

RADIANCE:

How Integral Lifework Restores Societal and Ecological Harmony

By T.Collins Logan

Nearly twenty years ago, I began formalizing some guiding principles for holistic self-care. These were principles I had gleaned from working in mainstream medicine as a health advocate, in my role as a people manager and coach in many different environments, in my study and practice of alternative medicine, as a spiritual lay leader, and as a client who received many years of personal therapy. Everything I had experienced seemed to converge around an elegant and obvious cascade of causal factors. In their most distilled form, the initial realization went like this:

1. That every human being has multiple dimensions of self-care that require nurturing – and nurturing in a harmonious and inter-cooperative way.
2. That many chronic maladies and impedances to well-being resulted from only one or more of these dimensions being neglected over lengthy periods of time, and/or one or more of these dimensions not operating harmoniously with each other (i.e. competing for our attention and requiring a “winner-take-all” trade-off).

It then became apparent that two questions needed to be answered. The first question was how to define the dimensions of nourishment themselves – facets like emotional well-being, mental well-being, physical well-being and so on. I eventually identified thirteen dimensions in total that, even though they overlapped to some degree, were distinct enough to address as separate considerations – some of these will be touched upon in this essay, but all of them are summarized [here](#). The second question was how to nurture these dimensions in a harmonious and cooperative way. And this led me to two additional foundational principles:

1. That, in order to harmonize each dimension of nourishment with all others, the internal structures that comprise and support each dimension must of necessity be harmonized as well. I came to call these structures “fulfillment impulses.”
2. That fulfillment impulses themselves were supported by deeper structures, which in turn also had to be balanced and harmonized. These deeper structures would be described as “primary drives.”

This essay will delve more carefully into these second two principles than my previous writing, mainly because I believe they offer the greatest insight into the broader societal challenges we are facing today. But, before we go there, I’ll briefly complete the arc of Integral Lifework’s implementation. Years ago, as I moved from Integral Lifework theory into its practice, what quickly became evident was that the practical application of such guiding principles in a coaching strategy required many different tools to execute – it appeared, in fact, that all of my previous experiences and learning were necessary to develop and navigate an effective coaching technique. One of the more potent realizations was that there are often deeply rooted, persistent barriers to well-being in any obstructed or neglected dimensions – barriers that invite completely different approaches for different people to resolve. In the same way, another realization was that how one person’s self-care could be integrated and harmonized – and what was most effective for them at a given time – was entirely different from what was most effective for another person, or even the same person at a different time. In other words, there was no silver bullet, one-size-fits-all solution for everyone.

Now let’s return to the second pair of foundational principles mentioned above – regarding supportive structures for all our dimensions of nourishment – as these will likely be the most difficult to appreciate without some careful elaboration.

Imagine for a moment that the dynamism of every living organism is shaped not only by a menu of successful responses to its environment, but also by the energy that those responses generate internally *because of how they interact with each other*. There are several familiar

scenarios that help clarify this relational dynamism. For example, anyone who has played a one-on-one sport knows that the level of play increases with the combined skill level of the players – not only in a linear, additive sense, but often exponentially. Each player can effectively enhance their previous level of skill because they are inspired by their opponent. In the same way, the intensity of pleasure experienced by two sex partners who are deeply in love with each other is often amplified beyond the thresholds they can experience individually. And the same principle can be observed in intellectual exchanges between people who sharpen each other’s wits, in the quality of artistic performance in music or theater when performers push each other out of their comfort zones, in the sophistication and subtlety of quips between two comedians who excite each other’s humor to new heights. In a way, this dynamism toward inventive excellence – towards new mental, emotional, physical and creative intensities – may be why cooperation and prosociality in human societies helped us thrive as a species. And it could be the explanation for why we evolved so many traits that seem honed by interpersonal competition and playfulness.

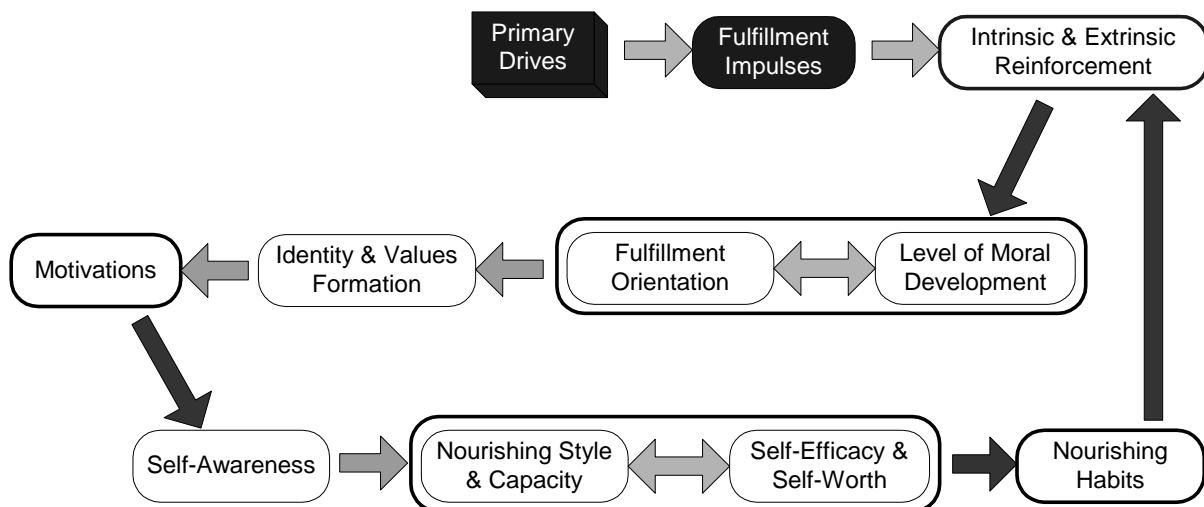
So what does this principle look like within and between our nourishment dimensions? Let’s consider just a few dimensions for now, and see how this principle expresses itself.

