

Healthy Sense of Self

How to be true to your Self
and make your world a better place!



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Sense-of-Self Help Introduction

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The Start of My Inner Quest

The development of the Sense of Self Method began nearly 30 years ago merely as my personal quest, as a new mother, to end insomnia. Now, this book represents part of a growing business, research, and educational project. Publishing this Method is the realization of my vision to contribute to a better life for each individual on a personal level, and on a bigger scale for the world at large.

It is 1985, and my daughter is three months old; it is time to return to work. I have a job as a bassoonist in the Amsterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, and the six weeks of maternity leave have come to an end. Why am I suddenly unable to drift off into a well-deserved and refreshing sleep, just when I need it most? Being a new mother is quite a challenge by itself, especially when your child is born prematurely. She was as tiny as a Barbie doll, my first-born. Combining the care of my baby with being in shape for my job required a clear mind and a well-rested body, but no . . . I can't sleep!

"No doubt I'm having trouble adjusting to my new situation. I trust it will gradually solve itself," I reassured myself. But it didn't. One night I would sleep reasonably well and the next two nights there would be little or no sleep at all. Not that I actually worried about something while lying in bed; no, my mind was totally blank. Nothing stirred. I had no idea what was going on.

In the months that followed the onset of this insomnia, I tried to cope in many ways. "Have a glass of hot milk before you go to bed," was my mother's advice. "A glass of red wine," a well-meaning friend suggested. "Stop doing anything an hour before you go to bed and do relaxation exercises," was someone else's advice. "No coffee for you!" I was ordered by many people. "No garlic and no peppers," was the remedy from a Tibetan healer, along with his prescription of a great number of bitter brown pills that made no difference. My doctor provided me with sleep medications, and yes, they did put me to sleep. But the moment I stopped taking them, it was over. I did not sleep anymore. As medical causes for my constant insomnia were ruled out, I despaired: "What else is left for me now but a lifetime of medication?"

I refused to start on that journey. I figured that sleeping is a natural process and if my sleep was being thwarted, there *had* to be a reason. I was determined to discover that reason. So I turned inward in my quest for the cause and the cure of what kept me awake at night and

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that was so damaging to my quality of life. It affected my ability to mother my child, maintain my health and resume my career, not to mention what it was doing to our family life.

In hindsight, I can say that I had more problems than just insomnia. They included an extreme temper. If things did not go the way I wanted, I would burst out in anger and blame everyone and the world for it. Even my best friend expressed her concern about my temper. My co-musicians complained that they felt I lacked team spirit. I had frequent colds on crucial performance days and a sore throat whenever I made a commitment to sing. "Your timing is off in ensemble-playing," my colleagues pointed out candidly.

I tried changing things *outside* myself: practicing like crazy, taking more lessons, getting help at home. Not a thing I tried had the desired result; as looking *outside* of me didn't really help with the problems, gradually I began to observe what was going on *inside* of me. I started to observe my thoughts and behavior. I delved deeper into all the things I was worrying about instead of pushing them away. "What are my motives for what I do or for what I try to avoid?" I wondered. What was the underlying reason was for my explosions of rage, which seemed so out of proportion to what actually took place on those moments.

A Mini-Disc recorder became my confidante. I began to record my thoughts and feelings, and sometimes I listened to what I had said. For 25 years, I talked to and studied myself, trying to make sense of what motivated me and I noticed that often I seemed to work against, instead of in favor of, my personal goals and ambitions. I discovered my choices were based on subconscious, not conscious, motives. Decades later, an understanding emerged about what was really going on in my mind that previously had been totally outside the spotlight of my awareness. I was shocked time and again to find what I started to call my Hidden Agenda.

I discovered that I had motives that I had never considered. Some of the emotions I experienced on a daily basis were reactions to things I had no conscious awareness of. To my surprise, I realized I had many fears. So I followed the trail back to the roots of my fears and I learned what kept me imprisoned and *why certain motives were still as active in me as when I was a child or an adolescent*. I had yet to understand the reasons for my fears or for my insomnia. All I was able to create was a map, and as we all know, "The map is not the territory." However, this map has proved very useful to me in changing the territory of my life, both internally and externally.

Many years later, I was able to describe the nature of many of my problems; I had to conclude that they stemmed from an unhealthy relationship with my mother. Unknowingly, an enmeshment had formed between the woman who had raised me and me. This state of enmeshment prevented me from developing any sense of being an independent and autonomous person. It kept me spellbound to try to live up to her conditions.

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Something Was Missing: My Sense of Self

In my search for the truth that would enable me to break free from my predicament, the discovery I made was quite unexpected, and one that I dreaded to even say aloud. It was the hardest truth I ever had to face, and even now when I think about how the ways of the world seem to trample people's holiest places, it chills my heart. The role and function of a mother is revered, and therefore I had great difficulty finding support among my family (father, brother, and sister) and even among friends, in contemplating the possibility that there might be any fault in the relationship between my mother and me. Even the Bible protects her: "*Honor your father and your mother,*" one of the commandments states. But how can we respectfully find a solution if things do not follow the commonly accepted picture of all-encompassing love?

Can we even allow ourselves to look at the (our) mother and find that she is just a person who has her own demons to fight? Should we not admit that, unless the mother is able and willing to get a clear sense of her shortcomings, she will not be able to attend to the needs of her child in a sufficient or optimal way. What I found was that I had never felt acknowledged and respected as a (valued) unique human being but that I had been treated as a pawn in her own game of life, which had thwarted in me the development of a healthy Sense of Self.

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Instead of having an inner "home base" for my "me-ness," I depended on getting approval, mainly from my mother but also my father. Sometimes it wasn't my mother but a replacement for them, like another "authority figure," who triggered in me the same need to feel accepted. Sometimes it just was, what I call, "virtual parental approval," as I had internalized most of their opinions and judgments, having been focused on them throughout my life.

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My life was quite an emotional jungle. My journey was mainly about finding my way through this entanglement by constantly scrutinizing and interpreting my symptoms—at whatever moments I could get out of the whirlpool of being absorbed by them. This task took over my life and by and by led me to follow a different path. This book is the result of that process.

Since then, my quality of life has gone way up. I am happier, healthier, more playful, and more successful. Occasionally I fall back, as I still need to refresh my reconditioning every

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so often. Through that, I can reach again, on the deepest level, the certainty that my *being* and my *doing* are separate. In order to *be* I do not have to *do*; in order to *do* I first have to *be*; *then* I have the choice of doing or not doing. My Being is no longer correlated with, or dependent on my Doing.

I can say wholeheartedly that every day, getting into the right mind-set and experiencing my Restored Sense of Self™ comes more easily. It needs to be said: My method of restoring one's Sense of Self is not a quick fix. However, everything is better than skipping your own life altogether—and honestly, it is mighty interesting as well!

I feel moved to share my story and my findings in the hope and expectation that you will find value in it. This sharing has required devoting myself nearly full-time for several years to developing the materials you are seeing. What motivated me to put in so much effort?

I have learned in the course of my healing process that we can break the vicious cycle, which perpetuates an unhealthy SoS from one generation to the next, by making our own SoS healthier. Once we will have taken care of our own SoS, we will be able to effectively facilitate a healthy SoS in our children. Then everyone's quality of life will improve considerably. There will be less violence, less war, less human suffering. I take pride in reporting about my life's journey so others can learn from my experiences and thus make this world a better place.

Sharing my findings with you, with the world, also fulfills a vow I made as a four-year-old girl looking at the ruins of World War II.

My Vow as a Little Girl

I was born in the Netherlands right after World War II. Even though I was not alive *during* the war, I vividly recall listening to my father's stories about the horrors that happened during the Holocaust. I remember walking with him over the ruins of the city in which he was born and raised, Groningen (see Figure P.1). I have stored in my memory in detail the atrocious acts of war I picked up on with my four-year-old ears. Is it a wonder that my firm decision, my vow to myself that I *had* to do something to make wars stop, was firmly engraved in my mind, even though I was just a little girl?

Little did I know that life would offer me an opportunity to contribute to the understanding of human behavior by having me grow up with a "lack of Sense of Self." Through the task of figuring out what was "off" in my life, I gained a deep understanding of what is "off" with the world and, with that, of what could be the healing procedure.

