

Creating Positive Negatives

Educating in the **Art's** for emotional
intelligence

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Abstract

Recognition of an overwhelming imbalance and disharmony rooted deeply in our societal psyche, requires the circulation of health; creative expression must be facilitated and incorporated into the very fabric of every interaction for the emotional awareness and insight necessary for honest communication and response ability.

My objective is that of prevention, through an education that *pro-actively* teaches emotional intelligence so that the necessary and *reactionary* treatment of existing dis-ease is no longer controlling.

Emotional Intelligence is recognized by neurologists to be of utmost concern in healthy living. The practice of Art Therapy has proven that the therapeutic qualities inherent in art making, that nurture heart appreciation, are traditionally neglected in education. The Integration of head and heart must be considered an essential and primary goal in order to create positive negatives. The denial of negative feelings leads to fragmentation and further confusion. Exploring negativity creates a positive affect when you are able to learn valuable life lessons. The synthesis of creativity in education will teach individuals to form unified wholes from the fragmented and often contradictory parts of the self and therefore inescapably prepare youth, by the critical period of adolescence, with Impetus.

The beneficial components of emotional intelligence are defined and a parallel is drawn to the accomplishments of the humanistic art therapy approaches. The necessity of teaching these perceptions within education is established: Resilience is demanded by inevitable life struggles, and the ability to perceive positive lessons when confronted with negative experiences is only possible with the life skills provided by sense-abilities.

Emotional Intelligence relies on the nonverbal guide that lives within each individual and speaks through an awareness of sensation.

We need balance, from the traditional, heavily academic oriented, to an education for wholeness in the primary educational system. Wholeness implies recognition and understanding of the internal; feeling based reality of the senses as well as mental intelligence. I will present the inherent qualities of active participation in creative processes, as provided by the practice of Art Therapy, that aid in acquiring the skills necessary for the instillation of Emotional Intelligence commonly neglected in most educational curriculum. I will discuss the urgency for possible preventative measures such as the habit formation of: personal critical thinking, self-expression, empathy, insight, stress and emotional regulation, responsibility and awareness, with the hope of preparing youth entirely for healthy meaningful lives, by the critical period of Adolescence.

Josef E. Garai's (1987) statement, in regards to art therapy, validates the necessity of creativity in life; "treatment must be directed toward reinforcement of the will to live and development of the ability to find meaning and identity in as fully creative a life-style as possible." If we make this the aim of education we will have less need for mental health treatment because individuals will know who they are and how to guide themselves. Further, current brain research asserts that emotional intelligence plays an important factor in the successfulness of living:

To the degree that our emotions get in the way of or enhance our ability to think and plan, to pursue training for a distant goal, to solve problems and the like, they define the limits of our capacity to use our innate mental abilities, and so determine how we do in life, and to the degree to which we are motivated by feelings of enthusiasm and pleasure in what we do--they propel us to accomplishment. It is in this sense that emotional intelligence is a master aptitude, a capacity that profoundly affects all other abilities, either facilitating or interfering with them (Goleman, 1995; p. 80).

Education does not address the impact of emotional intelligence and its affect on the ability to function needs to be recognized.

Education, as I relate to remembering mine as well as teaching now, is a systematic process of lecturing, memorizing, and regurgitating material without questioning. The "because I told you so" mentality of these methods, declares the student incompetent and enforces mindless following of the leader, low self esteem, lack of integrity, poor problem solving skills, as well as a myriad of other symptoms. And then we wonder why students act out? Schools label dysfunction and project the problems onto students:

The stigma of "disabled" or "low I.Q." or "lower socioeconomic class" too frequently forces young persons to become recipients of "treatment" or "training"... Far too seldom are such young people looked upon as beings capable of imagining, of choosing, and of acting from their own vantage

points on perceived possibility. Instead, they are subjected to outside pressures, manipulations, and predictions. The supporting structures that exist are not used to sustain a sense of agency among those they shelter; instead, they legitimate treatment, remediation, control—anything but difference and release (Green, 1995; p. 41).