First, for the sake of understanding the building blocks involved, we need to appreciate our primary drives and the fulfillment impulses they instigate. The primary drives identified by Integral Lifework are:

- ***To Exist***
- ***To Experience***
- ***To Adapt***
- ***To Affect***

As I write in the book *True Love*: “These fundamental drives govern everything we do and relate to every aspect of our existence. The focus of each drive – the processing space within which it

is most operant – shifts constantly, but the drive is ever-present. For example, in one moment I am concerned only with myself in the now: how I *exist* in this instant; how I *experience* this instant; how I *adapt* to this experience; and how I *affect* my own experience. In the next moment I am concerned with someone or something else, perhaps in a more expanded time-space: how some event in history perpetuates its existence; how others may share my experience of joy; how my elderly neighbors will adapt to the impending road construction; how a child will affect the life of a canine companion. The concept of widening circles of interaction will also become important in understanding our own evolution of being. But regardless of where we are along the arc of an ever-expanding self-concept, we cannot escape our primary drives.... We do, however, have a great deal of choice in how those drives are satisfied. Layered on top of primary drives are sixteen different fulfillment impulses. These fulfillment impulses contribute to how our motivations are defined and reinforced, and are instrumental in corralling all our efforts to serve primary drives. They also help us understand what constitutes full-spectrum nourishment, because every type of nourishment ultimately satisfies one or more fulfillment impulses. So primary drives generate fulfillment impulses, which in turn lead to motivations that are satisfied by essential nourishment.” This proposed process is captured in the diagram below.



This is not always an intuitive progression to grasp, but please be patient while I elaborate further – a complete chart of fulfillment impulses is also provided at the end of this paper.

In essence, fulfillment impulses are how we seek to satisfy our primary drives. For example, consider how the following two fulfillment impulses contribute to your own well-being:

FULFILLMENT IMPULSE	ACTIVE EXPRESSION	FELT SENSE
Imagination	Hypothesize/Consider/Extrapolate/Project	Sense of limitlessness, possibility, inventiveness, "aha"
Exchange	Communicate/Engage/Share/Interact	Sense of connection, intimacy, sharing, expression

Without *imagination*, how could we ever *adapt* to new situations? Without an *exchange* ability, how could we reliably effect our environment when other people are involved? This is a critical theme to appreciate. Equally critical is that, depending on our early experiences and conditioning, we will develop patterns of reliance on certain fulfillment impulses, prioritizing them above others. Again, from *True Love*: “What often happens over time is that a particular combination of fulfillment impulses becomes our habitual survival mechanism – our unique set of integrated motivations – and we lose the flexibility necessary to shift our fulfillment patterns in new situations. In other words, one or more fulfillment impulses are reinforced by our life experience, and so we come to rely on the motivational patterns and external structures created by those successes. We continue to generate empty habits and reflexive reactions that indulge cycles of reinforcement, until this whole process begins to feel familiar, safe and self-protective. As these experiences are integrated into our moral valuations, our sense of identity, our worldview and our prioritizations of thought and action are funneled into each choice and interaction, and, in turn, each choice and interaction sustains and supports those same facets of our being. Once this pattern is set, we become the happy hamster on a wheel – satisfied and certain we are making progress, but really going nowhere.”

This is not to say that many patterns and prioritizations of fulfillment impulse aren't perfectly healthy. In fact, in my experience and observation as an Integral Lifework coach, most of us develop habits that are very well-suited to a given environment – and indeed ones that successfully nourish many dimensions of being at once. It's just that certain dimensions – the dimensions we have tended to neglect – are not being nourished by those choices and long-term patterns. This may only be one or two dimensions of our being...but that is often enough to throw our life out of balance over time.

A main theme I want to convey, however, is that dialectical tension stimulates ongoing growth. There are popular sayings like “resistance builds strength” that hint at underlying patterns in both physical and spiritual disciplines. So let's examine just a few dimensions to see how this plays out. One dimension is *healthy body*. Remember that fulfillment impulses are the “internal structures that comprise and support” each nourishment dimension. In the fulfillment impulses chart, the first dialectic pair in the chart is “discovery” and “understanding.”

FULFILLMENT IMPULSE	ACTIVE EXPRESSION	FELT SENSE
Discovery	Observe/Explore/Expand/Experiment	Sense of adventure, risk, opportunity
Understanding	Contextualize/Evaluate/Identify/Interpret	Sense of purpose, meaning, context, structure

How do these contribute to nourishing our healthy body dimension? On the one hand, *discovery* is a strong component of most of our earliest physical activity – it's part of what stirs us into crawling around, grab new objects, touch and taste everything around us, and so on – and continues to contribute to our physical activities – walking, hiking, exploring, sports, travel, etc. – later in life. At the same time, *understanding* is a sort of regulator for our *discovery* impulse: it slows us down to consider the view from the mountain we've just climbed; to react to the feel, taste and smell of a new activity or environment; to savor the sense of accomplishment when we succeed at a sport; to learn from the consequences of risk-taking, and place some self-preservational limits on our *discovery* impulse.