Now, more than half a century later, my vow is ready to start its work. My contribution to humanity is to help bring peace in the family, peace among people in general. My Sense of

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Self Method greatly helps to establish peace within the heart and mind of each individual. When we have a clear SoS, we can find peace within ourselves. Only when we have peace within ourselves we are able to solve conflicts with others in a non-violent way.

My findings are the fruits of my life experience and intense effort to understand the ultimate cause of my personal problems. The root cause of these problems (and possibly yours) is quite similar to the root cause of war. By studying the SoS Method, you will—I believe with all my heart—not only experience a decrease in the number and level of intensity of your own problems, and finally get a good night’s sleep, but also contribute to a more peaceful world.

Ending the *war within* ourselves through gaining a Restored Sense of Self™ will lead us to happier and more productive lives. Finding our “inner home” may also help prevent *wars between* people, between nations. I truly hope that the impact of the concepts of this Method is clear and that it may help you and your loved ones to become more successful and live up to your potential.

The essence of this message is that once we gain the ability and the courage to honor our own spirit, we automatically gain an ease about letting others honor theirs, and no fighting is needed to establish who has the power. We can just be who we were born to be.

I truly thank you for having come to this point of reading of how this book was born. Now let us get ready to work our way toward our goal of less human suffering!²

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The purpose of this work is

1. to help people recognize whether they have a Substitute Sense of Self,
2. to find the cause of why and how this could happen,
3. to have people accept and face their condition based on these insights,
4. to eliminate the power of their unhealthy past in their present, and
5. to ultimately replace their Substitute Sense of Self by a Restored Sense of Self.

The SoS Method will remain a living work in progress for some time to come. I invite you to share your thoughts, thus helping to turn this educational work from a Method into a practical healing method and giving more people a chance to improve their quality of life.

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I salute our journey together. I invite your participation. Please share whatever you think can help implement a healthy SoS for all. To those who want to use the Method for healing purposes: Healing through a self-help method is hard work; I hope that this Method will help you heal faster and with less pain along the way.

This book presents

- the SoS Method with extensive explanation, examples, and details;
- several methods for self-assessment; and
- suggestions, exercises, and education for recovery: gaining a Restored Sense of Self (RestSoS).

Who Might Benefit from Working with This Method?

It is likely that you will be able to improve the quality of your life if any of the following describe you:

- Something is “off” but you are unable to find what it is.
- You know you are not living up to your potential.
- Doctors and therapists don’t make you better.
- You have relationship challenges: marriage, children, social.
- You are addicted to work or other activities or behavior.
- You have a terrible time staying sober.
- You are in pain physically or emotionally.

My insight is new, original, and highly unconventional. Who would think that there are people walking around in this life without a SoS? What does that actually imply? Please don’t toss out the idea too quickly just because you think it is unusual and therefore probably doesn’t apply to you. Or just because you don’t like the idea of applying it to yourself—the degree to which denial plays a role in all this is impressive. There are many people, including the majority of Americans, walking around *without* a healthy and Natural SoS.

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We now know that the solution is to restore or strengthen your SoS. Then we are no longer ruled by unhealthy and (in hindsight completely obsolete and unnecessary) subconscious motivations, which too often can be the cause of many problems and pains.

Educating ourselves about, and then healing, our SoS might alleviate an impressive array of problems. An astounding variety of ill health, lack of well-being, general or specific dysfunctions, and in general feeling miserable seem to all come down to the root cause of lacking a healthy SoS. Some of these problems and pains include but are not limited to the following:

Headaches

Fatigue

Anxiety

Insomnia

Depression

Marital problems

Relationship problems in general

Addictions of many kinds

Relapse during recovery from addiction to substance use

Anger issues and rage

Work-related problems

Being held back by “invisible glass ceilings”

Too much drama

Not living up to one’s potential

Being high-strung

Lack of focus or learning problems in children

The symptoms and problems show up differently for each of us and vary with our circumstances. The strength of the SoS Method is that it functions as an umbrella for a great number of ailments and dysfunctions. In other words, the root cause of a lot of dysfunction and disease may, I believe, be greatly relieved by having a Restored Sense of Self (RestSoS).

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No pills, potions, doctor's visits, new religion, or new technology is needed, though some people might require assistance or professional help. You are your own expert. That fact, together with understanding and applying the SoS Method, can give you great tools to solve a variety of issues you might have and deeply enhance your life!

What Is Required from You?

Getting to the answer to your challenges requires your open-minded willingness to look around inside your mind and feelings and be honest about what you find. I offer you suggestions of what to look for. If you find what I think you will find, you can apply to yourself the suggestions and solutions that worked for me. The Method is logical and easy to understand. There are stories and examples, and the basics are repeated on a regular basis. Once you get the ideas, you are well on your way to your own healing!

There also is a chance that you already have a healthy Natural Sense of Self. In that case you might want to read the book out of interest or to help understand your clients or even your friends. There is much to learn that can help you do better business with people once you have a clearer view on where they might be coming from.

There Is No Perfect Solution But . . .

For many of the problems and choices we face in life, there simply isn't the option to find a one and only best solution. Sometimes we need to set priorities or give in to the limitations of our personal circumstances. But one thing every caregiver *can* do is this: *Consider your children as independent, autonomous human beings and not as extensions of yourself!* Having a healthy SoS yourself enables you to do just that. If you feel that is a challenge for you, then please find the courage to undertake the steps necessary to work your own way to a healthy Restored Sense of Self. This will enable you to create a better future for yourself, for your child, and for the world!

In a nutshell, that is the purpose and goal, the hope and the vision, of the SoS Method and the activities of our company, HealthySenseOfSelf.

UNIT 1 – WHY do you think you do WHAT you do?

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Introduction to the Sense of Self Method (SoS Method)

What is it like not to have a Natural Sense of Self? The question is hard to pose, let alone to answer. How is it possible to experience the lack of something you do not know exists in the first place? In the Preface, I extensively described how I found out that I was lacking something other people seemed to have. Let me give you an example of a situation that helped me to see a small light that was going to grow and become a beacon in the jungle of darkness.

“Please don’t be mad at me,” I kept begging my husband every time I yelled at him to vent my annoyance when I was unable to fall asleep. “In reality I am not angry at you, but I am angry at the fact that I don’t sleep. I can’t keep myself from getting upset and I need to let it out.”

He understood, and so we went on like that for many years. However, at some point he said, “I do not quite understand you. Are you not the one in control of this anger? You either choose to or choose not to be angry. Then, if you do, you choose how to express yourself.” I simply could not find within myself any power, force, or will that was capable of such choosing or not choosing. Based on this and other similar conclusions I deduced that he must have something inside that I did not have. So I started to pay attention and look more closely into this.

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A Brief Summary of the SoS Method

This Method presents a new and integrated approach to the understanding of an important part of the human condition, and offers potential improvements. My point of departure is that body, mind, and emotions are continuously in communication with each other during all developmental and maturational phases, which then results in the way each person is whatever he or she is in the world right now.

Here is what I believe. Each of us is born with certain qualities and characteristics of who we are when our potential is optimally manifested in life. It is crucial that a person live under conditions that enable this process to take place. In other words, if there are few obstacles to your developing a healthy mind and body, then your life circumstances allow you to live up to your potential. What happens though, if there are too many obstacles? What happens to your potential when your development, as it could naturally go, is blocked

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or distorted by certain life circumstances (which seem to be the rule rather than the exception)?

I always felt I could have been so much more successful in doing what I have done, if I hadn't been forced to look within to find what was off with me, and how to change into a person who has her act together. If only I had been so lucky not to have been distracted by doing the things for the wrong reason, and to have spent all that energy and focus on my profession or even on being social, I would have been good at it and it would have been worth my education. Or perhaps, I would not have chosen to become a professional musician at all and would have found great satisfaction as a psychologist.

I would have had, possibly, a lot of people who wanted to be my friend because I had something to offer instead of being needy and fearing rejection.

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The Importance of a SoS

This Method maintains that:

- the development of a Natural Sense of Self is a core aspect of healthy, normal psychological maturation.
- the maturation of SoS is subject to either healthy or unhealthy development based on behavior of the primary caregiver toward the child.
- a lack of a Natural Sense of Self in a person leads automatically to dependency on a SSoS for self-experience, which is one of the root causes of many aspects of human suffering.

