The Heart Work of Faith
Emotions in Religious Community:
What People of Faith Need to Know

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OVERVIEW

i. Self-Authorship: Taking Charge of the Safety Ethic
ii. Self Transformation: Fostering An Engagement Ethic
iii. Getting to Wisdom
iv. Wise Clergy Practice

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the workshop. As workshop leaders, we are glad you are here to join us in the heart work of faith.

We are living in challenging times with social and environmental problems on the increase. Emotional needs are apparent in most individuals of every age group.

We are damaging the brains of our children in multiple ways: we're harming their social development; blunting their capacity to care for the natural world; and impairing their emotional development and sensate intelligence. Not surprisingly, when many of these kids grow up, their damaged feelings become rooted in distrust, fear and self-protection. Like parent, like child. Our Western culture has become a brain-damaging machine.

Consider the facts. Babies are born 18 months early. Only 25% of their brain development has taken place. But if they waited any longer, their heads would be too large to move through the birthing canal. After they are born, the way we hold, treat, and care for infants determines the emotional arc of their feelings, the type of intelligences they develop, their capacities for friendship and intimacy, and their orientation to the world. Children must be nurtured and cherished. This is faith by heart work.

Our faith communities can model care for the brains of infants, teens, and adults as a spiritual practice. They can provide sanctuaries and programs to correct and augment the ways in which human brains and humans souls are being damaged. They can transform emotional souls.

Faith by heart work is ethical work. Faith by heart communities shape how millions of people behave towards self and others in the name of God.

Let's examine how the brain works and most especially its emotional needs because faith by heart work builds communities as a spiritual practice within the walls of sanctuaries and beyond.

SESSION I
Self-Authorship: Taking Charge of the Safety Ethic

- Recall a time when your stress directed your behavior and you altered your behavior
- How did you recognize that you were stressed?
- Chest pounding, breathing rate, headache, jaw tightens, muscles tighten

A. Major Stress Response

The major stress response is complex but simply speaking it is framed as flight-fight-freeze-faint. When threatened, the sympathetic system is activated which increases blood flow to muscles and prepares one for flight or fight. Animals first try to run and, if they cannot, try to fight off the threat. If that does not work and their energy is getting used up, the parasympathetic system will be activated to protect their life and health: they will freeze, in an effort to preserve energy (and hope the threat goes away), and if that does not work, they will faint.

B. The Human Evolved Developmental Niche represents the developmental system that matches up with the maturational schedule of the child and optimizes development. For young children, these characteristics have been identified (Hewlett & Lamb, 2005; Konner, 2010; Narvaez, Panksepp, Schore & Gleason, 2013):

- **TOUCH**: *Held or kept near others constantly*
- **RESPONSIVITY**: *Prompt responses to fusses and cries*
- **BREASTFEEDING:** *Nursed frequently (2-3 times/hr initially) for 2-5 years*
- **ALLOMOTHERS**: *Frequently cared for by responsive individuals other than mothers (fathers and grandmothers, in particular)*
- **POSITIVE SOCIAL SUPPORT**: High social embeddedness
- **PLAY**: *Enjoy free play in natural world with multiage playmates*
- **SOOTHING PERINATAL EXPERIENCES**

C. What happens when a species provides a typical developmental nest? You get a species-typical individual.

D. Brain system function with species-typical care

Three systems represent brain strata that humans evolved. The "protoreptilian" survival systems (which include the emotions systems of anger, fear, panic that are linked to the stress response : fight, flight, freeze, faint). Under good care, these are conditioned to be rarely activated and controlled by the executive functions. The mammalian stratum include the social emotions of care and play. The executive functions and neocortex interact with one or the other sets of emotions.

E. What happens when evolved practices are denied to babies? Distress (photos) Unfortunately, this has happened over recent generations in the USA.

F. What happens to a baby physiologically when needs are ignored?
Brain systems are underdeveloped. There are gaps in otherwise normally-developed neuronal networks. Brain foundations are weakened in all sorts of systems.

G. What happens when a species provides an atypical developmental nest?
You get an atypical individual.

H. The (Major) Stress Response takes over

Attention shifts to self and lowers empathy

- Depletes resources for higher order processes
- "Fight" or "Flight": Based in the sympathetic system
  - Defensive or reactive aggression Feels "good" and "right"
- "Freezing" or "Fainting": Based in sympathetic system
  - protects body from death or psychological trauma
  - Submission, passivity, dissociation, compliance with an authority

Useful for moments of physical threat, but if when it becomes dispositional it is pathological

I. Power of Survival Systems from Early Undercare

When one receives species-atypical care or undercare in early life, when many systems are establishing themselves, one becomes stress reactive as a disposition. Early toxic stress enhances powers of "Protoreptilian" survival systems, making one Dispositionally stress reactive, hypervigilant for threat. The survival systems routinely take over brain function, impairing sociality and higher order cognitive capacities.

