

# The Tin-Elephant: Inner-Explorations of Personal Power

A Final Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Diploma Program and Master's Degree in Processwork

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## Abstract

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I invite you to join me on a journey into a woman's inner-exploration of personal power, through dreams and daily experiences, in the form of process-oriented written innerwork.

What remains when I lose the social privileges that I am used to? Who am I when I'm not in an admired position in the corporate world; when I move across the world and don't have the comfort of my home and familiar surroundings; when my dear ones are not there to catch me when I fall? Who am I and what do I bring to the world when I am just me: naked like a newborn baby? Will I survive?

I did what my inner critics were against: I stripped myself naked – naked to flesh and bones – in public, in search of the vital power in me that is always there, that will take me through any challenges, and will support me in being my true self in the world. Did I find it or not?

This is a creative writing project with a focus on personal power, using Processwork's method of innerwork to guide the writing process. The thesis introduces innerwork as a method of self-exploration for the purpose of personal growth; it illustrates how innerwork can be used in the exploration of personal power in the context of personal history and experiences in relationships, the body, and the world. It also gives

a brief overview of how personal power is viewed in the context of the Processwork paradigm, indigenous cultures, and the wider field of psychology, including the classical and feminist perspective. In the concluding section, I will show how my inner explorations and personal journey relate to other viewpoints of the topic of personal power.

Keywords: personal power, innerwork, dreams, personal history, life myth, relationships, body experiences, body image, world experiences, personal growth, women's issues, feminine power, self-empowerment.

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world, to have such profound personal and professional transformation. I also feel an unfathomable gratitude towards Arny Mindell, for creating Processwork paradigm with his wife, Amy Mindell, and colleagues. Processwork has given me a way of looking at life that makes it possible to feel at home, even in the most impossible situations, and to find flow in stuck places.

Besides my Processwork teachers, I am deeply grateful to my friends. I was lucky to meet Merit Raju on my first day of school, about twenty years ago. She has become my dear friend, teacher and an ally on a similar path. Merit brought me to consistent innerwork practice with yoga and meditation. Her sincere and personal published work inspired me. She later encouraged me to write publicly, by co-writing a book, and gave me the opportunity to be a monthly columnist for a progressive women's magazine. I also feel deep gratitude towards Moisés Espinoza for his caring, support and believing in me, and also for teaching me about following the Tao, wherever it takes you. I couldn't have done this journey without my cohort: MAPW3. Four years in this group often felt like simmering, boiling, and at times, burning in a rich stew that is spiced up with the most diverse flavors from all over the world. I will forever treasure our cooking together in the classroom, in relationship interactions, and in the kitchen.

It is hard to expand and grow without a secure sense of home, where you can be yourself. I feel blessed to have met the Carrolls, an awesome family in Portland, who "adopted" me and made Portland feel like home. I am also deeply grateful to the Tao House roommates: Dennis Palazolo, Christa Strotz, Paola Vidulich, Moisés Espinoza, Emory Mort, Kassandra Krauciunas, Zach Rossman and Satoko Muramatsu, with whom I could experience what it's like co-create a community-based home.

I wouldn't be here in this world without my parents, and their parents, and so on. Thank you dear mom and dad for bringing me into this world! I have learned a lot from diverse power dynamics in family. I am also thankful for my sister being an ally throughout my life in various ways. We have wrestled and disagreed, but in spite of that, there is deep love and connectedness between us, and she has showed me in beautiful ways, what living from your deepest self looks like.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Anne Murphy for introducing me to the poem of W. B. Yeats, when I was taking the first baby-steps of this project – it helped me get in touch with the feeling atmosphere of this journey, and bring it out into my writing. Thank you Danielle Swan for your help with editing the thesis, testing the innerwork exercises, and giving me valuable feedback from the reader's perspective that brought this thesis to this final form.

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### **Aedh Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven**

W.B. Yeats (1899)

Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,  
Enwrought with golden and silver light,  
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths  
Of night and light and the half light,  
I would spread the cloths under your feet:  
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;  
I have spread my dreams under your feet;  
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

## Preface

### Tread Softly

Dear reader, I am starting this thesis with a poem by W.B. Yeats because it captures the feeling that I have carried throughout the time of working on this project. The gentle and beautiful way he expresses the vulnerability of deep personal sharing touched me. My hope is that this thesis not only educates you, but also puts you in contact with your feelings of power and powerlessness, and that you will grow more into your personal power together with me. This paper is the most personal public sharing of my life. I want to share my story, because it is an empowering and insightful experience for me, and I also hope that it's inspiring and supportive for others who are on a personal growth journey.

I intend to be as open as possible when sharing my experiences, and simultaneously, I feel vulnerable doing so. I am sharing some life experiences in this paper, which I haven't shared with anybody before, due to shame and fear of being misunderstood and isolated. I am working on these feelings while writing this paper. What you will encounter in the following pages is not wisdom written in retrospect, based on past learning. Instead you will meet me as I am today – a work in progress. I invite you to join me in my inner-kitchen of personal growth and I will share with you what is cooking in the moment. I hope that it will inspire you to go into the depths of your inner-world, and encourage you to use the tools and methods of Processwork for that journey, as I have found them incredibly helpful.

## How to Read This Paper

Before I continue, I need to say a few things about what to expect and how to read this paper. The goal of this project is to show how Process-oriented innerwork can be used as a self-guided method for self-exploration and personal growth, and I will use my exploration of personal power as an example.

There is other Processwork literature available on innerwork, for example Mindell's (2002) book: *Working on Yourself Alone*, which has guided me in many ways. There is another book, written in the form of a final thesis of Processwork studies by Redwood (2009) called, *It's All About You*, that introduces Processwork innerwork tools for an audience with no prior Processwork experience. In spite of those and other helpful resources that introduce Processwork innerwork, I'd like to give a more detailed illustration of innerwork in practice in order to portray the subtle nuances of this practice. Processwork is an experiential method, and thus needs observational examples to learn from. I learned innerwork from the role-modeling and guidance of my supervisors, and I'd like to role model it to others..

To illustrate what innerwork in practice looks like, this thesis follows my inner wonderings in present time, as I write, and as I recall memories from the past. You will notice that I am using present and past tense in different parts of the writing. I write in present tense about the experiences that are happening in the moment and past tense when I am reflecting on the past. Sometimes I will share some past experiences and dreams using present tense. This means that I am re-accessing that memory, and I experience the feelings and body-sensations that accompany it in the present moment. In

a way, I am time-travelling between past and present, in order to capture the experiences, while simultaneously writing about them.

Besides revealing my inner processes to the reader, I created some innerwork exercises based on my inner-explorations. You will be guided to try out exercises connected to the four main themes that I will be exploring in the context of personal power: personal history, relationships, body experiences, and connection to the world. The exercises are in the appendixes and they are referred to in the corresponding chapters.

I need to mention also that my mother tongue is not English. I am an Estonian. I was born in Estonia and lived there for most of my life. Processwork studies brought me to the U.S. four years ago, and English has been my everyday language since then. I still find that the Estonian language and ways of thinking are deeply rooted in me, and I struggle sometimes with expressing my Estonian thoughts in English. Estonian and English are very different languages and my fluency in them is on different levels. Being aware of the language limitation, I still decided to approach this self-exploration project in English because I would like to reach a wider audience. This paper targets my processwork teachers, fellow Processwork students, the wider process Processwork community, and to anyone interested in exploring their personal power by cultivating deeper awareness around their inner and outer world experiences.

I will use Estonian words when English cannot capture the same essence as an Estonian word. It's a matter of sensing the language, sometimes the same word in English gives me a different feeling than that of the Estonian word. I also notice that even in the same language, words resonate with different feelings for different people, or even for the

same person at different times, depending on the context. So, knowing this limitation, I am aiming to be as clear as possible, and trust that whatever feelings come up in the readers are somehow meaningful.

## Introduction

“Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.

Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power.”

– Lao Tsu, *Tao Te Ching* (1989)

### Personal Power – What and Why?

Women’s issues around leadership initiated my interest of exploring the topic of personal power. I had also been reflecting on my experience of being in an executive leadership position prior to moving to a foreign country and becoming a processwork student, and how my inner sense of power changed. I wanted to compare my experiences of power and leadership with other women, and decided to facilitate a series of group discussions with professional women in Portland, Oregon. The discussions revealed that women who want to make a difference in the world, who want to follow their hearts and fulfill their missions, face similar challenges, however, their paths differ due to their life experiences and personal psychology. I also learned that sharing and comparing our personal experiences can create more awareness around the issues that we face, but eventually, each of us needs to find our own path. I realized that I needed to go deep inside myself and study my own personal power, to understand how it plays out in my life, and how I could use it more consciously.

When I think of personal power in my mother tongue, I am using an ancient Estonian word “vägi” in my mind. According to Kulmar (2006) vägi, particularly in indigenous traditions, refers to an impersonal force that fills the world and everything in

it with vigor. In this meaning the word vägi has been part of the Estonian language since the Uralic language formation. Uralic languages descended from a Proto-Uralic language that existed 7,000 to 10,000 years ago in the general area of the north-central Ural Mountains (Harms 2015). This is an impressive amount of time for a word to be around! I wonder how my ancestors experienced this impersonal force that gives vigor or life force to everything, how they related to it, and how they used it.

I am interested in learning about this essential power in me that, according to ancient animist religions, gives vigor or life force to everything that exists in the world (Kulmar 2006). I believe that this force is in me – and in everybody and everything else – so that we can fulfill our purpose in life and co-create the world we live in. In my view, the more we are connected to our life force, the more we are in tune with our purpose in life, and the happier and healthier we are. As a result, our relationship to others improves and we contribute more to the world.

A search on Amazon shows that there are 99, 639 books talking about “personal power” and 30, 907 books referring to “inner power”. This obviously shows that topic of power has not lost its significance since the times of our forefathers, and there are a lot of people in the modern world who are interested in exploring the theme. Theoretically, I could simply read some of these books and find the answers to my questions about personal power, but somehow I have a feeling that this is not in tune with my quest. I need to take the unpaved path and dive into myself to look for the answers that I am seeking.

I remember my parents jokingly calling me “Mina Ise!” (“I By Myself!” or “My Way”) as a child, meaning that I always insisted on figuring things out on my own. I



wasn't very good at taking advice or following guidelines. I could follow suggestions only when I had digested them and made them my own. I am curious about what others before me have thought or written about inner or personal power but I have to go on my journey first and then I can open up to others' experiences and viewpoints. In this vein, I will return to the wider discussion of personal power at the end of this thesis, once I have made my own discoveries.

### **My Way – The Approach to the Project**

I have set an ambitious goal to get to the roots of my personal power within a month. I want to use every opportunity to learn about power: relationship interactions, inner dialogues, nighttime dreams, body experiences, following flirts (dream-like experiences during the day that catch my attention and seem to carry some kind of mysterious message), as well as past events that still visit me. I decided to drop the agenda of studying women, power and leadership because I want to focus on my own experiences, rather than others, and in the moment I am interested in the wider topic of personal power rather than specifically in the realm of leadership. I want to open myself up to any experiences that come to teach me during this month.

When I considered letting go of the gender aspect of personal power, instead exploring my general experience as a human being, something unexpected happened that shook my world. It was a statement from a medical doctor and a member of Estonian parliament that made me understand that gender matters and that being a woman influences my experiences of power in the world. During a Social Commission Council

meeting of the parliament on 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2015 the commission was discussing the issues of child support and Mr. Vassiljev, the parliament member, said: “And why she marries an irresponsible man and has immeasurable number of kids with him! I think this kind of women, who marry irresponsible men, should be punished by law, and the law should intervene with full harshness and sterilize women like that” (Delfi, 2015). I needed to re-check the date to make sure that it was correct, because it felt like I was time-travelling – it couldn’t have happened in 21<sup>st</sup> century Estonia!

The social activist in me started to raise her head, but even before she could say anything another voice inside me shouted: “Don’t go there! It is so much bigger than you! It is suicide to bring gender into your power explorations.” Obviously the topic got hot inside me and I realized that gender does indeed have to do with power and I need to delve deeper into it.

It is embarrassing to share this quote with the world, because I love my home country and people and I would like to show only the sides of it to the world that I am proud of, but I need to face it, my home country is not perfect, as I am not perfect. Being able to address the imperfections is a step towards personal power.

At first I felt such anger towards the guy that I wanted to go and chop off his penis. Revenge can be seen as a powerful act against the misuse of power but it is actually weak. In revenge I am blind to my own misuse of power: I see him as the “bad guy” and myself as the “righteous one”, and I am not aware of how I use the same “medicine” as him against him, and it escalates the issue instead of solving it. I believe true personal power is a force that creates empowerment in yourself and in others you interact with, and doesn’t come out as power over others. It enables to stand out for the

ones who need protection and brings awareness to those who use their power unconsciously.

A series of questions came to my mind: What is this true personal power that I am looking for? What does it mean to be a woman in the world and be in your power? Is it possible, is it safe to be my authentic self and bring my wholeness out to the public – including my weirdness, wildness, sexuality, beauty, directness, fierceness, strength, clumsiness, insecurity and vulnerability? Is it possible to come out without becoming a boundary violator or a target for boundary violations?

On the following pages I delve into the depths of my inner world to find some answers about personal power: what it is, how to use it well in the world, and what holds it back. This paper will give insight into the topic of personal power using the Processwork method of innerwork as a way of bringing awareness to different aspects of my experience of personal power. It is not a scientific research project but a curious free-flowing inner-exploration.

## **Processwork and Innerwork**

My exploration of personal power is guided by the Processwork method of innerwork. This chapter gives an overview of the theory and practice of innerwork, in order to guide your understanding of the explorations to come and also assist in your ability to practice these methods for yourself.

Process-oriented psychology, also known as Processwork, is an awareness-based approach that can be used as a framework and method for psychological growth and

healing on a personal level, as well as for development and conflict resolution in relationships and groups. Founded by Dr. Arnold Mindell, a physicist and Jungian analyst, Processwork is a meta-paradigm that brings together ideas from physics and psychology, systems theory, Eastern philosophies, and indigenous spiritual traditions. Processwork is elaborate; it has many applications and a wide variety of methods, including working with dreams, body symptoms, non-ordinary states of consciousness, as well as facilitating relationship difficulties between two people and working with conflict in groups and communities. In the context of this thesis I will be focusing on aspects of Processwork that are essential from the perspective of innerwork: a Processwork method for exploring our inner worlds on our own.

Mindell (2002) presents the core idea of innerwork in his book *Working on Yourself Alone*:

In process-oriented meditation, you learn how to become a trained observer capable of helping yourself with your own feelings, visions, voices, relationships, movements, and body problems. The basic idea of inner dreambody work is that whatever you are able to experience contains its own evolution, solution and growth. The stuff of your visions, voices and body pains is not maya, not an illusion, but an express train to yourself (p. 38).

What makes innerwork special is that the focus is on valuing, and exploring inner experiences, rather than trying to rid yourself of them. It is a useful skill to have, especially on occasions when outside help is not available. Innerwork can be done anywhere and any time and it can take just a minute or extend to a longer practice, depending on the possibilities and needs of the practitioner.

There can be many occasions when innerwork is useful:

- Centering yourself when you feel off balance or need to prepare for a challenging situation;
- Understanding power dynamics;
- Becoming aware of your privileges to be able to use your power to benefit the whole;
- “Burning your wood”, ie. getting insight to your triggers and wounds;
- Growing in your capacity to identify with the “other” (seeing aspects/qualities of other people and/or disturbances as parts of yourself);
- Developing your ability to detach and be facilitative when dealing with experiences that are emotionally strong (Diamond, Schuitevoerder, Katrivanou 2013).