To improve the human condition, it is crucial that all people be educated in developing, strengthening, or restoring a Natural SoS in themselves as well as in their children.

Unit 2 – Whose life is it, anyway?

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Self and Sense of Self

Before we can understand how we come to fail to develop our Sense of Self (SoS) and make an effort to regain it, we must take a step backward and define what the Self is and what it is that makes up the Self. We also need to take a closer look at what is meant by “sensing” in “Sense of Self” and what Self and Sensing the Self are not.

What Is the Self?

The Sense of Self Method proclaims that strengthening or, if needed, restoring your Sense of Self is a key to reducing and/or eliminating many aspects of human suffering. So what does this Method consider the “Self” to be?

The **Self** has been an object of study and wonder for philosophers and psychologists for many centuries. If you want to learn how traditional psychology views the Self I refer you to the many good books about this subject. It is neither the purpose nor the scope of this Method to review and incorporate other relevant theories on this subject. The reader can compare or relate the underlying approach to what is already out there if he or she so wishes.

In the SoS Method, the Self is considered to be composed of six layers that, each in their own specific way, need to undergo a healthy and adequate development so each can contribute to a fully functioning healthy unit of interactive layers that we can compare the Self to. Note that the ability to sense this Self itself also depends on the opportunity or circumstances a person (child) has to effectively have those layers unfold their potential and do what they need to do at the time that it is meant to happen.

Even though the process of developing a healthy natural SoS is meant to go smoothly, all too often people encounter obstacles that hinder this process from taking place in a healthy, natural way. Please note that this is a crucial moment in the development of the young person and exactly the reason why a situation can be created in which the person identifies with other ways of giving his or her psyche a structure.

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Lack of Sensing, Not a Lack of Self

Before moving forward, I want to make it very clear that it is not a deficiency of Self that I consider the root cause of many ailments and dysfunctions in our daily lives but an inability

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to Sense the Self. The development of the ability to Sense the Self was obstructed during the crucial moments in a child's upbringing.

I wish it were possible to quantitatively measure the degree to which a person is (or is not) tuned into his or her Self. We could then measure when and to what degree that process is actively working in each individual person. I wish that we could attach numbers to the degree to which each person experiences their Self. We might be surprised to learn how greatly those numbers would vary, with the low numbers being found in many more people than we would think, specifically in people who have many problems in life.

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The Natural SoS

A **Natural Sense of Self (NatSoS)** is the most rudimentary and natural awareness of our own Being and of our be-ing alive. In this fortunate situation, every layer of the Self is healthy and, having developed correctly as we grew, performs satisfactorily according to its intended function. A Natural SoS is an abiding, unshakeable, subconscious awareness—the sensation of being an autonomous human being, ultimately independent of others, especially from our parent or primary caregiver(s). Having a Natural SoS does not refer only to physical independence, which obviously does not happen until adulthood, but also and most importantly to psycho-emotional independence. Having a Natural SoS can be considered the anchor of a person's be-ing. It is our ultimate inner home, or more exactly, it is who, what, and where we mean when saying or thinking "I" and "me." It is the place from which we act and are motivated.

This type of SoS feels natural to us, by which I mean unquestioned, unquestionable, foundational, basic, and intrinsic, because it has always been with us and it has grown with us as we age. It is so natural to us that we do not even need to become *consciously* aware of it, that is, to refer to it by words, by name, or by labeling it because of its steady, ongoing presence.

What people with a Natural SoS have in common is one important, automatic characteristic: the ability to be at rest. A Natural SoS provides us with the one and only safe haven we can expect to have in life: No matter what we do or what we do not like about ourselves a person with a Natural SoS can always rely on the security of the "I am" bedrock it provides. Being rooted within us, it cannot be affected by superficial, or surface, matters. With a Natural SoS, internal peace and confidence are the rulers of our being even when the world around us is in turmoil and chaos.

A Natural SoS makes us aware that we are a distinct "someone" different from other "someones." It allows us to fully *be* ourselves and enjoy being alive as who we are. It opens us to experience joy and personal satisfaction and allows us to be free to experience what

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we truly feel, to relate to others authentically without unhealthy filters, and to feel compassion. A natural Sense of Self is a blessing that permits us to focus on the content of our lives and “get things done” (without being distracted by an eternal search for the Self).

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Self-Esteem Requires a Sense of Self

The use of the word *self-esteem* is popular these days, as low self-esteem is also often used as the root cause of many problems, but self-esteem and Sense of Self are not the same. According to *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*, self-esteem is “confidence and satisfaction in one’s self; self-respect.” In the SoS Method, the concept of self-esteem follows this definition, that is, confidence that is based on the opinions of others and/or the judgments of others that we have internalized. In this context, self-esteem is indeed built on events and things *outside* of our being—a healthy self-validation or pride in one’s achievements or performances—and is not part of the profound Self.

So if we want to compare self-esteem, and its counterpart, self-loathing, to our SoS concept we just need to agree with the following truth: Before we esteem or loathe something, we must be aware that it exists. We must *sense* it. In other words, we cannot have low or high or whatever self-esteem if we do not sense our Self in the first place. Therefore, self-esteem is something that people with a Natural SoS can experience, but those without it cannot because they are unable to connect with the Self.

Unit 3 – Your past shapes your present. Is your present good enough to shape your future?

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Environmental Input: The Developmental Decider

A Strict Sequence

When a Sense of Self (SoS) starts to develop in a person, and that starts right at birth, it follows a particular pattern with particular input at particular times. Children who do not get what they need at the right time grow up locked into compensations that are self-destructive and that cause all kinds of suffering and problems.

Before we explore the natural, healthy process of how a person ought to grow up and compare it with what happens when that process is distorted in one or more ways, here are some thoughts about growth processes in nature.

Every infant, seedling, or animal goes through a formation process. Even after it has sprouted or been born, its anatomical and functional systems are still forming. This process follows a strict sequence that is pretty much predetermined by nature and, as a whole, it is also being influenced by *the interaction* between nature and nurture.

The genes of each living being are its “nature” aspect. The circumstances in which the being exists are its “nurture” aspect. These two influence each other, such that genes or circumstances may reinforce the growth and development of a plant or animal in one direction or another. Some processes need to take place before others can. If some bit of a living being’s physiology does not develop fully and appropriately at its given time—its “critical period”—the clock marches on anyway. When this critical time passes, the being is abnormal in some way, unable to live up to its full (initial) potential.

As it is with plants and animals, so it is for people. So much of who we are as people, and how our lives unfold, is initiated in our childhood. So let us take a brief look at what happens in childhood.

Humans do not stop developing after they are born. Development follows certain natural rules and certain patterns; for example, we crawl before we walk; we walk before we run; we babble before we talk. Another important but often overlooked rule is that certain kinds of input are required at certain times in the sequence for the development to occur as it is meant to. If the right input happens at the right time in the sequence, a child’s development is normal and healthy. If a child does not experience the correct conditions, it will grow in

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an unnatural and defective manner. It might be alive, but it is distorted and weak, and it struggles to function.

For example, an infant, during this process of formation—which can be specific and unique to a particular critical period in the sequence—needs various kinds of physical environmental inputs, such as adequate food, water, and warmth, as well as specific interpersonal, psychological, and emotional input. To understand fully the necessity of these inputs, it is necessary to realize that both physical and psychological inputs affect both body and mind.

The *natural* in Natural SoS means a person has a SoS that has developed at the natural time, in an adequate way, and in the natural order that the development of a human being requires. It indicates the development has been “normal”—that the human consciousness has been able to do what it is programmed to do, without encountering obstructions or Hindrances in facilitating the maturation process. If the various required inputs are not present or provided at the appropriate time, the development of a Natural SoS cannot take place, and the result is a person with a warped SoS.

When developed in a distorted manner, we often need others to support us.

A SoS is not something we are born with or that we develop automatically and inevitably, no matter what. We do have an inborn drive to develop it, but unless certain kinds of experiences (feedback) are provided and processed in infancy and early childhood, a SoS won't develop naturally and normally.