In other words, these two fulfillment impulses do work together to synthesize higher-level survival traits that allow to successfully *exist in, experience, adapt to* and *effect* our environment in physical ways...but they do so by often working at odds or in tension with each other. That is what “dialectic tension” means in this context: a helpful synthesis that emerges out of seeming opposition. And when that dialect tension isn’t present, a given dimension can become imbalanced. Consider what would happen if we could not moderate our *discovery* impulse at all? If we were constantly seeking risk, constantly immersing ourselves in adventure, never pausing to understand, appreciate and incorporate our experiences? Now consider the opposite tendency, where we never nurtured or responded to our *discovery* impulse, but instead spent all of our time contextualizing and interpreting? What adventures would we ever have to provide material for that evaluation and integration...?

Now let’s consider the *playful heart* dimension as another example, and the fulfillment impulses of “avoidance” and “union.” Playful heart is mainly about healthy emotional self-expression (rather than repression and reflexive self-editing), maintaining a strong and regular connection with our interior emotional landscape, and engaging in routine playfulness, creativity and emotional complexity from day-to-day. Take a look at two fulfillment impulses in play:

Avoidance	Escape/Evade/Deny/Reject	Sense of fearfulness, self-protectiveness, wariness, stubbornness
Union	Accept/Embrace/Incorporate/Combine	Sense of “being,” union, interdependence, continuity

Can you see how these two impulses create a dialectic pair? To protect and preserve our sense of well-being – especially in traumatic or chaotic environments – we may want to withdraw a bit from our emotional life, to insulate ourselves from an unfettered sense of play, and suppress our creative self-expression until we feel secure enough to open those emotional doors. On the other hand, our desire for a sense of union with our own interiority, our longing to honor and embrace it as a facet of our being, and the urge to incorporate that facet into our

lives, will all prod us toward greater creative expression and playfulness. And so union and avoidance seem at odds with each other, but also serve and shape each other into a productive whole. Together, they synthesize constructive behaviors that, once again, facilitate *existing, experiencing, adapting* and *affecting* our life. So can you see what would happen if we began to emphasize just one fulfillment impulse over the other, and denied that synthesis? If we either always avoided exploring or expressing our interior emotional landscape, or compulsively sought to express our emotions without resting and retreating, without maintaining personal boundaries, without muting our emotions when it was prudent to do so?

This same pattern replicates across all thirteen dimensions of being – and quite often multiple dialectic pairs will interact within the same dimension as well. But now we can delve a bit deeper into the meat of our discussion, as we touch upon how one other dimension, *supportive community*, is impacted by the generative dynamics of fulfillment impulses.

Let’s consider the interplay of the following fulfillment impulses in the *supportive community* dimension, which is all about inviting love and acceptance into our lives:

Autonomy	Differentiate/Individuate/Rebel/Isolate	Sense of distinct self, uniqueness, freedom, personal potential
Belonging	Cooperate/Conform/Commit/Submit	Sense of belonging, trust, community, acceptance

We all have a desire for both *autonomy* and *belonging*. If we emphasize fulfilling our *autonomy* impulse most of the time, it will be difficult for us to form lasting bonds with others or sustain a sense of community. If we allow our *belonging* impulse to dominate, we may have a strong sense of community and acceptance, but have a much weaker experience of personal freedom, and a less distinct and unique sense of self. When we allow the two impulses to synthesize nourishment as a balanced, interdependent relationship with a supportive community, that will allow us to experience both trusting relationships and to fulfill our personal potential and unique identity. In other words, rather than becoming enslaved to a sort of fearful

conformance in order to secure our sense of belonging and social capital, we can more freely experiment with optional levels of intimacy and interdependence to openly navigate our social capital without fear.

How can we best understand the balancing act of dialectic synthesis in this context? One of the simplest analogies can be found in human relationship dynamics. What do the healthiest, most caring, kind, nurturing and loving relationships look like? And how do those characteristics contrast with unhealthy, abrasive, hurtful relationships? Take a look at the table on the following page for comparison.

If we entertain these opposing relational characteristics as helpful guidelines, what do they tell us about how fulfillment impulses interact as dialectic pairs, or how dimensions of self-care can be balanced and harmonized, or indeed how primary drives themselves can be coordinated and inclusively honored? It does not require much reflection to recognize how crucial our interior relationships and interdependencies become in any journey towards wholeness. Honoring and celebrating those interconnections as *important relationships that must be nurtured and sustained* allows us to navigate the complexity of our own interior landscape – as well as our exterior interactions with others and our environment.