Those labeled such usually develop an enduring learned helplessness. The independent thinking and self-awareness necessary for self-direction and social engagement, development of individual identity, tolerance of the other and the working through of conflict that the arts facilitate are not encouraged. Students are basically taught reading, writing and arithmetic, while the arts are increasingly denied. Maxine Greene asserts the potential, to counter the alienation endorsed in present pedagogy, of incorporating the arts for "...finding alternatives to templates and schemata..." (1995; p. 52). The arts are the one place where personal feelings and experiences are expressed, within the educational curriculum, and then only on a minimal level.

Art education, as I experienced it in primary school, and as I see it in general today, neglects to teach the therapeutic aspects of creativity. The product orientation reduces creative expression to the achievement of conformist copying of pre-established step-by-step rules. This "art-making" teaches the perfect emulation of superficial societal images i.e. holiday art, and children are not encouraged to express their inner worlds. The requirements of neatness within rigid boundaries and color correctness limit and retard creative expression, and unfortunately discourage many from the power of art that aids in developing individual identity and the working through of conflict. Primary art education does not address the function of art making processes or inform that:

Art history teaches that art wrestle(s) with the confounding themes of existence. Humanity's relation to God, nature, war, sexuality, society, and self are the motifs repeated time and again...scenes are those of humankind's struggle to resolve conflict (Moon, 1994; pg. 95).

This awareness is only gained by a privileged few that can afford *higher* education in the elitist jargon of fine art (and then still only within a narrow canon). The art world hides and hoards information behind "deceptive... indecipherable... signs and symbols" (Green, 1995; p. 46). Any one can use art for communication and instead art is placed on a pedestal and reserved for that genius with innate "talent" or money. "Paintings, novels, and works of music are not likely to be realized by untutored consciousnesses when these artworks appear only in enclaves, in an esoteric or somehow timeless realm, assumed to be out of reach of many" (Green, 1995; p. 146).

Traditional education provides students with an understanding of the world that is verbal, linear, and based on logic, reasoning, and fact (Bush, 1998; Green, 1995; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982). This is just half of the big

picture because reality includes so much more...that can't be put into words.

"Some children may find articulation through imagery; others, through body movement; still others, through musical sound" (Green, 1996; p. 57).

Awareness is often non-temporal, and requires a willingness to be present without preconceived notions. Gut feelings can direct behavior without explanation. These are wonderful qualities in life and the lack of encouragement to utilize the senses has left many incomplete, and lost to an existence they do not trust or experience to the fullest. I do not discredit the importance of academic skills, however students are lacking the skills necessary to get through life's inevitable challenges. Garai (1987) also recognizes:

...that the inability to cope successfully with the vicissitudes of life or to find satisfactory avenues toward self-actualization, meaning, and identity is a common phenomenon affecting most people to a greater or lesser extent at different stages of their lives (p. 189).

Many highly intelligent people live mechanical meaningless lives full of strife and anxiety because they are self-centered and have no connection to the whole.

Recent studies have shown that the serious rate of deterioration in emotional competency puts all children at risk, regardless of background. This is of global concern (Goleman, 1997).

Emotional skills need to be fostered through education, if not for grander goals, then simply because traditional educational goals are neglected when the lack of coping skills necessary to tolerate life experiences interfere with achievement and stunt growth. Students are often distracted from their academic achievement because, "students who are anxious, angry, or depressed don't learn...powerful negative emotions twist attention toward their own preoccupations, interfering with the attempt to focus elsewhere" (Goleman, 1995; p. 78). The *ignore-ance* of such difficulties by institutions only amplifies the struggle, increases alienation and results in a lack of respect and interest in the half of education they are *trying* to teach.

It is imperative that we address life skills in education because we make it mandatory that children attend these institutions throughout development. It is the response ability of educators that needs to prepare them, to the fullest extent possible, for the real world, which can unfortunately no longer rely solely on the family. Goleman agrees, "As family life no longer offers growing numbers of children a sure footing in life, schools are left as the one place communities can turn to for correctives to children's deficiencies in emotional and social competence (p. 279). If children were learning these skills in school, the benefits would aid in their families as well. Intertwining creativity within curriculum can easily enhance conscious incorporation of emotional skills into education. It is imperative that life skills be instilled by the critical period of adolescence.