A core sense of an independently existing me-ness is part of normal, healthy human development, and our psychological development programs that into us. Normal development requires a specific attitude from the primary caregiver toward the child; this attitude needs to communicate certain information to the child about his or her “being.” This specific attitude needs to provide to the child the building blocks for the development of a healthy SoS, and is called Mirroring.

Unit 4 – “Thinks” are seldom what they seem”

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Motivation and the Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS)

Introduction and Overview to Motivation

This Method states that understanding and purifying your motivation is the key to developing and maintaining health and a reasonable degree of happiness. In other words, understanding your motivation is a crucial first step if you want to tackle the task of healing yourself from the dependency on a Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS) and move toward Restoring your Sense of Self (SoS).

If you understand your motivations, you have a key to understanding yourself. Why do we do what we do, or avoid doing some things, often at all costs? If we understand what we are actually after, we come closer to seeing the whole picture of ourselves. By figuring out what our *ultimate* goals are, we get to know ourselves thoroughly and learn what we are all about. Self-knowledge is power! Knowing ourselves fully will enable us to make smart decisions that also benefit others.

Discovering Our Motivations Is Not Easy

In order to be useful, our discovering of our motivations, of this key, requires total honesty with ourselves. That might seem easy enough. It isn't. Finding out the truth about our deepest motivations is not obvious, nor simple or easy.

It is a challenge because we human beings are masters at denial. We might be ready to admit that we sometimes deceive others by pretending we are closer to our ideal self than we are. Try on the shocking admission that you might be going out of your way to deceive yourself, even for a whole lifetime! Yet that is what many of us are doing!

How Do Our Motivations Develop?

This Method presents a new and holistic approach to the understanding of the human condition and the potential changes that can be made. Our point of departure is that the body, mind, and emotions are continuously in communication with each other, which then results in the way each person is what he or she is in the world right now.

Here's one way to look at that. You are born with certain qualities and characteristics of who you are on a soul level. If there are few obstacles to your developing a healthy mind and body, then your life circumstances are allowing you to live up to that potential.

But what happens though if there are too many obstacles, and your development, as it could naturally go, is blocked and distorted by some life circumstances? (This actually happens to many of us.) Then nature seeks ways in which your body, mind, and emotions can compensate for the lack-of-growth and/or health-promoting life circumstances.

How does motivation develop differently in those two cases? In a healthy situation, we know motivations by describing the obvious reason why we do something. In the unhealthy situation, motivations become more convoluted. We develop complex patterns of subconscious motivations in nature's attempt to compensate for our thwarted natural development.

Labeling Motivation as Direct and Indirect

In this section, you will learn how unhealthy motivations develop. First please make sure you understand how a healthy, Natural SoS develops (see Chapter 3).

We see how a child's motivation is formed by its circumstances and environment. Based on that understanding we will discover that motivations can be divided into direct (healthy) and indirect (unhealthy, the result of thwarted development), and you will learn how this comes in turn from and contributes to a healthy or unhealthy SoS. When you will be able to see the connection between a healthy NatSoS and Direct Motivation and how Indirect Motivation points to a SSoS you are on your way to healing!

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What Is Motivation?

In this Method, **Motivation** is generated by the reasons or reasoning we have (consciously or subconsciously) for doing or avoiding doing things. Motivation is the force that drives us to act and the incentive for our behavior. It either refers to a reasoning or force that moves us to act and that is the incentive for our behavior toward a goal that is experienced as desired and that aims at satisfaction ("fun"). But the drive to do or not do something can also be much stronger and reflect our needs or perceived needs for survival ("need"). In this Method, motivation refers more generally to the reasons, either conscious or subconscious, we have for doing or not doing things. It provides us with an agenda of doing what we are motivated to do and provides us the goal of accomplishing whatever we are motivated to do. This distinction of motivation as being fun- or need-oriented will be addressed later in the chapter.

Why Is Knowing Our Motives Important?

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Questioning my *motivations* and coming up with true, sincere answers was the key to getting insights when working through my own self-knowledge toward my healing. Once the insights were there, the potential for healing was created. “What exactly drives me to do what I do, or avoid so strongly what I don’t want to do? What are the *real* reasons for my choices and behaviors?”

I remember the many instances during the time I worked as a professional bassoonist when I was unable to stop practicing or preparing my reeds. It felt as if my life literally depended on the quality of my performance. In hindsight I can see why I was so compulsive in my preparations for a concert—I could not afford for others to think I was a bad musician and go home with that devastating feeling of having failed to perform well. It felt as if my spirit would evaporate until the next time when I would do well.

“Thinks Are Seldom What They Seem”

Consider these examples of differing motivations, which are hard to spot for the common observer.

Here we have two mothers and each take their child to a music school. Even though to an observer these two people are “doing the same thing,” their motives might be totally different. One might be motivated to develop her child’s talent and help the child be happy in the activities involved in that development. The other might be motivated to have a child who’s a good musician because it reflects well on her as a parent.

The outcome of the experience would therefore be different for all involved. The first mother and child would probably find satisfaction and mutual enjoyment. The second mother and child would probably have stress, fights, tensions, and mutual dislike. And the child might not only rebel at the activities, but feel disempowered, manipulated, resentful, and inauthentic. So why did I get started in music?

Two mothers are complimenting their children after a test at school. It looks as if they are doing the same thing. But their motives could be different, and the effect of the compliment could be different in each case, too.

The first mother might be motivated by unconditional love and recognition of the child’s intrinsic worth, so she is supporting her child’s self-image as capable and loved no matter the test results. The effect of the compliment would be smiles on both faces, a deepening of their bond, and better mental health for the child. The second mother might be giving the child approval, which the child knows is only because of a good test result, a good performance. The child would be glad, but already worried about future failures. The mother might be getting an emotional rush from having a child who appears intelligent to

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the world, thus reflecting well on her own intelligence, which she isn't sure is high enough to get *her own* mother's approval. The mother's motive is to have the child do well on future tests.

For the second mother it isn't really about the child, and a nagging fear of future failure lurks for the child as well as for the mother through the child. The child is a pawn in the mother's game. The child senses she needs to perform well in order to get "good vibes" from the mother; the mother depends on the child for her "Feeling-good-about-Self" (FgaS) state.

Unit 5 – Are you using your life to prove that you are okay?

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Ego-References and Other Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

So, indirect motivation is the immediate result of the dependency on our caregiver's approval that our understanding as a child takes for acknowledgment. Now that we have a sense of the difference between Direct and Indirect Motivation, let us shed a light on the pathway that is responsible for the motivation to be indirect.

So Ego-References refer to a set of required conditions to be performed at a high quality, and include specific behaviors and actions that we believe will satisfy the parent if we can improve our performance of them and that will get us the needed approval. They stem directly from the observations made in early childhood that are referred to in this work as the Early Childhood Survival Strategy (ECSS) ([link](#)).

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Ego-References

The term **Ego-Reference** is central and unique to the Sense of Self (SoS) Method. It is a complex concept and part of the Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS)–oriented System.

Ego-Reference as a whole has everything to do with referring to the Substitute Sense of Self, mistaken for the real (healthy) SoS.

Each Ego-Reference, when worked on, is solely geared to win approval while soothing the fear for the perceived ever-present threat of ([link](#)) Annihilation that is lurking. Ego-References are grown into solid, unchangeable strategies. You have to think of them as less dense items, with an energy that is still not hardened into, what it becomes in later days, the compulsion a person can't remove from his or her path because it has become part of him or her. So in general when we speak of Ego-References the child has already grown into an adult.

The specific desired behaviors are meant to result in the person receiving the right “vibes” from his or her caregiver. For example, a person may think: “I have to finish this work today,” not so much because the work needs to be finished—which would be Direct Motivation for finishing the work—but because by finishing it early, I anticipate a sense of approval that will lead to me “Feeling-good-about-Myself”—which is the real motive for finishing the work.