The entry point to innerwork can be whatever attracts or disturbs you: it can be a past or current experience, a nighttime dream, a body symptom or sensation that calls your attention, a relationship conflict with somebody or even a world issue that you are interested in. When you have found that “something” that you would like to explore, you are ready to dive in.

Before diving in, I will give a short overview of some of the main concepts of Processwork to help understand the basic structure of innerwork. Firstly, what is meant by *process* in the context of Processwork? Diamond and Jones (2004) explain that practicing Processwork involves understanding “process” as the flow of experience in oneself and in the environment and following this flow in a differentiated way. (p. 17) Differentiating the flow of process involves noticing

change as it occurs and the elusive or hidden dimension of the experience  
(Diamond and Jones (2004, p. 19).

The process can be more *primary*, meaning it is closer to our identity; or more *secondary* and further away from what we identify with. Primary and secondary processes are separated by *edge*, or the boundary between known and unknown aspects of ourselves. According to Diamond and Jones (2004, p. 20): “The edge represents the limit of the known identity as well as a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities. The edge is often felt as discomfort, nervousness, or excitement because it is an encounter with something new or unfamiliar”. Because of the discomfort, our natural reaction is often to back away from the edge and stay with the known. Edges however, are fruitful grounds for change, and by staying with them, exploring them, and crossing them when we’re ready, expands us and makes us freer to be ourselves. Based on the example with the parliament member in the previous chapter, my primary identity has to do with caring and compassion towards the single mothers and the fighter for justice is more secondary. When the fighter in me activated, I got to an edge – a critical voice in me stopped me from following that direction. This made me aware that I am not identifying with the fighter in me enough and I should explore it more.

Becoming aware of different aspects of our process helps us to see what parts of ourselves we disown. Befriending and integrating those parts to our identity make us more whole as a person. From this perspective all experiences that we have at any moment are *meaningful* – they help us become aware of different parts of ourselves, and increasing awareness may bring relief and freedom to our lives (Mindell & Mindell, 2002; Diamond & Jones, 2004; Mindell, 2003).

From a Processwork perspective we experience life on three parallel levels: the *consensus reality* – the reality we agree upon collectively as “real”, the factual and tangible aspects of life; *dreamland* – subjective personal experiences like dreams, feelings, fantasies, and perceptions that cannot be shared or compared objectively with others; and the *sentient realm, essence or Dreaming* – the reality beneath conscious awareness that is almost intangible and not describable in words, where all dreams and experiences arise (Mindell 2000; Diamond & Jones 2004). Therefore Dreaming in Processwork is a wider concept than nighttime dreaming. Mindell (2000) says:

If you track yourself closely, you notice the Dreaming showing itself during the day. Every time you feel a bit sleepy, have what you might call an intuition or sudden fantasy, sense a slight moodiness, or feel strange sensations in your body, you are Dreaming in the daytime (p.14).

This unifying dreaming process – the *dreambody* – exists underneath our everyday experiences and manifests through our dreams, body symptoms (Mindell, 1998; Goodbread, 1997a; Mindell & Mindell, 2002), relationship dynamics and world events (Mindell, 1993; Mindell, 1995; Goodbread, 1997b; Diamond & Jones, 2004). Mindell (2002) explains how the concept of dreambody helps us to get to know all the different aspects of ourselves:

The dreambody is symmetrical; it is like a many-faceted jewel, a diamond, since all its sides, i.e. each of its channels, the world, dream and body, reflect the same information in different ways... Becoming yourself can be understood as knowing your dreambody, becoming whole or round, developing your full experience through awareness of each your different channels (p.38).

For example an ache in your body can cause similar feelings as an argument with somebody. You may experience the pain as stabbing, pressing, radiating or something else, and when you think of the troublesome relationship, you might find that the other person “feels” the same way. In that case those two processes are connected in the dreambody.

We can tap into the dreaming realm and deepen our experience through different *channels*. A channel is sensory, motor, or relational mode of perceiving or communicating experience (Diamond & Jones, 2004, p. 25). We experience the world mainly through the following channels: proprioception or body feeling, visual, auditory, movement or kinesthetic, relationship (experiences in relation to others) and world (experiences in relation to the environment or field we are in) (Mindell 2002; Diamond & Jones 2004). Finding the channel in which the dreaming process tries to manifest and amplifying it by making it bigger, stronger and more tangible, and eventually adding other channels to fill out the whole experience helps us to unfold the process and understand it on a deeper level.

When re-accessing the experience of reading the quote of the parliament member from the news, I notice that I have a sensation of tightness in my chest – like something is squeezing my heart. This informs me that the secondary process is happening in the proprioceptive channel and to unfold it, I should amplify the experience in that channel. I close my eyes and focus on the squeezing sensation once more; to see how exactly it feels. I notice my hands are starting to make a squeezing movement and I grab a pillow and squeeze it, to feel it even stronger. I notice that the pillow is like a wild animal that wants to free itself from my grip and I want to tame it. I follow this fantasy and play it



out some more until an insight pops up. I realize that it is about taming my wild inner nature – I need to hold myself to my edges during this innerwork journey, to make sure that I don't avoid the unknown and sometimes unpleasant secondary material.

Working with the process is both art and science. Having the understanding of process structure helps to follow the experience, and at the same time deepening a process requires that we follow our inner-experiences and consciously use *metaskills* or feeling attitudes that support the process. Metaskills encompass beliefs about life and death, nature, learning, and growth, as well as the feeling with which skills are applied (Diamond & Jones 2004, p.32). Amy Mindell, the founder of the term, explains in her book: *Metaskills: The spiritual art of therapy*, how metaskills can be used in therapeutic relationship (2003):

The term “metaskills,” then refers not only to the feelings that occur while we are working, but to become *aware* of these feelings as they arise inside of us. Further, the term “metaskills” implies that, in addition to noticing the attitudes, we pick them up and cull their energy, using our feelings and attitudes in the service of the client. (p. 37)

Becoming aware of our feeling attitudes and using them consciously is not only helpful in therapy or innerwork, but everywhere in life, in anything we do and in any interaction we have with yourself or others.

This a very brief overview of Processwork theory on innerwork, The main goal of this paper is to demonstrate how Processwork can be used to explore our inner worlds, based on an example of exploration of personal power, so hopefully this little glimpse into some of the main concepts of Processwork will help you to follow the innerwork I

am about to demonstrate. I recommend looking up some of the books and articles that are listed under the references of this thesis in case you are interested in learning more.

In the next chapters you will witness my innerwork on personal power. It is raw and real. I edited it minimally to show the actual process, leaving in all the “imperfect” parts that I would usually hide from others. It wasn’t easy for the perfectionist in me, but it felt right in this context – after all, all those parts are part of my personal power.

## Diving in!

“You enter the forest  
at the darkest point,  
where there is no path.

Where there is a way or path,  
it is someone else's path.

You are not on your own path.

If you follow someone else's way,  
you are not going to realize  
your potential.”

– Joseph Campbell, *The Hero's Journey* (2003)

When diving in, I am keeping in mind two core understandings in Processwork. The first one is that the process is always happening in the moment, meaning what ever we are pondering about or working on, is present all the time, and we can tap into it by noticing what is going on inside or around us at any moment of time (Diamond & Jones 2004; Mindell 2002). The second one is that the core pattern of the process is visible in the beginnings. For example, the patterns of our lives are recognizable in our childhood dreams and first memories, and the myths of relationships are revealed when we initially meet someone. Being aware of the dreaming process in the beginnings, as well as the present energies, provides us the map of the process structure such as: what is more primary and secondary, and the edge between them. Awareness of the primary and secondary dynamics, and the edges that keep us identifying one-sidedly, helps us learn to accept and appreciate all parts of ourselves, which then allows for greater freedom and fluidity in our life experiences.

The pattern of this project was present in the beginning as well. To tap into the mythical pattern of this project and find a map that will guide me, I will start by looking back at my initial experiences and a dream I had when I started the journey of this project. But before that, I need to bring in what is happening to me currently as I am about to dive into the innerwork. Here they are – the main forces of my process in action!

### **Inner Battle Between Fear and Curiosity**

I have been procrastinating for a week, though it has been a useful time as many of my house chores I usually postpone, have gotten done. However, I know I am at an edge, afraid to jump into the unknown, and this knowing doesn't help me because I still don't know how to cross that edge.

There are two voices fighting inside me. The first one is the scared one saying, "Oh no! I am freaking out! Power! This word is so loaded with different meanings and associations! I don't even know where to start. It is intimidating! I am not ready, I don't know enough, I am not aware enough, and I might get really hurt when I show my imperfection to the world. I shouldn't do it, it will annihilate me!"

The second voice is coming from the place of wonder and curiosity saying, "This project is the most valuable gift that you could ever give to yourself! You deserve to take a break from the world and focus only on yourself for one month of your life! Just be curious, explore without expectations and see what comes up. You don't need to know anything, just be open to the experience. You know you have some amazing powers in you and you have felt them. Get to know your powers so that you could be in contact

with them more. This will bring more value and meaning to your life and you will be more valuable for the world.”

I was thinking of having an inner dialogue between the sides, to see who wins the debate, but I noticed my bias toward the curious one, so it seemed that it would not be a fair fight. This is why the fight is ongoing and I am stuck! I shut the scared one down by siding with the curious one, and then in roundabout ways, it sneaks back in to stop me when I lose my awareness.

I decided to stop listening to both voices. In that moment, I noticed that I'm holding my hand on my chest. Mmm it feels good! I focus on my hand for a moment and press it even stronger on my chest to understand what the hand is trying to communicate to me. It feels good and I feel like leaning into the hand. The hand seems to respond to me saying, “Yes, you may lean on me. I am here to support you.” My whole body relaxes and I take a deep breath. I realize that I have been marginalizing the supporter in me. Now the frightened one can relax and the curious one is happy, knowing that we will jump in.

### **Meeting the Tin-Elephant**

When I began to write this paper, even before I knew what it would be about, I had a dream that felt meaningful to the significance of this project. The dream was like a secret map to hidden treasure in fairytales: mysterious, symbolic, and when you can figure out how to read it, a treasure can be found in the most unexpected places. I believe

this dream holds the secret of my journey to personal power. The question is: am I able to unravel its mystery?

The dream went as follows. I am getting into a taxi to get a ride home from a fancy awards gala night, with lots of celebrities present. I am content and happy and feel how tiredness starts to sink in at the moment when I sit in the cab. I know my way home and notice that the driver is taking a different route. My inner voices are debating, “He is going the wrong way, I should correct him!” The other one says, “No, he is a professional and knows the city much better than you do and he might know a shortcut that you are not aware of. You don’t have to be a co-driver all the time. Relax and enjoy the ride!” The second voice wins and I don’t say anything to the driver.

When we get to my neighborhood it turns out that the driver didn’t know that my street is a dead-end street and he tried to approach it from the closed-end side. We keep on driving on a straight, long, dark road that has a middle section to divide the two directions. I find myself suddenly in the co-driver role, although I decided not to do it earlier. I am squinting my eyes to adjust them to the darkness to spot a place for a U-turn. The houses on the roadside are replaced with a forest. As we move away from the city, I suddenly see ruins of an ancient castle on our left, and there is a place to make a turn just next to it. The castle looks mysterious. It’s lit decoratively, and the ways the shadows and lights play on its walls mesmerize me. I feel how it pulls me and I ask the cab driver to take me there.

Majestic stairs invite me up and I follow the invitation. I reach to a massive wooden door guarded by two metal statues of elephants, one on each side of the entrance. I wonder what’s behind the door, but the elephants capture my attention. They are

massive in size, but almost entirely eaten by rust and barely holding together. I lift one of them up. It feels so fragile, light, and airy. This sensation makes me sad. I feel a sense that everything is temporary, and what was beautiful and powerful centuries ago, is on its way to become nothing. I also feel privileged to meet the elephants, to connect with their ancient power, wisdom and beauty, before they dissolve.

Next, two good friends of mine, twin-sisters who were my peers in psychology studies, approach me holding stemless gerbera flowers in their hands. They ask me if they should throw them away because they cannot be put in a vase. I look at the blossoms. They have so much life and beauty in them and I suggest that we should put them in a bowl of water so that they can live longer and share their beauty with the world. My friends give the flowers to me, and the dream ends.

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The elephant from my dream reappeared in my life a few months later. I was driving through Lake Oswego, Oregon and suddenly there was a metal sculpture of an elephant on the left side of a long road, just like in my dream. My heart started beating fast and I got so excited. I asked my friend, who was driving, to pull aside and take me to see the sculpture. The statue possessed exactly the same qualities of my dream elephant: fragility, airiness and lightness. A sign in front of it read, "August Trunk hopes to stimulate conversation regarding complex issues of a global society".



*Figure 1.* August Trunk, Sculpture by Alisa Formway Roe (2015).

The message from the elephant, “August Trunk”, touched me deeply and I was wondering how it is connected to my project. I wondered, what are the complex issues of the global society that I should discuss? I was debating between different topics, trying to find an answer to that question, but nothing seemed to inspire me until I decided to focus on exploring my relationship to power. Immediately after deciding, I had a new elephant-dream, which I saw as a sign telling me I’m on the right track.



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The second dream went as follows. The elephant and I are in the middle of a polluted, smelly, steamy, and noisy industrial area. I am trying to picture the city map in my mind to figure out the least stressful route for my big but sensitive friend to get out of there. I am worried that if the elephant panics, she will get out of control and I wouldn't be able to calm her down, which could be dangerous or even lethal for her. I somehow need to reassure her that everything will be all right and that she will get back to nature, but I'm not sure how to do that. My intuition tells me to stroke her, to create a feeling connection with her. Elephants are very sensitive and she would understand me through feelings. I approach her slowly, telling her in my mind: "I know you are scared and I want to help you. I am scared too, I don't know how to win your trust, but we need to trust each other, then we can get out of here." The moment my hand touches her for the first time, I am amazed by the sensation that I feel; she feels like velvet. Her skin has very short fur on it, and touching it is incredibly soothing. Overcoming my fear to make contact with this big and powerful creature is a fascinating experience. I feel her soothing me, when my initial intention was to soothe her.

### **Unfolding the Dreaming of the Tin-Elephant**

There are many details and symbols in this dreaming process that catch my attention. Starting with the first dream: the awards gala, the cab driver, the home on a dead end street and not getting home, darkness, a long road with no turning points, an ancient castle, a high stairway to the entrance, a massive wooden door, rusty and fragile

elephant statues, my twin-friends, stemless flowers, and myself as someone who got awarded that night and trusted a cab driver to take me home via an alternative route, and instead found myself in front of a mysterious castle.

I notice how the dream mirrors my path in Processwork studies. I left the fancy world of “award galas”, and the status of a prestigious role of a human resources partner on an executive board of a famous company in the region, where I had been recognized and publicly awarded for my work. I felt content but tired of this work, and felt it was time to move on, not knowing what I should do next. Following my heart’s desire and letting go of rational beliefs about what would be the next logical step in my life, I found myself in Portland studying Processwork and decided to stay in the U.S. As the road in the dream took me out of the city and into nature, my path took me out of the social belief system and way of life that I had adapted. And in the dream I found myself in front of a castle – something ancient and mysterious. Processwork draws from ancient wisdom and has mysterious aspects to it, but I am not exactly sure yet, if this is the castle and how I relate to the castle in the everyday life. What is behind the massive wooden doors is still a mystery. The elephants that guard the castle door, and the feeling of lifting one of them up, are the strongest memories of the dream. In a way, the flowers without stems have similar energy as the elephants as well. My rational mind doesn’t see the meaning of the elephants, but what remains, is the sensation of lifting the elephant that connects me to the feeling that life is transient. It’s interesting that the dream ended in the moment where my friends who remind me of my “old way of life”, gave me the stemless flowers that once were full of beauty and vitality, but now are useless and unappreciated by my old value system.

