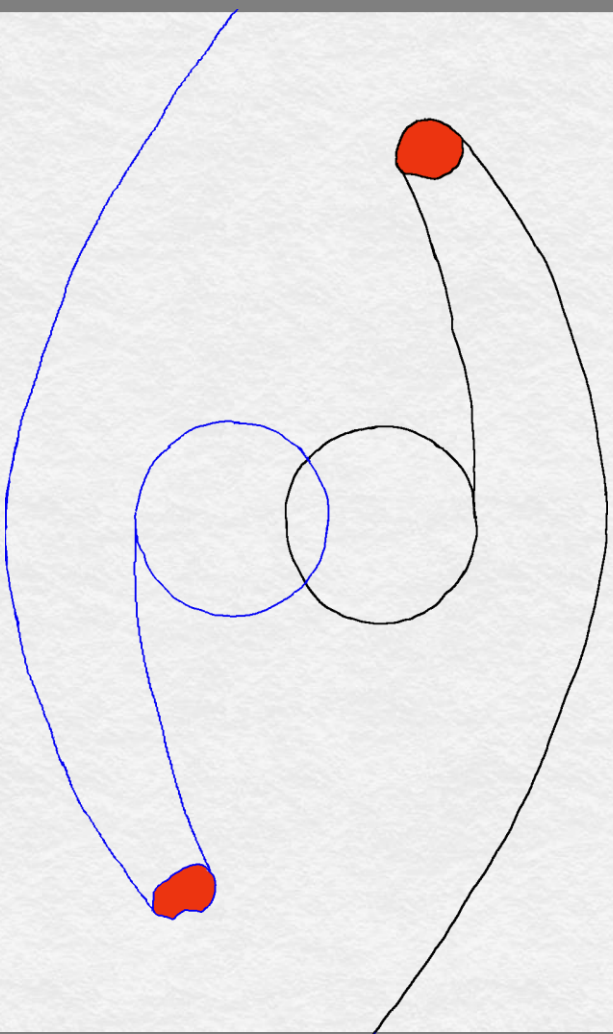


The Inner Garden

*Your inner world is like a garden with fertile soil:
it can create a heaven in harsh times if you wisely cultivate good seeds
or
it can create a hell in easy times if you neglect it and weeds take over*



You have a rich inner world*

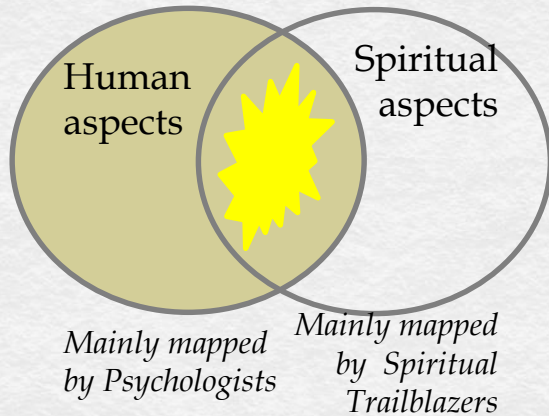
Three core ideas

- 1) You have an inner world that powerfully shapes your life; it is like an inner garden whose plants can either be great nourishment or terrible toxins for living a meaningful life.
- 2) Your inner garden needs your wise cultivation so that it helps you; a neglected inner garden allows the weeds of your inner world – the default tendencies of the brain – to proliferate and hinder you.
- 3) Your inner garden is home to both you and God, present within you as a Divine Companion, who wants to personally accompany you in your life; spiritual attitudes create an inner soil conducive for this relationship.

*Caveat. Your inner world is potentially rich. Your inner world is like a parcel of good soil that only becomes a garden when it is well cultivated. Some other analogies... Your body has the potential to run a 5K race in less than 25 minutes but only if you cultivate this physical potential with regular and intelligent exercise. Your mind has the potential to read and write but only if you cultivate and practice these skills.

