

## INTRODUCTION

“You don't do rituals because you don't have [anything] else to do. You do them because you have a lot of things to do, and because you want to do those lots of things very well. So life is seen as a mechanism that is supported by all kinds of ritual. This is why such a large portion of people's lives is invested in either recovering from ritual, doing ritual or thinking about ritual.” Malidoma Some, Dagara and author of “The Healing Wisdom of Africa”.

“Native people believed they had to learn through contact or direct experience rather than through abstraction. Ceremonies developed as techniques for accessing knowledge.” Gregory Cajete, Tewa author of “Native Science”.

One day when I was on a panel discussing the relationship between “Love and Decolonization” I spoke about some protocols and ceremonies that are used by Indigenous communities in struggle. These protocols are practiced to keep spirits high, deepen connections among community members and maintain focus on honourable and just outcomes. I noted that such protocols allow people to benefit from “good mind” and that there was an increasing amount of mainstream scientific research that demonstrated the many advantages of engaging in these and similar activities.

Because ceremonies and protocols allow participants to give thanks, vision an optimistic future, feel grounded on their land, connect to ancestors, feel responsibility to coming generations and cooperate together they generate biological processes that cultivate wellbeing. More than that, they generate results in terms of communities achieving their many-faceted goals.

Mainstream science is starting to understand that cultivating thoughts, feelings and actions based in generosity, gratitude, optimism, hope, compassion and cooperation are good for our physical health and mental capacities. Such states of being help our bodies heal from injuries or the impact of stress. They heighten our immunity, enhance creativity, facilitate problem-solving and much more. Of course, these biological processes feed into our relationships, affecting our friends, families and co-workers in similarly positive ways. Furthermore, the more you return to these feelings and shift your focus toward positivity, the more your body, including your brain, literally restructures itself so it becomes easier over time.

What's even more exciting, especially to social justice advocates, is the impact these states of being have on the outcomes of our work. New research devoted to assessing the impact of corporate leadership practices indicates that optimism and hope are more likely to result in desired outcomes than neutral or negative mindsets. While as activists we may not like the idea of corporations learning how to more effectively wield their power while generating happier and more productive workforces, there are still some lessons to be learned from the studies. But more about this later.

While on this Love and Decolonization panel, someone asked me if I could suggest processes that non-Indigenous activist groups could use to benefit from positive mindsets. I referred people to the science and challenged them to develop their own processes, noting that you don't need to claim a spiritual practice or be culturally homogenous to take advantage of scientific findings. Since then, however, I've thought seriously about that question and wondered if I might make a more effective contribution to the wellbeing of activists, community organizers and our movements generally. Hence, "Ways of Wielding the Force", the booklet you are reading, downloaded itself into my brain.

There are so many great resources aimed at helping groups develop healthy and effective ways of working: books, articles, courses, workshops and so on. Many of these are, thankfully, free and easily accessible online. If we're lucky, we have people in our networks with the experience and expertise to role model and teach useful skills around organizing. These teachers and other resources help us learn about forming groups, visioning, setting goals, adopting strategies, implementing tactics, structuring agendas, facilitating meetings, organizing in communities, recruiting new members, long term planning, evaluating and so much more. These are valuable skills that activists, organizers and anyone who wishes to function in collaborative, community environments need to develop.

However, given that these resources and practices were developed within a framework of materiality, they often neglect a potentially huge variety of skills and practices that work on energetic levels to improve group dynamics and enhance effectiveness.

In my book "Wielding the Force: The Science of Social Justice" I shared emerging scientific knowledge that made the case for shifting our worldview from materialism (that we live in a material world comprised of matter) to one that recognizes our inter-connectedness and inter-relatedness on an energetic level. This worldview recognizes that, at its core, everything is energy.

