

An instructive, encouraging and delightful book that I believe can wake us out of our numbed state, where we've forgotten our true nature, our fundamental human goodness. Please read it.

—Margaret J. Wheatley, author of *Leadership and the New Science*

The TRANCE *of* SCARCITY

Stop Holding Your Breath and Start Living Your Life

Victoria Castle

An Excerpt From

***The Trance of Scarcity:
Stop Holding Your Breath and Start Living Your Life***

by Victoria Castle
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Introduction

What eclipses people's greatness? What stops us short from being as creative, caring, and resilient as we are? What is it that squeezes the life out of us so stealthily that we volunteer to shrink to a shadow of our true selves? And most importantly, how do we stop it?

Before we can decide on a treatment, we must first find the *source* of the malaise. Once Albert Einstein was presented with the following scenario: If you had one hour to solve a difficult problem, how would you use the time? He answered, "I'd spend the first 55 minutes defining the problem." In my own life, thoroughly defining the problem presented by the Trance of Scarcity took quite a bit longer than 55 minutes! But while my research may not have been comfortable or brief, it revealed to me an element of our existence, a *way of being*, that is most often invisible to us. Yet it fairly floats in the air we breathe. We catch it like a virus as we move within our cultural and familial surroundings, but then, strangely, we keep it alive for years without realizing how much better we would feel without it.

In working with thousands of people, I have repeatedly encountered the tragic theme of *I am not enough*—not good enough, smart enough, rich enough, young enough, old enough, worthy enough. Almost as prevalent is the theme of *There is not enough*—not enough time, money, opportunity, love, cooperation, power, you name it. This prevailing premise of *not-enoughness* successfully cripples the lives of people who would otherwise be buoyant and passionate. Since its subjects are so readily yet unwittingly loyal to it, I came to call this blight the Trance of Scarcity.

A trance is a semi-conscious state, a daze, a predisposition: under its spell we accept what we're told without question. The Trance

of Scarcity shows up in a hundred personalized versions, but the results are always the same. Instead of experiencing the brilliance and creativity we are aching to offer, the world gets the by-products of actions that oppress, isolate, exclude, and defeat.

The Trance of Scarcity has us in its snare and produces unfathomable waste. The Trance may show up privately, as self-doubt and over-consumerism, or publicly, as elitism and disregard for future generations. Many of us spend our time lamenting the way things are, justifying all the reasons why they can't be different, and preparing for the worst. Whether we act as the oppressed or the oppressor, we are caught in a web of our own making. As a reigning planetary myth, the Trance effectively keeps us from living in peace with ourselves and each other.

There is life on the other side of the Trance—a life characterized by vitality, fulfillment, and efficacy. It's not a pipe dream, and it's not as far away as we've been led to believe. It does, however, require tampering a bit with our beliefs and confronting whatever has lived within us as the stone cold truth (usually the most disruptive things we can imagine!). But then, claiming one's freedom always causes a certain degree of disruption. Breaking free is the polar opposite of comfort and stasis, very different from sedating ourselves so we can tolerate captivity.

To successfully upgrade from scarcity and struggle to abundance and ease, we must interrupt and dislodge old patterns that have been living quite comfortably within us, acting like they own the place. These old patterns are like a cat that likes to sleep on your head but isn't the least bit interested in the fact that you are allergic to it. It's time to move the cat. A little discomfort can end a lifetime of suffering.

The more each of us chooses to live and breathe and move within a reality of sufficiency and inclusion, the quicker we will

break the Trance that now holds our world in its sway. We end this disastrous tale when we stop telling it to ourselves and each other, when we literally begin to embody a better reality. The Trance loses its power when we address the *source* of the suffering rather than applying yet another bandage to the symptoms. We can eliminate this suffering, one person at a time, starting now.

This book will help you break free from the Trance of Scarcity in three ways.