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Conditions That Become Ego-References

Which characteristics or behaviors become Ego-References depend on a person's individual specific circumstances. What the young child discovers when trying to adjust to the caregiver's demanding behavior or to the caregiver's responses to its own behaviors determines what Ego-Reference the person will develop. Each individual child discovers different behaviors (to do or refrain from) that evoke approval from his or her particular primary caregiver. Thus, each child develops actions and behaviors unique to itself and its situation, although there most likely are common patterns. It would be interesting to identify those by researching them more in depth. Chosen Ego-References might also have to do with the child's own specific temperament and inclinations and be colored by the particular conditions and requirements the child senses the caregiver is imposing on him or her. They can be, but are not necessarily, the caregiver's own Ego-References.

For example, whenever Erica, who had a hard time falling asleep, overslept, her aunt (who had raised her from when she was little) looked at her in a manner that said, "Why do you do this to me?" She would look at Erica with the look of an abused dog, which made Erica feel very guilty. It is not hard to fathom that Erica's Ego-Reference became "sleeping well." "I need to sleep well in order to get my aunt's friendship and approval, which would feel for her as if she was getting the keys to the castle." (This is a metaphor for her being allowed into her aunt's environment while feeling included. See *The Castle of Enmeshment* on page 97.)

Similarly, when Erica was sick or feeling under the weather and had to stay home from school, her aunt silently resented the situation, because it would give her extra trouble. It would be a Hindrance on her way to having a clean house and everything taken care of, which would give her the desired FgaS state. Another interesting detail is that Erica's aunt did not allow herself to be sick either. Being sick was something the parents of Erica's aunt despised as well. It possibly was even an Ego-Reference to Erica's grand-parents. No wonder Erica developed the inner command to make sure she was OK at all times, which would lead her to pretend she was fine, even when feeling under the weather, lousy, or nervous.

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Ego-References and Vehicles

As discussed in the preceding chapter, the term *Vehicle* is used to indicate an action, activity, or behavior that serves as a carrier for and an opportunity to work on an Ego-Reference. The action that functions as a Vehicle has two functions: It brings about an overt result and it serves to realize a person's Hidden Agenda, which is a positive outcome of an

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Ego-Reference. A person's focus is only indirectly on the overt goal; the person's real intent is to attain the Hidden Goal and/or the FgaS state, feeding his or her SSoS.

Here are some examples of behaviors used as Vehicles: household- or job-related requirements, paying a visit to someone, sending a card to someone, helping someone in any way, pursuing a certain education, educating children a certain way, going places, washing your car, being on time, and having a relationship partner, among others.

You'll find other examples of Vehicles discussed throughout this book.

Examples of Ego-References

Remember that Ego-References are held subconsciously. Considerable introspection may be required to discover that you hold the belief—accepted in early childhood—that you desperately need to fulfill these conditions and requirements. We can think of Ego-References as self-imposed conditions but we need to be always aware that this was the best that could have been done. It was a second best option. Note that Ego-References are rules with unrealistic demands of “always”—there is no allowance for circumstances. Holding on to Ego-References degrades these peoples' quality of life and makes them the slave of fulfilling the conditions.

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To get a better feel for what aspects of a person's life can become an Ego-Reference, here is a list of the ones I had.

- As a mother, *my* family has to be positive and have a positive atmosphere at all times.
- I need to be in shape physically, emotionally, and psychologically so that I am always OK.
- I need to sleep well, be fit, be in a good mood, and look well-rested.
- I need to know what I want.
- I need to be on time.
- I have to have my act together.
- I need to achieve something in life, make something of myself.
- I need to stay away from getting angry, upset, irritated, or even annoyed.
- I need to avoid conflicts at all costs.

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- I should never have or create problems for myself or anyone else.
- I have to make sure that I do not become sick or am not feeling well because it is not appreciated.
- I need to do things differently from other people and find a sense of being special.
- I need to be different from what and who I naturally am; I cannot just be who I naturally am.
- I have to stand out from the crowd.
- As a mother, I need to spend enough time with my children and husband.
- As a person, I must achieve great things in the world.
- As a housewife, I have to have my house clean and well-organized.
- As a spouse, I have to be in a good mood and never be angry.
- I must not complain.
- I have to be successful and admired.

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When I visited my mother in the last decade of her life (I was in my fifties), I would not enter her house without bringing some flowers or a little gift. I never thought of actually making her a bit happy; I did it to get approval. (Ego-Reference: “not being selfish.”) I had to keep up with my sister who gave her so many presents and flowers. I had to keep up so much that there was no room left for any spontaneity.

Other times, I felt I had to take her on a few trips to change the impression that I was leading a selfish life. My sister did it, so I also had to do it so I would not lose points. But due to the lack of predictability in my sleeping pattern I was unable to offer that as generously for it tied directly to another Ego-Reference, one that already was a hot item during my visits to my mother: I had to sleep well to actually be able to plan to take her out.

Unit 6 – The need to “Feel-good-about-self” can be compulsive.

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The “Feeling-good-about-self” State

Is “Feeling-good-about-self” (Fgas) a State, a Thought or a Feeling?

In traditional psychology, thoughts are not to be confused with feelings. I learned this when going over the Sense of Self Method with Dr. Hal Dibner. The more I thought about that, the clearer it became to me how the “**Feel-good-about-self**” state was actually more a *thinking* good about oneself. It is basically a positive self-judgment that, based on the SSoS-oriented System criteria, is taken for feeling (sensing) the Self.

Over time during childhood, this feeling or state of judging oneself based on the fulfillment of certain conditions becomes a Substitute (unnatural, unhealthy) way of Sensing the Self. This state of judging oneself to have complied with the (self-)imposed conditions, and therefore being OK, functions as the ultimate goal in life and leads to compulsive behavior.

For those of us with a Substitute Sense of Self, life consists of mere moments of “Feeling-good-about-ourselves,” like puddle jumping for children playing in the street, the dry pavement parts being the Fgas moments. The puddles need to be seen as the lapses of time spent on working hard to get the required positive outcomes and during which no Self is experienced. There is just an identification with the task at hand. Experiencing their Fgas state is their only reference to a self as it is their only way to avoid feeling annihilated. Because of this, they perceive reaching this state as a matter of life or death. Because this state results from actions or achievements that produce approval, they cannot stop trying to get the best-possible version of their action or achievement. This leads to “over” doing actions and achievements: They over-practice, overachieve, over-care, and so on.

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The Role of the “Feel-good-about-self” State in the SSoS-oriented System

The Fgas state plays a crucial role in the structure of the psyche of a human being who has a Substitute Sense of Self. When I first set out to identify the importance it played in my life, I was still far from seeing the whole of this Method. I was not even aware that the only “feelings” I experienced were those related to my Hidden Goal and my SSoS-oriented System. The only feelings I was capable of were based on anxiety of not being able and/or in a position to make my Hidden Goal come true: being acknowledged as a valuable person

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in my mother's/parent's life and thereby getting a "virtual backbone." I experienced anger and desperation about possibly being thwarted or disabled in this process and I experienced fear that the Fgas state was always disappearing too fast.

These emotions were so violent and dominating that there was no room for anything that "stirs the heart"; no frequency was available on which this could occur. I always lived with the vague impression that something squashed my true (natural) range of feelings—that that something continuously squeezed out of my heart all the juices so I could not *really* feel something.

I thought that "Feeling-good-about-myself," which only happened when I fulfilled the conditions, was an exception, that it was really a feeling. Even working on fulfilling the conditions gave me an experience that simulated the Fgas state by anticipating it. So I was only relatively at ease when actively working on these conditions (Ego-References). Anything else that needed to be done or even anything else that was meant to be fun was experienced as anxiety provoking and interfering with my actual goal.

Unit 7 – “Will I ever outgrow the need for approval?”

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An Influence Throughout Life

As a child grows up and becomes more autonomous, the direct influence and impact of parents'/caregivers' behavior on the child normally diminishes. This is true for children who have developed a reasonable healthy SoS, but for those in an “**Enmeshment**,” an unhealthy degree of dependency continues through adulthood and even into old age, even though the parent's or caregiver's influence has become less visible, less obvious, and therefore less traceable. The continuation of this unhealthy relationship is often facilitated by modern ease of communication (see Chapter 7 for more on Enmeshment). Too often, for example, grown children become terribly stressed when visiting their parents, because they know they are not the sons and daughters their parents want them to be, and they feel the need of their parent's approval and validation. It's often similarly stressing when parents come to visit. A grown woman, for example, may start to clean and organize like a madwoman because her house never seems to be “good enough” for her mother. If you point this out to her, she might prefer to not look at her own behavior and to be in denial of the truth and mention futile things that justify her behavior. But when the stress level she experiences is so much higher than is justified by the actual event, it is likely that deep down inside she feels her SSoS is at stake.