Although there are many symbols in the initial dream, I will focus mainly on the Tin-Elephant, the massive and fragile figure, because it was the most mysterious element of the dream, and it re-appeared in different forms in my waking and dream-life. I am still mesmerized by how the elephant came to meet me in real life and brought me a message that touched and excited me. I want to stimulate conversations around complex issues in the global society! And I am also struck by the timing of the second dream where I guided the elephant out of the city and discovered the soothing nature of it through touch. I had the dream just after I had decided on my direction for my final project – innerwork on personal power.

It is time to look into the dreaming inside the Tin-Elephant. When I ask myself, what do I associate with an elephant? The following comes to mind: joyfulness, empathy, strong feeling connection, long memory, grounded, community-oriented, taking care of the young and old who cannot survive on their own, and female as the leader of their tribe. I associate words with the other element of the elephant statue, metal, such as: strong and unbreakable, yet something that can be shaped by the core elements of nature – fire and water.

I experienced the nature of the elephant through touch and proprioceptive body sensations. I close my eyes to feel into those sensations once again: the lightness and fragility of the Tin-Elephant in the first dream, the sensation of cold metal and light buzzing vibrations it gave me when touching the sculpture in Lake Oswego, and the soft soothing quality of the elephant's skin in my later dream. When I reconnect with those sensations, I feel my chest expand, and a sensation of being in contact with something deep. When I am exploring the different qualities, I recognize the qualities of the

elephant in myself: care, compassion, community-oriented leadership, groundedness, connectedness to nature, awareness of body sensations, and intuition. Those qualities feel like “soft powers” to me in the moment. The qualities of metal, the “hard powers”, are also part of my nature, such as strength, resilience, straight-forwardness, bluntness, and strong emotions that can be perceived as extremely hot or cold. I’m aware of how I have both the qualities of the elephant and the metal in me.

Memories from the past arise, and remind me how the elephant and metal sides of myself have played out in my life. I notice that I like my “elephant-side” more than “metal-side”, and I have tried to smooth it or suppress it because it’s gotten me in trouble. I also realize how suppressing my metal-like nature hasn’t worked, and I should explore how I could bring it out more consciously.

I see the Tin-Elephant as the essence of my power, even though I’ve just started exploring it and know very little of it. I’m curious if and how the energies and qualities of the tin-elephant will show up during the following innerwork journey. Since my dreaming experiences of lifting and touching the various elephants in waking and dream life were the strongest, I know that my dreaming process is currently happening in the proprioceptive channel. Guided by the dream of the Tin-Elephant, I plan to explore how my upbringing and childhood have influenced my relationship to power, and how I experience personal power (and powerlessness) in my body, in relationships, and in the world today.

## Personal History and Power

“The doors to the world of the wild Self are few but precious. If you have a deep scar, that is a door, if you have an old, old story, that is a door. If you love the sky and the water so much you almost cannot bear it, that is a door. If you yearn for a deeper life, a full life, a sane life, that is a door.”

– Clarissa Pinkola Estés, *Women Who Run With the Wolves* (1995)

I invite you to join me on a trip back in time. Let's revisit my childhood memories and dreams to see what kind of powers were there in the beginning, how they have played out in my life, and how they might shape me today. We'll begin in my childhood home, look into some memories, and the earliest dream that I can recall. In the end, we'll see if it all has something in common with the Tin-Elephant, and if it sheds more light onto the mystery of personal power and the next steps of this quest.

### The Roots of the Search of Power

I grew up in a household of three generations. I lived with my grandparents from my father's side, my parents, and my younger sister. My grandmother was a strong woman and sort of the matriarch of the house. She had learned how to fight through life since age three when her father died, and her mother left her to be raised by my grandmother's step-brother who was 20 years older. She worked hard to make it on her own, and managed to achieve a lot, especially for an Estonian woman born in the 1920s. She became an accountant and later, a manager of a legendary liquor store in Tallinn, both of which were not typical “women's jobs”.

My grandfather on my father's side was an intelligent man. He was an engineer/architect, a passionate bridge and chess player, and he also loved fairytales. He had a big collection of fairytale books with stories from all over the world that my sister and I loved. I remember him as a warm-hearted and quiet man who was kind of in the background, and never really engaged in social interactions. He was my grandmother's second husband. Her first husband disappeared during the war and was declared dead. My grandmother, with her strong personality and leadership, was the main breadwinner of the house and thus my grandfather let her do her own thing and didn't get involved much. Their relationship wasn't easy, and they both drank alcohol as a "way out" when things got heavy.

My mother's family had an opposite model. Her father was a strong patriarch and the authoritarian head of the family, and her mother was the quiet one in the background.

The ghost of the war was present for the whole family. It had directly effected the whole generation of my grandparents, but was rarely mentioned, and when it did come up, the conversation focused on adventurous survival stories. Suffering was not mentioned, although all my grandparents had been directly impacted by the war in horrific and painful ways. Alcohol seemed to be "the medicine" for it in my family and many others in Estonia.

My grandparents were caring towards their grandchildren, but at the same time, my father was in a power struggle with his mother, until the end of her life. Our whole family was affected by it because it was constantly in the atmosphere of our home. My father followed his parents' example by finding a solution in alcohol, which made his

suppressed power, that he was likely not identifying with, come out even stronger, and in an abusive manner.

My mother was in the passive role, similarly to her mother. She suffered from physical and verbal abuse, unable to stop it and unable to leave. My parents' dynamics were scary and painful to witness as a child, and those memories are still activated each time I see my father drunk, even if he is not acting abusively.

Neither of my parents had good role models who could teach them how to find their personal power, and how to use it well in their relationships. I think the silencing of the war may have influenced their uses of power. The experience of it was too overwhelming for my grandparents to talk about, and so they shut most of their feelings down. As a result, my parents found power in rules, instead of relating. This seemed to be the most efficient way to handle relationships for them. Everything was governed by rules in our home, and disobedience was unacceptable. Early on, I had a rebellious nature, questioning and fighting against the rules. They didn't seem fair to me compared to what I had experienced in my friends' homes. This got me into trouble, and made the unemotional and rules-based relationship with my parents even harder. I didn't feel accepted as I was, and the only way to feel cared for, was by following rules and studying hard. I had an ambivalent relationship to that reality, sometimes behaving well to please them and receive praise, because I yearned for the feeling of being loved, and other times rebelling against their cold rules and lack of feelings by getting into big fights with them, because I couldn't bare the unemotional relating style.

I too have misused my power since early on. Especially with my younger sister, I forced rules upon her, and punished her by not playing with her when she didn't follow

my rules. I did it without knowing that I had any power. And I suspect this is the case with everybody who has misused power in my family. They weren't in touch with their power, and were overcompensating to achieve the sense of control. I still find myself unintentionally misusing my power and causing hurt from time to time. I have a strong and straightforward style of communicating and sometimes it comes off as giving orders, or I speak in a passionate way that makes my opinion seem it's the only "right opinion". When I'm not aware of this, and I don't notice the feedback from the other side, I can override others. That is another reason I chose this innerwork journey of personal power. I wanted to become aware of the secondary aspects of my powerful nature that if not used consciously, could cause pain. I believe I'm not the only one who struggles with using their power well, so I hope that my findings are useful for others too.

Power in its nature is neither good nor bad. The ways in which we use power can create compassion and caring, or hurt and oppression. All of the power figures that come to us through memories, dreams and real life situations, are also parts of us, and getting to know them will help us learn about our powers and find a balanced and caring way to use them in the world.

Based on the memories from my childhood home, I see how the Tin-Elephant was present already in my family dynamics. The qualities of metal: the cold and heavy pushing through, and surrendering on the other side. The war and alcohol as strong background forces, represented the extremes of those two energies: the destruction and death in result of pushing through, and letting go from everyday reality through the altered states of alcohol. The elephant was hidden in my yearning for love, joy and feeling of connectedness to my pack. I am not surprised that I want to identify with the



elephant and not metal qualities of myself, because of this imbalance. Those memories bring up other childhood stories that I will explore in order to see if there are similar or different energies present in them.

### **Power Stories from Childhood**

My very first home was my maternal grandparents' apartment, a small apartment building that was shared amongst four families. The house was on a hilltop and from one side of the house there was a paved path with a stairway to the back yard. On the other side of the house the ground was flat and grassy without a path around the house. When I was born my mother took me to the back yard in the pram to put me asleep. As the stairs were difficult to use with the pram, she used the even, grassy side, to go behind the house. One of the neighbors didn't like it and told my grandfather, the owner of our family's apartment, that we shouldn't walk there because there wasn't a paved path. Grandfather unwelcomed her complaint and found it unreasonable, as it was obvious that it was difficult to go behind the house with a pram from the stairs. He decided not to argue with the neighbor but to solve the problem from the other end: by paving the way. He brought pavement stones and built a pathway around the house across the grass. By the next morning the neighbor who made the complaint had removed the stones. This was my first encounter with a power struggle in my life.

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My family has their favorite story of my childhood that I have been told again and again. I was maybe two years old, just learning to talk and forming my first sentences. My parents went out and left me at home with my aunt. I was crying inconsolably when they left. Aunty took me to the window and tried to shift my attention by pointing at a dog that was running outside: “Vaata, aua!” (“Look, a woof!” using a baby-word for a dog that imitates the sound of a dog). I stopped crying and replied to her with a strong and clear voice: “See ei ole aua, see on koer!” (“This is not a woof, this is a dog!”). I have never asked my family why they like telling that story, but I notice that I like it too. I recognize myself in it: I don’t do “baby-talk”, and straightforwardness and clarity are definitely noticeable traits of mine. Most of the time others appreciate this in me, but sometimes I have been told that my style is too blunt and masculine.

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Growing up, I had a soft spot for animals. My first profession dream was to become a veterinarian. When I was about 9 years old, I brought a homeless kitten home. Cats lived in the basements of nearby apartment blocks and cat catchers were called to get rid of them. There was a litter of kittens in one of the basements and I couldn’t bear their fate and decided to save at least one of them. I climbed into the basement through a half-open window and caught one of the kittens and brought it home. It was the first encounter with a human being for the kitten and she was scared to death and hid under the kitchen stove the moment she got loose. While the kitten was hiding, I had a big fight with my parents about wanting to keep her. Somehow I won the argument and got to

keep her. She grew into a beautiful cat and became a dear friend and comforter in difficult moments throughout many years.

The “pushing through” energy seems to be present in different forms in all these stories. I see it in my grandpa’s way of paving the road – “just getting it done”; my own way of speaking as a child – “saying things as they are, without baby-talk”; and also in the way I decided to save a kitten - not thinking about the authority’s opinions, just “following my heart and going for it”. It is harder for me to notice the energy of “detachment and dropping out of everyday reality”. I think in some ways it is present in the symbols of the baby, the dog and the kitten – they seem to be in life in a more dreamy way and not so present in the everyday reality the way grownup human beings are. I feel another power that babies and animals have, but I don’t know exactly how to verbalize it. It has to do with awakening love and care in others, just by the nature of their being.

### **The Earliest Dream**

The earliest nighttime dream I remember from childhood is from an altered state of a high fever. I was feeling my body swelling up like a balloon. I looked at my hand and my fingers were becoming bigger and bigger. For a moment I was afraid that I would explode. Then I noticed how my boundaries became foggy and I was diffusing into the dark empty space that I was weightlessly floating in. While I was looking at myself defusing into the darkness, I had a sensation of very fast vibrations running through my

body. I noticed it first in my fingers and toes and then it went all through my body. It felt kind of like electricity but it wasn't painful or uncomfortable, just buzzing very fast.

The main energies that stand out to me from this dream are the "fast buzzing vibration" and "effortless defusing into nothingness". It feels like life and death are united in the same moment: I am becoming nothing while feeling very alive.

### **Patterns in Personal History**

What to make out of all those pieces? How to put them together? Maybe I shouldn't try to put them together, and instead let them just defuse into nothingness, like in my childhood dream? I notice the push in me to create clarity and the detached one who is happy to just float with the experience of different energies. I wonder if those two energies can somehow work together?

I notice that my eyes have been heavy and I have closed them several times while writing the last sentences. I let go of writing to drop out for a moment and connect with my body. I become aware of a cramping sensation in my stomach that I have been marginalizing for a while. I let myself feel it and recognize the pushing energy in the cramps. When I amplify it with breathing into my stomach, I feel like throwing up. The sensation is not strong enough to really throw up, but I imagine what it would be like to do it. What a relief! Just letting go, letting everything come out. Not resisting the pressure in my stomach and just following it relaxes my body and my writing starts to flow again.

It is incredible to notice the energies of my childhood dream and memories in my body at the moment. The wisdom they hold for me right now is to notice the natural push

in me, to follow and not resist it, and let everything come out. This gives me a valuable tip for this project: I need to feel the push and not hold back what wants to come out. At the next moment I recognize the Tin-Elephant in my childhood dreams and memories: the metal-nature of pushing through, and the elephant-nature of following the flow of nature, body and intuition.

If you're interested in exploring your personal power based on your childhood dream or memory, below is an exercise that can assist you.

### **Innerwork Exercise: Power in Childhood Dream/Memory**

1. Remember your earliest dream or memory from the childhood. It can also be a repetitive dream from the childhood.
2. Identify two main characters or energies in it and make a few notes about them. Often the memories or dreams hold some kind of conflict or opposing energies in them. For example there might be a scary monster chasing you in a dream.
3. Make a hand gesture to represent one energy, then make another gesture for the other character. What are their energies like? Light or heavy, slow or fast, sharp or soft, etc. Don't think too much; make movements that come to you spontaneously when you feel into the energies.
4. Now leave the dream or memory aside and close your eyes to connect with your body. Notice any body sensations that you feel, and see if anything that is happening in your body reminds you of the two energies that you just discovered. Scan your whole body from head to toe.
5. When you have found the energies in your body, notice how they express themselves and amplify them by putting your attention on them one by one. If the sensation has to do with a movement, try to make it bigger or smaller, faster or slower to feel it more. If it is a proprioceptive sensation, try to really feel it. Applying pressure on it or shaking the part of the body where the experience is might help to amplify the sensation. When you lose contact with the sensation that you are exploring, go back to the moment where you last felt it and start again from there.
6. Play with those energies in your body until you get some kind of an insight – a message that is somehow useful for you in the moment or in a wider context of your life.
7. Reflect on how those two energies have been playing out throughout your life. How does this insight help you with using those energies in your life more consciously?

*Figure 2.* Innerwork Exercise: Power in Childhood Dream/Memory.

## Relationships and Power

“The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances:  
if there is any reaction, both are transformed.”  
– C.G. Jung (n.d.)

Relationships and the use of power in relationship were big themes during my childhood. I was hurt in relationships by the unconscious use of power, and I hurt others, following the unconscious relating patterns of my family system. It's time to look into my relationships today. To do so, I will use a situation that happened during the period of my innerwork marathon. I have a perfect example to use, a Skype-chat session that I can re-access since it remains in the Skype history. I can revisit it to look at what really happened, and not rely only on my memory, which would probably distort the actual events.