And this leads to another critical observation: that our interiority is contextualized (and ultimately nourished) through its relationship with the exterior world. All of the interior harmonies and tensions play out across the interplay with our environment – **they are not just reflected and actualized there, they are synthesized through that interaction and relationship.** “As within, so without” is therefore not solely about projection or reification – though that is taking place – it is also about the necessary and reciprocal engagement with external environments that creates who and how we are. Therefore, dialectic tension is inherent between our interior structures and our exterior environment, further stimulating growth and facilitating evolution: *Relationships are us.*

CONSTRUCTIVE/SKILLFUL RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS	DESTRUCTIVE/UNSKILLFUL RELATIONSHIP CHARACTERISTICS
Mutual Praise and Generosity are Easy	Mutual Praise and Generosity are Hard
Encouraging, Accepting & Supportive	Discouraging, Critical & Controlling
Differences are Celebrated & Appreciated	Antagonized by Differences
Less Victim/Abuser/Rescuer Dynamics	More Victim/Abuser/Rescuer Dynamics
Independence is Encouraged	Codependence is Encouraged
Fear & Anger are Frequently Subsumed by Joy	Joy is Frequently Subsumed by Fear & Anger
Humor Diffuses Tension	Humor Creates Tension
Respect & Trust Tend to be Unconditional/Foundational/Presupposed	Respect & Trust Tend to be Conditional/Earned
Belief & Agreement are a First Reflex	Disbelief & Disagreement are a First Reflex
A Sense of Safety Buffers Ambiguity & Uncertainty	Ambiguity & Uncertainty Create Volatility/Instability
Feelings of Disconnection & Loneliness can be Healed through Communication	Feelings of Disconnection & Loneliness Persist without Remedy
More Willingness to Bridge Divides and Compromise	Less Willingness to Bridge Divides and Compromise
Personal Boundaries are More Fluid & Negotiable	Personal Boundaries are More Rigid & Non-Negotiable
Desires to Repair what is Broken or Hurt Are Emphasized/Prevalent	Desires to Hurt, Break and Resist Repairs Are Emphasized/Prevalent
Exasperation is Ultimately Answered by Acquiescence & Reconciliation	Exasperation Ultimately Results in Division & Rejection
Past Injury is Eventually Forgotten or Forgiven	Past Injury is Seldom Forgotten or Forgiven
Compassionate Affection is an Enduring Felt Experience that Overrides Destructive Impulses	Compassionate Affection is a Fleeting Impulse that is Overridden by Circumstances
Faith in Each Other is a Cultivated Quality of Character	Faith in Each Other Is a Neglected Quality of Character
More Resilient & Courageous When Facing Adversity	More Fragile & Despairing When Facing Adversity

If I am kind, patient, and forgiving in responding to all of my fulfillment impulses – if I can move past injuries and perceived wrongs to acceptance, positive encouragement and supportive habits – while at the same time allowing dialectic tensions to energize and expand my compassion and caring within, then I will grow solid, enduring, resilient and generative supportive structures within myself that enable healthier interactions with my environment and other people. And all of those external interactions and relationships are also internalized, becoming part of my interior landscape and the tapestry of my consciousness. I will strengthen all the core components of my being, so that I can, in turn, more easily manifest constructive and skillful relationship characteristics with everyone in my life. And I will strengthen those exterior relationships to nourish the core components of my being. It is a continuous, self-reinforcing cycle. Once those reciprocal interior-exterior relationship patterns are firmly established, that same energy, harmony and continuity can propagate ever-farther outwards, into my community, my consumption choices, my civic involvement, my politics, my relationship with Nature, my attitudes about all of existence. This creates much vaster and more subtle feedback loops – much more abstract dialectic tensions – but this is, I believe, how collective maturation, wisdom and skillfulness occur on the grandest scales.

So our relationship with and between each facet of self echoes across all other relationships – with other people and creatures, with the natural world, with systems and technologies, with spiritual realms, and with the Universe itself. Yes, there is often tension and even apparent conflict involved, but when this is understood within a dialectic nourishment paradigm, within the context of “constructive debate” that synthesizes higher order outcomes, then it can have powerful transformative effect. So this is how Integral Lifework concepts can assist with societal healing. Societal dysfunction is symptom of ***all these relationships*** being out-of-balance, of interior-exterior nourishment and nurturing that are interrupted or distorted – a dialectic tension that is lopsided or unmanaged. There is a way to reverse the decline of civility – and the erosion of institutions that support civil society itself – and that is through a commitment to renewed and resilient, courageous and compassionate, *higher-quality relationships* within and without; a commitment to an integrative synthesis guided by a clearer intentionality.

How Does Balance, Harmony & Quality Relationship Propagate?

Another observed principle of Integral Lifework is that our own personal maturity and moral development over time will naturally spark an interest in concerns beyond ourselves and those closest to us. When we are young – emotionally, spiritually or physically – our tendency will be to fixate on our own worries, desires and whims. As we grow, our focus tends to expand beyond our immediate self-absorbed horizons to family, friends, community and so on. And, if we have a solid sense of safety, support, and nurturing – and a mature modeling of adulthood in those around us – we will develop empathy, compassion, kindness, generosity, and other prosocial traits over the normal course of our growth. Our interests, attention and prosocial responses will then expand ever further, into new arenas of action and intention. At least, this is how humans appear to have evolved prosociality and a sense of civic responsibility.

The challenge, unfortunately, is that modern culture has disrupted a lot of that natural and healthy development. We have become conditioned to spend much of our time indoors, and much of that time staring at tiny screens. Our physical, interpersonal intimacy has been replaced with electronic communications. We have been encouraged to think of ourselves as isolated atoms competing with each other, rather than cooperative members of a thriving community. Our needs are largely satisfied through consuming things via transactional relationships with businesses, rather than the nourishment of personal relationships with friends and neighbors. Our lifestyles lack healthy levels of exercise, creative self expression, emotional complexity, intellectual stimulation, and the strengthening of countless other facets of our humanity – unless we consciously structure those elements into our lives. The result is that much of the nourishment to *all dimensions of our being* has been disrupted. All of this is like keeping a beautiful plant in a shadowy room, with stale air, very little sunlight, and the barest trickle of water...and then expected to grow and thrive. Of that plant will struggle.