"Wielding" is grounded in cutting edge science and ancient wisdom that is only now beginning to seep into popular culture, the education system

and various other social institutions. This booklet follows up on the new knowledge explored in “Wielding” by providing some practical ways that groups can take advantage of our energetic relatedness to each other and the natural world. These practices promise to make our work more effective, more sustainable and more connected to life.

As social justice activists and community organizers we understand that knowing is not doing. Theorizing is not praxis. Spiritual wisdom teaches us the same thing. This is why we have ceremonies and other activities that allow us to actually practice our spiritual teachings. As we all know, praxis is most effective when it is infused into our being; into our every day thoughts and actions.

Through the 13 group exercises offered below, “Ways of Wielding” will allow you to actually practice the new/old knowledge discussed in the first book. As we know, the more we practice, the easier it gets because our body physically reshapes itself to accommodate what we focus on.

“If I destroy you, I destroy myself. If I honour you, I honour myself.”  
Hunbatz Men, Mayan, [www.whitebison.org](http://www.whitebison.org).

These 13 exercises will allow you to develop expertise and skills in the following areas:

- \* Being aware of and better managing your thoughts and feelings as well as what energies you radiate into the world.
- \* Being aware of the energies that surround you, what is yours, what isn't and how to manage what is there.
- \* Catching story from non-verbal clues. Story is everywhere. It resides in our bodies, in the gestures and expressions of others as well as in the behaviors of plants, animals and the weather. We all know this at some level but we will come to feel it at a deeper level if we allow ourselves to develop the skills these exercises will begin to sharpen. Catching story enables us to respond to the life we're connected to in a way that promotes social justice and moves us all forward.
- \* Cultivating work and personal relationships that are mutually satisfying, meaningful and purposeful. There is no limit to how deep you can enter the cycle of knowing someone better and caring for them more. This cycle leads to some of life's most gratifying moments. Ask anyone why they do what they do and most of the time you'll get answers that range from making more money to catalyzing beneficial social change. But ask someone about their most memorable and meaningful moments in life and what you'll get are stories of connection – to people or other life forms. Healthy relationships are crucial to our ability to enjoy our life

experiences. Which brings me to the final promise of how Ways of Wielding will help you practice:

\* Loving and caring for others. Yes it's a simple act but, as we all know, very hard to do for everyone all the time. It might be easy to care for your children or your spouse but what about those who disagree with you? What about those who harm others? What about your own collective member who behaves badly? It's one thing to recognize we're all connected and interdependent. It's another to allow that knowledge to consistently inform your behaviours. I'm not one to suggest we can always come to one mind (a kind of consensus) over every issue or that we have to accept all behaviours. But we can always ask ourselves if we're acting in a way that is consistent with our values. We can ask if our thoughts, words and deeds are informed by our knowledge of what is most likely to create the better world to which we aspire. And then we can make changes, if we want.

If this all sounds New Agey and airy-fairy to you, think about the fact that science classifies our thoughts and feelings as nothing more than bioelectric energy. As we know from volumes of medical knowledge related to stress, our thoughts and feelings impact our physical wellbeing. Emotions that cause, coincide with and worsen stress include anger, fear, depression, grief, guilt, shame, etc. These emotions catalyze many reactions in our bodies: our biochemistry, brains, heart, organs and cells are all impacted. The longer we remain in these stressful states and the more we return to them, the more we jeopardize our health. It is now a well-accepted fact that stress is a causal factor in many, many illnesses. Certainly not the only cause, but a major contributor.

Changing our relationship to our feelings of anger, sadness, grief and fear can lessen the impact of stress on our bodies. In "Wielding" I discuss the difference between BEING angry and FEELING angry and how that one little change in how we experience our emotions can impact us.

Likewise the energies of positive thoughts and feelings have a positive impact on our bodies. The scientific evidence of this is quickly mounting but it is knowledge that the world's Indigenous peoples as well as many other wisdom traditions have had and used for centuries. The exercises/rituals I offer below are based in these knowledge ways and promise to radically alter the way social justice organizing is practiced. In fact, it should even impact our vision of what a socially just world looks like.