Adolescence is the serious culminating point of development. Inherently every youth is at risk. It is of absolute importance that, by this time period, individuals have already formed a firm foundation with which to tolerate the massive upheaval they are experiencing physically, mentally and emotionally; ...it is crucial that the latency stage will have furnished the youngster with the tools to accomplish the tasks of adolescence. Without the control of ego functions developed before puberty, the adolescent will have difficulty surviving the turbulent reorganization required of his/her emotional life (Linesh, 1988; p. 5).

Current brain studies show that during childhood and adolescence it is imperative to instill emotional skills while the brain is developing due to the much more difficult task of change once the mind has matured (Goleman, 1996). These studies show that, "several brain areas critical for emotional life are among the slowest to mature...(and) continue to develop into late adolescence, until somewhere between sixteen and eighteen years of age"(Goleman, 1995; p. 226).

The adolescent's struggle- to form an identity separate from the family- is aided powerfully with visual communication because they have not fully developed verbal expressiveness and that of play is perceived as threateningly immature (Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Linesh, 1988). Images offer an avenue for nonverbal communication, skill formation and have the power to clarify conflict with intensity and often rapidly (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Linesh, 1988; Rhyne, 1987). Images have the ability to contain vast amounts of information, including duality synthesized as one; and opposed to linear thought which is too logical to contain contradictions (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Green, 1995; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Linesh, 1988; Rhyne, 1987).

Many of the struggles experienced by the adolescent involve conflicts of identity and self-expression. These conflicts can be made accessible for exploration through art productions in a way that they cannot through verbal expression (Linesh, 1988; p. ix).

Creativity becomes increasingly important to the adolescent as it offers a private place to explore these normal coping- skills (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Linesh, 1988; Rhyne, 1987).

Graphic representations are recognized as being useful during all transitional periods of life as they direct and guide for healthy growth (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Linesh, 1988; Rhyne, 1987). Adolescence marks one of the most massive transitions in life. High school graduation frees youth into the world from the guided structure of the formative years. Adolescents are left to make life choices for themselves and should be fully prepared with enough knowledge to prevent them from limiting their potential. This is why art

processes are important, especially to the adolescent whose life space is a conflict of duality between child and adult.

Preventative education has been attempted widely by offering short programs with specific problem orientation such as, showing a video on aids prevention in class (Goleman, 1995). These programs have proven ineffective, due to the fact that genuine learning has to do with experience, not merely the reception of information (Goleman, 1995). Appreciation of and participation in creative processes offer the experiential activity that encourages genuine learning and facilitates understanding of feelings (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Green, 1995; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Linesh, 1988; Rhyne, 1987). Maxine Green asserts that acknowledging emotion and imagination in education will be possible by incorporating in depth studies of the arts:

By "aesthetic education" I mean the deliberate efforts to foster increasingly informed and involved encounters with art. The point of enabling our students to both engage in art as maker and experience existing artworks is to release them to be more fully present... We are fully present to art when we understand what is there to be noticed in the work at hand, release our imaginations to create orders in the field of what is perceived, and allow our feelings to inform and illuminate what is there to be realized (1995; p. 138).

The arts offer a place that can contain contradiction, a place to search for and create meaning, connections and untapped possibilities (Green, 1995).

It is necessary that the elements of emotional skills be incorporated into every facet of education for the general population, not only as a reactionary and disciplinary act after a disturbance (Goleman, 1995). Studies of model curriculums, of which beneficial statistics have been recognized, incorporate the following components: Self-awareness, personal decision-making, managing feelings, handling stress, empathy, communication, self-disclosure, self-acceptance, personal responsibility, assertiveness, concentration, motivation, imagination, catharsis, mastery, lawfulness, group dynamics, and conflict resolution (Goleman, 1996; Kivnick and Erikson, 1982; Stone and Harold, 1978). The development of each of these points can be seriously enhanced in education by teaching an understanding of art's therapeutic potential as is recognized in the practice of art therapy.

I believe art therapy approaches applied to education will necessarily be eclectic. In life there has never been an idea that could not be challenged, so it would be impossible to adhere to any one perspective. Honest communication and growth are possible by being open and receptive to learning whatever can be learned from every engagement in life with respect and tolerance, and then to synthesize with trust in self the information and experiences encountered.