So Integral Lifework seeks to reclaim the normal course of human maturity – to reintroduce the full-spectrum nourishment across all dimensions of being that required for healthy prosocial

growth to occur. To unlock the room in which our suffering plant has been placed, and bring it out into plentiful sun, rain and wind so it can thrive again. And once that thriving begins to take its normal, natural course, the harmonies that have been introduced into our inner life will intrinsically begin to propagate outward on their own – across all outward arenas of action and intention – as we engage that world in the course building a rich array of external relationships. In Integral Lifework, this process is called *radiance*, and is illustrated in the graphic to follow. Radiance is energized by many different forces at different times – by optimism and enthusiasm, by a sense of duty and responsibility, by discipline and sticktoitiveness, by compassionate affection, by commitment borne of wonder and devotion, by spontaneous generosity, and so on. And much of this energy mirrors the interplay of the fulfillment impulses already discussed. But Integral Lifework also asserts that all of these motivational forces ultimately submit themselves to a larger field of driving energy: *agape* – the mysterious empathic essence that manifests as love-in-action, skillful compassion, transformative charity and so on. *Agape* is entangled with the four primary drives, inspiring them and serving them, even as it mitigates jealousy, viciousness, avarice, murderous violence, the will-to-power, callous indifference, and other destructive or disruptive impulses. And it is *agape* that collects within and around everyone on a generative path of growth and transformation. I would even assert it is *agape* that creates the carrier waves – the transmitting substrates – of radiance itself.

*(Please note the graphic illustration on the following references an **Integral Lifework Developmental Correlations** chart, which will helpful in defining and contextualizing the larger societal and ecological impacts of radiance; you can view that chart [here](#).)*

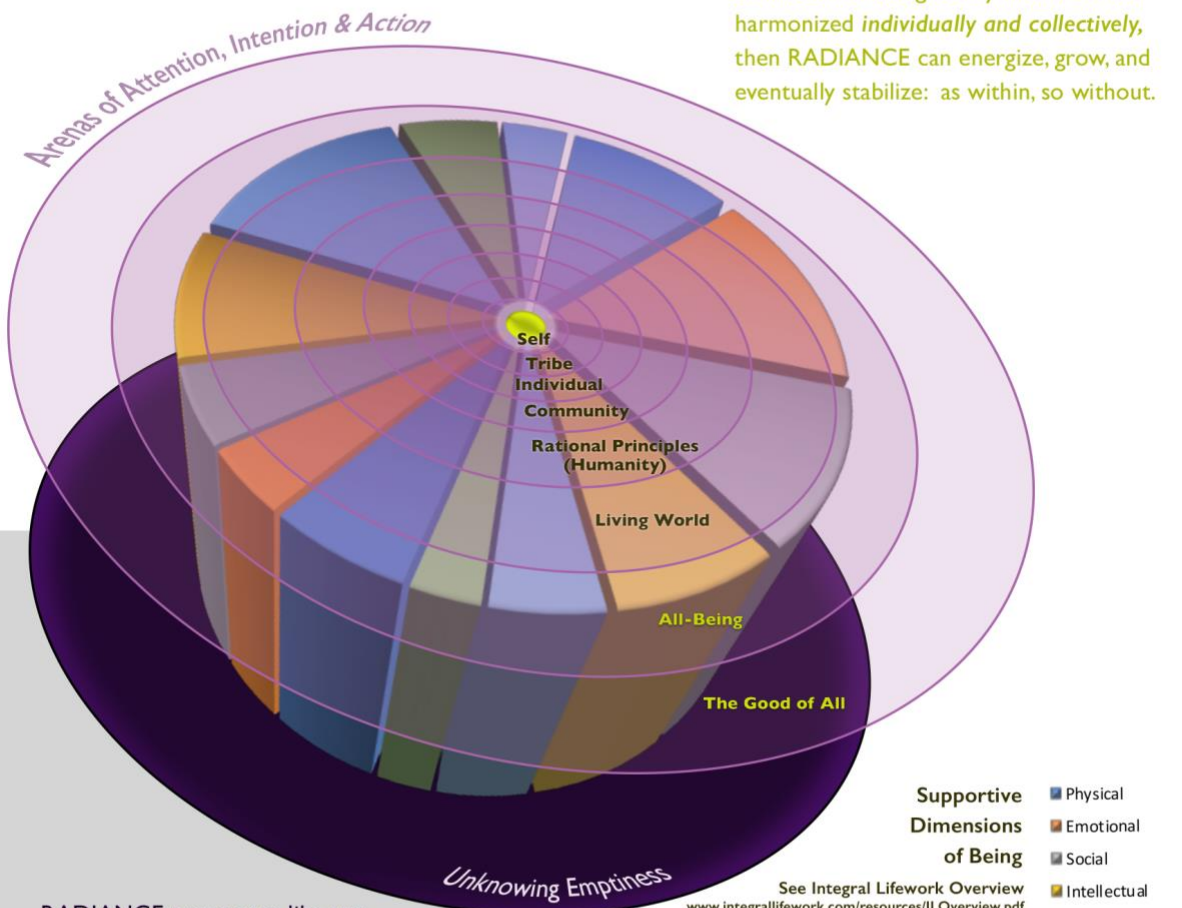
So it cannot be emphasized enough that the courage required to initiate all new horizons of relationship is grounded in love. This is true whether we are engaging traumatic episodic memories from our past, giving a professional presentation to 200 people, initiating romantic overtures with the object of our desire, or confronting our own negative self-talk. Love – in all its forms and levels of maturity – is the only constant...all else is temporary and fleeting.