1. By defying the cultural “common sense” that scarcity is an unchangeable truth, and revealing it for what it is—a mere story. Rather than offer strategies for better living in a world of scarcity, we will address the *source* of the “reality of scarcity” and expose it as a hoax, thus eliminating its power over us.
2. By leveraging the two elements that create our personal realities—our Stories and how we embody them—and then using those elements to create the reality we want. Insights and platitudes have too little impact on our lived experience; it is the practical essentials of *embodiment* that lead us to a new and sustained *way of being* where abundance is readily at hand. Embodiment is a key player in living beyond the Trance and will be illustrated in detail.
3. By using the powerful, well-tested practices of the Cycle of Abundance that result in greater ease, freedom, and satisfaction. Through these practices—as relevant to organizations as they are to individuals—you will learn to literally embody the state of abundance, of living in the world with greater effectiveness and ease.

Part I of this book looks at the roots of the Trance of Scarcity and the social constructs that hold it in place. We will then explore what generates your own reality and how you can change it at the most essential level, rather than waste another minute trying to get your circumstances to behave. Our focus here is on cultivating

the *way of being* that aligns us with abundance: the state of ease and flow.

You can live your life so that you're never captured or crippled by circumstances again. Embodying abundance isn't like a fad diet, it's a *way of being* firmly grounded in what actually works. It means that no matter what life presents, you can embody confidence, resilience, and success—not because you're more deserving but because you've found the leverage point for real freedom. It's a whole new ball game, and one that people miss out on when they maintain blind allegiance to the Trance of Scarcity, which insists that *there is never enough, regardless*.

After a lifetime of struggle and strain, we become suspicious of pleasure, ease, and flow. According to the Trance, the tighter we're wound the better. But ironically, this contraction of mind and body is the perfect breeding ground for scarcity.

In Part II, we'll investigate how the most important ally to embodying abundance is (*oh no!*) pleasure. We're talking about real pleasure—not the shallow kind that comes from overindulgence but rather the capacity to be so fully present to our lives that we partake of their richness in a way that feeds the soul. The original root of the word *pleasure* means *supple*, like a river freely flowing or a fabric with give and resilience. Abundance thrives on flow, not constriction. Specific practices are offered in this book that will show you how to embody this flow.

What we embody becomes our *way of being*; it influences every part of us. Our *way of being* in the world is the result of what we practice, whether or not it is intentional. Our habits and automatic reactions live in our muscles and in our nervous system. That's why the conceptual approach of "mind over matter" does little more than irritate—it cannot override what is already embodied. Some behaviors and habits are the result of years of embodying our unex-

amined Stories (such as the Trance of Scarcity), and they hold us in patterns that run counter to our biggest commitments, patterns such as believing we're not good enough, waiting for circumstances to change so we can be successful, and accumulating enough stuff that we feel safe.

The good news is we already have all the technology we need to make the fundamental shift away from the Trance of Scarcity and into embodied abundance. By engaging in the practices offered in this book, we can release our habitual embodiment of the Trance. We can change our experience from a life dominated by struggle and constriction to a life of greater ease and possibility. And this shift can occur *independent* of our circumstances.

Embodied abundance goes far beyond the narcissistic orientation of "As long as *I* have what *I* need, that's all that matters." Real abundance means living in a state of fullness and flow, welcoming our interconnectedness with everyone else. This is the great power of breaking free from the Trance of Scarcity. Little by little, we are released from the *Me* orientation that has kept us separate and lonely, and we enter the *We* orientation that makes room for our hearts and minds to stay open and connected.

In addition to working with my clients and students, I have personally, in excruciating detail, tested all of the principles presented here. About 20 years ago I went through a year I now affectionately refer to as Victoria's Adventures in Hell. At the time, I just called it Hell. In a matter of months I went through a crushing divorce, my father died, I had surgery for a major health risk, I moved to a new city where I knew no one, I looked for work for six months, and day by day I watched the little money I had disappear. I was well down the path of permanent suffering and struggle when, much to my surprise, I found a different route and took it. Since then my focus has been on embodying what I learned during that time

and making it accessible to others, with the hope that their own Adventures in Hell might be as short-lived as possible. This book includes plenty of stories from my own experience, for your education . . . and amusement.

What I learned was this simple but crucial formula: What we believe and what we embody becomes our reality. If we address both causes, our lives change. While the power of belief has been recognized for years, embodiment has been overlooked, even though it is essential to lasting change. Anything short of embodiment is just chatter.