J. How does Brain Function influence Morality/Ethics?

When in charge, "protoreptilian" survival systems drive a Safety or Protectionist Ethic. When in charge, Mammalian systems become an Engagement Ethic
Executive controls build on one or the other systems for Imagination Ethics. When Protectionism is activated, imagination is used for **vicious** (controlling, aggressive) ends or for withdrawn, **detached**-from-relationship ends (e.g., Western corporations, Western science—overgeneralizations because not all western corporations or western science are like this). When Engagement is enhanced with Imagination it represents a **Communal** Imagination

K. Protectionist Ethics

They are more dominant in a personality when early life does not conform with mammalian needs (neglectful or harsh child rearing) and in cultures emphasizing fear or human nature asf fallen and bad (allowing child undercare to prevail). The USA is one such culture.

L. Protectionist Imagination

- Impaired by emotion distortion, stress reactivity
- Adopts one or more "dangerous ideas" (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003) of superiority**,** distrust, vulnerability, injustice, and helplessness.
- Two types of self-protective imagination
  Vicious (aggression)
  Detached (withdrawal or numbness)

M. Taking Charge of the Safety Ethic

1. Purposeful self-authorship. You can foster new habits, attitudes, behaviors in yourself—humanity's greatest gift.
2. Learn self-calming. What techniques can you use? Practice pausing as a threefold spiritual practice: Pause, discern what you felt, reflect upon your discoveries in order to create new strategies for self-development as a spiritual practice.
3. Slow down, revamp and reframe. Note your hot buttons/triggers that make you stressed (and lead to an aggressive mode exhibited in blaming, attacking, one-upsmanship or to a withdrawing mode of shutting off emotions, socially withdrawing)

SUMMARY OF SESSION I

The stress response shifts our capacities to self orientation (blood flow shifts to mobilize us for survival action). This shift can be dispositional based on undercare in early life or trauma.
When the stress response is active, it changes our ethical mindset to self-protectionism. To avoid this mindset, one must learn to calm oneself, which sometimes requires uncovering and transforming our trigger points. Create liturgical services that calm stressed emotions through the use of music and embodied rituals.

SESSION II:
Self Transformation: Fostering an Engagement Ethic

When did you know that your life would be dedicated to religious or spiritiual work? Describe the event and identify the dominant emotion you felt at the time.

In recent centuries, the Western traditions by and large have emphasized a detached rationality or intellect. Psychology is shifting away from this view towards the importance of emotion and implicit (subconscious) systems for our everyday functioning. The realization now is that much of who we are is governed by implicit systems, like the biological functions described earlier. Affective neuroscience shows us how emotion systems are shaped in early life (Panksepp, 1998) And contemporary affect theology shows how religious communities transform primary emotions into uplifting religious sentiments and feelings (Thandeka, 2009).

A. Emotions are Foundational to Adaptive Functioning

- Emotional systems are placed centrally in the brain and interact with more evolved cognitive structures and lower-level physiological and motor outputs
- Emotions are genetically ingrained, inherited, "psychobehavioral potentials" that help an animal behave adaptively and are shaped by experience *(Panksepp, 1998).*

B. Emotion and Cognition are Built Together

- General cognitive structures "*emerge* from recurrent patterns of sensorimotor activity"[1]
- Experience influences functioning of subcortical and neocortical structures that regulate sociality. Religious communities create shared religious feelings in their individual members.
- Emotional circuitry established early in life is related to the brain's architecture of morality & ethical expression

C. Ethic of Engagement: Relational Presence

- Capacities for present-ism, being emotionally and flexibly attuned to others in the present moment
- Mammalian emotional systems drive us towards intimacy. They include social and sexual instincts, empathy and parental care, play—the emotion systems underlying Darwin's "moral sense" *(Darwin, 1891; Loye, 2002)*
- These emotion systems are primed by supportive, caring relationships and environments in early life for which secure attachment is a result

D. ***Ethic of Engagement is not innate*** but *d*ependent on proper care during sensitive periods in infancy and childhood when epigenetic processes are scheduled to take place (genes turned on by experience). In early life self-regulatory systems governed by the right brain hemisphere are scheduled to develop. The right hemisphere takes learns from experience and the left hemisphere throughout life draws its categories and knowledge systems from this collection of experience (childhood is a time for the right hemisphere's primary development so whole-body experiences during childhood are vital for optimal development).

