

Process Vs. Perpetuate

We're DNA-Wired And Raised To Be Dysfunctional and To Have 'Stuff'

Dysfunctional people have been raising dysfunctional people for maybe as far back as time goes. All of our role models, in one way or another, were dysfunctional. This leaves us with 'stuff.'

Stuff is what is left inside us from the unhealed events in our life that have wounded us. Stuff can be created when others don't act from love toward us. Stuff also gets created when we don't think and act from love.

There is a psychological term called process. Process is successful when stuff in us is neutralized; when its power is de-powered.

Caveat To The Reader

The first two and a half pages define processing and perpetuating. These pages also describe the nervous system. This description of the nervous system may be new to you, and therefore not very easily understood when you first read the beginning pages. I suggest re-reading one time the beginning pages to become more familiar with the terms sympathetic dominance and parasympathetic dominance. If you understand these terms, then you may gain greater insight into how to more easily go from an internal hellish state to a more heavenly state (how to process your stuff).

Defining Process and Perpetuate

Processing is a widely accepted psychological term. One of the dictionary definitions for process is: the action of going forward.

It's common to hear people say: "I'm processing what happened" or "I'm processing what I'm feeling." Processing involves going from having difficulty with an emotion (anger, fear or sadness) that is accompanied by thoughts/a story and coming to a resolution of that emotion and thought. Processing involves going forward to resolution.

Perpetuate is when something is continuing or enduring forever. Some people perpetuate their stuff rather than come to a resolution. (Stuff is what is left inside us from the unhealed events in our life that have wounded us.)

Process and Perpetuate During Group Work

I've watched through the years of group work with Charles the people who were processing (going forward to resolution). Other people were perpetuating their stuff to go on and on and on.

Both the people who processed and the people who perpetuated were very uncomfortable when they began sharing. With the people who perpetuated, it was obvious to Charles and to almost everyone in the room that the person was perpetuating-reinforcing their stuff rather than going forward to resolution (processing).

This is one of the beautiful experiences of group work. You can see something in another person very clearly because it's not happening to you. You're far enough away to have a clear perspective.

Perpetuating and Not Processing

There was always, always, always one thing in common with every person who was perpetuating – they were listening to their thoughts. They could be listening to their thoughts and believing their thoughts. They could be listening and trying to find a solution. They could be listening and be at war with the thoughts. They were always listening to and interacting with their thoughts.

Sympathetic Dominance, Parasympathetic Dominance and Processing

There is a neurological (physical) way to explain processing. Processing is going from a sympathetic dominant state to a parasympathetic dominant state. Our nervous system has two different parts: the sympathetic part and the parasympathetic part.

The sympathetic part is the fight, flight or freeze part of the nervous system. It's the agitated and irritated part of our nervous system.

The parasympathetic part of our nervous system is the calm, centered and relaxed part of our nervous system.

When we're in an agitated fear, sadness or anger state (which is the state when there is something to process), we're in a sympathetic dominant state. The key to processing, to actually going forward and releasing the agitation, anger, sadness or fear, is for our nervous system to go from this sympathetic dominant state to being in a parasympathetic dominant state.

When we listen to the thoughts of our mind and feel our emotions become more energized then we're reinforcing the sympathetic dominant state (perpetuating and not processing). There are four practices that are very helpful to process what binds us from being free. These four practices help us to go from the sympathetic dominant state to the parasympathetic dominant state.

We'll next re-visit perpetuating. Then the remainder of this article is about the four practices to help you process and not perpetuate.

More About Perpetuating

When your thoughts are in the forefront, front and center, and you're in sympathetic dominance, then you're perpetuating and not processing. It's that simple.

Sympathetic dominance is like the accelerator on your car. You press down on the accelerator and the car goes. Parasympathetic dominance is like the brakes. You press down on the brakes and the car slows down.

When you're in sympathetic dominance, when the accelerator is pedal to the metal, the mind wants to be in control. The hardest thing to do when you're in sympathetic dominance is for the thoughts of your mind to slow down or to go into the background.

A lot is being asked of you for you to be more passive to your thoughts when you're in the grip of sympathetic dominance. The remainder of this article is about four practices to help your mind to be more calm (to be more in parasympathetic dominance).

The First Practice - Stay With The Uncomfortable Sensations In The Body

This first practice will ground you. Your body can be uncomfortable in many ways when you're in sympathetic dominance. There can be so much energy in your body that you feel the need to move or shake your body. You also may want to cry or scream to help release the energy in your body. Parts of your body may also feel deadened or heavy.

This heightened energy that is exciting the body is also exciting the emotions and the thoughts. This heightened energy is physically being sustained by the release of adrenalin and cortisol. Once adrenalin is released, it's going to continue to stimulate the body, emotions and mind for many minutes. Adrenalin is released during a time of sympathetic dominance.

To help bring your body to parasympathetic dominance, can you have a gentle attention to any extra energized place or any deadened place in your body? Is there any movement, relaxing, making of sound or releasing of emotion that you can do to help lessen the adrenalin-fueled tension, agitation or deadening in your body that is in response to the sympathetic dominance?