This perspective is of utmost importance especially in America, where everyone

is coming together from multiple backgrounds including culture, language and religion. The life experience and needs of each individual will not only influence the singular person but also every interaction between people in a group (Green, 1995; Wadeson, 1987).

An eclectic person takes nothing for granted and believes that every theory and concept has something to offer. While this is true, each concept also has the possibility to be limiting (Wadeson, 1987). Whenever a choice is made rigidly, its selection negates contradicting possibilities. This perspective validates an inclination to be open to diversity. Wadeson (1987) discusses growth as a total "mystery" which requires a constant quest for understanding and the refinement of one's thinking in an active process of "...attending to all possible influences..."(p. 300).

The Humanistic perspective, in general, recognizes the value of non-verbal sense-abilities. These approaches share an optimistic perspective of the capacity to be found within the individual by the individual. Change and the ability for people to take responsibility for their life choices is recognized, and needs to be brought to the awareness of the whole population, because, too often, people claim victimization and displace responsibility elsewhere. Included within the *category* of humanistic approaches are Phenomenology, Gestalt, and Humanistic.

Phenomenology, as is expressed by the word, is the study of the world perceived and observed through the senses and the mind (Betensky, 1987). The main interest in this approach is that of the qualitative exploration of subjective experience with immediacy and without "...preconceived or inferred theories about them"(Betensky, 1987; p. 149). Art, due to its inherent holding and conveying of expressive qualities, combines intricately with the phenomenological idea of discovering the underlying parts of the self in order to investigate them consciously (Betenski, 1987). This is best accomplished by free exploration of art materials, followed by visual display, distancing, and intentional looking (Betenski, 1987).

The Phenomenologists acts as a guide in exploring the structural components of the artwork and how they relate to each other. The ability to learn to identify subjective feelings and their meaning aids in learning to use the art expression as a mediator between the self and the outside world (Betenski, 1987). Self-discovery is facilitated by encouraging reflection back to intent and what actually came through during the process of developing the artwork. Paying attention to patterns throughout a body of work, relates this process to parallel coping skills in real-life experiences (Betenski, 1987).

The essence of the Phenomenological Approach to Art Therapy is as follows:

Through the act of looking at their own art expressions, new facets of themselves become apparent to the art makers, and new communication takes place between the art expression and the subjective experience of the client-turned beholder. Clients learn to perceive more clearly and more articulately the phenomena of the formal components and their logical forces and apply the newly acquired art of looking to phenomena outside and around themselves, in their interactions with others.

As they discover facets of themselves in their interactions with others, yet another interesting occurrence takes place: they transcend their self-centeredness and become a member of the world-literally-in their everyday life. They assume responsibility for their artwork from the start and actively participate in the intellectual and artistic process of working through the difficulties that have arisen in interactions between themselves and others. This is the particular contribution of the phenomenological approach to art expression in therapy-arrived at through artwork and the subsequent treatment of the organization of the art expression-from pre-intentional functioning to fully intentional living (Betenski, 1987).

It is easy to intuit the possibility of instructing everyone in these qualities to balance an education that neglects to address them. Encourage free expression in art making and teach reflective perception, rather than educating in a superficial, conformist, and product oriented art that kills the interest and confidence of many.

Gestalt Theorists also promote that people are fully capable of solving their own problems. Further, what is stressed is the ability to be present and engaged in the "here and now." This is accomplished by expanding awareness of what unknown fragmented parts of the personality are distracting from the present and by incorporating these, through the *experiencing* of past conflicts directly in the present (Rhyne, 1987). The ability to be in the moment is valuable due to prejudices that censor receptiveness. Artwork clarifies immediate perceptions and awareness due to its concrete presence (Rhyne, 1987; Linesh, 1988).

The Gestalt Guide encourages thinking with all of the senses by entering the art work and acting out the art's forms, through physical and verbal activity in order to bring kinesthetic and sensory-based perceptions into awareness (Rhyne, 1987). In this way it is possible to learn about "...the whole configuration of personal expressiveness in visual messages, in voice tone, in body language, and in verbal content as well...aimed toward encouraging...responsible, honest, direct communication..." (Rhyne, 1987; p. 189). The basis of this approach is respect for the natural drive toward balance

found in every individual, and the encouragement to tap into the highest potential possible to discover inner resources and needs while communicating with the self through personal visual messages (Rhyne, 1987). Education should nurture these vital lessons in everyone to ingrain internal guidance/support systems and therefore, self-reliance.