Expanding Strata of Moral Valuation & Self-Identification Energized by Agape

See Integral Lifework Developmental Correlations Chart for Detailed Descriptions www.level-7.org/resources/Developmental_CorrelationsV2.pdf

= RADIANCE

Temporary emanations of increasing moral altitude, enlarging arenas of compassionate intention and action, greater inclusivity and integration of self-concept, and more unitive political economy, which then all coincide with each other. As long as every supportive dimension of being is fully nurtured and harmonized *individually and collectively*, then RADIANCE can energize, grow, and eventually stabilize: as within, so without.



RADIANCE propagates like any waveform, interacting with all other emanations: sometimes amplifying, sometimes interfering, sometimes negating, and sometimes synthesizing new, unexpected patterns.

RADIANCE is creative and destructive at the same time, and is not permanent.

Each dimension will differ in emphasis, capacity and efficacy for each person and culture. Likewise, how all dimensions are nourished and harmonized with each other will also be unique. But when all dimensions are fully energized and nurtured, and all barriers mitigated, then *agape* and all of *agape's* prosocial children will naturally spring forth.

See Integral Lifework Overview www.integrallifework.com/resources/ILOverview.pdf

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What about Barriers, Antagonists & Adversaries?

That there are persisting barriers, antagonists and adversaries to our individual and collective thriving at all has been challenged in some postmodern worldviews. Does “evil” really exist? Are their internal or external forces pushing back against human development? Or that seek to distort or replace what *agape* looks like? Are such considerations just a matter of perception or philosophical position, rather than essential characteristics? Is what is perceived to be evil just a temporary, cyclical, predictable imbalance? Skepticism and doubt itself can contribute to a healthy dialectic: observed principles can be strengthened and refined when put through this gauntlet. But are there elements of our existence – and our interiority – that do not contribute to “a healthy dialectic?” Are there forces, intelligences, patterns, impulses and positions that push far past dialectic tension, into the realm of corruption and annihilation? That conclusively eliminate even the possibility of a Phoenix effect of rebirth and rejuvenation? That seem to strive to encourage entropy or disable the first law of thermodynamics in an absolute sense, rather than stimulating transformation and evolution as a consequence of change?

I believe this is an important question to meditate upon – and a perennial one.

In the context of Integral Lifework, this question can be focused on small-scale considerations. For example, which barriers to growth and thriving are structural and immutable, and which can be changed or attenuated? Which perceived adversaries and antagonists are merely the unhealed aspects of ourselves come to haunt us – or reminders of our own faults, echoes of our Jungian shadow? Is there anything that cannot be dealt with entirely through self-healing, forgiveness, acceptance, and integration? For certainly how we relate to the disruptive facets of our own interiority will govern how we relate to a perceived external threat: the Other in society – opposing tribes, political philosophies, economic groups, ethnic groups, etc. – as well as antagonistic memes, systems, behaviors, patterns, and beings. What is a wise and efficacious response to events and influences that do not stimulate creatively destructive synthesis, but instead invoke non-existence? And what of incidental speed bumps and setbacks

– seemingly arbitrary events or conditions that arise in the course of our efforts? How can we differentiate one from the other? Is there a simple way to tease all of these potential frustrations and disruptions apart from each other, and deal with each of them in the wisest fashion? Or, better yet, is there a straightforward approach to dealing with them all....?

Once again, the principles of relationship come into play. My observation has been that there are several distinct categories of impedance to well-being and thriving that can be loosely categorized in the following ways – and please note that many of these categories can have both interior and exterior components and manifestations:

1. **Structural barriers** – On the one hand, these include internal pre-existing or acquired physiological and psychological conditions that cannot be altered in substantial ways. A lost limb, a chronic and incurable medical condition, a brain injury or disease, a genetic predisposition, and so forth. These can sometimes be mitigated or adapted to...but often not entirely eliminated. On the other hand, structural barriers can also be external systemic or environmental conditions that prevent certain choices or behaviors from bearing fruit. This includes strong social mores and prejudices, the unavailability of critical civic institutions, a rule-of-law that oppresses or discriminates, and so on. These external barriers may also sometimes be mitigated or attenuated...just not entirely eliminated (at least not very quickly or easily).
2. **Shadow-drag** – This refers either to what could be described as interior shadow-sabotage, or exterior karmic manifestations. In the case of interior shadow-sabotage, this is simply aspects of our unconscious self of which we are unaware – or have forcefully avoided and repressed, or have encountered but haven't fully processed or integrated yet – that reflexively disrupt our well-being. Often, this disruption is blamed on others in the form of projection: a dissatisfaction about our own misunderstood, rejected and unintegrated characteristics that we project onto others as accusations. Jungian “shadow work” is a reference to encountering, accepting and

integrating these aspects of self that we frame as unpleasant or worthy of avoidance. At the external end of the spectrum, shadow-drag also encompasses the ongoing consequences of our intentionality over time: the karma we accumulate through deliberate intention cascades throughout all subsequent choices, and all subsequent experiences. In the case of both shadow and karma, these do not always lead to negative or antagonistic conditions (though this is very common). It's just that, in both cases, if we aren't consciously aware of our shadow or our karmic patterns, the consequences can be disruptive to our well-being and thriving.