Like a garden with very fertile soil capable of supporting thriving plants, your inner world has the potential to support a vibrant and productive inner life that helps you cope with challenges and seize opportunities. But such a thriving inner life only happens if you recognize your inner capabilities and cultivate them. Cultivation requires exercising your inner core muscles: your insights, values and choices. Cultivation requires planting good seeds – accurate ideas and perspectives; valuable perspectives come from both psychologists and spiritual sages. When harmonized, these perspectives can help you with psychological issues and also create an inner environment conducive to a more intimate relationship with your Divine Companion.

Two Maps of the Inner World



Psychological and spiritual perspectives complement each other

Psychologists know a great deal about human nature: how you construct the narratives that guide your life; how some narratives are helpful and others are limiting or harmful; how emotions, especially fear, can dominate the inner world; how long-ago wounds can trigger anxiety or anger now; how early attachment influences your current relationships.

Spiritual sages – people who had a first-hand experience of the Divine Companion – see your inner world as having both human and spiritual parts: spiritual emotions, such as reverence, awe, humility and holy desire; receptivity for spiritual infusions that can uplift your mind with an inner poise greater than you can muster on your own; and the capacity for spiritual relationship with the tender and vibrant Divine Companion who lives within you, in your inner world.

Spirituality is seldom addressed by psychologists, but if you listen carefully, you will hear how insights of psychologists overlap with spiritual sages. The inner terrain mapped by psychology can lead you to the inner trailheads that lead to your inner spiritual terrain. In turn, the spiritual perspective complements the psychological perspective. Weaving together the psychological and spiritual maps of your inner world can help you understand all aspects of yourself so you can build a more meaningful life and forge more compassionate relationships.

Noticing the One in your Inner Garden

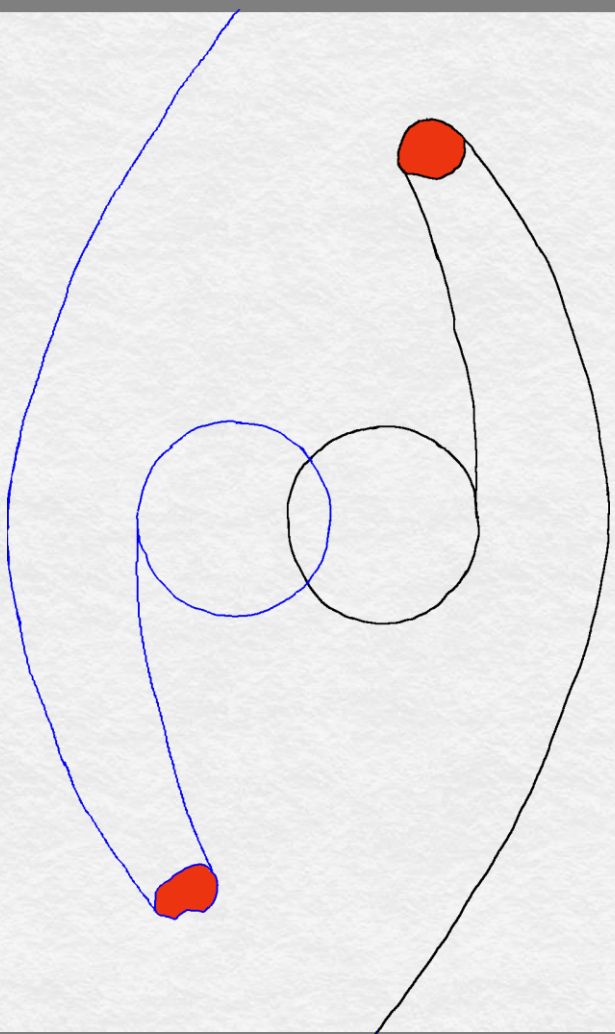
It takes effort to understand your inner world because much of it forms very early in life before you were aware of it. Perhaps as young child, you decided that others will value you and love you if you are good at fixing things (or pleasing others; being funny or quiet; or having another trait that others valued). You likely overdeveloped the part of you that seemed to bring acceptance and love early in life. Such early plans may work well enough in childhood but, later in life, the same plan seldom helps you get love as well as it originally did. Your ability to communicate feelings may have atrophied while you focused on fixing things; you may have lost yourself as you focused on pleasing others; wanting to be the smartest person in the room may have made you aloof. Your original plan that once worked so well may later become your biggest obstacle to a meaningful life and real intimacy with another person. The failure of your main *modus operandi* can be a good thing if it becomes the impetus to notice and develop other parts of your inner world.