- The right hemisphere also governs brain circuitries necessary for social engagement: control of negative emotion; awareness of oneness; awareness of realms beyond what the intellect can apprehend.
  See Greenspan & Shanker 1999; Panksepp 1998; Schore, 1994
- The study of the core affective levels of human consciousness is, for liberal theology, a study of the material impulses of the human soul. See Thandeka, 2009

E. What does the Right Hemisphere govern? *(See work of Allan Schore and Iain McGilchrist*)

- Self-regulation
- Intersubjectivity (capacity to share embodied social space with another)
- Social pleasure
- Emotional intelligence (e.g., emotional self-awareness and self-expression; emotional reading of others; communication through eye gaze)
- Empathy
- Beingness
- Self transcendence and Higher consciousness (e.g., sense of oneness with the Whole)

Luckily, the right brain can grow throughout life!

F. Retooling Oneself And Others in Adulthood

- Humans are self-organizing complex systems

Humans can self-author—revamp themselves throughout life (though it gets harder with age)

Remember that epigenetics is ongoing and of different types: Immediate gene expression; behavioral state-related gene expression; experience or activity dependent gene expression

G. Growing the Right Hemisphere in Adulthood

- Build comfort level with social pleasure

Join support groups
Make a close friend
Learn to play (sledding, laugh club)

* Create "thick" liturgies in religious services that move hearts and well as minds

H. *Fostering an Engagement Ethic*

1. Expand your social self
   Connect with others even briefly
   Enjoy others
   Practice *presence*
   Practice Pausing as a spiritual practice
2. Nonviolent communication (Marshall Rosenfield)
   Focus on conveying needs, listening to needs (people need help figuring this out) and negotiating getting everyone's needs met. (in contrast to making demands and coercing others)

SESSION II SUMMARY

Social capacities require good experience, especially during sensitive periods of their development. Appropriate care fosters the neurobiology that underlies social and moral functioning, including right hemisphere development. The right hemisphere governs many systems fundamental to our sociality. The right hemisphere grows throughout life by presence-fostering experiences like silly free playing, dancing and the arts. Progressive religious programs and services can help the right hemisphere grow.

SESSION III:
GETTING TO WISDOM

Recall a time in which you had a sacred encounter and experienced yourself as embedded part of the web of life and felt awe. This feeling is the embodied ground of sacred wisdom.
To be wise, we need to know what a human being is and what is needed for good development.

A. Who are human beings and what do they need?

- **Animal** needs for nourishment and warmth
- **Mammalian** needs for affection and play
- **Social mammalian** needs for extensive bonding, and community support

B. Humans are biosocial constructions

- **Dynamic system** –initial conditions matter for trajectory and subsequent [moral] behavior
  - Developmentally plastic '**constructive interactionism'** (Oyama); a constant interaction between "nature" & "nurture" (Timing, duration, intensity matter)
- Epigenetic effects of early experience for all systems
  - Emotion systems, pleasure focus and social worldview (*Tomkins);*
  - Self (social and moral) *(Schore; Stern; Trevarthen)*

- Humans developmentally born 9-18 months early
  - 25% of adult brain volume at full-term birth (40-42 weeks) (80% by age 3)

- Humans require a supportive childhood (e.g., "exterogestation," external womb) (Montagu, 1978)

C. Urie Bronfenbrenner identified the layers of support for child development. As dynamic systems, every pattern of experience has significant effects on a child's developmental trajectory through ongoing epigenetic effects, influencing not only physiology but psychobiology and the moral sense.

D. Understand our heritages from proper development and mentoring:

- Naturally cooperative
- Receptively intelligent
- Ecologically attached
- Individualism AND collectivism
- Small egos, large selves
- Sense of eternity now
- *How do we know humans are like this? From studies of nomadic forager societies (99% of human genus history)*

E. Our 99%: Nomadic Foragers

1. Common set of practices for child raising (the evolved nest)
2. Common worldview—all things are alive with agency and purpose: Commonself.
3. Common adult personality –generosity, happiness, calmness and high intelligence.

F. Humanity's Moral Sense: More powerful than natural selection (Darwin's notebooks)

- Social pleasure
- Empathy
- Memory function
- Social concern
- Habit control

Nomadic foraging peoples display these characteristics. From the data available, they seem to be diminishing in the USA.

G. Wisdom Practices Promote an Engagement Moral Sense

- What practices do you use to get reconnected?
- Wisdom development practices used by others: Meditation, Mindfulness

Visualize a favorite place in the natural world: experience it with your senses. What wisdom is conveyed by that place?

H. Wisdom Traditions: Contrast between Western Religious Wisdom Traditions and Primal Wisdom

There are many commonalities but a couple of key differences.