3. **Malicious malevolence** – Most often malicious malevolence is an exterior actor who cultivates ill-will towards us. Sometimes, however, negative consequences occur simply because we are in the vicinity these influences. The two most obvious signs of this presence are *deceptive manipulation* and *invalidation*. Deceptive manipulation is a coercion or persuasion that is self-serving or serves a destructive ideology. Invalidation is the tearing down of positive feelings, important truths, personal abilities and aptitudes, or other components that would otherwise support, encourage and enrich our well-being.
4. **The unhealed and chaotic** – This is probably the most common antagonist to well-being and thriving, and can be experienced internally in ourselves, or externally through relationships with others. It is simply what happens when even the best intentions are mired in ignorance, a lack of skill, irrational groupthink, unhealthy patterns of thinking and behavior, cycles of abuse, or unhealed trauma. An example that is surprisingly pervasive is *arrested grief*, where the normal progression of grieving over personal pain is interrupted and frozen, crippling that person's ability to heal, grow and thrive.
5. **The struggling but immature** – We are all on our own separate journeys, with varying capacities, insights, aptitudes, and stages of progress. We exist to support, nurture

and teach each other...or, if that isn't possible, to at least bear with each other. But immaturity in ourselves and others can inadvertently do a lot of damage. This is often where plentiful patience and forgiveness come into play...as when dealing with a child.

6. **Temporary setbacks** – Exterior roadblocks and interior derailment are predictable but essentially arbitrary. These are our “teachable moments;” the normal highs and lows of the fortune’s ever-turning wheel.
7. **Empty habit** – This is a particularly pernicious pattern that can occur within us or in our surrounding environment. This is the mindless repetition of something that once had meaning and import, but without a persisting clarity of intention, conviction or objective. It is “running on autopilot” without conscious consideration, and is destructive because it stifles the positive, healing, nourishing and transformative energy of whatever the constructive habit used to be.
8. **Animalism** – This is a surrender to animal appetites and urges without conscious care or consideration of consequences. As fulfilling of primary drives, such urges are an understandable and important evolutionary component of human beings – our “limbic reflexes” if you will. When it us unmanaged and undisciplined, however, it becomes hedonist indulgence run amok.
9. **Legalism** – Rigidly following the letter of the law, while essentially violating the spirit of the law. Legalism is a sort of black-and-white rectitude or righteousness that has forgotten the underlying purpose and context of the prescriptions and proscriptions that define it. (I like how Iain McGilchrist expands on this as a “hemispheric utilization bias” of the left side of the brain.)
10. **Willful ignorance** – Just what it sounds like: willfully and stubbornly maintaining ignorance in the face of corrective information and evidence. There are many reasons

this can occur – personal trauma, moral immaturity, unresolved grief, overwhelming fear or anxiety, lockstep conformance to groupthink, etc. – most of which point to severe imbalances in the internal/external nourishment dynamic across multiple dimensions.

11. **Moral contraction** – This is a spiraling downward, a regression and retardation of moral altitude and development, which can happen individually or collectively. For clarification of what the characteristics of this reversion look like, you can revisit the [Integral Lifework Developmental Correlations Chart](#). As for the “whys” of this phenomenon, various levels of stress that either disrupt or completely negate balanced and harmonious nourishment are often in play.

12. **Egotism/pride.**

13. **Apathy and lethargy.**

There are often other perceived barriers that are really just ordinary features of our existence: sometimes we may just be having a bad day. There are also many more variations of barriers, antagonists and adversaries than those just listed. But these few provide some test cases for how to manage patterns and forces that appear to disrupt or countervail individual and collective harmony and nurturing.

To begin, the baseline intention in Integral Lifework is to pursue **the greatest compassionate good, for the greatest number, for the greatest duration, in the most skillful manner, and in alignment with our own gifts, strengths and opportunities** – the shorthand for this is “the good of All,” but that is what is meant by the phrase. This is also not a fixed mental, volitional or emotional state, but a highly fluid one that constantly adjusts and evolves in response to new information and contexts. We might say it is the *meta-intention* behind all our more

immediate and localized intentionality; it is the larger container that envelopes all our day-to-day, moment-to-moment whims and wishes.

But here's the rub: the cycles of our successes and setbacks, flourishing and resistance, reification and dissipation, are always in flux. Nothing is stagnant or immutable, and nothing is guaranteed – while at the same time all things are possible. Which means that we will undoubtedly encounter some of the barriers, antagonisms and adversaries described in the list above – just as we will undoubtedly moderate or even vanquish them, at least for a time. There will be iterations of our maturity, competence, depths of compassion, clarity of insight, moral discernment, frustration, elation, conflict and resolution. Such is the organic dynamism of our existence. And, as I have suggested many times before in other writings, these cycles – and the growth inherent to them – appear to be unceasing.

That said, there is no reason for us not to identify our adversaries, call them out, *and diffuse their influence*. This is a subtly nonviolent, non-aggressive stance that nevertheless can be intensely oppositional. The objective is neither to reject and ignore, nor tolerate or integrate any highly destructive forces, tendencies or ideologies. *Instead, the strategy here is to de-energize them so they can no longer perpetuate or exacerbate harm*. For some influences are so disabling, so toxic and corrosive, that they cannot participate in any healthy dialectic. As a result, we cannot allow them equal footing in our nourishment strategies or multidimensional discourse; we can learn from them, certainly, and even gain insight into our own weaknesses (and *shadow-drag*) and areas that require growth...but the worst offenders must be kept at arm's length or have their agency disabled – for the sake of *the good of All*.