Having experienced a frustration or dissatisfaction with their life, some turned inward; they found solace and assistance from a Divine Companion who was dwelling in their inner world all along, waiting to help. Their stories may help you appreciate that the same possibility also awaits you in your own inner world.

Spiritual sages found an inner Someone who was profoundly loving and understanding. As they cultivated this relationship, they drew closer their Divine Companion in their own experience; grasping the Divine Companion's beautiful character led them to whole-heartedly embrace this precious partnership. When embraced, this relationship bore great fruit: they easily dropped their original but limited narratives and saw life – themselves and others – in a broader way, with deeper insight and with warmer compassion.

A ego-driven mindset (“I’m the boss of my inner world”) comes naturally; the idea of sharing the inner reins often seems scary. But people who gladly allowed their Divine Companion to lead their inner world found infusions of love and clarity far richer than anything they had managed to create on their own. “Giving up” control didn’t impoverish them: instead, it enriched them and their lives became fuller and challenges less overwhelming.

If you don’t really pay attention, you may never notice the Divine Companion who dwells in your inner world. Knowing the various parts of your inner world can help you notice and appreciate the existence of your Divine Companion and then cultivate that inner relationship.



Inner World, Inner Garden

Your inner world, like a garden, can be vibrant or it can lay dormant; it can be well-cultivated or overrun with weeds. A vibrant and cultivated inner garden can sustain you and create beauty that enriches your life; a dormant or untended inner garden won't produce much helpful fruit.

The Inner World and the Outer World

Your outer life is probably quite clear to you: the family who raised you, your friends, work and perhaps an intimate partner. The details of the outer world are plain to see: what places are safe and comfortable and what places are dangerous; what you are good at and what you struggle with; how the personality or character of one friend differs from another. The outer world is concrete and easily described; another aspect of your life—your inner world—is not so readily described but understanding it better and getting to know it can make a huge difference in your life.

Your invisible inner world includes your thoughts, emotions, decisions, abilities, values, and narratives about yourself, others and life. Your inner world is unseen but powerful determines how you respond to others and how you act in the outer world. Despite all its influence, you might not know your inner world very well because it can operate just outside of your awareness.

Metaphors make a new idea more understandable by showing how it is analogous to something more familiar. Your inner world—your mind—is like a garden plot with soil that is more conducive to growing certain seeds than others. Your outer world is like the environment around garden: the amount of sun light and rain fall that it receives; the desired and undesired seeds from the surrounding area that blow into the garden and take root.

The following pages use a garden that you might have in your yard as a metaphor for the world that exists inside of you. The pages that describe the literal part of the metaphor (a garden in your yard that can be easily seen and described) have a green background; the pages that describe the other part of the metaphor (your inner world that can't be seen and can be harder to describe) have an off-white background like this page.

Your inner world is always operating, sometimes in helpful ways and sometimes harmful ways, yet you might not understand how it operates and affects you. Everyone's inner world shares common basic features, such as language, logic, emotions and human attachment. Each person creates a unique inner world from these basic features with the choices they make. Some people love using language to tell stories or express the subtle nuances of life; others mainly use language for taking care of the business of daily life or for creating fear in others. Some people form secure attachments with a partner and close friends; others struggle with to trust and form healthy relationships. Some people are spiritually receptive; others place no value on spirituality and dismiss the idea that the inner world even has a spiritual aspect. Your choices in your inner world create your unique personality and shape your relationships and the direction of you life.

A Garden

Garden Metaphor



Surrounding Environment

Soil: the heart of a garden which determines what grows

A garden is a finite plot of land that is distinct from all the land around it just you are distinct from the people around you. Your garden has a boundary, perhaps a fence, that indicates where your garden ends and the surrounding landscape begins. Your garden is the land that is uniquely yours where you are responsible for what grows, or doesn't grow.