The suggestions I outline in this book are not going to replace the practical skills that help groups function well. They will not negate any of the "how to" resources currently available. However, they will enhance your work in many ways on many levels.

Furthermore, while my spiritual teachings have informed the activities in this book, you do not need to identify as a spiritual person or affiliate with any spiritual practice to benefit from the exercises. The activities are scientifically valid ways of enhancing productivity, effectiveness and a sense of connection within groups -- even in the mainstream. As mentioned, the new science is informing leadership training, healthcare, education and other activities in mainstream society. Although, there are some important and concrete differences between what I offer here and what is offered in the mainstream because I am not interested in shoring up a worldview or economic system that does not serve humanity, the Earth or Our Relations.

By definition and law, the corporate sector is about profit. Even not-for-profit groups are being pressured to prioritize financial goals over the needs of communities. New leadership training is still about motivating and inspiring people to behave and act in ways that result in greater profit for their employers. Even non-profits have to make the case that their work contributes in some way to maintaining and enriching capitalist society. Example: How many literacy, settlement service and training programs have to promise to make people job ready in order to qualify for funding?

Having reviewed some of the literature devoted to leadership training, I find myself concerned about the use of scientific findings to manipulate people's feelings and behaviours in order to make them happier about activities that not only enable others to profit from their work but also contribute to the destruction of the environment, the proliferation of consumerism and the depletion of crucial resources that contribute to the wellbeing of life on the planet. Training managers, executives and supervisors in techniques that improve their and workers' health and mental capacities will not resolve the fundamental problem of a financial system that is unsustainable and anti-life.

That is why I've written this booklet, which is more about addressing our collective physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing for the sake of healing each other and the planet on which we all depend. It's about enabling communities to empower themselves by heightening their awareness of connectedness and utilizing the energies of which we're comprised to raise the collective spirit and become more effective at the work of co-creating a kinder, healthier and more socially just world.

Social justice activists, community workers, teachers, artists, students and anyone interested in seeing their groups, collectives, organizations, relationships and collaborations achieve their aspirations will benefit by implementing any one of the practices I discuss in this booklet. In utilizing these techniques you won't need to look to "leadership" of any kind to manage, mentor, coach or otherwise manipulate you into

contributing to the future of our communities. As a group, you'll be self-motivated, self-inspired and have the capacity to do that for yourselves.

For those who have read "Wielding the Force", this booklet is a more practical set of activities that inspire the knowledge discussed in that publication. In other words, this booklet is about taking action. If you haven't read "Wielding" you don't need to. Even without that information you will still benefit from incorporating these activities into your personal and group life. You don't have to be aware of how something is healing you to benefit from it. Why?

If you operate out of a spiritual framework you possibly already have an understanding of how Spirit works. But if you don't, and it certainly doesn't matter, there is empirical, proven science that explains how and why these exercises will positively impact your social justice and community work.

As explained in "Wielding", positive/ pleasant feelings and mental frameworks such as optimism, hope, gratitude, compassion, generosity and love generate the best indicators of longevity, physical health and mental capacity. Many studies have concluded that cultivating a realistically optimistic mindset accelerates tissue repair, heightens immunity, improves mental clarity, facilitates problem-solving and enhances creativity.

Hard science tells us that the more often, the longer and the more frequently you return to these states of being the more you enable your brain and other parts of your body to restructure themselves so that you can actually create a physical bias toward optimism and positivity in your life and work. In this way you can spiral upward. You feel good, your body restructures and functions to intensify that feeling, you feel better, your body heightens the feeling and on and on it goes. You can enjoy a state of optimism more often, return to that state quicker after experiencing stressful events and be less bothered by stressful occurrences in your life. But as beautiful as that sounds, it doesn't stop at the level of the personal. As you heal yourself you heal others.