### The Tin-Elephant and a Virtual Hug

I am stuck. Everything is irritating and just being alive is hard! I feel so tender and fragile that even a fruit fly, flying in front of my nose while I try to have a sip of tea, has the power to break me to pieces.

I need to connect to somebody! This will hopefully shift me. I decide to go online and see who is available on Skype. A dear friend of mine has a green light on! We haven't spoken for a while but he seems like the perfect person to talk to. I ask if he has

time and he replies positively! Yes! I am saved! I give him a video call the next moment and just seeing him and hearing his voice is calming.

I notice myself being shy and I compress my needy-fragile-tender-falling-apart-self in a tight space in my belly and try to appear all-together.

My friend starts to share about his current projects he's working on. He shares his excitement and his worries, and I listen to him and feel into his experiences. It feels relieving to disconnect from my own fragile self and enter somebody else's world. At one point he asks, "And how are you doing?" Suddenly the misery gets out of its cage and attacks me again. I still feel shy to reveal to my friend my fragile self that is sinking in the swampland of hopelessness.

I tell him superficially, "I am struggling with a project," and suddenly the Skype connection slows down to snail speed. The words from the other end of the line become distorted and it's impossible to understand anything he says.

"F... the internet! On the worst possible moment!" I would like to scream but I don't dare to. A moment later, the fury turns against me: "F... you Reet! Why didn't you tell him what is going on with you? Why didn't you share your feelings? Now you have to sit with them on your own again and there is no way out! You deserve this, you pitiful piece of s...!"

The bad internet connection seems like a sign from the universe, letting me know that I need to dig myself out of this swamp on my own. "F... you universe! Why are you always against me?" I am mad and helpless at the same time and start to cry like a little child who doesn't get what they want and doesn't understand why. I am full of self-pity



and anger, and feel completely powerless. All the forces in the world seem to be against me.

This kind of breakdown is extreme in my case. I rarely cry. In fact, I usually cannot cry most of the times I feel like crying.

The anger feeds me and I am not ready to give up! The video call between me and my friend has been reduced to just texting back and forth with long breaks in between, waiting for the momentary internet connection to appear and forward the message to the other side.

I notice that the disconnection on Skype makes space for me to connect with myself. “What do I really need?” I ask myself. I feel my fragile and tense body and realize that I really need to be held in the moment. I need to be held by somebody whom I can trust and really let myself fall into pieces. I need some big-time mothering!

I need it so badly and it feels so scary to say it. How can I ask this from my friend, especially over the distance and on a Skype chat? I cannot see his reaction and obviously he couldn’t hold me, at least not physically. But I want to learn from my mistake and at least put my need out there, regardless what may come.

The next moment I am writing in the Skype window, “I am shy to say it, but what I really need from you in the moment is... please imagine that you are holding me, and I can imagine you doing that, and I can just cry and feel that.” I press enter and hold my breath. He replies after a long two-minute pause, “I feel you, I am holding you. Thank you for saying it.” Ohhh! I am closing my eyes and feeling into this feeling of being held and tears start rolling down my cheeks heavier and heavier, until the sweater collar against my neck is soaking wet. What a relief!

A few minutes later I say to him, “Thank you, I really felt you! Thank you so much!” He replies with a Skype teddy bear hug and adds, “I have faith in you and your amazing abilities to push through any difficulties.”

Suddenly I am angry again. What? I am not strong! I want to be broken into a million pieces in my bed in the moment, soaking in my own tears, I think this to my self and then reply, “I don’t want to be strong all the time, it is exhausting!” – leaving out my anger, because at the same time, I really appreciate that he is willing to participate in this weird experience, and I don’t want to upset him because he may leave. He writes, “Crying is good. Really deep crying is deeply good. Even though the last sentence does not make sense, I hope you understand.” This is the last drop and I blurt out in response, “I don’t need advice in the moment!” He responds, “That is a big thing to hear from you.” I don’t even think about a response, the only thing I can connect to is my need to be held. I need to cry more. “Can we just stay with the hug?” I asked. He replies, “Yes... hug! Yes to staying with hug! Thank you!” I feel him holding me and I relax into another two-minute virtual hug, shaking from crying and tears rolling down my cheeks.

Slowly the mood starts to shift and my heart fills with big gratitude towards my friend and I type to him, “Thank you for staying with me when I am broken and not trying to fix me!” He replies with a teddy bear hug. I do the same, and add, “I am starting to feel better now. I appreciate it so much that you stayed with me through this. I really needed to cry and you helped me.” He replies, “I am so glad.”

I take a deep breath and suddenly became conscious of time. When I mention this to him, he too realizes that he needs to go and says, “Yes, I do need to get myself organized so I will need to disconnect at some point... but only when you tell me that you

are ok.” I reply, “I am ok”, feeling a bit sad that this experience has such an abrupt ending, but I don’t want to take more of his time. He replies, “I am glad to hear. Thank you for being clear about what you needed. I really appreciate it and value it. You are a good teacher,” followed by a teddy bear hug. I am shouting out “NO-NO-NO!” inside myself, like a toddler who is having a temper tantrum. “I am not a teacher! I am nothing!”

I am embarrassed to say, but the story continued with another round of me having a reaction and then cleaning up the mess. We ended in a good place, feeling deeply connected, finding this experience valuable for both of us and my mood had shifted.

### **Inner Diversity and Outer Relationships**

Here is the Tin-Elephant again! If a fruit fly would land on her trunk, the trunk would fall off. And she tries to hold it together, no matter what, not even noticing how much energy she puts into trying to appear all-together. I recognize this figure from many of my relationships.

Sometimes I just feel so fragile and don’t see my strength, and the other person feels it and intentionally or unintentionally tries to help me to pick it up. My reaction to it is an attack because I see myself as a victim and it feels like the other person is siding against me, instead of understanding and supporting me in my vulnerable state. My power comes out in the attack, and I am not aware of it! The situation may get messy or even abusive if I am not able to detach from my victim role and see the whole situation from the outside.

I am glad that this relationship pattern re-appeared on Skype text and it was easy to go back and follow it step-by-step. Thank you universe for messing with the internet connection! I can see the power dynamics of this situation in black and white, or in blue and grey, to be exact about the Skype colors! I want to explore this pattern even further, to learn about the different powers that I have and don't identify with. I hope that it will help me to recognize those powers and use them intentionally and goodheartedly in future interactions in my many different relationships.

I notice a few different figures in this interaction: the fruit fly who is flying in front of my nose, the toddler who is crying: "me-me-me!", the mother who is holding and giving unconditional love, the rusty and fragile Tin-Elephant who falls apart when you touch it, the teacher who is teaching the world about bringing your needs out, the Skype-Internet-Universe who regulates the connecting and disconnecting, and the leader or elder who knows what to do and guides the process. I actually missed the last one - the leader or elder - in the first round of identifying different power-figures in that situation and it came back to show itself the night after the interaction with my friend, in a night-time dream.

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The dream about the leader went as follows. I am attending a board meeting of an influential organization over Skype, being one of the board members. The board meeting is live to thousands of employees of the organization over a huge screen in a big hall. The space is as big as a town square and it is packed with people following the meeting. The meeting starts with an introduction of all board members. The CEO goes first. His Skype

camera view is magnified to the full screen. He is sitting in front of a desk at his home and plays guitar in front of his laptop. His wife is adjusting flowers in a vase in the background, and his child is playing on the floor. All of them seem to just be doing their own thing. The house looks sunny and spacious and the atmosphere feels light and happy. I am amazed by how he introduces himself. He does so very casually and just showing himself as a person. At the same time I am very self-conscious and try to find a spot in my house that would look representable. I am looking at myself through the Skype camera view on my screen and notice old and faded dark green curtains behind me. My home looks dark, small and worn-out. I am embarrassed about it and desperately try to adjust the camera to the best possible angle, to show myself, and my house in a good light. I feel the time pressure as I run out of time, and my turn is coming up soon.

This dream made me realize that there is a leader or an elder figure present in my experience. There is a character that represents the feeling of being “at home”, in the way he shows his home and private world to the public. It is a part of me that is relaxed and in touch with my whole self, as well as the outside world. This part of me knew that I needed to connect with a friend, and was free to ask for help when I needed it, and did it seamlessly and casually. During the Skype interaction with my friend I wasn’t identifying with that part of myself, and the dream from the following night helped me to realize it.

When I looked back at the relationship interaction as a whole, I noticed that all those figures in my experience had some unique powers. I decided to get to the core of them using an innerwork method, which is introduced as an innerwork exercise in the end of this chapter (page 56).

Here is an overview of my discoveries:

- The fruit fly, the toddler, and the Skype-Internet-Universe, merged into the same thing when I found the essence of their power. They are not concerned with anybody else's "should" and "should not", they just do their own thing. In the situation with my friend, this was the power that got me across the internal barrier to connect and to keep on bugging him until I really got what I needed. Interestingly, I notice that this is what the Universe seems to do with me sometimes- it keeps on bringing the same pattern back to me until I finally find my way through it, instead of trying to avoid it. I learned a big lesson about the power of following my will.
- The mother has the capacity to hold and love. She doesn't give up on anybody. She has the eternal unconditional love. The mother was the part that was able to make the connection with my friend by listening to his story first.
- The rusty Tin-Elephant has the power to transform through letting go. It can fall apart. It was the part of me that was able to cry inconsolably and just let go. This is one of the hardest powers for me to access because it means being entirely vulnerable and showing the sides of me that I consider as weak – the sides that I try to hide, even from myself.
- The teacher and the leader or elder turned out to be the same on a deeper level. The essence of their power is to make change in the world by being a role-model. It is not about teaching or leading, it is about being your genuine self. In the relationship interaction with my friend, he saw me as a

teacher and I couldn't identify with it. Never the less, my behavior modeled something important for him that helped him on his journey of personal growth.

This example shows me the essence of different figures that influence my outer relationships in different ways. Those are personal associations and you might come to different insights when unfolding the same figures, which is okay. This is an outcome of an experiential exploration of my inner world, and your inner world is probably different than mine. The value of this kind of exercise is that by bringing awareness to the causes of our behaviors, we can use those energies in a more conscious and powerful manner.

**Innerwork Exercise: Finding Your Personal Power in the “Other”**

1. Think of a relationship experience where you felt powerless. Imagine that you are just a witness of it, not a participant. Watch it like a movie or a dream, being detached from any of the characters, then write the story down.
2. Now detach even more. Read what you wrote, like you are reading something written by an unknown author. Read it with an intention to discover the figures that have some kind of power in the story, whatever power means to you. In this context, figures may have different attributes. They could be live or not alive objects. Notice which figures seem to have some kind of power and take notes for them.
3. You may choose to focus on all the figures, or if there are many, choose 2-3 figures that are the strangest or most unusual to you. Focus on one figure at a time. Close your eyes and imagine what it would be like to be that character in the story. How would that character sit, stand, or move? Feel into the state that accompanies the body posture or movement. Feel it in your whole body. Maybe there are sounds that go with the movement? Become this character fully.
4. While you are in the experience of that being notice how you perceive the world around you. What is your attitude towards it? What is your deepest wisdom about the world?
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for the other 1 or 2 figures that you initially chose to focus on.
6. Make some notes about your experience.

*Figure 3.* Innerwork Exercise: Finding Your Personal Power in the “Other”.



## The Body and Power

“Having a body that is like a musical instrument, open enough to be able to resonate, literally resonate with what is coming both from the inside and from the outside, so that one is able to surrender to powers greater than oneself.”  
– Marion Woodman (2012)

The body has come up for me a lot during this inner exploration. I notice that I am more connected to my body sensations and aware of what it is doing than I usually am. I believe in the wisdom of my body and trust it, and I also have a tendency to marginalize my body when I get caught in everyday business. As a woman, I have a complicated relationship with my body. Sometimes I am loving it, while also being ashamed of it at different times due to critical voices that impose mainstream standards of what a woman should look like on me. Exploring my relationship with my body seems like a fruitful ground to find some insights about the powers inside me, and this will be the focus of the following stories.

### Body Image and Powerlessness

“You didn’t pass your body exam!” my therapist says to me in a dream the night before our next session. I can relate the exam-theme with the final exams of the MA in Processwork program that I had passed some weeks ago, but what is a body exam? And I didn’t pass it! I actually agreed with my therapist’s evaluation in the dream. I remember feeling embarrassed and sad, that after all the hard work that I had done, I didn’t pass the exam.

When I look back to my childhood and young adulthood, I had a lot of insecurity around my body image and I have done some work around it. I think I have the best relationship with my body now than I ever had. I feel privileged to have a healthy, sturdy and good-looking body. I have never had serious body symptoms or injuries that have stopped me from enjoying life. And I take care of my body so that we can explore many more wonders of the world together. I am not going to extremes, but I eat well, move regularly, try to avoid heavy stress, and allow myself some fun and pleasures. And there is always space for improvement, like with every relationship. This dream makes me question if I am marginalizing something. I wonder if my relationship with my body is not as good as I think it is?

### **What is it like at the Edge?**

It's eleven o'clock at night. I haven't written anything today and I had promised myself to write at least a page a day. To keep my promise, I decided to write about why I am not writing.

Obviously I am at an edge – an edge to get “undressed” in front of who ever will read this paper, and even worse, in front of myself!

Why did I choose to write about my body? What does it have to do with the exploration of power? Already the fact that I am curious about the topic, but I am not able to write about it, says something about power – I don't feel empowered!

Revealing this fact brings up feelings of shame, fear of rejection and sadness. I feel ashamed of not loving my body full-heartedly – I should be happy with what nature

has given to me and how life has shaped it! Who am I to judge it? Then there's fear of rejection: I am afraid of being rejected or looked down on by others, because they will find out that I don't love my body unconditionally. And even worse is the fact that I am not embracing my privilege of being a young, healthy, white-skinned, beautiful woman – all those things make it easier to make it in the world and there are many people who have much less rank because of their physical capabilities or appearance. I have no right to complain! And sadness: I am sad that after years of personal work I am still caught in internalized social standards and compare myself against a rigid mainstream beauty-template, instead of embracing my uniqueness. Writing this is painful! But I feel a need to keep going, because I know I am not the only one, and I would like to break the silence.

Wait a minute! What I am saying here? In the first part of this chapter I stated the opposite: I have the best ever relationship with my body.

Both sides are true: I do love my body! A lot! And I feel good in and thankful of the experiences that I have had in the world thanks to it. And then there is the other side of me that feels insecure about my body and feels ashamed. I have tried to “fix” that side of me because in the moments when I don't love my body, I give away my power, or even worse, I might misuse my power unconsciously because I don't identify with the power of the beauty, health and strength that I have. But the insecure side is still there and I need to open myself up to listen to it, because it seems to have things to tell.

This brings me to another layer of the body-topic. Besides body image or health, I cannot overlook the fact that I am a sexual being, and sexuality is related to my body. Sexual pleasure is a beautiful gift that nature has given us and I embrace it as part of the

human experience. I have had peak experiences of love, connectedness and spirituality through sex, and at the same I have experienced feelings of shame and fear. There have been times when I have wanted to hide from the whole world that I am a sexual being, and times when I have wished that sexuality wouldn't exist at all.

I notice that it is hard to write about sexuality. The critic is ranting. It makes me stop and question, why exactly it is so hard to write about body and sexuality? Why do I want to go and make a sandwich in the kitchen instead? Why is my mind getting blurry?