The general landscape outside the garden represents your circumstances in the world. Your surrounding landscape may have a very warm or rather cool climate; may be at a low or high altitude; may have little, average or very abundant rainfall. The general landscape affects your garden; you have little control over it but you must adjust your gardening techniques based on those factors outside your garden.

Other gardens outside your own garden represent the other people in your life, your social world. Nearby gardens represent people who play a prominent role in your life, the people who you interact a lot with. Farther away gardens represent people, such as acquaintances, with whom you have less contact.

The heart of a garden is the soil which determines which seeds can grow and how healthy a plant they become. The plants that grow in your garden will feed you: perhaps you will be well-fed or barely eke out a subsistence-level living. Some plants that grow in your garden may be toxic; others may add beauty to your world.

Your Inner World

Your Inner World



Your outer world

Mind: the heart of your inner world where choices are made

Your inner world represents you, an individual person distinct from other people around you. Although you are connected with other people, you are clearly not them. No one can exercise or eat for another person; each person must exercise and eat for themselves. No one can make decisions for another person; each person must decide for themselves.

You don't form your thoughts in a vacuum: the general ideas of your time and place powerfully influence how you think. In very religious times, most people simply take the idea of God as a given; in more secular times, the idea of God may seem quaint and misguided to many. If you carefully cultivate your inner world, you can determine whether prevailing ideas or your own ideas are the most powerful influence on your thinking.

You don't select your values in isolation: the values that others hold powerfully influence what you value and consider important. If many people around you think that being attractive or rich are essential to being loved, you may take such ideas as true without much reflection. But if you carefully cultivate your inner world, you can select your own values. The ideas and values that you hold in your inner world will determine the kind of life that you have. Healthy ideas and values will support a meaningful life; harmful ideas and values can create a hot mess of your life.

A Garden with Different Soils

Garden Metaphor



A garden has different soils

A garden has different areas with different soils and conditions: Some areas of a garden may have rich soil; other areas have weak soil. Some areas have well-drained soil; other areas have soggy soil. The starting characteristics of a garden soil determine what plants it is best suited for.

Poor soil, newly formed from rock recently broken down by lichens, can only support the hardiest of plants. Rich soil, like soil formed by many years of enrichment from decaying plants, can support plants much better and even plants requiring ideal conditions can thrive there.

Different types of soil are better suited to certain types of plants. Clay soils drain poorly and harden like concrete when dry, but some shrubs and fruit trees can thrive in clay. Sandy soils dry out quickly and have few plant nutrients, but carrots, parsnips and potatoes do well in sandy soils. Silty soil is rich in nutrients and holds water very well; many trees and vegetables do well in silty soil. You can put in a great deal of effort but get little produce if you plant your vegetables in soil that is poorly suited to their needs.

A wise gardener understands that different kinds of soil exist in different parts of the garden; a foolish gardener thinks that the soil in every piece of the garden is identical to the soil in other pieces of the garden.

Inner World with Different Capacities

Your Inner World



Your inner garden has different capacities

Your inner garden has different soils: different mental capacities to deal with different aspects of life. Master inner gardeners describe two very different parts of your inner world: your psychological mind and your spiritual mind. Your psychological mind is well-suited for dealing with the material issues of life and for navigating relationships with other people; your spiritual mind is well-suited for discerning spiritual wisdom and forging a spiritual relationship with God.

Your psychological mind has many different capacities within it, such as analytical and poetic capabilities; musical and artistic capabilities; language and visual processing capabilities; social and somatic capabilities. Each capability is suited for doing specific things. Your analytical capabilities are good for filing your taxes and designing a strong building or a healthy diet; your poetical capabilities are good for expressing your love to your partner, parent or child. Imagine the disaster that would result if you used your poetic capabilities to file your taxes or your analytical capabilities to express your love and affection!

Your spiritual capabilities enable you to grasp the personality of God, a capabilities that are distinct from those that enable you to grasp the personality of another person. Imagine how much is lost if you use only your psychological capabilities, and not your spiritual capabilities, to understand God's lovely character!