With this gentle attention on your body allow the emotional feelings and the mental thoughts to be as they are. If your body can release the excessive or stuck energy, then you're truly processing (moving forward by releasing what binds you).

The Second Practice - Breathe Into Your Belly

Previous papers have been written about the importance of your abdomen going out when you inhale and your abdomen going in when you exhale. The more your belly moves, the more your diaphragm moves. If your diaphragm is minimally moving, you're activating the sympathetic part of your nervous system; thereby reinforcing the sympathetic dominance.

As your diaphragm moves, you're slowly shifting from sympathetic dominance to parasympathetic dominance. If you miss utilizing this point of diaphragmatic breathing, you'll be extending the time of sympathetic dominance. (There is a footnote at the end of this article with links to previous articles about abdominal-diaphragmatic breathing).

About Emotions – Prelude To The Third Practice

I like the simplicity that there are three basic emotions – mad, sad and glad.

Mad and sad (both are states of agitation) are emotions associated with the sympathetic nervous system. (The sympathetic nervous system is associated with being agitated.) A partial list of sympathetic emotions (mad and sad) are anger, rage, hatred, fear, shame, anxiety, jealousy and envy.

Glad is associated with the parasympathetic nervous system. (The parasympathetic nervous system is associated with being calm, centered and relaxed.)

A partial list of parasympathetic emotions (glad) are happiness, contentment and joy.

The Third Practice - Stay With The Uncomfortable Emotional Feelings

For the purpose of this section, we're going to focus on the two sympathetic emotions; on mad and sad. Glad is not an emotion that needs to be processed.

Reflect for a moment on when you felt mad or sad. Can you feel just mad or sad without the mind adding thoughts? Can you be with just feeling mad or sad?

If you can stay with mad or sad, and feel these emotions with no or with little story-thoughts from the mind, then the emotions will process and not perpetuate. When story is added in, then these emotions can intensify and become stronger and be perpetuated (go on and on and on). It's very hard to not 'buy into' and respond with more thoughts when you're feeling mad or sad.

You can use the first two practices of coming back to feeling your body tension, agitation or heaviness and breathing into your belly to help you stay with the emotions of mad and sad.

If you can stay with these three practices, your mind will have a much greater ability to become more calm because both your body and your emotions are going from sympathetic dominance (agitated, irritated or upset) to parasympathetic dominance (calm and relaxed).

The Fourth Practice - As Your Mind Talks, Listen With More Detachment

Your mind will talk. It's as okay for your mind to talk as it is for your heart to pump blood and for your stomach to digest food. Please know that your mind is doing its job. Don't make the thoughts in your mind an enemy.

The mind is in sympathetic dominance when you're in the midst of a process. I suggest not trying to do anything about the thoughts that are coming through. Let them come.

The mechanism of the mind to keep producing thoughts is very strong when you're in sympathetic dominance. You may engage the thoughts for positive reasons: "I want to understand what went on" or "I want to come up with a solution." These positive reasons are engaging your mind to think more. The more that you engage the thoughts, the more that you will energize the thoughts and bring yourself further into sympathetic dominance.

Once the shift happens from sympathetic dominance to parasympathetic dominance, then that's the time when thought and words becomes productive. We cannot 'think straight' when we're in sympathetic dominance.

Each person reading this article has experienced many times when they've said something when they were in sympathetic dominance (in strong feelings of mad or sad). How many times has that turned out well? How many times has more hurt been perpetuated by speaking or acting from sympathetic dominance?

If our thoughts and words can wait until we're again in parasympathetic dominance, our life would be so much better and our love would flow so much more toward ourselves and toward those who we love.

We cannot stop thought. We don't have to act from thought. We also don't have to believe thought. We can wait. We can wait for our body to release the excessive adrenalin-fueled disturbance. We can be with the mad or sad emotions with kindness and compassion; as we would if we were holding a child who was feeling very mad or sad. Then, when things settle down, thought becomes very helpful and revealing.

Final Remarks

As you use these four practices, your time of shifting from hell to more heaven will happen faster and easier (though not necessarily as fast or as easy as you'd like). [Pema Chödrön](#) says that the same feelings and thoughts can still arise in her, though after decades of practicing being friendly to her body, emotions and thoughts, the uncomfortableness now passes very quickly.

This is the possibility for each of us; to live in less reactivity (less sympathetic dominance) and to live in more love (more parasympathetic dominance).

May you live in kindness.

Footnotes:

The next article written [Letting Go and Coming Back](#) continues along the line of thought in this article. [Click here](#) to read [Letting Go and Coming Back](#).

Previous articles about abdominal-diaphragmatic breathing are:

[Click here](#) to read a seven page article titled the article [Breathe and Relax](#).

Other previous articles, with the specific pages referring to abdominal breathing, are

[Morning Anxiety](#) (pg. 4), [A Better Quality Of Life](#) (briefly on pg. 3), [Processing](#) (pg. 4), [Being Triggered](#) (pg. 5) and [Moving Forward When We're In Reaction](#) (pg. 4).

Previous articles about processing are:

[Click here](#) to read a five page article about processing.

[Click here](#) to read a different six page article about processing.

[Click here](#) to read a five page article on waking up with anxiety. This article suggests ways to assist processing.