At any age, grown children whose parents are alive can still be needy; they still hope that by facilitating their parents' caprices they might finally get their deepest wish come true: being unconditionally loved and feeling accepted the way they are, being acknowledged as a valuable human being important in their parent's lives.

Even if an ocean lies between parents and their grown children, parents' influence can be just as present as ever within the child's inner life. The parent's standards and criteria still reverberate in his or her head and form what I call the **Virtual, Internalized Parental Voice (VIPV)**.

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Self-absorbed parents are unable to regard their children as anything but a pawn in the (subconsciously played) emotional games of their own lives. I call this “playing games” because their actions and world in fact have nothing to do with the reality of life in the world outside their small circle of awareness; the developmental needs of their children are part of that reality of life outside that circle.

Self-absorbed parents can never foster the development of a Natural SoS in their children because they put themselves continuously not only in the center of their own world but

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also in the center of other people's worlds while their child bends over backward in an attempt to get his or her need of acknowledgment as a being, as existing, met.

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An Eternal Vicious Cycle

A parent who lacks a SoS and who is compulsively driven to fulfill his or her perceived survival conditions makes that his or her children have to facilitate the parent's Hidden Agenda—consequently there is hardly no room for their own input, whether that be wanting to have friends over for play, engaging in activities that the parent has no interest in, or being sick or demanding attention in any way.

These patterns of behavior are likely to develop into a vicious behavioral cycle that extends over generations. The parents are not able to focus on their child and acknowledge it as a truly existing human being with all the rights that come with it. They then raise their child in such a way that, when in the situation of being a parent themselves, they will be unable to pay attention to their own children. Again they are not free from dependencies on fulfilling the Ego-References of trying to be heard and seen themselves.

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The Virtual, Internalized Parental Voice (VIPV)

So the good vibes of the caregiver, when no longer available, are not even directly necessary anymore. The now-grown children judge themselves by their caregiver's criteria, which they take on as their own. This approval from the virtual parent, also called the internalized parent, includes criteria that were used by the now-long-gone parent. They use these internalized parental judgments as criteria to anchor themselves in their lives through the FgaS state that then constitutes a SSoS for them.

To include the presence of another voice other than your own in your Self may sound strange or even far-fetched. And truly, it took me quite a while to discover this aspect, but when looking into myself more deeply, I felt as if my parent was still present through my own voice, which really wasn't my own voice. The voice that was supposedly mine presented criteria copied from my parent, not generated by myself.

Unit 8 – “Help! I sense my Self disappearing when I don’t succeed in making you happy!”

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Approval, Fear, the Black Hole, and Annihilation

When a parent or caregiver is unable to acknowledge their child as a “real” autonomously existing person that parent fails to provide the foundation on which their child can build a healthy Sense of Self. The child experiences the resulting lack of Sense of Self, on a deep, primordial level of consciousness, as a painful void.

I refer to this void as a **Black Hole**. This void generates a gigantic power that sucks in any positive outcome of an achievement or behavior of the child that would have led to approval, which then is experienced as a Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS). Any situation that goes well in the person’s life and that would gain the caregiver’s explicit approval is used to fill the void of this Black Hole to create, if you will, a sort of balance in the system. At the same time though failure fear is a steady companion of this success as it is success not for the sake of itself, but for the sake of gaining a SsoS.

To get a full understanding of the rest of the developmental process, and the power of the unhealthy motivations that develop from this type of (Distorted) Mirroring, we need to take a close look at the child’s inner experience of the Black Hole, an experience this Method calls “Annihilation.” We also need to take into account and study the fear developed from having experienced this void, **Fear of Annihilation**.

Experiencing Annihilation

In this Method, the term **Annihilation** is an inner, usually not consciously defined, perception of feeling as if one is alive but does not exist to others. It comes down to feeling like a person without a voice or a face as a unique individual, and comes from not being acknowledged as an independent, potentially autonomous being. The person, sensing that he or she is not being seen, heard, or taken into account, feels invisible, or is reduced to a quasi-nonexistence.

The experience of Annihilation is not so much that of existing and then not existing because of dying physically. The ultimate terror of Annihilation arises from the gut-level experience of feeling invisible even though one is physically present—present as a body but not addressed and taken in by the community. It is as if a person’s authentic essence/spirit is not able or allowed to come through to manifest itself in his or her environment.

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Experiencing Annihilation is not recognized as such by the person at all; it merely manifests as a rising awareness of being “off” in some way, and as a result of being discounted, it comes down to a deep feeling of being rejected, of being denied access to the world of the others.

To label this complex condition, the term *Annihilation* is used, rather than death or nonexistence, for two reasons.

First, there always are certain fundamental layers in the Self that do develop or exist in any kind of childhood environment, no matter how starved for acknowledgment the child is. Thus, the child can be thought of as half-alive.

Second, because whatever sense of selfhood the child subconsciously manages to achieve is always disappearing along with the approval/good vibes that (unhealthy, Substitute) SoS depends on. The physical body dies only once. Annihilation, as described here, happens over and over again. By comparison, one could say that death is benign. The subconscious sense of not existing is experienced as terror. As we shall see, the motivation to avoid the experience of Annihilation is compelling.

Ideally the relationship between the infant and the parent(s) or primary caregiver(s) feeds the infant’s sense of being acknowledged as someone existing as a separate person. This then contributes to the development of a healthy Natural SoS. This sense of being a Self is the opposite of the experience of Annihilation. If an infant’s primary caregiver fails to reflect to the infant: “I see you as a being independent of me, no matter what you do or do not do,” then a condition is created for a warped SoS.

What happens if a child’s (person’s) own needs and nature are NOT taken into account by others? The child may conclude it isn’t good enough. And as it is, in that process, also being overlooked and ignored, it makes the child feel like being a ghost with a body—bodily alive but in the living hell of being invisible to everyone. An eerie suspicion of “I am not real. I have no real empowerment” may emerge in the child’s or later the adult’s mind. This vague uncertainty plus the strategies the child develops to try to overcome it or compensate for this feeling may stay with him or her for the whole of his or her adult life and greatly determine its quality.

I remember being present with certain groups of people and trying to mingle. I convinced myself it was normal to be overlooked and not addressed. I felt so unimportant to others, yet inside I knew I was worth a lot. I had no sense of when to come into a conversation or when to speak up in a group. I wasn’t in touch with the part of your being that generates impulses and that, if you trust it, makes those decisions for you. If you have no SoS, there is no way you can rely on your intuition as you are not aligned with it.

Fearing Annihilation

Fear of the experience of Annihilation arises in young children—and then over and over again while growing up and as an adult as well, lifelong—and stems from the circumstance of not being heard and seen in their essence and not being acknowledged as independent and autonomous persons. This circumstance, which once was a reality for them, is never recognized or confirmed, though. When a person (a parent) *is* with the child, feeds it, and gives it clothes, it looks like he or she cares for the child. In other words, it isn't really visible to an outsider, nor is it within the ability of a child to recognize that a parent merely tolerates the child and lets him or her come closer when the child complies behaviorally to the parent's wishes. That doesn't mean that this situation is less real, though.

I remember a situation in which, as a 12-year-old, I had an accident with my bicycle. I somehow had lost my balance and landed with my ribcage on one of the handlebars. I was in pain, but I do not remember a word of comfort from my caregiver and the trip to the doctor's office lives in my memory as a nuisance to my caregiver: "How could you do that to me?" was the non-verbal message. I don't think she really saw me.

It is hard for the grown person who has been in that situation to believe in him- or herself. There is always this uncanny sense that something is at stake: Annihilation. Now this Fear of Annihilation that lingers in one's life is the living proof of the defects in the relationship between caregiver and child. It is hard to put the finger on it later in life though, as this relationship is now only a memory.