The Landscape around the Garden

Garden Metaphor



Surrounding Environment

sun and heat

rain

seeds that blow in

Outside the garden vs. inside the garden

The environment outside your garden powerfully affects your garden: the sun that shines on it, the coolness or warmth of the climate, the rain that falls into the garden, the organisms and various seeds that come into your garden from the surrounding environment.

The outside influences on your garden are likely a mixed bag: perhaps your garden has much sun in the summer but receives very little rain then. Perhaps many weed seeds drift in and grow out of control like invasive plants. Some weeds may look very beautiful but are too domineering or toxic. Perhaps your garden needs continual protection against slugs or deer that abound in the surrounding landscape.

Your garden, in this metaphor is within hearing range of other gardens. You can hear what other gardeners are saying: perhaps they are talking about their gardens or just exchanging small talk and gossip. Their ideas will drift into your garden and possibly influence how you think about your own garden: perhaps if they don't think very deeply about their garden, you won't think very deeply about yours either; or perhaps if all of the gardeners within earshot share some misinformed ideas about gardening, you will consider these misinformed ideas to be quite true and they will shape how you take care of your own garden.

The World around You

Your Inner World



Your outer world

your family

social and financial influences

the general zeitgeist

Your outer world is impossible to miss

Your inner world doesn't exist in a vacuum; it is inextricably connected to the outer world: your material circumstances and social connections.

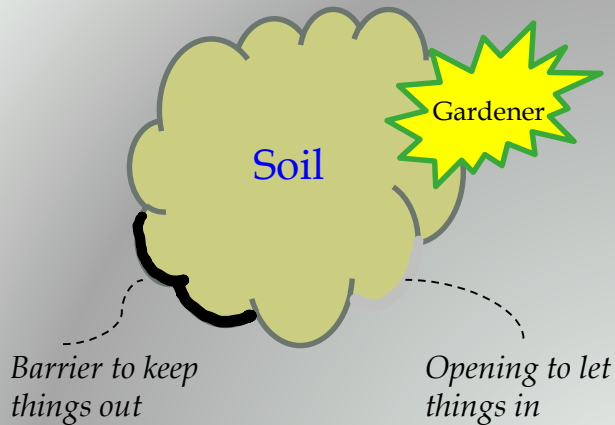
Some aspects of your outer world help you, such as a prevailing peace or economic opportunities for all; other of your outer world hinder you, such as being unable to escape a war zone or access meaningful work.

Some aspects of the outer world are broad and affect many people: whether you have good educational opportunities or not; whether you are included or excluded because of your race, religion, or gender. Some aspects of the outer world are more personal and affect mainly you: the warmth or neglect of your family of origin; your connection – or lack of – with your friends; whether you are poor or financially secure; the quality of your friendships; the impact of bullies; the concern and skill of your teachers and coaches.

You have some, but usually very limited, influence over much of your outer world; your ability to influence your outer world can require extraordinary effort to bring about minor changes. Compared to the outer world, you have far more influence in shaping your inner world. If you use that influence wisely, you can create an inner world that helps you cope better with people and situations in your outer world.

The Garden Fence

Garden Metaphor



The gardener's role: keeping out, letting in

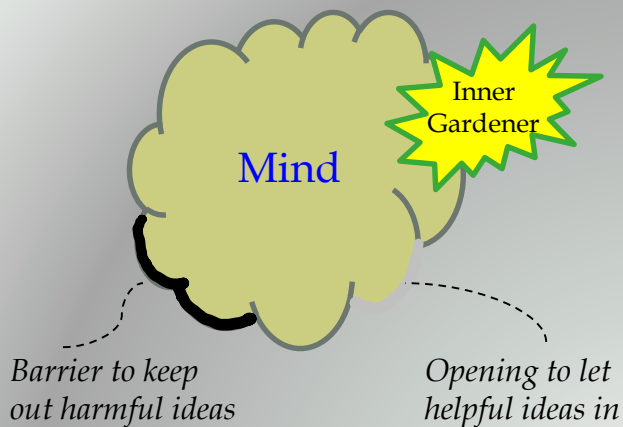
The gardener is not the garden itself nor the surrounding environment. The gardener owns the garden plot and will subsist on whatever the garden produces. The gardener plays a pivotal role in the garden. The gardener can be lazy (do nothing), foolish (work hard but achieve little) or wise (work hard and achieve much). The fruits of the garden will reflect the abilities of the gardener.