As I caught sight of the Trance of Scarcity quietly pulling my strings, I realized that it was pervasive in far more lives than mine. The Trance has proven itself to be pandemic. In individuals, communities, organizations, systems, and governments, it has become institutionalized and is accepted without question. Learning to free ourselves is both a personal and planetary issue, if we are to create a future in which we all can thrive.

When one person gains access to her greatness, we all benefit. The essentials of embodied abundance aren't sneaky or slippery, they're hidden only as long as we look at life through the lens of the Trance of Scarcity. We keep seeing the hopeless view conjured by *not enough*, and eventually, being thoroughly convinced that the whole thing is pointless, we stop looking.

At this period in history, the majority of people throughout the world feel disempowered and exhausted. Doesn't make for a very bright future, does it? We know all too well what life looks like inside the Trance of Scarcity—the evidence is everywhere we turn. The time is right to see what life is like when we live in freedom from the Trance. Fulfilled people—those who have ready access to their greatness and aliveness—are resourceful, generous, resilient, peace-making folk. A world full of such people has a very different

future than the one we face now. Each one of us holds a piece of the larger solution. Each of us plays our part by making the contribution that is ours alone to make, the one that we're itching to bring forth. That's where the real fun is.

If you have had enough struggle, if you are ready for greater autonomy and aliveness, read on. You'll be helping to change the world, whether you intend to or not. Once you embody abundance as your *way of being*, you can't help but be more inspired and more inspiring. You'll build bridges to replace dead ends, and you'll easily arrive at solutions to issues that used to overwhelm you. You'll have broken free from the Trance of Scarcity, and your bountiful life will show it clearly to anyone who wants the same.

PART I

STATE

*If struggling were the way to get there,
we'd all be there by now.*

1 Chapter

Belonging: Are You In or Out?

Chances are you're a master at reading situations to see where and how you can belong. It's hardwired into us as human beings. Of all the mammals on earth, we spend the greatest length of time dependent on others. Our survival depends on our being included, cared for, and accepted so that we belong in our tribe. We get very good at noticing how we must behave in order to be included. Even when we've moved past the risk of biological need, we remain watchful: "Am I in or out?" Teenagers experience this questioning particularly intensely; that's probably why very few of us would want to repeat our teen years.

Most of us have been bombarded with religious and cultural messages about what it takes to belong, who decides whether or not we belong, and what might threaten our belonging. In all our choices, the issue of belonging stands in the background, whether or not we're aware of it. For most of us, wanting to belong runs the whole show. The trouble is, most of us are convinced that we didn't make the cut, that we don't belong, so we spend all our time either auditioning for others' approval, hoping we'll be included, or pretending not to care whether we're in or out. At the bottom of all this suffering lies the Trance of Scarcity.

A reporter once asked Albert Einstein, "Dr. Einstein, if you could ask the universe a single question and receive a direct reply, what would you ask?"

His response was immediate, as though he had been pondering it for quite some time. "Is the universe friendly?"

What is your answer to this essential question? It's worth noting. How we answer this question forms the basis of our response to all that we encounter in our lives. Whether or not we allow ourselves in or out of any given situation depends on it.

If we answer that the universe is *not* friendly, we hold ourselves at the mercy of imagined hostile external forces; we feel we're strictly on our own. This belief impoverishes every area of our lives. And we're not the only ones feeling this way. For centuries, humanity has been marinating in such messages, sometimes provided by religion, sometimes by society at large—insisting that we're unworthy outsiders, that we must earn our way to belonging.

Bound by this message, we feel alone, ashamed, permanently insufficient. We move through the world like dejected spectators: strained, isolated, telling ourselves story after story of our unworthiness and life's unfairness. Feeding on a continual diet of despair and rejection, courtesy of the Trance of Scarcity, we desperately seek ways to go numb. Our life force is gradually diminished to a whisper.

If we answer that the universe *is* friendly, however, we show up at the party ready to greet old friends and meet new ones. We add our signature dish to the potluck and prepare to feast. We understand that partaking of the flow takes nothing away from anyone else. We freely partake of and freely contribute to the constant stream of resources and possibilities. Our belonging is undisputed. No longer auditioning, we're confirmed in our right to exist. We live with a sense of freedom and possibility. We create a life of meaning and fulfillment, absorbed in making the unique contribution to the human community that is ours to make.