It is the fear of not being visible as a Being, despite being bodily present, to others. The never-articulated subconscious belief is "I am unable to participate in life because nobody sees or hears me." Obviously, this leads to feelings of inadequacy and deep inferiority, and thus Annihilation becomes a constant threat and a constant reality. Fearing it, and the attempt to prevent the disappearance of anything remotely resembling a SoS, the SSoS becomes a dominant motive in life.

This fear, the seed for compulsions and addictions later in life, can be so intolerably terrifying and painful that it rarely reaches conscious awareness; most people who have it experience some milder version and do not realize what they are really afraid of!

This fear is also a profound motive to gain and keep the caregiver's real or virtual approval, which allows the "Feeling-good-about-Self" (Fgas) state to soothe the state of mind.

Fear of Annihilation in a person's psyche generates a powerful force that generates compulsions and addictions in desperate attempts to avoid experiencing it. Imagine how it would be if your *only experience of truly existing* were while you felt good about yourself?

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Thus, the Fear of Annihilation is the fountainhead for many other fears, for example, fear of not being able to access the aforementioned state of Fgas that then functions as a SSoS. In short, the Fear of Annihilation is comparable to—and maybe even worse than—the fear of death.

In a person with certain early-childhood deprivations, fearing Annihilation never stops; it keeps the person in suspense (and in a “trance”) for his or her whole life. It is a constant threat and a constant albeit unrecognized reality. The attempt to prevent Annihilation becomes—with the power of a force of nature—a dominant yet completely subconscious operating motive in life, and it generates an entire system of unhealthy, detrimental psycho-emotional habits, beliefs, needs, desires, compulsions, addictions, and motives. This system enslaves us until, and unless, we become aware of it.

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The Substitute Sense of Self (SSoS)

When a Natural Sense of Self does not develop, another structure develops in its place: a Substitute Sense of Self. It makes up for what is missing within us. Or it could very well be the other way around: Because another structure develops in the growing infant, there is no room for a natural SoS to develop. When a healthy (i.e., Natural) SoS is lacking automatically the foundation develops of, what later turns out to become, a compulsive drive for achievement-based approval to enable the person to experience a fleeting imitation of the lacking Natural SoS.

If an ongoing sense of autonomous existence does not develop, an inner vacuum is created that leads to an intolerable terror. Subconsciously, a person then adopts various unhealthy strategies for getting positive feedback, be it physically, emotionally, verbally, or nonverbally, from his or her caregiver or parent. This feedback becomes the closest to a healthy regard that the person can obtain. These unhealthy, subconsciously self-imposed strategies include various requirements (conditions) for feeling or acting or behaving in certain ways to get recognized. Through successfully meeting these requirements or conditions, people feel good about themselves, which is comparable with receiving a sort of validation that they “exist” as a Being. I consider this to be a substitute way of experiencing the Self, or, in other words, a SSoS.

The SSoS is the central part of a complex collection of psycho-emotional motives, goals, feelings, needs, desires, habits, and behaviors that, as a whole, is called the SSoS-oriented System (see Chapter 8). This system operates a great deal of the person’s psyche and behavior, and has a profound influence on his or her health, relationships, work, environment, children, and spouse—in general on life itself. It causes a great deal of (unnecessary) suffering for the person who is ruled by it as well as for the people in this

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person's direct environment. But now that we are able to identify the condition and label it, it can, fortunately, be addressed and, with enough determination and effort, be healed.

Unit 9 – Putting it all together: Are You Riding an Emotional Rollercoaster?

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Life in a SSoS-oriented Way

Living in a SSoS-oriented way is a life based on fiction because it involves, although subconsciously, a fictional Self. People live the fiction that approval is a substitute for having a right to exist and that approval is necessary to have any experience of a SoS: “I won’t exist unless I get approval.” They live with this in order to experience anything resembling their right to exist.

This fiction feeds and yet arises from an unhealthy compulsive cycle. Because of their subconscious perception of having their existence prolonged and not annihilated, they need the continuous influx of feeling good about themselves while never being aware of the falseness of the construct.

The term *substitute* in this Method connotes that a SSoS is unhealthy. When a SSoS is at the steering wheel of our lives, when life is guided by and anchored in a SSoS, we go through life in an inauthentic way. We are not in touch with nor able to express the core of our own being, nor are we in touch with our repressed natural, authentic needs, feelings, motives, and desires.

Because the SSoS has taken the place of our never-developed Natural SoS, on a subconscious level we never feel that we are fully existing, which is a cause of ongoing anger and sadness. Because of this nonexistence of an **Authentic Self (Real Self)**, feelings are blocked or dried up, which leads to the inability to experience joy or pleasure in normally pleasurable acts.

We are guided daily by what Vehicles will best help us fulfill our Ego-References and achieve the Fgas state, we engage in activities that are not really of our own choosing. We may study music not for the joy of music, but to fulfill the desire of a caregiver, or we may wash dishes not because we enjoy a tidy kitchen, but to satisfy something else, perhaps our parents’ insistence that the kitchen always be spotless.

So as you can see, in this process, although the body is not destroyed, eventually there is a near extinction of a person’s spirit and psyche. The person is always conforming to something external, never free to know and express his or her real nature; the real potential Self never develops, and once the SSoS-oriented System has settled in, it becomes his or her identity.

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After years of constrained, contorted behavioral compulsions from their ECSS, children start to identify with the ego-referent behavior: The behavior is part and parcel of their SoS, which is a SSoS. Working to fulfill the conditions becomes not only their identity, but the only reason for living. Life for them becomes one big struggle to live up to all the (self-imposed) conditions to constantly renew this fictional identity. You can imagine how stressful this is, and what a sad situation, made even worse by the collateral damage of the side effects, sufferings, and problems.

When people do not notice this psycho-emotional pattern operating in them, they are bound to repeat it. These people are *not* in touch with themselves and are merely juggling as much as possible to experience the SSoS. The poignant drama here is that they are skipping their lives altogether and aren't growing and maturing. In addition, these people are not the masters of their own lives; they are slaves to the force of nature that is fulfilling the Ego-References and achieving the Fgas emotional state. Life is not about them but about juggling the many. People caught in this SSoS-oriented life miss out on a life that is their "own." In a way, we could even say that their worst fear is true: They *don't really exist!* In the long run, that can cause many diseases and addictions, big and small.

Personally, I dare say that I must have missed out on quite a number of years of active presence while being the slave of my Ego-References.

In the grip of these imperious imperatives, the only thing we see about the world and people is our own point of view, which is all about fulfillment of our Ego-References. There is no room for another person to be truly seen or heard or acknowledged as a person by us. All people are merely pawns in the game of fulfilling Ego-References, which is no game but deadly serious. And through their actions and behaviors, others sense their inauthenticity because they are perceived subliminally as being uncaring, insincere, and distant—which, indeed, they are!

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The Harmful Effects of the Addiction to (or Dependency on) a SSoS

Unhealthy motivations, like Hidden Agendas, are fairly common, and people employing them would not necessarily be called mentally ill. Not all Hidden Agendas are equally bad; it is up to you to decide to which degree they have taken over your life. The ones that aim to compensate for past traumatic experiences *tend to* lead to many kinds of suffering in oneself and in others, though. The actions, which function as Vehicles for our Hidden Agendas, are, as said before, everyday little actions and activities. Still, it all may seem pretty harmless. Not so.

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Here are the harmful effects that stem from Indirect Motivation and indirectly from the dependency of a SSoS:

Addiction to the SSoS leads to compulsive task fulfilling behavior: When behaviors have a hidden (subconscious) agenda of getting approval, *they become compulsive and addictive*. If succeeding in achieving the agenda feels at risk, we can erupt in rage and violence, become overwhelmed by these emotions, and not know why! Or we can become chronically depressed, as well as suffer from disease, insomnia, and many other types of human suffering, including divorce. All of these can be traced to one root cause: being motivated by the Hidden Agenda of getting approval. By cleaning up your motivation, you not only improve your quality of life; you also help make the world a better place.

Physical symptoms: I am not a doctor so I cannot go into specifics. However, it seems to me that much physical distress might be the direct result of the dependency on a SSoS, including gum-disease for example and many more (see Comparison Chart and Map of Healing)

Fear-based symptoms: The various types of fear, including but not limited to anxiety, fear of failure, Fear of Annihilation, certain cases of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, certain phobias, and general isolation.