Noticing this difficulty is actually helpful. I let go of my thoughts, and feel my body. I notice the tension in my body. It feels like something is squeezing me, and I recognize the squeeze from an earlier innerwork, and I remember it is was about taming the unknown and sometimes unpleasant experiences inside myself. Next, I realize that I have been holding my breath for a while and I let go and take a deep breath. I feel tenderness in my heart. I feel vulnerable, really vulnerable! Some visual memories pop up from the past, memories of situations that have shamed me or scared me. I notice that I want to share those stories. This is a part of taming them, because otherwise they will be like ghosts that haunt me and take away my power. Simultaneously, I want to respect my vulnerability. I don't want to abuse myself to make a point about power. Navigating and sharing this territory will be a fine dance around personal boundaries.

## Touch as Taboo

People often ask, “What do you remember about your childhood?” Usually it is exciting to share those memories. As I have mentioned before, according to Processwork theory, the earliest dreams or memories show the mythical elements of our life path, (the main energies that we are dealing with and challenges that we might face throughout our lives). The earliest memory from my childhood is sexual, although I had no idea at that time what sex or sexuality actually were. Now as an adult, I see this memory as fascinating and sweet, but there is a complex memory held in my body that can still get unconsciously activated. It gets triggered in situations where oppressive mainstream values of “right” and “wrong” around sexuality are expressed. The withholding shaming power of those internalized values is shown in the fact that I had not shared this memory with anybody, until it came up a few weeks ago in my therapy session.

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I must have been about five when it happened and this what I remember:

My father drank often and became loud and aggressive, and my parents fought behind their closed bedroom door. I heard them through the wall of my room and was often scared and had a hard time falling asleep.

Touching wasn't part of our family culture. We didn't hug, not to mention cuddling or being physically close in any other ways. I must have missed the soothing quality of physical connection, especially at stressful times, and I started to touch myself in bed before falling asleep. I have no memory of how I got there, but I discovered the

pleasure of orgasm at the age of five. I am amazed by my body's wisdom to comfort itself with touch and to discover ways to experience pleasure, especially in a culture where touch wasn't valued. Touching myself and self-pleasuring had to do with self-soothing and comforting myself when the atmosphere was scary.

Although we didn't have much body contact in our family, nudity was considered normal. We had a sauna in our house and Sunday was the sauna day. We all got undressed, sat next to each other in the steam room and washed each other's backs. That was kind of a family ritual at the end of each week and it was a happy relaxed time that we all enjoyed together. Especially the time in the steam room was fun, because our parents created word games and told us stories to keep us there. How else can you make little children sit still for 15 minutes in a 100-degree Celsius (212F) temperature?

Coming from a family culture where nakedness was normal, I decided to share my "amazing discovery" with a friend from kindergarten who was visiting her grandmother in my neighborhood. It was a warm summer day and we were playing the doctor game in the garden. She was the doctor and I wanted to show her my "amazing discovery". Because I didn't have words to describe the experience, I just I took my pants down. The moment I did it, she ran away. I was so ashamed about what I had done. I was worried that she might tell somebody about it and then the whole world would shame me, and nobody would want to play with me anymore.

I was relieved that it happened during the summer and she wasn't around my neighborhood very often. The story never became public and we never talked about it in the future. In fact, I don't remember talking to her ever again after that situation because I went to a different kindergarten the next autumn.

I learned the hard way that I shouldn't reveal everything about my body to others. While I allow this memory to come alive and see it vividly, another memory pops up, probably because the feelings associated with each are closely related. The second one is closer to my consciousness and revisits me more often. I feel I need to get this out of me and on the paper, as it is one of those scary haunting memories that has a paralyzing affect when it pops up.

### **Losing the Voice**

When I was seventeen, I started going out to a neighborhood dance club with friends from school from time to time. We were all underage and we did some unbelievable tricks to get in. It was a teenage thing – everybody was going, and I was curious to go too.

One time, my best friend and I were going there. The place was in walking distance from home and it was considered a safe neighborhood. I had never been scared on those streets and I had been out there a lot, even when I was younger, just wandering around with friends.

It was wintertime and the streets were dark. Suddenly three drunken guys approached us from the opposite direction. They were loud and obnoxious. We heard them from far away. When our paths crossed, they wanted to talk to us, but we kept on going and didn't engage in the conversation. Suddenly one of them grabbed me and pushed me through a gate into a garden of a random, old and abandoned house on the street. It was probably the only empty house on the street, and it happened to be just next

to the place where our roads crossed with those guys! The man was upset that I refused to talk to him and he was determined to give me a lesson that this is not a way to treat him. He pushed me against the massive gate pillar from the inside of the garden. The pillar was so big that it covered us entirely and was invisible from the street what was happening. He held me with his body weight, and at the same time tried to rip down my pants and open his zipper. I tried to fight back, but felt powerless against his weight and physical strength. Suddenly I felt how all the power from my muscles disappeared, I wanted to scream but I didn't have a voice. I was totally powerless! My friend was still on the street with the two other guys. She probably realized that running after me would escalate the situation and she was able to stay calm and do something amazing. It took some minutes that felt forever to me, but she was able to reason with the friends of the guy who was trying to rape me and convince them to come and get their friend off me. If my friend hadn't succeeded, this would have been my first sexual experience with a man. I cannot say how thankful I am to her for the ability to change the course of events.

After this experience I had a typical feeling of rape victims. I blamed myself for the course of events because I was out at night in the first place. Although it was wintertime and my body was covered with thick layers of winter clothes and there was nothing sexually provocative in how I dressed or behaved, I became very self-conscious about what I wore and how I related to men after that incident. I tried to be modest about how I dressed and I avoided flirting or showing my sexuality in any other way.



## **In the Moment**

As I finish writing about that experience, I notice that I was holding my breath again. I take a deep breath and energy starts to flow. I feel tender and vulnerable and also more open and free. I don't want to hide anymore.

I notice the activist in me who is starting to warm up and would like to fight for all the women, children, and also men in the world, who have been or are at risk of being disempowered about their bodies, or even worse have experienced or are at risk of any kind of violence. I feel connected to all the power-fights in the world, the ones that are happening inside us, those in relationships, and the ones that take place between genders, races, nations and countries. Wow! It seems like I am blowing this issue way out of proportion! But the magnitude of this issue is connected to the body and feeling empowered in our bodies! If we would feel and listen to our bodies more, we would take better care of others and ourselves. We would create more safety and less conflict.

I take another big breath and my mind quiets down again. I take my own advice and listen to my body. I feel safe. I notice this soft and caring feeling towards myself. I don't need to be afraid and I don't need to fight. Just sharing and holding those stories is enough for the moment. I notice that there is one more story I want to share that evolves from the previous ones.

## Naked in Public

About one and a half year ago I was asked to be a psychology columnist for a woman's magazine in Estonia. This magazine promotes values that are important to me such as: healthy lifestyle, sustainability, mindfulness and natural beauty. It is printed on recycled paper, which tells me that the makers of this magazine are not only talking about those values, but are really making an effort to live by them too.

One special chapter of the magazine aims to raise awareness around women's body-image issues and wants to show the beauty of women of different sizes, shapes and ages. The readers who feel inspired by the idea are welcomed to pose nude for the magazine and share a short story about their relationship to their bodies. A talented professional photographer takes the photos, so the pictures are artistic and gorgeous, but the principle is that the photos are not Photoshopped, unlike the usual photos in mass media, to show the viewers what women truly look like.

While I was writing monthly psychology columns to the magazine, the creative leader of it asked me if I would be interested in posing for the body section and writing about the experience in my column. The activist in me loved the opportunity to challenge my own body image issues, the fears around being exposed in this way, and to write about a theme that is full of controversies for many women.

I did the photo session. It was an edgy experience, but the photographer was professional and made me feel surprisingly comfortable during the experience. The photo session had just ended and I felt empowered by crossing a huge edge - first by exposing

my body to a complete stranger, and secondly letting her take photos of me to be shown to the world.

There we were, sitting together behind her Mac computer, looking at the photos on a big screen to choose the one that would be published in the magazine. It was the first time I had seen a nude photo of myself. [Sitting here now, I feel how this situation comes to life in the present moment. My heart is beating and I am sweating. Definitely edgy!] We look at the photos and she comments, “Wow! This is a great shot! Almost perfect! If I Photoshop it a bit, it would be excellent! I could smooth out the skin on your butt a bit and maybe make the belly a bit flatter. And this shot is great too. I like your neckline. We could raise your breast up a bit so that it wouldn’t look so saggy. Would you like that? Yeah, both of those photos would be perfect after those minor adjustments. Which one you would prefer? Then I will fix it and send it to the magazine.”

Wow! What do I say to that?! What a mixed experience! The whole idea behind exposing myself naked in the magazine was about showing the beauty of a “real woman” in a natural way, without photoshopping the image. It was supposed to be an act of social activism: taking back the power over my body and seeing its beauty, without comparing myself to the unreachable beauty standards that are created by the mass media. And here I am experiencing my self-confidence falling into pieces when a sharp professional eye is detecting the imperfections of my body. I am having an inner fight between the one in me who loves my body and who wants to make a statement to the world about the natural beauty of women, and the critic who represents the mainstream beauty patrol. Suddenly a voice from my past revisits me. “Is this cellulite?” an old boyfriend asked me, adding that he had dated slimmer women before he met me. I got over the embarrassment with him,

and he ended up loving me with all my imperfections, but obviously this memory has still stayed with me and when it joined the forces with the professional opinion of the photographer, I was silenced. I didn't say a word to the photographer, trusting that she is a professional and knows what is best. Later on, I decided to take my power back by not letting the photo get published, but that happened unconsciously and I wasn't clear about the real reasons behind it until now.

By attending that photo session, I took a bold step towards fighting my fears and taking back the power of my body that I had lost through my childhood and youth experiences, but I wasn't able to go all the way, because I couldn't stand up for my natural beauty against the "expert opinion" of the photographer. While I started working on this paper I realized that I felt similarly to how I felt in the photo shoot: vulnerable and bold at the same time. I wanted to bare my soul in writing, to reveal my personal growth process, so that I could grow into my power through that experience, and also inspire others on their paths to personal power. I printed out the photo that was supposed to be published in the magazine and put it up on the wall in my room, so that I could stay close to that emotional state while writing. I mentioned this to my therapist and she pointed out how I am still not going all the way, and she jokingly suggested that I should put the picture up in my kitchen on the fridge door so that everybody could see it. As I live in a communal house with five other people, some of them from my school, some of them from elsewhere, putting a picture on a fridge door would definitely be a public act.

I agreed with my therapist about still not going all the way and took her joking advice seriously. That same evening, while some of my housemates were chatting in the kitchen, I put the photo up on the fridge door. A huge heat wave went through my body,

and my whole body started sweating. I was surprised by the strength of my reaction as everybody in the house had seen me naked before, because we have a sauna in the house and I have been comfortable with nudity in the sauna since childhood. But putting my photo on the fridge was obviously a huge edge to cross and I learned how different the experiences of nakedness can be depending on the context.

The photo on the fridge started some good conversations about bodies and body image in our house that night and days to follow. It was also interesting to notice my own reactions to the photo in different situations and on different days. For example, when a roommate's friends or parents came over for a visit. Not all my roommates engaged in the conversations about nakedness, and I don't have any idea what the visitors of the house thought or felt when seeing a nude photo of a woman on a fridge. This reminds me that I will never know all the reactions that I might provoke in other people, and I realize that it is actually not relevant. The most important part is my inner feeling about my actions and myself.

### **Retaking the Body Exam**

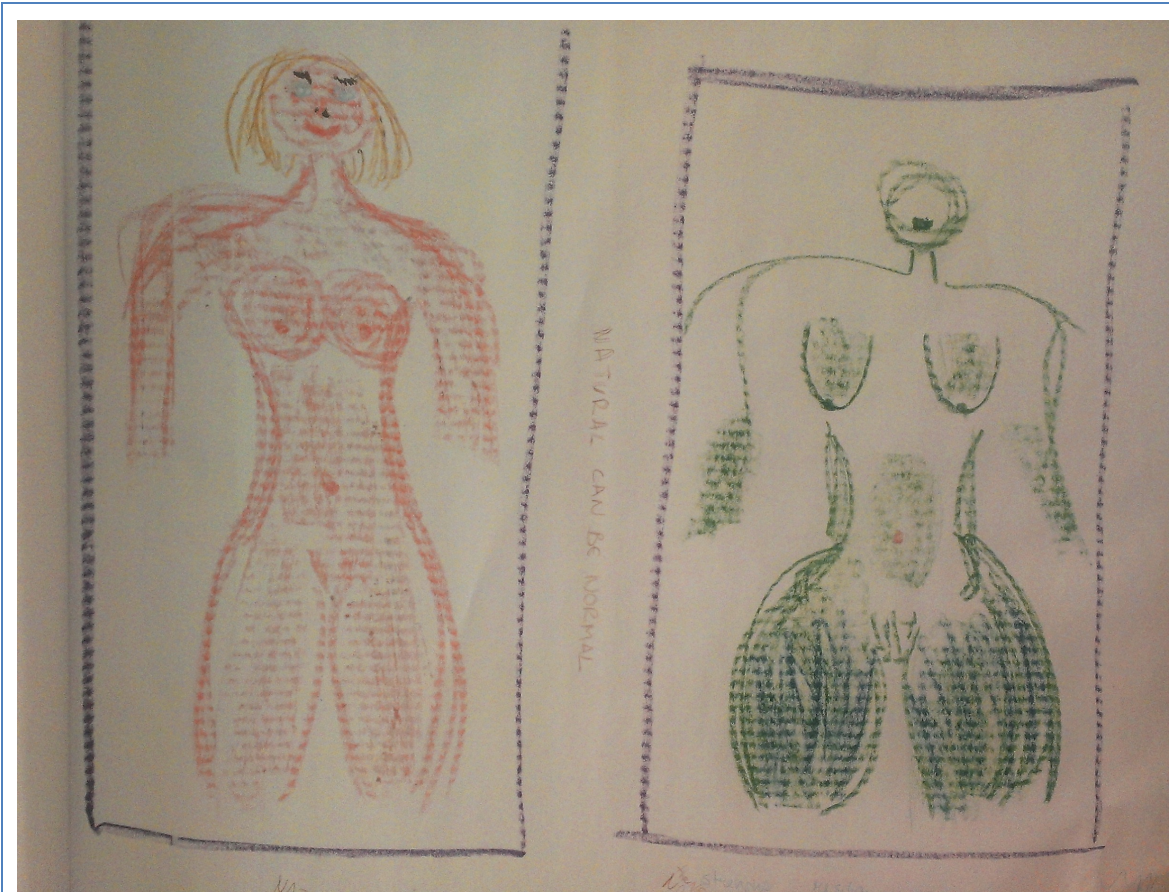
Life was back to normal. I had gotten used to seeing my photo on the fridge door every time I opened and closed it, and I didn't have reactions when new people visited the house and happened to go to the kitchen. In fact I even liked it there. It was my symbol of openness that I wanted to bring into this writing project, and I enjoyed a feeling of "stimulating conversations on one of the most complex topics of global society" as the Tin-Elephant suggested to me. And this is when I had the dream that I

mentioned in the very beginning of the body-chapter, where my therapist told me, “You didn’t pass the body exam”. I shared the dream with her in our next session and we unfolded it together.