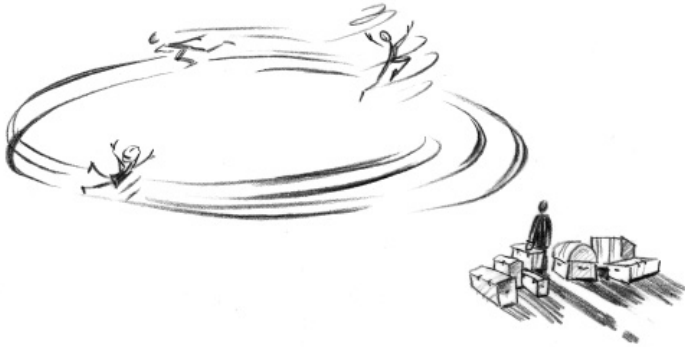
Step Into the Circle

Imagine you're walking in open country. You come upon a vast Circle in an expansive, fertile field. Streams and springs are flowing into this sunny area, providing the optimal environment for life to flourish. This is not a Circle made by human hands; rather, it's a zone where the energy of the universe flows without restriction. The Circle is not made or run by people, though everyone and everything is included in it. You have your own permanent place here. Just looking around, smell the fresh scent of the natural world, feel the sun on your skin; it feels good to be here.

The Circle is home to a flow of satisfying relationships, meaningful work, inspired learning, endless resources and opportunities, laughter and creativity, and a prevailing sense of ease. Remember a time when you felt carefree, safe, energized, and happy—maybe building a fort with some friends as a kid, or dancing with your sweetheart. That's the feeling: a pervasive sense of glad assurance. In the Circle, life is not a series of obstacles to overcome; it's a steady flow of possibilities.

There is no fence around this Circle, no admission gate, no entrance fee. Regardless of your age, your weight, the color of your skin, your gender, your education, your nationality, your financial status, or other people's opinions of you—you already belong here. No person or condition has the power to keep you out. You alone can take yourself out of the Circle, but your place will always be reserved for you. Your place in the Circle never expires. If you leave, it's simply vacant until you return.

So come on in. Or you may find that you don't have to move at all, the Circle expands to include you. The Circle can be as spacious or cozy as you like. Set down all the baggage you've been



carrying. Isn't it nice to be rid of that burden? Your shoulders relax, you take a deep breath, and your back uncoils. The tension begins to subside in your stomach and neck. It's like getting into a hot tub after a long rainy trudge on a winter's day. When you're ready, take time to wander all over the Circle until you find the spot you like best. You can stand, sit, lie down, walk, turn cartwheels, whatever you choose to do. The nature of the Circle is flow, and you are part of that flow wherever you are and whatever you do within the Circle. There is nothing here that you must force or control.

Here are some reports of how it feels to reside inside the Circle.

"I'm smarter, funnier, and I'm sure better-looking."

"Colors are brighter and I feel alive, like when I hiked Mount Rainier."

"Now I know why our puppy is happy all the time!"

"I realize I've been on a deprivation diet my whole life. And it turns out there's a banquet being served 24 hours a day. I'm having seconds!"

"An oasis in the desert . . . Now I get what that means."

"Problems really do become opportunities here."

"I hesitate to give up my pessimism, but it seems like nothing's out of reach here."

"I had no idea how clenched I was. The more I open up, the better it gets!"

"The only restriction on what's possible is how much good I can stand!"

For a moment now, purposefully yank yourself out of the Circle. Stand at a distance, looking at the Circle but no longer inside it. Notice how you feel when you take yourself out and separate yourself. You may feel lonely, separate, left out, invisible, or disconnected. Being outside the Circle may also feel familiar, while being inside may feel like a wild, unlikely fantasy. If you're used to struggle, ease can feel foreign and you may distrust it at first.

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Connectedness is an organizing principle of the universe.

David Bohm

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Now come back into the Circle and once again make yourself at home in the way that feels best for you. For some, being in the Circle may feel like "too much," and you may actually feel more comfortable outside. Honor your own pace. You might begin by moving closer to the Circle and just checking it out. Then you might move toward the edge, and later step just barely inside. This practice entails finding where you have greatest access to your aliveness, to your endless resources. There's no wrong way to consent to becoming part of the Circle. Simply discover what works for you. Just know that *you already belong* and that your space is always reserved for you, no matter what.