Depression-related symptoms: Common depression. I have a hunch that there are many more symptoms that are the immediate result of the addiction to or dependency on a SSoS for your self-experience.

General dysfunction: There is a lot more to say about all kinds of dysfunctions we encounter on a daily basis in our lives as well as in society as a whole, violence, suicidal thoughts or acts, divorce, greed, bullying, frequent fights in families, and many more . . . The purpose of this book though does not permit going into more detail about those. For now we focus on getting the SoS Method verbalized and out to the world. It is our intention as the company HEALTHYSENSEOFSELF to study all aspects of dysfunction and disease that could possibly benefit from our body of work here. We welcome any experts in those fields to join us.

Mental and/or emotional problems: Including, but not limited to: a lack of the ability to focus, heightened sensitivity to criticism, unstoppable urge to hurry up in everything you do, memory problems, learning problems (math!) for children, inability to experience feelings, problems relating to other people, and so many more . . .

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Note that the child's **SSoS-oriented Goal** has now reached a new phase: The whole of the SSoS-oriented System has come into place, and it starts to rule and further form the (young) adult. In this system, the person, as he or she grows, builds on the earlier observations and strivings from childhood and, as a young adult, identifies this way of being as being him or her. Because there is no truthful way to get in touch with the Self the person is forever unable to develop any other way of existing other than through fulfilling those conditions. Such a person always needs to achieve and has no inner place to rest. This exhausting, debilitating, and stressful lifestyle is the overture to the next phase: exhaustion, burnout, or disease.

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In review, we develop a SSoS-oriented System through the following experiences:

1. We receive Mirroring from a Distorted Mirror (i.e., a caregiver/parent who is self-absorbed) that states, "You are not unconditionally OK," which makes us believe that we are not worth being taken into account the way we are.
2. From this Mirroring, we perceive that we are deficient in some way and that we are to blame for not being acknowledged as a unique human being with the right to be the way we are. We experience Annihilation (our spirit is not acknowledged). We don't develop the spine for our psyche, a healthy Sense of Self (SoS). We develop Fear of Annihilation and become totally absorbed in avoiding Annihilation.
3. To avoid feeling annihilated, we observe what pleases the parent and adopt complying to these aspects, turning that adaptation into our Early Childhood Survival Strategy (ECSS).
4. With repetition, we begin to identify with these observations and they become Ego-References.
5. We use Vehicles as an excuse or as a cover-up to perform the Ego-References.
6. Over time we strive to fulfill our Ego-References; each time with a need to complete it better than before, with one specific agenda in mind that we are not aware of—approval from the caregiver/parent or, if he or she is no longer with us, from our Virtual, Internalized Parent Voice (VIPV).
7. When we bring our Ego-Reference to a good ending, we experience our Hidden Agenda, in other words we experience the "Feeling-good-about-Self (Fgas)" state, which functions as our SSoS.
8. Because the Fgas-state is fleeting, we have to begin the process over and over again in order to make sure we can experience it as if it were permanently available. Each time we are more determined to succeed in achieving our

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Ego-Reference's goal. It is this unknown goal that drives us. We are not consciously aware of it and mistakenly take it for a reason for living.

9. We also develop a fear of experiencing the Fear of Annihilation.
10. We suffer from many other SSoS-oriented fears, ailments, and disorders.

A SSoS is kept in place in the person's psyche only through constant re-creation through this complex system of dependencies, conditions to be met, motivations, the Hidden Goal/Agenda, emotions, and behaviors.

The Complex Emotional World of the SSoS-oriented System

How can we start to understand the psycho-emotional makeup of a person who is governed by a SSoS-oriented System for self-experience? I refer to my own experiences here, but a detailed, "linear" description of all emotional aspects that were at play within me when I was still totally Substitute Sense of Self-oriented is hard to give.

For me, it meant that the emotions in the family where I grew up must have been quite overwhelming. In fact, as a young adult, I felt a distance between myself and most of the common things people seemed to be preoccupied with—things that would upset them or make them happy. I had made a decision not to be bothered by them and to focus on how to do things differently. Later in life though, when I became a mother, I needed to review this strategy because there was no escape from the trivialities and logistics in life at that point: I had to learn to deal with it all.

There are two predominant emotions in a person who has a SSoS: the Fear of Annihilation and the FgaS state. Fear is the basic motivation for doing what it takes to get to a FgaS, and they seesaw back and forth. When one is high, the other is low. There is never a stable situation, because the FgaS state never lasts for long before it fades and requires the next "fix" of approval. When it fades, the Fear of Annihilation gets stronger. (Note that a FgaS state does not survive a good night's sleep—hence, insomnia.)

The Soup of SSoS-related Goals and Emotions

The complexity of all the emotions that a Substitute Sense of Self generates in a person is best compared to soup: Everything is in it but you do not recognize the individual ingredients. So I've decided to describe my psycho-emotional makeup as if it were soup. Everybody's soup tastes differently, even though many of the ingredients might be the same. My goal in creating this description is for you to get insight into what "laws" are at work when you combine some of these psycho-emotional ingredients:

- Normal quality-of-life events and emotions;

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- “Holy decisions,” such as “I am never going to do this or that; I am always going to be such and such; I’m absolutely going to do things in a different way compared to my parents; I am going to be different from everybody else.”;
- The two sides of Ego-References: the normal Quality of Life motivation, for example, “not wanting anger in your house,” plus the SSoS-oriented motivations for not wanting to be angry (for Fear of Annihilation);
- Multiple simultaneously existing but incompatible Ego-References that lead to Inner Conflict;
- The “elephant in the room” of feeling good at all cost (as a family-wide Ego-Reference and Hidden Goal). I refer to the unspoken agreement (in my family of origin) that every family member makes it his or her top priority to behave in such a way that other members are provided or can preserve their FgaS as a SSoS;
- Fear of encountering reasons to be angry, and the continuous conscious and subconscious drive to be on the lookout to avoid those. (See the issues of control in the following discussion.);
- Fear of one’s own feelings/behavior;
- Fear of “screwing it up.” There is perceived to be so much at stake (Quality of Life-level family peace next to the [much stronger] SSoS-oriented goal), but we are distressed and puzzled because we are not aware of that, or of what is at stake (nor is anybody else). All we are aware of about ourselves is that we are “high-strung,” that our temper is not always contained, and that in some vague, undefined way, we sense a temper display puts us back to zero, having to start from scratch. Start what, we don't know!

We are still talking soup here:

The need to control and the constant presence of fear, stress, and the overzealous effort to do things the right way function as the binding ingredients for this soup (comparable to the function of corn starch). Throw into this pot of soup as herbs-of-the-season some random ingredients like the parental expressions such as

“All is wasted now” (“We had a pleasant evening, but in the end things turned sour. But all is wasted now.”);

“You are always the one to screw it up” (a too easily made accusation);

“You blew it again”;

“I’m walking on eggshells”;

“If you are this or that way, everybody will walk out on you”;

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“Make sure you are not giving in to others and stay true to yourself, but I guess it is hard when you have no self”;

and other similar expressions.

Put this on the fire of the Hidden Agenda (to bring the Ego-Reference to a good end), stir it really well while heating it to a boiling point, and serve it to your loved ones. Do you think they will like this soup?

Principles at Work in Making Soup

Let's elaborate some more on the analogy of soup so you might get a clearer sense of the mood and mind-set of a person who is dependent on a SSoS for experiencing his or her Self. There are a number of principles at work:

- Dependency on the outcome of an Ego-Reference leads to heavy control.
- Ego-Reference plus Ego-Reference equals Inner Conflict.
- Inner Conflict leads to blaming others, rage, depression, and insomnia. A person's circumstances spiral downward. The need to repair the circumstances (make up for it by going overboard) and to control others and the circumstances even more in order not to “do it again” increases stress and fear.
- Self-sabotage continuously thwarts a potential good outcome to an Ego-Reference.
- Anger, rage, insomnia, and/or depression due to the thwarting of the Ego-Reference adds more stress.
- Stress plus fear equals more need to control.
- Stress plus need to control equals more stress; ultimately there is a point that the body and/or mind can't handle it anymore and falls ill from exhaustion, fear, and depression.