The gardener is responsible for keeping out undesired influences, such as weed seeds blow into the garden, slugs that destroy productive plants or birds that take away precious fruits. The gardener has options for keeping out undesired influences, each option with a mix of advantages and disadvantages. For example, herbicides take less effort to keep down weeds but will contaminate your crop; weeding takes more effort but is more selective and less contaminating.

The gardener is responsible for letting in and conserving desired influences. For example, a gardener might build a hoop house to retain heat and warm the soil so that plants that need warmer temperatures can be started earlier and grow better. Or a garden in a climate with dry summers may need to store winter moisture so that the stored water can be later allocated throughout the drier months. Or a gardener may accept some seeds from other gardeners to increase the variety of the garden.

Permeability into your Inner World

Your Inner World



The Inner Gardener's Role: keeping out, letting in

Ideas from the outside world often seem to be clamoring for entrance into your inner world. Some ideas are harmful and can infect your thinking, much as a virus can infect your body; once established, it can be very hard to eradicate their negative influence. Some are helpful ideas that can elevate your thinking, much as essential vitamins help your body function optimally.

Ideas can easily enter your inner world without you even noticing. One of the Inner Gardener's chief roles is to avoid that by patrolling which ideas are let in or excluded. Ideally, the Inner Gardener maintains a permeable boundary around your mind that excludes or minimizes harmful ideas but also admits helpful ideas. But very often the loudest voices with the angriest ideas come quite easily into your mind and take root very strongly. Calmer voices with compassionate ideals may be drowned out by the louder voices and prevent the calmer voices from entering your inner world and taking root in your mind.

A good gardener wisely chooses which plants to grow. A good inner gardener wisely chooses what is most important in life, such as choosing growth over status, connection over dominance or submission. The gardener's values (what the gardener treasures the most) determines what ideas proliferate in the mind and what ideas wither away.

Tending the soil

Garden Metaphor



Gardener's Role: continually enriching the soil

In addition to controlling what comes across the garden fence, the gardener is also responsible for what is within the fence: the quality of the soil. Your starting soil may need supplements if it has too little organic matter; it may need water if there's too little rain; the weeds that come from seeds that drifted uninvited into your garden will need weeding.

Loam is a nearly ideal garden soil with a well-balanced mix of sand, clay and silt that is optimal for many plants and vegetables. But even an ideal loamy soil requires continual care to replenish organic matter or it may need lime to prevent it from becoming too acidic over time.

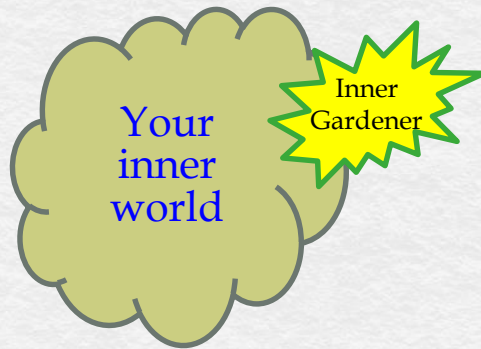
If you work to improve your garden soil each season, it will remain well suited for growing plants year after year. With continual enrichment over time, an originally poor soil that produced minimal crops may become rich enough to produce bumper crops.

If you do little to continually enrich your garden's soil, even initially good soil may become depleted over time, possibly producing less and less each year as the soil loses its fertility because it was not replenished.

The gardener has a great deal of influence – although may not use it – to correct deficiencies of the original state of a garden's soil and to preserve the good qualities of the soil over time.

Cultivating your Inner World

Your Inner World



Inner Gardener's Role: continually enriching your mind

In addition to minding what comes in from the outer world, the Inner Gardener is also responsible for the condition of the mind. Your mind has multiple capacities but they are useless unless they are exercised regularly. Just as you may have great capacity for music or relationships, that capacity will be virtually nonexistent until you exercise it regularly.