Processwork as an approach to awareness stresses the importance of the present-moment experience, rather than talking about the challenges or disturbances that haunt us from the past or future. When we are talking about situations that we have faced in the past or anticipate to face in the future, the thinking-mind gets stimulated, and feelings are often marginalized. Connecting with the experience in the moment, and feeling deeply into it can provide new insights, or even a shortcut to a solution. Otherwise, the mind might continue running in circles, and getting stuck in old patterns.

My therapist suggested, “Go on inside for a minute and just feel your body.” It took me to a visual experience of seeing myself naked in a mirror. To amplify the experience, she encouraged me to draw what I saw in my mind’s eye and look at the drawing.

This experience helped me discover two different “lookers” in side of me: one of them liked my body, and the other one was critical about it, similarly to how I described my experience in the beginning of this chapter. I drew the images that both lookers were seeing (see Figure 4, page 71).



### The second drawing

The perception of the one who likes my body

Keywords: Natural, Strength, Resilience, The New Normal, Natural can be normal\*

\* Text written on the drawing during the session.

### The first drawing

The perception of the one who is critical

Keywords: Normal\*

*Figure 4.* The Drawings of Two Body Images.

When looking at the drawings I discovered that I actually liked the picture that the critical looker was seeing much more than the picture that the friendly looker saw. The picture that was drawn through the eyes of the critical observer had more character: it was green, it had no facial characteristics besides a mouth, and it had big hips and thighs.

It looked like a piece of nature – it looked natural, and there was strength and resilience in that figure. The picture drawn through the friendly looker’s eyes was drawn with a pink crayon; it had blue eyes, smiley mouth, yellow hair and the only features that added some character to it where the thick brown eyebrows. When looking at it, I became critical about it, seeing it as too normal. I was also criticizing my drawing skills that were too childish and didn’t do justice to what the friendly looker actually saw in my mind’s eye. It was interesting to notice the dynamics of my looking: the inner image of the friendly looker looked better in my mind’s eye than the picture on the paper and the inner image of the critical looker looked great on paper for the looker who was observing the drawings.

A few interesting “mistakes” happened during this body drawing process. When talking about the pictures I named the pink one “normal” and the green one “natural”, and I decided to add the titles to the pictures. While writing the titles on the drawings I accidentally swopped them, so the “normal” got titled as “natural” and “natural” got titled as “normal”. I also accidentally used pink crayon when marking the belly button to the green image. The third mix-up happened when I wrote the words “strength” and “resilience” under the green picture, to memorize that this is what I saw in it, and the pen I randomly chose was so light colored that the words were barely noticeable on paper.

In Processwork those kind of “accidents” are called double signals, meaning that there is something else happening in the person that they are not identifying with and this something wants to come to awareness, so it comes out in unintended signals. Others, rather than the person themselves, often first notice those signals, and they often create relationship issues, because we get unexpected reactions from people. From the power



perspective, those are not harnessed powers and they want us to pick them up and use them consciously.

In the case of those drawings, those seeming mistakes or accidents brought my awareness to how my natural body is beautiful according to the norms of the mainstream and this is a power I need to become more aware of. The light pen helped me to become aware of how I don't fully believe in my strength and resilience and I need to identify with those qualities in myself more.

### **Falling in Love**

Wow! I did it! By sharing these body experiences, I brought my most vulnerable parts to the daylight. I dared to look at them and show them to the world. I feel fragile and strong at the same time, like the Tin-Elephant feeling! She has the strength and resilience to go through anything, and she can be vulnerable and fall apart, and let herself be shaped by the experience. I am falling in love with this amazing creature, and it feels wonderful! I am falling in love with myself! Letting myself be strong and fragile at the same time vitalizes also the other powers that I discovered through the relationship experience I shared in the previous chapter. I can see the playful child, the loving mother and the "elderful" teacher, all present in the moment.

If you are interested in exploring how your body image can reveal aspects of your personal power, there is an innerwork exercise on the following page.

### **Innerwork Exercise: Body Drawing**

You need paper and pencils, crayons or other drawing materials to do this exercise. You may or may not want to use a mirror.

1. Look at yourself naked in a full length mirror, or imagine looking at yourself in a mirror.
2. Just observe what you see, turn around and look at the mirror image from different angles. Notice your thoughts and feelings without challenging any of them. Trust that everything that you notice is somehow valuable. Make some notes about what you saw and how you felt.
3. Now let go of your usual identity. Move around and shake yourself, to leave the previous experience behind. Close your eyes and imagine that you are an artist who is about to draw an image of the mental snapshot you took in the previous step. What stands out for you as the artist? What shapes, colors and shades catch your attention? Draw the image, allowing the artist complete freedom to play with the colors and shapes, and just go with the flow of the creative process. Do it quickly with one go, without trying to be too precise, but just following your hand on the paper.
4. When you feel you are done, close your eyes for a moment and let your mind become a bit foggy and dreamy, similar to the state that you experience when waking up or falling asleep. When you have reached the state, open your eyes half way. Look at your drawing with half open eyes from that state. See it like a dream image. Notice what stands out for you, and what associations come to mind. Wander around in that dreamy space.
5. What was the most unusual or surprising thing that you noticed? What is the power of it? How is it your power? How could you use this power in your life?

Figure 5. *Innerwork Exercise: Body Drawing.*

## World and Power

“The willingness to show up changes us, it makes us a little braver each time.”  
– Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly* (2012)

So far, I have explored aspects of power in personal history, relationships and my body. I have stripped myself naked and looked at myself deeply, and now I have a question – what to wear? Or to be more precise, how to wear the powers that I have discovered in the world? It is time to see how power comes up in my interactions with the community and environment that surrounds me? I wonder, what do the flirts from the environment and nighttime dreams suggest about how to bring my powers into the world?

### A Mouse in the Bathroom

When I went to pee late last night, before going to sleep, I almost stepped on a mouse that was making an escape from under the bathtub towards the door. I made a subdued scream, having two reactions simultaneously: the spontaneous scream and yet holding it back because I was aware of a housemate who was sleeping in the room next door. I noticed my heart beating fast. A tiny mouse frightened me! I almost killed it with my big foot, and I was scared!

We have been struggling with ant invasion throughout the spring, and now there are mice in the house. The creatures of the wilderness want to move in and it seems that the more we fight them, the bigger they get. From a Processwork perspective, they are

not only ants and mice but flirts and dreamfigures that represent energies that remind us about our marginalized aspects or marginalized powers, ie. the parts of us that we are not aware of or are trying to get rid of because we don't like them. I notice how those kinds of flirting figures come to wake me up when I am at an edge, unable to move forward with my writing. The first morning when I started writing, I had a huge ant-attack in my room. I had left some sweets on the table overnight and the ants had discovered the treasure and came for it by the hundreds.

For the last few days I have been contemplating this chapter, the chapter where I want to focus on my sense of power in relation to the world. Does the mouse have something to say about it? Who is a mouse? First thing that comes to my mind is that mice are the messengers of death. My grandmother used to say that mice move in to the house when death is around. Mice are cute and shy, and at the same time they have sharp teeth and they can bite holes through the walls. They are also very resilient and fertile as a species – it is not easy to get rid of them. After scanning my mind, I decided to search on Google, “symbolic meaning of mouse”, and clicked on the first result to see what the wide Internet world had to say about those little creatures. It was an interesting find. Besides the associations I already had for mice, what resonated with me the most, was the connection with the Earth and underworld, and the Navajo Indian's viewpoint of their connection to new beginnings (What's Your Sign, n.d.).

I can feel it, the connection to new beginnings! I am closing my eyes to shape shift into a mouse. In other words, I imagine what it is like to be a mouse and become it in my fantasy. I feel the connection to the Earth, and the cycle of life and death. “The Earth is bountiful, just follow your instincts, and your life will be rich and fertile. Death

is natural, it is crossing yet another edge, it will come on its own time, don't worry about it. Live fully while you are here." Those are the thoughts that pop up randomly while I am sensing the world from the perspective of a mouse. What a great way to be!

Death has been around for me in different forms during this year. I visited home during Christmas and New Year's to say goodbye to my grandmother. A very dear soul with whom I had a deep connection throughout my life, and I still feel the connection. She died 13 days after our last goodbye. Thirteen has been a significant number for me, especially in connection to endings, good endings that have created space for something new to be born. Her last words to me were, "See you in Heaven!" Isn't it an amazing way to say farewell? Instead of something final, she created an eternal connection between us with her words. It was her time to go and I am glad that she waited for me to come for the last visit in the earthly way. Now I know I can connect with her every time I look at the sky. I feel her presence. She would turn 90 in three days. Birth is present in that sense too even though she is not in human body anymore.

My life as a Processwork student is ending soon. This is another death that I feel. It is a significant transition and I don't know who will be born after my student identity dies. A door into a new world will open, maybe the massive wooden door that is guarded by two tin elephant statues? This paper is a part of a transformation where I am letting parts of myself die and then giving birth to a new identity. The little mouse came to remind me that I have the power to transform, that I have the vital life force in me to create new life and can let nature shape me, surrendering to the never-ending changes of my identity. This connects me also to my childhood dream, the sense of losing my boundaries and diffusing into the universe while feeling the vibrations of life force

running through me. I know I will be fine no matter what happens, and I don't need to have all the answers beforehand. Thank you little mouse for paying me a visit and reminding me about it! My usual self had forgotten about this deeper nature of mine. It has been worrying lately about things like: Who will I be after graduating the school? Where in the world will I live? What should I offer to the world to be useful, valued and loved? This "worrier" in me can be paralyzed by critical voices inside and outside of me, and in result of that, I may lose the connection with my deeper nature.

### **What to Wear?**

The other day I was in a meeting with several people who hold important positions in different organizations. The meeting started with a check-in where each one of us shared something about ourselves. To my big surprise, a person whom I admire for her way of bringing her gifts, talents and power into the world, said something about her power struggle. She was about to make a presentation in front of big international audience and she had been obsessing about what to wear for it. The presentation itself seemed to be marginal, compared to the question of what to wear.

It was so grounding to hear from somebody who is one of my superheroes of power that she has the "I have nothing to wear" feeling in front of her wardrobe before an important event where she wants to impress the world. What to wear is my big obsession in the moments when I want to show up as my best self and I don't feel that "just me" is enough. I obsess about my looks before big meetings, public presentations, and when going out on a date. I am glad I am not worried about looking my best when going to

local grocery store anymore. I used to do that. I couldn't go to my neighborhood store when I hadn't at least showered and was wearing presentable clothes. I am out of that phase now and it is good to see that I have made some progress.

But how to wear my power in the world all the time, in every situation, especially in the challenging ones, is still a question. I am sitting in my favorite armchair in a Portland coffee shop that has been a birthing place of some parts of this paper, while I contemplate that question. Most people around me are sitting behind their laptops and seem to be in their serious working worlds – the place where I should be too but I have a hard time to enter. Suddenly a father comes in with his daughter who must be about 4 or 5 years old. He holds her on his hip when they walk in. They choose a table in the back room and he puts the girl down to go and order a coffee. The girl starts running around the table and her pink shoes start blinking. She gets more and more excited about her shoes and runs even faster. I notice the change in the atmosphere and a smile comes on my face. What would it be like to wear pink blinking shoes? I start moving my feet to the rhythm of a happy song that is playing in the background and join the little girl in my fantasy world and become the 4-year old.

I love my new pink and blinking shoes! I am running in circles around a coffee table and while I pick up the speed the shoes become alive. Suddenly they take me away from the table and I go on my own to explore other rooms of the coffee place. I am curious about everything, and actually I am the most interested in what is happening outside on the street. I notice that I am a bit shy to leave the safe place near my father, but it is not me who is deciding to go – my shoes are taking me – and I follow them. I could

go to the end of the world in my blinking magic shoes and as I wear them, the world feels full of love, wonder and fun. That's the way to wear power!

I let the magic shoes take me on a journey through two dreams that I had this week. Those dreams must have something to tell me about how to wrap up my exploration of inner-power and wear it outside, in the world.

### **Saying: "No!"**

The first dream is about the upcoming final residency for my studies. Our cohort is about to have our last group process together. I feel the end of our journey and it makes me anxious. I don't want it to end! If it has to end, I want it to be a special and intimate experience. I notice that we are not by ourselves in the classroom, there are other community members present – people from other cohorts, faculty members and local people from Portland. I am irritated that our last experience together as a cohort is open to the community.

We start sorting for the topic what we would like to explore. I would like to bring up the topic of our cohort ending and what feelings it brings up. When I start talking a student from another cohort interrupts me and brings in a political world issue that he is passionate about. He starts lobbying for his topic, not even noticing that he cut me off while I was speaking. He is full of passion and has no shame to actively push for his topic. He holds a microphone and asks different group members directive questions to get supportive responses to his viewpoint. Suddenly he puts the microphone in my face and says: "Reet, you support me, don't you? You agree with me that this is the topic that we



should focus on?" I shout, "NO!!!" full of fury. He doesn't seem to even notice my reaction and goes to the next person and asks the same question. The whole room seems to be hypnotized by him. Nobody notices my "no" and more and more people join to support his topic. I am disappointed and angry and walk out of the room, slamming the door behind me. I bump into a friend in the corridor who notices my upset and asks about what happened. I insist on leaving the building and suddenly I notice that I am barefoot. I have left my shoes in the room. And I wake up.

### **The Psychopath**

A few nights later I had another dream. I was on a hike or a journey with the guy who rudely used his power to dominate the group in the previous dream. In this dream we seemed to be friends.

We are on a trail through a forest and suddenly there is a prison on our way. It is huge and going around it would take forever. We decide that we should go through it, instead of going around. It is risky: we need to sneak in and then sneak out on the other side. We may get caught at any point but we trust that we can make it and go. He climbs up the prison wall and I follow. When we are inside we decide to go over the tops of several abandoned buildings to be less visible. He climbs on top of the first building. It is a one-story building and he reaches there without an effort. I have trouble climbing up. He notices my struggle, grabs my hands, pulls me up and keeps going, jumping from this roof to the next one. I hesitate to make the jump and the next moment I realize that I am not alone on that rooftop. There is a "psychopath" with a big kitchen knife on the roof

with me. I apologize for my insensitive use of language, as my waking self does not use pathologizing language towards people in extreme states, but in the dream, this was the word that came to me when I saw this guy. He reminded me of Hannibal Lecter from the movie *The Silence of the Lambs*.

The psychopath makes a wild jump towards me and grabs my right hand. I try to wrestle myself free from his grip but he has an inhuman amount of strength in his madness and he is determined to dismember me while I am alive. I wake up in the moment when he is in the middle of sawing off my right thumb.

### **Should I Use the Kitchen Knife?**

I am glad I have my pink blinking magic shoes that bring only love, wonder and fun to my life! I couldn't imagine re-entering these dreams, especially the last one, without them. I decided to share the dreams with one of my therapists and supervisors and the following dialogue shows how the dreams unfolded.

Therapist: How should we work on the dream?

Me: I like your way of story telling and at the same time I want to go inside and feel it. (I close my eyes and look down, feeling the inner experience that is happening the moment after sharing the disturbing dreams.)

Therapist: I like how you go inside. It shows me that you stay close to your power. You follow yourself.

Me: In the dream I see the power out side of me.

Therapist: Yes and it is also your inner-relationship between different powers.