There is an increasing array of evidence that shows us that one person's emotional state is contagious and, although there are many influencing factors, we can help each other spiral upwards. Additionally, how you interact with other life forms on the planet (plants, animals and other beings in the natural world), can also enhance your physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Many examples of this are provided in "Wielding" as well as other places so it won't be reviewed here. However, at the end of this booklet you will find website links to research institutions that offer free, plain language resources to help you understand the scientific findings and their implications.

By the way, this does not suggest that your negative/unpleasant emotions do not serve a useful purpose in your life and work. Feelings like anger, fear, depression, grief and others have a role to play in a healthy emotional life. So-called negative emotions should never be denied, ignored or repressed. In community organizing these feelings can keep you realistic, grounded, practical, focused and safe. They prevent you from being too open and trusting, too naïve and optimistic, in situations where you need to be more critical and aware.

What's important to understand, however, is that the physiological processes of negative states of mind such as anger and fear are absolutely not compatible with those of love, optimism and joy. Contrary to popular belief love and anger cannot be felt at the same time.

Because activists sometimes reject this information I have learned to explore this concept by putting the science away for a moment and drawing more on philosophy. In philosophy there is a difference between emotions and temperament. Emotions are reactions to external events. They are temporary unless you dwell on them and then they become your "set point" or temperament. Your underlying temperament is a state of mind you cultivate over time, consciously or unconsciously. Your "set point" is the place to which you return after an external event has rocked your world. This is the state of mind you generally maintain, until something external knocks you off your centre. Your temperament can be positive or negative, caring and loving or angry and fearful, but there are consequences for either and they are different.

Furthermore, you can change your temperament over time and with varying amounts of effort. Spiritual practices, if you engage in them regularly and sincerely, will help you shift from a negative to a more positive temperament. If you are not a spiritual person, it can still be done through mindfulness techniques that are explored on the websites of HeartMath, the Institute of Noetic Sciences and the Good Science Centre -- to name a few. Neuropsychologist Dr. Rick Hanson's book, "Hardwiring Happiness", offers a template for doing this that is based in biology. There are other scientific and popular books and articles that deal with how to shift your mental/emotional "set point", though you will have to take into account that some are not necessarily coming from a social justice perspective but are coming more from a corporate leadership training place. Yet the techniques will still be valid.

Something else to keep in mind about incompatible states of mind comes from Dr. Richard Boyatzis from the Departments of Organizational Behavior, Psychology, and Cognitive Science at Case Western Reserve University. His writings show us that when the brain is focused and attentive, we certainly get tasks done. This is the state that many theorists, academics and researchers find themselves in when they are noticing, analyzing and constructively criticizing. It is the frame of mind

many activists find themselves in when researching issues impacting their communities. So this is an important mind frame, not to be confused with the mindset produced by chronic stress.

However, fMRI scans show that while in this focused frame of mind, the parts of your brain that form the “Social Network” are shut down. The Social Network refers to areas of the brain that activate when you are socially engaged with others, whether it is at the level of thought or action. The Social Network enables and intensifies empathy, compassion, kindness, cooperation and other pro-social thoughts and actions. You are also more innovative and creative when the social network is active so your ability to problem-solve becomes much more expansive. Your focus shifts away from the problem and you become more motivated by the outcomes you want to create; more inspired by the vision you hold. For example, do you see a difference between being focused on wanting to alleviate your pain (solving a specific, current problem) versus wanting to be healthy in your senior years (having a positive future goal you’re working toward)? It’s a subtle difference but shows up differently in the brain.

My point is that, while you need both the focused and social functions of your brain to effectively work toward social justice, they cannot be active at the same time. So you need to cultivate both mindsets in a way that doesn’t allow either to excessively dominate or shut down. Balance is as important in this regard as it is in every other aspect of life.