Your mind has the capacity to see things in a shallow or a deeper way. For example, if you react angrily in some situations, you might simply dismiss that as the way you are without much thought; or you might recognize the reaction as coming from a victim mentality or an inflated sense of life's harshness; or you may see even deeper into the experiences that formed these views and decide that you want to revise them. The way that you see yourself is determined by your insight and depth of understanding.

Your mind can discern what is true and accurate from what is false and inaccurate; your capacity to discern grows when you use it. You might fool yourself into thinking that you are discerning, but your real level of discernment is revealed by the kind of life you are creating.

Like a garden, your inner world needs cultivation so that your innate capacities can flourish. Unlike a garden, where using the soil can exhaust it, using your inner capacities strengthens, not weakens, them.

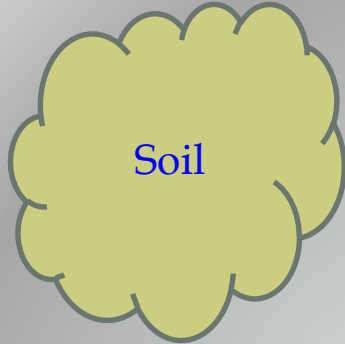
The Master Gardeners

Garden Metaphor

Master Gardener

Wise Advice

Good Seeds



Ordinary Gardeners

Mixed Advice

Gardening wisdom is available

The world outside the garden provides ideas as well as sun and rain; these ideas come from other gardeners.

Some people, master gardeners who have gardened for a long time, have learned much about what works and what is unlikely to work in a garden: what types of soil are better for certain plants, what varieties of vegetables are best suited for a certain soil and climate, and when to plant and harvest. They have not only gardened for many years, they have gardened thoughtfully and have learned from both their mistakes and their successes. Their advice is well worth following.

Other people, ordinary gardeners, may have muddled through their gardening and developed some half-baked ideas about how you should garden in your own garden. Their advice is usually quite mixed: some may be worth following and other parts of their advice may even be harmful. They may have such strong opinions and great confidence that their ideas have the aura of truth even when they are quite erroneous.

Your garden will thrive when you take the advice of master gardeners and disregard the unwise advice of lesser gardeners.

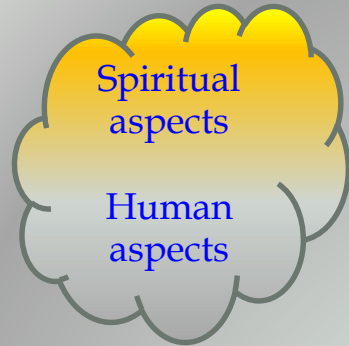
Sages of the Inner World

Your Inner World

Sages

Accurate Inner Map

Good advice



Ordinary People

Mixed advice

Inner life wisdom is available

Through experience and research, psychologists have come to understand much about your human nature: how you develop narratives; how your attachment style affects your relationships; how emotions like anxiety and anger affect you. This understanding helps you change your inner world if you want to.

Through first-hand experience, spiritual sages have come to understand that your inner world also contains spiritual aspects that are more than your human aspects. The spiritual aspects of your inner world are the capabilities that enable you to encounter a Divine Companion, an inner Someone who is profoundly loving and understanding. The more this relationship is cultivated, the closer you draw to your Divine Companion. Through your own first-hand experience, you can grasp your Divine Companion's beautiful character and then decide to whole-heartedly embrace this precious partnership. When embraced, this relationship bears great fruit: you may easily drop some original but limited narratives and see life – yourself and others – in a broader way, with deeper insight, with warmer compassion.

Without your intentional inner exploration, you could miss this spiritual terrain and your Divine Companion; and you might conclude that your inner world consists only of your human aspects.

Garden Formation

Starting Conditions

Each garden starts as an unformed plot with some basic features, such as the soil and the local climate. Plants from the surrounding environment predominate in the garden plot. The starting condition of the garden plot is unlikely to provide you with the variety of food that you need to be healthy. You will need to work to shape the garden to your needs and liking.