We take the dreams apart and I bring in my associations to different figures:

- The fellow student from both dreams – a bully, somebody who acts with “power over”.
- Psychopath – somebody who is in an extreme state and not in contact with everyday reality. He is hunting for life force and he wants to cut me to pieces while I am alive, to get in contact with my life force.
- Me in the dreams – somebody who is searching for their authentic power.
- Prison – a place where you take things apart and that forces you to have a look at parts of you that you don’t like
- Final residency – end of a learning journey.
- Shoes – they make it smoother to walk in the world.
- Right side of the body – I am left-handed so it is my less dominant side, I also associate right side with masculine, straightforward, logical and direct energy.
- Thumb – Funny, but the first thing that came to my mind with a thumb was: you cannot show “thumbs up” without a thumb. Thumb is separate from other fingers and this is its value: without a thumb you cannot hold on to things.

The next step is to weave the story back together using the associations that popped up.

Therapist: There is a bully that is lobbying for one side only and the figure who is looking for her true power is saying a strong no to it. In the second dream the part of you that is interested in finding your authentic power is going on a hike with the part that is

acting with “power over”. It is already a good start. The prison is a place where you take things really apart and your writing process forces you to have things out... prison, not in a negative way, but as energy that makes you focused.

Suddenly an intense sound of a dog whimpering out on the street gets my attention and I cannot focus on what my supervisor is telling me. She calms me down by explaining that there is a dog park nearby and those kinds of sounds are normal in the area. I say to her that I have a soft spot for animals and she asks me to say more to understand what I mean. I tell her the story of how I got my first pet who was a wild cat living out of garbage cans and how I fought for its right to live in our house.

She said that this energy must be somehow present in the dream and I said it was in the friend who stopped me when I ran out of the door in the first dream: she stopped me and made me realize that I had left my shoes behind.

Therapist: It seems like there is an energy that pushes too much and other side is reminding about your sensitivity. Shall I or shall I not push? Maybe you should be more sensitive to your vulnerability? You walk out without shoes, it means you cannot completely walk out and in the second dream you go on a hike with that energy.

Me: Without shoes I am more sensitive to the earth. Shoes are very personal and they are a part of personal power. They help with being less sensitive, more detached. Sometimes the sensitivity is needed and sometimes the detachment.

Therapist: Shoes usually have to do with the world channel because you walk in the world. Shoes change the relationship with the world. You forget the shoes - maybe it is good, maybe not. It is hard to tell yet. In the second dream you step into the world in a relatively sensitive way and the two energies work better together.

Reet: Yes, it is hard to tell if I should be more sensitive with my self when stepping into the world: if I should go back and get the shoes or not.

Therapist: And a new figure appears who is interested in your life force directly. Power is life force and life force is behind power. He is interested in dismembering you. This is the same energy as cutting yourself apart. It is not good or bad, it is just what is happening. He got your right hand, the less dominant hand.

Me: He wants to cut of the logical and more direct energy. I am not able to do the thumbs up and holding on to things is not possible.

Therapist: I don't understand the psychopath fully yet. You have to show me how he grabbed you and cut off the thumb.

She reaches out her hand and I start to show her how the mad man in my dream acted. I hesitate because I am concerned that I might hurt her. She hears me and hands me a pillow to use instead of her hand. Now I can freely act out the scene from the dream. And feel into what it is like to be the psychopath.

Me: When you are cutting something that is alive, you can see life: the inside of life.

Therapist: This part is desperate to get in touch with life, life force.

Me: Blood is coming out with a force... the wanting to be in contact with juiciness of life. I am cutting myself to pieces and turning myself inside out and showing it to the world to feel the juiciness of life?

Therapist: This is your last step of integrating your power.

Me: Coming into my power means I need to cut myself up?

Therapist: And you need to shift levels and go to a different state of consciousness to feel the life force. Dismemberment is a classic shamanic term for finding power. You are not just straightforward and in consensus reality, you are also in a different state that is shamanistic and going for the life force in a most unconventional way. You are put in the prison to structurally go into the experience and consciously dismember yourself. The freedom doesn't come from breaking out of the jail but from being dismembered – transformation through being taken to pieces. You are super straightforward and you are also in an altered state. Your communication style is straightforward but you yourself are very much in an altered state.

### **The End**

What can I say? I thought this last piece of my inner-exploration will be about joy and wonder of wearing pink blinking shoes like a 4-year old, but that was only one part of the story – the shoes helped me step into the dark unknown. It turns out that I not only need to undress, but also I need to dismember myself in front of the world on my quest to power.

Wasn't it obvious from the beginning? The Tin-Elephant was eaten by rust and about to fall apart when I lifted it up. And still, I needed to lift it up and watch it crumble in my hands, while studying it inside out, to come to this conclusion.

When I am feeling into being the cheerful, trusting, loving and curious 4-year old, it reminds me of the elephant – the joyfulness, sensitivity and loving nature of this big and beautiful creature. And the psychopath who is going for the life force with a kitchen

knife puts me in contact with the energy of the tin that is crumbling apart when encountering the fire and water powers of nature. I wonder how I could be the psychopath and elephant when stepping out to the world. In the supervision session my supervisor pointed out that the psychopath was in a different state of consciousness and the dismembering was a shamanic act of going for power. I felt that it is time for me to shift my state of consciousness to find an answer to this question.

I left my laptop and stood up, moving around a bit to get in contact with my body. Then I closed my eyes and let my mind get foggy. I let my body take over and it took me to a trance-like dance. It started with round and winding movements from my hips and at the same time, my arms were strong and stiff, and I was holding my palms together, fingers pointing outwards. I felt the elephant nature in my hip movement and the psychopath in my arms. While I continued moving, the dance got wilder and the movements got bigger and faster. This shamanic dance took me to other worlds. I felt like a martial artist. My movements were precise and coming from my core. I was amazed afterwards that I didn't knock anything over or hit my self when moving wildly with my eyes closed in my room. While in the dance, I also noticed the sharpness and softness playing together. It felt like I was the fire and water at the same time, stinging at times and flowing softly in others. The dance brought me to an insight: when I am connected with my core, I create a loving container for transformation, where the forces of nature can transform identities, relationships and maybe even communities. From that place I will act with love and at the same time not always softly. I might cut sharply and precisely, like a martial artist, with the aim to get to the essence of something or to bring

transformation. This is the essence of how I should use my power in the world. Being in contact with my body and letting go of my ordinary mind are the short cuts to get there.

I feel complete. The writing journey will end here, but this is not the end of my hunt for personal power. It is a lifetime journey and I am much closer to the beginning than to the end. Dismembering myself and feeling the life force are the two central elements of my life myth – in my childhood dream, I was watching myself dissolving into the Universe, becoming the tiniest particles that diffuse into nothingness, and at the same time I was feeling the most amazing electrical vibrations in my body – the life force! Being at the edge of losing yourself is the moment of being truly alive – it is vulnerable and beautiful! Living at that edge is my calling and shifting through different states of consciousness to enter unharnessed powers is the way to enjoy it. Thank you Universe for the wardrobe full of powers to choose from, try on and wear!

In case you are interested in finding out where your body and different state of consciousness might take you and what powers might reveal, below is an innerwork exercise that will help you with this.



### **Innerwork Exercise: Your Shamanic Dance in the World**

1. Ask yourself: “What are the two main energies or powers in me that seem contradictory in their nature? How should I live them in the world?” Make some notes.
2. Stand up and feel into your body. Notice its natural tendencies to move and follow them. Close your eyes to get in better contact with your body, and simultaneously make sure that you are aware of your surroundings so that you won’t hurt yourself. You may hold your eyes half-open if you need to.
3. Let your everyday mind drop away and go into a foggy and dreamy state of mind – let yourself be half here, half in the dreamland.
4. Follow your body’s movements and let them get bigger and wilder until you feel how the dance has taken you over and you are in a trance-like state. Keep a little awareness to make sure not to hurt yourself.
5. Flowing with that state, notice if the powers that you identified before – your core powers - are somehow part of the dance. Notice how they express themselves and how they move together and interact.
6. Keep on dancing until you get some kind of insight about those powers, their relationship to each other and how you could bring them into the world together.

*Figure 6.* Innerwork Exercise: Your Shamanic Dance in the World.

## A Wider Perspective on Personal Power

- “When we become an example of balance and inner peace, even just with our partner, children, or friends, we are healing the planet.”
- Flordemayo, Mayan elder and spiritual healer, *Grandmothers Counsel the World* (Schaefer, 2006)

After finishing my month-long innerwork, that actually stretched out to be almost two months, I realize that my quest for power is about figuring out who I truly am. My quest is about *personal* power, knowing who we are, and daring to be ourselves everywhere and with everybody, especially with ourselves.

Now it is time to step back and see how my inner exploration of power relates to what has been researched and written on the topic before me. The amount of literature on the topic of personal power is vast. I am going to touch upon a tiny fragment of it here, hoping that the references will guide you to further reading, in case you are interested in exploring the field more in depth. For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on aspects that I found helpful in framing the inner journey that I went through and deepening the understanding of it. First I will look at personal power through the lens of Processwork, as this is the framework I am trained in. Then, I will add some other perspectives that I found helpful.

## Processwork and Personal Power

Studying Processwork as a worldview and methodology, with many incredible teachers as guides and role models, has foremost been a journey to personal power. I use Processwork through that lens also when working with clients one on one couples and groups. Whatever issues we are working on in ourselves, in our relationships, or in our interactions with the wider environment, there is a process of discovering the powers within us that we have ignored or put down for some reason. Learning to use those powers consciously will improve our wellbeing inside ourselves and out in the world. Personal power is something that is always there; we are born with it and we will never lose it. The question is, how can we connect to it and use it? Our personal power may be more tangible from the outside than from within, as Mindell explains:

People feel your power, your presence. It precedes us. Your own processmind [your deepest self], your special powers, your beauty precedes you... It is a kind of power each person possesses. Making it conscious and using that power is a big thing. It takes years and years, and at the same time, it takes not even one minute. Maybe you can see it in your baby picture? Ask your friends what it is they sense about you, even when you are not around! (2013, p. 211)

Discovering your personal power is easy when you look for it consciously. It is present in your body and it comes out in all of your interactions. The hardest aspect in discovering it, is focusing and staying with your conscious intent when you encounter edges that stop you from going deeper into your inner world.

Arnold Mindell talks about *personal power* in his books “*The Shaman’s Body*” and “*Dreambody*.” In the former, he expands on the concept of personal power that was depicted by Carlos Castaneda, in his books about the teachings of Don Juan Matus. Don Juan was a Yaqui shaman and spiritual teacher, who explained how we can get in contact with our personal power through the dreaming processes of our dreams, body experiences, and experiences in relationships and the world. Mindell (1993). In “*Dreambody*”, Mindell further explains and focuses on the dreaming processes that happen through our bodies (Mindell 1998). Mindell (1993, 1998) describes personal power as the wisdom of the body that, when followed, will lead to personal growth and freedom. One of the keys to access our personal power is heightening our awareness of barely noticeable body signals, natural movement tendencies, as well as the nature of body symptoms. As Mindell explains,

Once the abandoned Self in the body has been touched by listening and caring for it, the body awakens and acts like a partner of consciousness. The Self in the body, the dreambody, becomes personal power, unfolds its wings, stretches beyond imprisonment in doings, and acts out its dreams, its myths. One sees this happen in dreambody work, as individuals follow their bodies, let them flow freely and discover the myth behind personal life, the experience of freedom (1998, p. 227).

The dreambody – the dreaming experience that manifests in our lives through body symptoms and experiences, nighttime dreams, dream-like relationship experiences and flirts in the environment – is the doorway to personal power. The dreaming process that is continuously happening under the radar of our everyday awareness can be accessed

through innerwork, where one can explore and discover the deeper meaning of these experiences and therefore get in touch with their personal power.

Processwork theory has one more angle of looking at power that helps with gaining greater awareness of your powers and learning to use them, which is *rank theory*. “Rank is the sum of a person’s privileges” (Mindell, 1995, p.28). Everybody has some kind of privileges compared to others. The privileges can be *earned*, meaning that we have made an effort to gain them (for example we have done psychological work with ourselves, or we have contributed to the community and therefore gained respect and appreciation of others); or privileges can be *inherent*, in that we have them due to being born into a certain group or place in the world (for example our race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, and financial status can influence greatly our rank and privileges in the world). Rank can come from *external* or *internal* sources, such as how we are perceived by others based on our socio-cultural status, or the latter, how we see ourselves based on our psychological sense of well-being and spiritual beliefs. All these different dimensions of rank influence our experience in the world, making us feel good when we have more rank and privileges than others, and making us feel inferior or oppressed, when we feel that we have less rank and privileges than others.

“Power is transient and not a constant experience for any of us” (Schuitevoerder 2000, p.66). Our experience of power can change from moment to moment, depending on the circumstances of the situation that we are in. It is important to note that we are more aware of our lower rank experiences than when we have more rank than others. High rank puts us at ease and we often don’t reflect on why we feel good, we just enjoy it. Lack of awareness of high rank is one of the main causes of conflicts because we can

unconsciously act superior or oppressive. We are more aware of low rank because it creates a sense of threat. Diamond (2015b) explains the reasons behind it as follows:

From an evolutionary standpoint, low rank is a matter of life and death: you're at the mercy of something or someone with greater power. You could be killed, hurt, or eaten. It's a classic fight, flight, or freeze moment. Even if we're not physically threatened, we still respond with the same surge of hormones. Our emotional brain doesn't parse probabilities. A curt email or a demeaning look can trigger the same reaction as a charging tiger.

Being in the low rank position, the one who doesn't fit in and is seen as inferior is painful, but this experience can have another side. This "other side" of low rank can connect us with our personal power, as Menken (1995) elucidates:

Paradoxically, these threatening and oppressive circumstances often create ripe ground for personal development. It is when we are most unbalanced and least secure, when our identities are under threat, that we must reflect and push our edges to develop. At these times we search for meaning in the incomprehensible. We grow beyond parts of ourselves that only suffer, and are forced to expand beyond our identity that the mainstream has laid for us (p. 30).

Painful experiences offer us a fruitful ground for personal growth, and growing spiritually and psychologically connects us to our personal power. "Instead of letting trouble get you down, it can raise your consciousness and give you the power of understanding. Used with awareness, this power becomes compassion – that incredible tenderness that makes life worthwhile" (Mindell 1995, p. 60).

In conclusion, from the perspective of Processwork, gaining more personal power is not about becoming more powerful in comparison to others, in fact, personal power has nothing to do with competition. Rather, it's a sense of being connected to your deepest Self and dreaming process. This gives us freedom to access and express all of our different parts and be true to ourselves in the flow of life. Being in touch with our personal power gives us compassion towards others and ourselves, and supports us in bringing our gifts to the world.

### **Other Views on Personal Power**

There are many other ways to look at personal power, besides through the lens of Processwork. In fact, I believe each person has his or her own view. I will touch upon a few other viewpoints that help to understand personal power in the context of this thesis, drawing from indigenous traditions and psychological approaches, including classical views and feminist psychology.