	Primal Wisdom	Traditional Wisdom
Shared Properties	Wisdom exists beyond intellect Wisdom accesses other realms Humans have special responsibilities (co-creation)	
	Practice involves surrender to the energy realm Practice involves ego detachment	
	Wisdom is state-dependent Oneness in love Fear must be overcome	
Compassion	Towards all of natural world	Towards other people
Focus	All forms of life	Humanity
What is feared	Alienation from animal nature	Animal nature
Key behavior	Gift sharing is not optional	Hospitality (as a choice)

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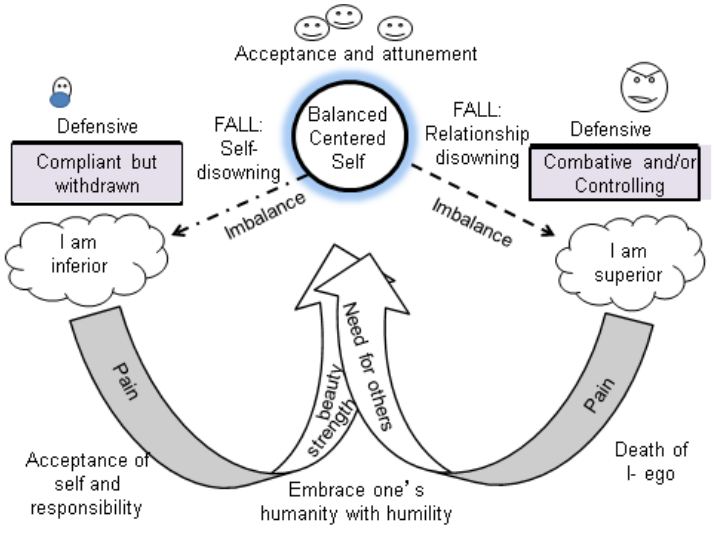
I. Wisdom Practices Retool Us

- Maintain hormonal systems of connection (e.g., oxytocin, the cuddle hormone)
- Grow the "right brain" and integrate it with higher order cognitive understandings to foster: I-Thou relationships; Hospitality (Martin Marty); Agape love
- Action-based support of individual and communal flourishing

J. We can retool ourselves with the processes of becoming re-balanced.



K. Religious communities can create processes for becoming re-balanced emotional and rational souls.

L. Wisdom can move us away from the Cycle of Competitive Detachment where undercare of the young leads to poor psychosocialneurobiology development and then to adults with illbeing and limited capacities who create a culture of distraction where adults are overwhelmed, overcontrolling and detached from their emotions and spirit.

M. Wisdom practices can move us toward a cycle of cooperative companionship where companionship care is provided to children, fostering a good psychosocialneurobiology and wellbeing in adulthood with full capacities, leading to community practices where basic needs are met.

SESSION IV:
WISE CLERGY PRACTICE

A. Parish life can shift our consciousness to enwebbedness
It can emphasize and nourish our heritages :

- Naturally cooperative
- Small egos, large selves
- Sense of eternity now
  (instead of apocalypse now)

B. Cultural Climates Matter

- Cultures can be calming and communal or numbing, or oriented to fear and crisis
- Calming cultures foster High Engagement Ethic, Low Safety Ethic and use imagination for communal purposes
- These are growth communities

C. Primal Parish Wisdom approach would ensure that we

- Expand the circle of concern to include the flourishing of other-than-human life
- Partnership with Nature
- Communers with and supporters of Life, as partners and companions.
- Care for all life
- Maintaining biodiversity
- Live sustainably
- Small I-egos and large selves

Opposite of:

Restlessness
Placelessness
Ever searching “hungry ghosts”
“Place” ful-ness
Humility, truth and love (plus surrender)

D. RAVES: A structured approach to ethical character development in individuals and communities (Narvaez & Bock, 2014)

Relationships (trust, support and connection)
Apprenticeship (mentors for different needs)
Virtuous models (focus on those with the virtues sought rather than filling the mind with vice; we act on where we habitually put our attention; Murdoch) A virtuous person is one who displays excellence in a behavior that promotes community flourishing.
Ethical skills (in ethical sensitivity, judgment, motivation, action)
Self authorship (self-developmental practice)

SESSION IV SUMMARY

We can build wisdom from the ground up (childhood and beyond) when we follow our 99% approach (primal wisdom). We can take up building wisdom & communal imagination in adulthood through self-authorship and leadership for wisdom development. Leaders offer opportunities for their charges to practice calming, to practice presence (e.g., by using play and other communal activities that promote joy, social pleasure). Leaders help their charges avoid or revamp survival-rooted imaginations (avoid apocalypse language, us-vs-them orientation and detachment from responsibility to the Whole). Instead they promote connection to and concern for the Whole (Ecological Communal Imagination) and collaborate on ways to promote its flourishing.

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