Another key is to avoid getting stuck in negativity and certainly not to allow it to motivate your work in communities. While a hyper-vigilant and focused mindset helps you notice, analyze and constructively criticize what isn’t working in our world, allowing yourself to be mired in stressful feelings and thoughts is detrimental to your health, your relationships and the world you aspire to create. While you should never repress, deny or ignore any of your feelings, being stuck in any of them is not helpful. Even the pleasant / positive ones. This case is made very thoroughly in “Wielding” so I won’t belabor it here.

I also don’t want to suggest that people who are suffering from a clinical depression or any other mental or physical illness need only shift their thinking to become well. That is too simplistic and also discussed in “Wielding”. There are so many environmental and social factors that impact our wellbeing that shifts in thinking can only count for so much. But to the extent they matter it’s worth trying in my experience. Also, mere thinking reshapes our physical bodies and how they function. So the more often you practice shifting your outlook to be more optimistic the more skilled and powerful you become at it.

In any case, there’s another concept regarding stress called the “allostatic load” I’d like to briefly discuss here. This refers to situations where



everyday irritations and annoyances that we all experience mount until you find yourself in a chronic state of stress – stuck in fight or flight. Even when you're not depressed or stuck in unpleasant emotional states you can, over time, find yourself being impacted by long-term stress. Studies suggest that the only way of countering this is to, first be aware of it, and secondly, intentionally engage in self-care that aims to repair the damage caused by long-term stress. These exercises are among many ways that self- and group-care can reverse the impact of the inevitable stress we're all going to experience.

Social “soft” science has long demonstrated what hard science is finally telling us. Many, many studies have shown us that the carrot is more effective than the stick when it comes to motivating people to do and be their best while co-creating a better world. However, not any and every carrot will do the trick. For example, research looking at how corporate leadership can best motivate workers concludes that “negative emotional attractors” like invoking the fear response (e.g., if you don't improve your performance you'll be let go) only work for so long. Similarly, we can expect that people motivated by “do something or the planet will die” and “if you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem” will only be inspired for so long to work hard for social change. We can further expect them to burn out faster as fear takes a heavy toll on the body.

Economist Daniel H. Pink's work shows that, once survival needs are met and a reasonable quality of life are assured, even financial carrots (like promised bonuses and raises) are ineffective at motivating people to work harder, smarter or with more creativity. And none of these motivators generates enthusiasm, optimism or cooperation.

On the other hand, “positive emotional attractors” or PEA's, as they are referred to in the literature, motivate performance and are more likely to achieve desired, sustainable results. An example of a PEA is encouraging workers to see themselves as contributing to some greater good, such as reminding your “team” that selling solar systems helps the planet. Or telling folks that a percentage of company profits supports cancer research. PEA's are a source of inspiration about the bigger picture and it seems from the research that almost everyone cares about contributing to the world in positive ways.

When achievements and results are measured, positive motivators produce improved AND sustainable outcomes. People work harder, are more creative, more adaptable and achieve better results. Additionally, although this is not necessarily a goal of the business world, the people doing the motivating, as well as those being motivated, transform to become more emotionally and socially skilled in the process.

What this suggests is that motivating ourselves with the vision of the world we aspire to create is far more inspiring and effective than acting

out of our fears about worst-case scenarios. The more we can create images of the desired vision, with whatever we have available (words, visual art, music, role modeling, film, websites, etc.), the more likely we are to stay motivated and inspire others to join us in our work.

Pro-social emotions, thoughts and actions inspire and motivate more pro-social actions in yourself and others. These result in more optimism, generosity, cooperation, compassion, kindness, productivity and an awareness of inter-connectedness. Groups, communities and societies can benefit from an upwardly moving spiral of cooperative, kind and productive people. And before you know it, we'll be living in that better world we worked together to create.

This is how the exercises in this booklet can help your group, co-operative and community. They will enable you, as a group, to be more effective, produce sustainable results, enjoy success, recruit and retain members as well as minimize time spent on resolving tension or managing conflict. These activities will energize, inspire, motivate and generally lift the collective spirit while we transform our world for the better.