Starting from the roots – ancient beliefs about power and personal power – Mails (1991) talks about the meaning of power for Native Americans. He explains that although there is no consensus on the definition of power, the common view seems to be that “power comes initially from a supernatural source or sources, and that it is best described as an astounding and electric-like energy that pervades the universe. Power is present everywhere and in varying degrees within everything.” (Mails 1991, p 47)

It is fascinating to see how the Native American understanding of the term “power” is similar to the meaning of the ancient Estonian word “vägi”, which translates

as “power” in English, and refers to the “life force that fills the world and everything in it”. Ringvee (2000) explains the meaning of power in the context of the indigenous Estonian belief system and way of life, called “Maausk” (Earth Religion or believing in the Earth): “The concept of power is connected to seeing the world as a spiritual place – everything in the world has power that is simultaneously its domain of influence as well as its essence.” To elaborate on this further Kruuse (2014) describes ancient Estonian beliefs as follows:

Our ancestors believed the Creator to be Mother Earth, a spirit who gives birth to everything – including all beings, plants, trees, objects and phenomena. Spirits were part of ordinary life and there was a direct connection with the energy world. In a down-to-earth and simple way, everyone knew and felt that everything is connected, and the natural balance is maintained by the interaction of primal elements – air, fire, water and earth. Kruuse (2014)

According to indigenous Estonian traditions, power is connected to wellbeing. They believe if one is in contact with one’s power, they show good health and doing well in life, while one who has lost the connection with their power, experiences sickness and misfortune. It was believed that power could be used in good and bad ways, not only in action, but also with words, thoughts and looks. As everything was seen as connected, it was important to keep good relations with all the spirits so that you wouldn’t lose your power. Kalle Kütt, a witch doctor and healer, claims that Estonians obtain personal power from solitude and from being by themselves in the nature. He explains that there are many possibilities to retreat from crowds that will allow us to listen to ourselves and the surrounding nature (personal communication, October 9, 2015).



Based on the literature available, there seems to be one notable difference between Native American spirituality and Estonian beliefs: the distinction between “ordinary” power and “spiritual” or “higher” power. For ancient Estonians everything and everybody has power and the connectedness to our power has to do with the quality of our relationships to other people, animals, nature and spirits, and everything around us. However, Fools Crow, a Native American holy man from the Sioux tribe distinguishes regular people from holy people, by the powers available to them and how they use them (Mails, 1991). According to Fools Crow, holy men are channels, they are like hollow bones that let the Higher Powers come through them to their people. They don't use their personal power to heal but let the Higher Powers work through them. Holy men need to be clear so that the powers could move through them freely. (Mails 1991) This means they need to let go of the ego needs, behave in the best possible way in every situation, and share power with everybody. Castaneda (2006) brings out a similar distinction between an average man and the warrior through the viewpoint of his teacher, the Yaqui shaman Don Juan Matus:

The self-confidence of a warrior is not the self-confidence of the average man. The average man seeks certainty in the eyes of the onlooker and calls that self-confidence. The warrior seeks impeccability in his own eyes and calls that humbleness. The average man is hooked to his fellow men, while the warrior is hooked only to himself. You're after the self-confidence of the average man, when you should be after the humbleness of a warrior. The difference between the two is remarkable. Self-confidence entails knowing something for sure; humbleness entails being impeccable in one's actions and feelings (p.7).

Two different Native American traditions view the states of being clear or impeccable, humble and free of ego needs, as features of individuals who have connections to Higher Powers. Without the distinction between different levels of powers, in indigenous Estonian tradition the importance of using our powers for the benefit of the whole, and being impeccable in our relationship to everybody and everything, is connected to personal power in a similar way to Native American understandings.

From the viewpoints of Estonian and North-American indigenous traditions, personal power has to do with spiritual power that comes from higher sources, and simultaneously something that is within us from the moment of birth, and remains throughout our lives. Personal power can be felt as an electric energy, life force, and should be used with compassion in service of the whole, including the community, nature and the spirits (Kulmar, 2006; Mails, 1991).

The scientific view of personal power was created with the birth of psychology. Jung (1966) used the word “power” as the opposite of love, seeing one as the shadow of the other. This is one possible way to look at some aspects of power, in the context of using power over others, but this is not an aspect of personal power, as it is discussed in this thesis. There are parallels to what I call *personal* power in the context of this thesis to Jung’s concept of *individuation*. Jung (1966, p.226) explains, “Individuation means becoming an ‘in-dividual’, and, in so far as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as ‘coming to selfhood’, or ‘self-realization’”. This viewpoint is similar to the Processwork perspective and indigenous views of seeing personal power as being connected to your deepest self and being connected to the life

force. Also, similarly to Processwork and indigenous views, Jung sees becoming aware of the “unconscious” (the *dreaming* in the context of Processwork and *spirit world* in the indigenous cultures) as the key to individuation, or personal power, and points out how this has a positive effect on our relationship to the community. “The process of individuation brings to birth a consciousness of human community precisely because it makes us aware of the unconscious, which unites and is common to all mankind. Individuation is an at-one-ment with oneself and at the same time with humanity, since oneself is a part of humanity” (1954, p.227). Jung developed two methods for connecting the conscious and unconscious to support the individuation process: working with night-time dreams and active imagination (Johnson 1986).

From the perspective of humanistic psychology, personal power could be viewed as arising from one’s true Self. Rogers saw the process as unmasking ourselves from the different layers of identities that we have developed in the process of socialization.

Rogers (1961, p. 114) explains that through inner explorations,

gradually, painfully, the individual explores what is behind the masks he presents to the world, and even behind the masks with which he has been deceiving himself. Deeply and often vividly he experiences the various elements of himself, which have been hidden within. Thus to an increasing degree he becomes himself – not a façade of intellectual rationality, but a living, breathing, feeling, fluctuating process – in short, he becomes a person.

The idea of “becoming one’s true Self” is similar to what I have called personal power as it talks also about getting in contact with our deepest nature, which in result, our identities become more fluid and we are freer in our lives. Humanistic approach also sees

the way to one's true Self or personal power, as an experiential journey, that has to do with connecting with your innerworld of feelings and sensations. Both Jungians and humanistic psychologists describe the process of becoming one's true Self as a painful and challenging journey, yet rewarding in the end, because it creates an inner sense of freedom.

Jung (1969), Estés (1995) and Woodman (1987) explain how the collective aspects of our unconscious world, such as the archetypes from the collective unconscious, and the socio-cultural dynamics, play significant roles in our lives and hinder the individuation process, unless we make efforts to become aware of these unconscious components. This shows that our journey to personal power is not isolated from the social context around us, but is interconnected with the historical and current patterns and belief systems.

Search for personal power, as I have been describing in this thesis, can be seen as a specific aspect of the journey to self-awareness. Feminist psychologists emphasize that the journey to self-awareness is different for men and women. Bolen (1984, p 4.) points out how women are influenced by “powerful inner forces, or archetypes, which can be personified by Greek goddesses” and “outer forces or *stereotypes* – the roles to which society expects women to conform”, and how social stereotypes “reinforce some goddess patterns and repress others”. Douglas (1990) mentions several ways that have been proven to be helpful for women on their journey to personal power: *focus on the body* – finding the access to the deepest self through body experiences; *individual approach* – women need to find their own path, rather than follow pre-developed approaches; and lastly, *rituals* – either ancient traditions, co-created ceremonies, or self-created rites. Each

of these methods have been shown to support women on this quest of personal power. Woodman (1987, p. 206) captures the essence of a women's path to their true selves through rituals as follows:

Many women, however, are creating their own rites, sometimes modeled on ancient rituals celebrating the ancient goddesses, sometimes modeled on rituals that have been guided from within by dreams, by body responses or active imagination. If the body is allowed to move as it wishes to move, it enacts its own feeling in ritualized movement. These rituals, however unsophisticated, are crucial in re-connecting women to their own instinctual roots. If the ritual emerges from their own authentic Being, well-educated women, superbly trained in the ways of technology and rational thinking, find themselves silenced in the presence of their own straightforward, non-negotiable, inner truth. For the first time in their complex lives, they feel their own I AM.

Woodman's viewpoints are validated and well illustrated by Adams-Matthews (2001) research of adult women's recollection and transformation of menarche and feminine embodiment through ceremony. She found that claiming one's feminine self is closely aligned with the claiming of personal power and pointed out that the women who participated in her study as co-researchers were aware of their personal power as "an energy that must be directed in a non-threatening way, an expression of 'graceful power,' to 'gracefully empower' their feminine selves and others. It is the energy of choice to direct one's personal power to create a satisfying life for themselves." (Adams-Matthews 2001, p. 370). This research shows how women from Western modern culture, perceive personal power similarly to the ways the indigenous traditions do: they experience it as

an energy, and mention the importance of using it in a compassionate way. They also perceive it as a way to wellness and fulfilling lives.

The importance of being able to guide your own journey and connect to the wisdom of the body in women's paths towards their deepest selves, is also confirmed by Wagner's (2012, p 124) study of women and fulfillment. Based on Wagner's research another empowering aspect for women is "sharing their significant life learnings with others":

As if bestowing a gift born out of the core elements of their own personal journeys, central aspects of the women's unique paths became a kind of mission or source of purpose directing their lives. Although not necessarily always overtly expressed, the women's stories indicated that the struggles, insights, and transformations they experienced in their own journeys inspired the very stuff they were drawn to offer others. (Wagner 2012, p. 124)

It seems like the transformational processes create the vision for life calling and guide and motivate them in their professions.

To sum up the different ideas on personal power, there seems to be common ground between the indigenous traditions, more modern psychological views, and experiences of everyday women who have participated in different research projects:

- Personal power is described as an energy that can be felt in the body (Mindell 1998, Mails 1991, Kruuse 2014, Castaneda 2006).
- The sense of being connected to our personal power has to do with being connected to our deepest selves (Mindell 2013, Jung 1954, Rogers 1991,

Woodman 1987, Adams-Matthews 2001, Wagner 2012), and some viewpoints also mention the connectedness to something bigger than our selves (Mails 1991, Castaneda 2006, Ringvee 2000, Kruise 2014).

- According to indigenous beliefs and psychological studies, the journey to our deepest selves needs strong motivation as it includes facing many obstacles in the inner and outer world (Castaneda 2006, Mails 1991, Jung 1966, Rogers 1991, Douglas 1990). Dreams and body experiences can be important guides on that journey (Mindell 1993, Mindell 1998, Johnson 1986).
- Feminist psychologists also mention the importance of the body, rituals, and being able to take leadership in one's journey (Douglas 1990, Woodman 1987, Adams-Matthews 2001).

Being in your power has to do with knowing your deepest self and being in contact with it, and out of that grows self-love and acceptance, which also manifests in being compassionate and caring towards others and the environment.

## Conclusions

“Whenever we try to fit in or hide what we think is uncool, we become vulnerable. Our personal power is there because of – not in spite of – our peculiarities. When we try to fit in and be accepted, we are dependent on others’ perceptions and expectations. But when we have nothing to lose – when we embrace our quirks and transform them into superpowers – we become amazing.”  
 – Julie Diamond (2015a)

The innerwork marathon is over. I am beyond the finish line. And I am alive! Very alive! I feel that the experience is still fresh and it is hard to detach myself from it, and somehow I need to sum it up. Looking at the title of this chapter – Conclusions – makes me feel like I am caught by a news reporter, who jumps up to the athlete just after crossing the finish line, and puts a microphone in their face, to catch the first impressions after the race, where they have given everything they’ve got to extend their known boundaries, and reach their highest potential. I am half in and half out of the experience of innerwork and still catching my breath. But it’s time to look back at the journey and see how it is significant in the context of my life, and in the context of studying personal power in general.

First of all, let’s sum up what the whole project was about. This was an introspective creative writing project with a focus on personal power. I used the Processwork method of innerwork to explore personal power in an experiential way, by unfolding my inner-experiences around personal history, relationships, body experiences, and encounters with the wider world. To help the reader join my inner-journey, and learn the methodology of Process-oriented innerwork, I introduced the main concepts and tools of innerwork in the beginning of the thesis. I also created an innerwork exercise for each



theme explored, so that the reader could follow her or his experiences in similar areas and personally learn from them, not just from reflecting on my work. The inner-journey was followed by an overview of different ways and methods that have been developed throughout human history to support personal growth and explore personal power. The concept of personal power was looked at through the lens of the Processwork paradigm, indigenous worldviews of Estonian and Native American cultures, and psychological views from classical and feminist perspectives.

### **Discoveries from the Project, and Possible Future Explorations**

The core learning of this project was more experiential and emotional, than intellectual. I feel in deeper contact with the life force inside me, which allows me to be more vulnerable and connect with the world in a more profound way. I have more compassion toward myself and others, I feel more grounded and centered, and this makes it easier to be my true to myself, and to be my true self with others. Feeling into this experience brings me to one of the main conclusions of this project: Process-oriented innerwork is a deep and empowering method for inner-exploration of personal power. It not only helps to become aware of different aspects of our powers, but helps us to feel into our personal power as a whole, which is then reflected in positive ways in our sense of Self and connection to the world.

Another important aspect of the innerwork was the numerous insights about the patterns of my inner world. I felt like a puzzle picture was coming together piece by piece throughout the journey, and the process seems to be ongoing. I am able to frame different

experiences that I encounter through the perspective of my journey to personal power. When I feel disempowered, I can see the experience from a detached perspective. From that place, I can learn from my experiences and find the power I see in another and in myself, and thus can bring awareness to the inner powers that I am marginalizing in the moment. As a result, the disempowering feelings that I encounter from time to time are not as strong, and I am able to step back into my power more fluidly.

It was also fascinating to see how the core energies that came from the Tin-Elephant dream figure – *letting go, falling apart, holding it together* – as well as – *sensitivity and caring, and straightforwardness and toughness* – kept on playing out in different ways throughout my exploration. It was especially amazing to see how they are connected to the energies of my childhood dream and life myth: the totality of letting go and becoming nothing and feeling the life force in that experience.

From a more intellectual perspective, the researcher in me was excited to see how my quest for personal power was similar in many ways to the journeys of others, relating back as far as ancient indigenous traditions. Indigenous cultures, and different psychological modalities also value the dreaming, spiritual, and mysterious aspects of our lives as the keys to our deepest selves, and therefore to our personal power. Another discovery I had was that I hadn't planned to focus so much on my body, but my innerwork took me there, and in the end it made a lot of sense in the context of what different modalities had to say about the journey to personal power. It was especially interesting to see how feminist psychology stressed the importance of body experiences, being able to lead your own journey and the rituals in women's journeys to their deepest selves. Prior to receiving this information from other perspectives, I was determined to

follow myself and not rely on any pre-developed method to reach to the core of my power. The only thing I didn't do was using rituals, and I wonder about that. Maybe I should explore this more and create some rituals that help me stay connected with my personal power? I do have daily rituals in my everyday life, like morning meditation and yoga practice, which definitely helps me to stay connected to myself, when interacting with the outside world during the day, but I hadn't thought about it in the context of personal power before. I am interested in finding out more about the power of rituals.

If I had unlimited resources to continue with this work, I'd be interested in doing a similar project with a group of people who are interested in exploring their personal power. I'm curious how similar or different their views on personal power would be, and how their paths would unfold through innerwork. This might be a next step of this journey – to develop a personal development course for people who are interested in exploring their personal power. This could give insight into the similarities and differences in a diverse population. It would be interesting to see how gender, ethnic background, age, and other aspects of human diversity affect our journeys to our deepest selves – in what ways we are similar and where we differ.

It would also be great if the innerwork method were explored in the context of other personal quests or big life transitions. Finding our life calling or profession, coping with serious illness, recovering from trauma, facing death, giving birth and becoming a parent, are some topics that would be fascinating to explore and find out if and how innerwork could help us go through those transitions.

Those are some ideas that I am throwing into the air, hoping that some of them will manifest through me or somebody else. My innerwork marathon ends here, but it is

not the end of my quest to personal power – that journey will continue with its mysterious twists and turns at least until the end of this life, and who knows what happens after that.

Thank you, dear reader, for accompanying me on this journey! I hope you found some insights and inspirations for your own journey to your deepest self.

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