Humanistic theorists realize that life is an ever-changing process where resilience is necessary in order to tolerate the inevitable tensions encountered throughout. They promote experience that involves the opportunity to raise "...curiosity, excitement, self-expression, and intimacy" (Garai, 1987; p. 189). Self-actualization, as one primary goal, is the result of living honestly with authentic self-disclosure and ultimately with the hope to find meaning in life by relating personal needs to those of the community at large (Garai, 1987). This is important because the norm of professional discretion or "classroom depersonalization" (Green, 1996; p. 170) limits opportunities to learn from others and prevents many from finding meaning in these interactions.

Humanists offer a realistic recognition that the conflicting polarities within personality and life need to be balanced, not denied due to standards of perfection, in a "rhythmical flow" as to encourage productive behavior rather than self-destructive behavior (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Linesh, 1988).

The Humanistic-holistic approach is summarized as follows:

- (1) promotion of the holistic approach to health care;
- (2) achievement of genuine individuation;
- (3) movement from autonomy to intimacy reflected in satisfactory interpersonal relationships;
- (4) formulation of meaningful life goals;
- (5) adoption of a holistic perspective of the life-cycle;
- (6) awareness of the fluidity and stability of individual identity throughout the changes and crises of the life-span; and
- (7) the use of empathy and intuition in the development of deeper levels of symbolic communication (Garai, 1987; Garia, 1976).

Humanistic approaches realize that the expression of feelings promotes growth and that art is the symbolic expression of feeling. Humanistic theorists recognize the value of all expressive arts to transform feeling into honest expression. In doing so the experience of positive catharsis is made possible (Garai, 1987).

Art Processes will facilitate health when an individual can develop the ability to listen to their insight (Garai, 1987; Goleman, 1997; Green, 1996; Linesh, 1988). Therefore, it is essential to incorporate these approaches into education. Understanding symbolic meaning, as an aid and/or alternative to verbal communication and it's often deceptiveness, is of value to everyone.

Humanistic theorists also recognize the need for emotional intelligence to balance education:

...humanistic art therapists have been influenced by the recent findings of brain research. Some have devised specific techniques to reinforce intuition, empathy, and spatial discrimination, the dominant characteristics of the right hemisphere, in order to achieve harmonious coordination between these traits and the dominant characteristics of the left hemisphere, logical reasoning and rational thinking. In our society, the emphasis on logical thinking, reasoning, and rationality in the educational system has led to diminished training in empathy, intuition, and imagination, which are indispensable for problem solving and innovative decision making (Garai, 1987; p. 189).

I have provided descriptions for the basic premises inherent in art therapy intervention. I have summarized the information in such a way as to remove the ideas from the client/therapist environment so that they may be seen as general methods of educating for insightful living.

Creative processes foster the freedom and courage necessary to release often inaccessible and unacceptable feelings. This experience promotes understanding and offers a concrete record for further reflection out side of the self. The container, provided by the art object, creates a safe place where the value and significance of any and all emotions can be explored and individual patterns can be realized. Art can be utilized for the practical application of symbolic risk taking, limitless experimentation and emotional awareness.

The ability to follow through, with reflection and insightful discovery, fostered by art facilitates emotional regulation; and having feelings be proportioned with circumstance, is of major importance.

“When emotions are too Muted they create dullness and distance; when out of control, too extreme and persistent, they become pathological as in immobilizing depression, overwhelming anxiety, raging anger, manic agitation” (Goleman, 1995).

Clarity in comprehension of one's portfolio of feelings will encourage change, growth, and problem solving skills. With creative reflection negative experiences or perceptions become possibilities for learning. These lessons are the positive aspects of conflict that offer balance.

Imbalance shows itself in a culture with drastically high crime and drug rates, suicide, homicide, genocide, poverty, unemployment, addiction, teenage pregnancy, homelessness, inadequate medical and mental health care, intolerance, apathy, bigotry, inconsideration, lack of communication, date rape, media distraction, and pharmaceutical numbness...etc. The disintegration of emotional control has surged significantly in the last 10 years (Goleman, 1995).