The nature of the Circle is flow, so whenever you step into the Circle, you step into the flow. When you're out of the Circle, separate, you're resisting the flow. Remember: There's no way to earn your way into the Circle because you already belong.

Stepping into the Circle isn't determined by your worthiness. It depends on your consent.



*Feeding on a continual diet of despair and rejection
courtesy of the Trance of Scarcity, we desperately seek
ways to go numb. Our life force is gradually diminished to
a whisper.*

Can you hear a loud chorus right now saying, "Yeah, right, nice fantasy! Now let's get back to the real world, shall we?" Could this be your *Do Not Disturb the Comfort Zone* alarm going off? Hang on for a moment, now, and just check this out. What would it be like if you lived—all the time—as if you already belonged?

Notice that last bit. We're not just consumers in this Circle. We are generators, far more ingenious, inspired, and outrageously collaborative than we could have imagined. The Circle is enriched because we're in it.

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*From the moment we cease trying to swim upstream and begin to
flow with the current, something changes in us.*

Arthur Sokoloff

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Let's be clear: the Circle is not a place. It doesn't have a time zone or a compass point. The Circle is a *way of being*—and we're either *being* in the Circle or *being* out of the Circle. Most of us have thoroughly embodied a *way of being* outside of the Circle. I did. It was from this vantage point that I discovered the Circle. I kept

seeing this other reality in the distance, and I kept wondering what you had to do to be eligible to get in. It couldn't possibly be open to *everyone*. It couldn't possibly be open to *me*. I was raised on a common assortment of mantras: *There's Not Enough; Settle for Less; Wait Your Turn; Fight Like Hell for What You Want*.

No matter which of these phrases I chose, there was an implied atmosphere of competition and combat, of domination and intimidation. To dominate or intimidate, it's necessary to create a sense of scarcity. (We'll explore this further in the next chapter.) Of course, my parents' objective was not to dominate or intimidate me (though there were surely times they would have welcomed help subduing their unruly offspring). They were doing their best to prepare me for what they believed were the harsh realities of life, to toughen me up so I could survive in a world of scarcity and struggle.

Not enough thinking keeps us in survival mode, our reptilian brain on constant alert, scanning for threats, preparing to attack or defend. *Not enough* thinking preempts our higher brain functions, the ones that inspire us to innovate and cooperate.

Now here's where the Trance gets tricky. If we believe that being separate is the way to be safe, then we'll create distance between ourselves and others; we'll refuse to count on anyone; we'll isolate ourselves. There are two corners into which we can wedge ourselves so that we remain separate. Both of them are inauthentic due to the fact that we're hardwired to relate to and connect with life. In one corner we can decide to be a victim. Our theme song becomes "You done me wrong just like I always knew you would." In the other corner we can decide to be a hero or a martyr. Whichever corner we stand in—victim or hero/martyr—we're operating out of separation.

Preparing for Struggle Perpetuates Struggle

Let's go back to the Circle now. Remember: No one can keep you out but you. There's no fence, no gate, no ticket taker. No one but you can take yourself out of the Circle, and most of us do so hundreds of times a day. To get out quickly, here are several accelerated routes: *I'm not enough. There is not enough. This can never work. It's impossible. It's too late. Nobody cares. It's too hard. I don't deserve it. I don't belong.* Accelerated routes out of the Circle can also take these forms: *shallow or no breathing, slumped shoulders, furrowed brow, tense neck, clenched jaw, and collapsed chest.* Whether you leave the Circle by way of internal messages or by way of physical constriction, the result is the same. Scarcity and struggle take hold.

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If my aim is to prove I am "enough," the project goes on to infinity because the battle was already lost on the day I conceded the issue was debatable.

Nathaniel Brandon

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Whenever we constrict the flow of life force by clenching our bodies or by telling ourselves limiting Stories, we are practicing separation rather than belonging—and that takes us out of the Circle. When we feel stingy, judgmental, defeated, self-righteous, or victimized, we've stepped out of the Circle. When we open up, relax, and join in, we have stepped into the Circle, and we experience the warmth and delight of being in the flow.

