiritual Direction
- ❖ Spiritual Practice Support
- ❖ Supervision (focus on director) & Consultation (focus on directee)
- ❖ Apprenticeship in a Trauma-Informed Scope of Practice

Additional Learning Opportunities

Saturdays at 11am EDT/10am CDT/9am MDT/8am PDT

21 May: SDI Questions & Responses Follow-Up

4 June: A Little a Lot: Elements of a Micro-Practice

18 June: The Window of Tolerance in Spiritual Direction

9 July: Applied Polyvagal Theory in Spiritual Direction

23 July: Our Somas: Decolonization Cautions and Corrections for Spiritual Direction

A Few of My Primary Sources

- ❖ Somatic Experiencing®: [Peter Levine](#)
- ❖ Applied Polyvagal Theory: [Deb Dana](#)
- ❖ Positive Neuroplasticity: [Rick Hanson](#)
- ❖ Attachment Theory: [Diane Poole Heller](#)
- ❖ (Somatic) Internal Family Systems: [Richard Schwartz](#) & ([Susan McConnell](#))
- ❖ Trauma-informed hermeneutic of the Wisdom Traditions
- ❖ Yoga (as a philosophy) & Ayurveda (Somatic wellness)

Curated Resources

Books

- ❖ [*The Body Keeps the Score*](#), Bessel van der Kolk
- ❖ [*Decolonizing Trauma Work: Indigenous Stories & Strategies*](#), Renee Linklater
- ❖ [*What Happened to You?*](#) Oprah Winfrey and Bruce Perry

Other Places

- ❖ [*The Wisdom of Trauma*](#) (resources page)
- ❖ [*Being Well*](#): Rick Hanson & Forrest Hanson
- ❖ [*Hidden Brain*](#) (NPR)
- ❖ [*On Being*](#) & [*Poetry Unbound*](#)

Questions & Responses

Questions

Clarifications

Comments

Rebuttals

Send them: email or chat box (Zoom).
Content or practice skills; not consultation.