How we manage these antagonisms, interruptions and distractions to individual and collective thriving will often be intensely personal or unique to a given situation. But are there any cognitive equivalents to a broad-spectrum antibiotic that can be applied to them all? I would say yes, there are three things that will aid us individually and collectively in most circumstances. The first is our ability to develop discernment and a reliable internal compass

for navigating challenging situations. The second is to cultivate wisdom in evaluating the most appropriate response. And the third is to maintain perpetual vigilance. **Discernment, wisdom and vigilance.** When these three are consistently and patiently applied to difficult situations, emotions, behaviors, relationships, systems and so on, then outcomes tend to align with an upward spiral of nurturing and thriving, instead of a downward spiral of destructive despair. Not always...but most of the time, especially if we maintain “the good of All” as our intention.

Of course, developing discernment, cultivating wisdom, and maintaining vigilance are skills that do not always come naturally or easily, and require time, energy, focus and commitment to actualize. Different people, groups and organizations also arrive at their own level of competence in each of these skills, through diverse avenues and practices. Here again there is no one-size-fits all “silver bullet.” But I’ve stumbled across some helpful hints about how we can achieve some success in these areas. For example, here is some shorthand for generating discernment and wisdom:

data/observation → education/information/contextualization → insight/knowledge → compassionate/inclusive intentionality (i.e. “for the good of All”) → application/testing/efficacy → experiential feedback → ongoing practice + fine-tuning → additional multidimensional input streams (emotional + somatic + spiritual + analytical intelligence) → *discernment* → consistent operationalization + values alignment → *wisdom*

When all of the elements of this process are revisited each day, by each person, and in each group deliberation or participatory process, this constitutes one form of vigilance. We need not take on all of our brokenness at once – or that of others, or the world’s – but we can at least wrestle a few demons into a more harmless, neutered state.

Conclusion

What has been proposed here is a simple hypothesis: that there is a natural momentum to our interior life and exterior skillfulness – one that both relies on our participation in relationships and society, and drives us toward compassionate interactions with greater scope – and all of that healthy and constructive interplay relies on dialectic tension to grow and evolve. The never-ending exchanges of resonance, harmony and nourishment are, in turn, co-creative: learning and growth require application and actualization, just as improved efficacy in application and actualization require learning and growth. And finally, all barriers contribute to a continuous unfolding and energizing of progress if we consciously attend to them – not through oppressive conflict, but through wise and discerning diffusion of their negative influences.

The result? A possibility of mitigating or healing the many categories of impedance to individual and collective well-being, and potentially ridding our lives – and all of society – of the performative personas, toxic groupthink, and mindless conformance that degrade authenticity of self and self-expression, and perpetuate destructive dissonance and polarization. By replacing these downward spirals with compassionate, nurturing relationships, we can instigate dialectic tensions that are transformative, innovative, and broadly inclusive. This is how ideological purity, tribal groupthink, virtue signaling and “sacred narratives” are set aside in favor of genuine connection and belonging. And this is how moral immaturity is overcome with an upward spiral of personal and collective insight and wisdom. There is a way out of the confusing maze in which we all find ourselves – a maze that is leading us to a [truly existential crisis of societal and ecological degradation](#) – and it is to surf the radiance of our innermost being into the good of All. This is not a fanciful ideal, but a natural consequence of attending to our most important relationships within and without.

Fulfillment Impulses Chart

FULFILLMENT IMPULSE	ACTIVE EXPRESSION	FELT SENSE
Discovery	Observe/Explore/Expand/Experiment	Sense of adventure, risk, opportunity
Understanding	Contextualize/Evaluate/Identify/Interpret	Sense of purpose, meaning, context, structure
Effectiveness	Impact/Shape/Actuate/Realize	Sense of activity, success, achievement, accomplishment
Perpetuation	Stabilize/Maintain/Secure/Contain	Sense of safety, family, security, "home"
Reproduction	Sexualize/Gratify/Stimulate/Attract	Sense of attraction, arousal, satisfaction, release, pleasure
Maturation	Nurture/Support/Grow/Thrive	Sense of caring, supporting, growing, maturing
Fulfillment	Complete/Transform/Transcend/Become	Sense of wonder, awe, fulfillment, transcendence, self-transformation
Sustenance	Taste/Consume/Quench/Savor	Sense of fullness, enjoyment, contentment, satiation
Avoidance	Escape/Evade/Deny/Reject	Sense of fearfulness, self-protectiveness, wariness, stubbornness
Union	Accept/Embrace/Incorporate/Combine	Sense of "being," union, interdependence, continuity
Autonomy	Differentiate/Individuate/Rebel/Isolate	Sense of distinct self, uniqueness, freedom, personal potential
Belonging	Cooperate/Conform/Commit/Submit	Sense of belonging, trust, community, acceptance
Affirmation	Appreciate/Enjoy/Celebrate/Create	Sense of "I am," play, gratitude, aesthetics, inspiration
Mastery	Empower/Compete/Dominate/Destroy	Sense of strength, power, control, skill, competence
Imagination	Hypothesize/Consider/Extrapolate/Project	Sense of limitlessness, possibility, inventiveness, "aha"
Exchange	Communicate/Engage/Share/Interact	Sense of connection, intimacy, sharing, expression