So, you may be saying, if there are accelerated routes out of the Circle, there must also be a quick way or two of getting back in. And indeed, this is the case. It's a very short list: Give your consent.

This is all that's required to come back into the Circle—only your consent. The Latin root word for *consent*, *consentire*, means *to join with feeling*. Perfect, isn't it? We experience being either in or out of the Circle according to how we *feel*, how we *are*, according to what we say is so.

Choosing to belong in the Circle is an act of sovereignty. We belong because we choose to belong. We don't force or demand it because that would mean we were still playing the eligibility game. Consent is simply accepting our place in the flow of life. It's a choice made from moment to moment. So here's the practice: Whenever you notice you've stepped out of the Circle, consent to come back in.

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Spirituality is belonging to something greater than yourself.

Brother David Steindl-Rast

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Taking your place in the Circle means belonging to the flow of all life, joining with it, drawing on its juice and vitality, and making your own contribution to it. Stepping into the Circle means hooking up your individual life force with a life force much bigger than yours—the life force that moves and fuels all things.

The Circle is only one image, of course. If it's useful to you, great. If it's distracting, find an image that works better for you. Why did I choose a circle and not a river, you ask? Because, like the Cycle of Abundance, the flow constantly replenishes itself.



The Cycle of Abundance works like the breath; there's inhalation and exhalation. So where is the starting point, the ending point? Exactly! There isn't one. Being part of the Circle gives you access to everything that is flowing through life, and whatever you bring with you becomes part of the flow. You're not just an insignificant gnat flying around in the vast circle of infinity—what you bring into the Circle matters. It's part of the character of the whole. It's a good reason not to vacate your post.

In his powerful book *No Future without Forgiveness*, Desmond Tutu shares the concept of *ubuntu*. In African culture, *ubuntu* is our interconnectedness with all of life, as well as the responsibility inherent in our connection. It might be translated this way: "I am human because I belong." I don't belong because I am human, but the other way around. Belonging is understood as the very essence of humanity.



PRACTICE

Choosing to Belong



Since we're exploring *embodied* abundance (not conceptual abundance), here's our first Somatic practice. Remember: What you practice, you become!

1. Read the description of the Circle at the beginning of this chapter, or close your eyes and visualize your own Circle image. Make it a visceral experience. What does it feel like in your belly, in your feet, in your throat, to belong to the Circle? Really take time to wander around in this inner experience until you find the *way of being* in the Circle that feels best to you. And—this is important—there is no one right way to be there.

Spend a few moments there, just getting used to being in the flow without needing to make anything happen. It may feel very foreign; most of us have been nosing that grindstone for decades. You might even feel a little bit idle; that's okay. Relax and enjoy. You're in the midst of the flow; everything comes right to where you are. It flows through you, and then out from you. Effortlessly.

2. Now bring your attention to your concerns about the future. Maybe you sense a lack of money or a lack of self-worth. Maybe you remember your problems at work or at home, or how much you have to do, or how unfair life is. Notice how all this feels in your body. In particular, notice your breath, your level of tension, your degree of aliveness.

Chances are good that when you began considering the future, you just propelled yourself out of the Circle. So take a moment to feel what it's like to be distant, to be out of the flow, to be separate from the rest of life. What's your degree of aliveness? It may feel quite familiar. If you've spent 20, 30, 40, or 50 years outside the Circle, then being outside feels like business as usual.

3. When you've had enough of that, take a deep breath and consciously consent to rejoining the Circle. You might say this out loud or simply think the words to yourself. Recognize that you are the only one who has the authority to take yourself out of the Circle. You are automatically a part of the Circle, if you consent to be. You have dominion here. You make the choice. Now, one more time, quietly notice how it feels here. What is your breathing like? How tense or relaxed are you? What feels possible from this vantage point? What is your degree of aliveness at this moment? If being in the Circle feels a little foreign to you, just take it slowly. Gradually keep coming back to the orientation of joining the flow of life energy and endless possibility.
4. Repeat this practice several times, making it more vivid and visceral each time. Go at your own pace, until being in the Circle feels like home.

What if we lived as if we already belonged?

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