If we are to balance the dysfunction we must incorporate something, in our primary education, to foster emotional intelligence.

Emotional education will bring things full circle where individuals and families will function in a well-rounded society. The therapeutic value of art processes will be included in the education of everyone as a necessary, habit forming, awareness seeking practice. Healthy living will result when these skills are incorporated, during development, in order to reduce the now prevalent risk of not living to full potential. A balanced curriculum will reduce the need for help from a mental health field that is a luxury most can not afford either financially, emotionally or for lack of spare time. Emotional intelligence should be fostered in youth because:

...early emotional hardships and trauma have such enduring and pervasive effects in adulthood...(and)psychotherapy can often take so long to affect some of these patterns(and)...even after therapy those patterns tend to remain as underlying propensities, though with an overlay of new insights and relearned responses (Goleman, 1995; p. 227).

Traumatic experiences often results in a detrimental lack of trust, in self and/or other; and is apparently enabled by the denial of feelings in many interactions.

Educating in the therapeutic power of art processes will nurture the trust in self necessary to recognize what is needed and aspired for in life, as well as the knowledge of the interconnectedness of everything that results in trusting the whole. The ability to recognize individual as well as global capabilities and limitations will enhance self worth. Trust is necessary to be open and receptive with engagement, involvement and responsibility to learn from whatever life lesson you are confronted.

Education should integrate creative expression and awareness while the head and heart are forming, so that they come naturally as they should in a safe environment. The ultimate calling is to broaden perception, foster creative problem solving skills and instill tolerance, respect, and courage in communication. The resulting confidence will enable individuals to *deal with the consequences of actions* even if in a hostile environment. Individuals will be able to develop meaning from seemingly insignificant interactions and despite conflict. *Response- ability* and well being will arise.

The components of emotional intelligence are the same as the goals of the humanistic art therapy approaches. They encourage the recognition of emotion non-verbally, with the hope of articulation. They foster internal and external control through choice. Validation and recognition of the significance of feelings and acceptance, unconditionally positive, are recognized by all to aid in growth and self- communication in order to achieve social communication.

In challenging the world at large, I believe that inner revolution changes everything. No matter how seemingly small the accomplishment of individual

fulfillment, it affects every interaction, every detail of life and will echo infinitely. "The humanistic art therapist is...deeply concerned about the future of the world and the challenges mankind will face..." (Garai, 1987; p. 189). The difficulties of existence would be simplified greatly if people had more emotional awareness. Emotions are finally recognized as a main factor in functioning regardless of intellectual intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

The practice of art therapy successfully utilizes the therapeutic power of art in the mental health field. The skills necessary to develop a balance between head and heart are found in the creative exploration of feelings and the self through appreciating and engaging in art processes. I urge the incorporation of this knowledge into education. The point is to assert these energies pro-actively in order to prevent the necessity for the reactive treatment of problems as recognized in the work of mental health professionals today.

Maxine Greene also passionately demands closer attentiveness to the self, the environment and the fostering of inherent ability in youth. She too cries for the awareness of the ripple effect of individual acts and of the potential in education for the manifestation of a better future in the present through the use of imagination (image in action):

We are more likely to uncover or be able to interpret what we are experiencing if we can at times recapture some of our own lost spontaneity and some awareness of our own backgrounds, either through communication with children, psychotherapy, or engagement with works of art (1995; p. 52).

I believe it is fully possible to combine all three of these modes of communication and incorporate them integrally into education.

The Integration of head and heart must be considered an essential and primary goal in order to create positive negatives. The denial of inevitable negative feelings leads to fragmentation and further confusion. Exploring negativity creates a positive affect when you are able to learn valuable life lessons. The synthesis of creativity in education will teach individuals to form unified wholes from the fragmented and often contradictory parts of the self and therefore inescapably prepare youth, by the critical period of adolescence, with Impetus.

The necessity of teaching the beneficial components of emotional intelligence within education is established: Resilience is demanded by inevitable life struggles, and the ability to perceive positive lessons when confronted with negative experiences is only possible with the life skills provided by sense-abilities. Emotional Intelligence relies on the nonverbal guide that lives within each individual and speaks through an awareness of sensation.

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