Garden Structures

Your garden may need some structures to keep out certain things, such as birds or deer that would eat the food that you want to preserve for yourself. You will need a fence to ensure that you have enough food for yourself.

Your garden may need some structures to keep in other things. If the days are not warm enough for growing certain plants, you may need to build a cold frame or a hoop house to raise the temperature in one area of your garden.

Garden Maintenance

Your garden (*The Garden Of Weedin'*) will certainly need regular weeding to remove the unwanted plants that invade and can so easily dominate your garden. Your garden may also need regular

watering. Some plants may need pruning to be most productive while other plants may need a trellis to support more expansive growth.

Garden Enrichment

Sometimes your garden may get an infusion, perhaps some manure from a nearby farm or grass clippings from your yard. Or you may get heirloom seeds from a neighbor's garden.

Garden Planning

Your balanced diet depends on what plants you grow in your garden. If you plant all of your garden plot in strawberries, you won't have the nutrients supplied by green vegetables and potatoes. If you plant only one kind of herb, the taste of your food will have no variety. If you plant only flowers, your home may look lovely but you may will starve yourself of the nutrition you need (or become very dependent on others).

The status of a garden depends very much on the gardener: whether the current garden is improved over the original plot or whether it has changed very little. A garden can be shaped by the gardener in wise ways or foolish ways; a neglected garden seldom produces enough to sustain the gardener.

Your Formation

Starting Conditions

Each person begins life with some basic tendencies. You were born with a thirst drive to motivate you to seek liquids and a hunger drive to seek nourishment. You were born with curiosity, a desire to learn, and sociability, a desire to connect. These drives may be well balanced or one may predominate.

Inner Structures: Your Narratives

Just as a garden can produce helpful or harmful plants, your inner world can produce helpful or harmful narratives: your ideas about how you should navigate the challenges and opportunities of life. A well-cultivated garden produces food that strengthens you and flowers that beautify your life; a neglected garden can be overcome by noxious weeds and produce few helpful plants. Likewise, a well-cultivated inner world supports helpful ideas for navigating the outer world; a neglected inner world allows harmful ideas to proliferate that lead to personal disasters in the outer world.

Just as a gardener can change what plants grow in a garden, you can also change your narratives by letting go of harmful ideas and embracing helpful ideas. Just as a gardener creates the garden by selecting certain seeds, you can create the life that you want by carefully selecting the ideas and narratives that you nurture.

Inner Maintenance

You accumulate many ideas over the years, some of them helpful and some of them quite harmful. Your inner world will certainly need weeding to remove the unhelpful beliefs and values that can easily invade and dominate your thinking. Helpful but less insistent ideas may need your attention and a regular practice to ensure that they grow stronger.

Inner Enrichment

Sometimes your inner world may get an infusion, such as a new and useful idea. Perhaps a life master offers you some insight into your situation that helps you escape psychological gridlock. Perhaps a spiritual sage opens your eyes to the spiritual possibilities contained within yourself.

Discernment

All of these elements of your inner growth require discernment, the ability to recognize that some ideas are better than others. Discernment is not always easy because some lesser ideas may be much fun in the short term but very harmful in the long run; examples are addictions and abusive relationships which can be very alluring initially before their real nature becomes apparent and then they are often very difficult to abandon.

Your Formation

Inner Planning

Perhaps you have muddled through life up to this point without much planning, subsisting on the narratives you acquired without much consideration or perhaps without any awareness at all. Perhaps you came to value monetary success or social status without really understanding the better values that you have excluded choosing by those lower values.

The quality and meaningfulness of your life depends on the values you adopt: which things you want most, which things you like if they come easily and which things you want to avoid at all costs. If you value material security more than relationships, you may have more than enough for your material needs but be very lonely. If you are very analytical, you may find your world lacking in beauty. Your highest value, what you treasure and desire more than anything else, strongly influences your life.

Much depends on the values that you, the inner gardener, have adopted. Focusing your attention on meaning and kindness enriches your inner world; you will be motivated to grow and be creative. Focusing your attention on often imaginary fears strangles your inner world; focusing on life's evils may motivate you to lash out at others, even innocent people.

Beginning, Middle and End

Your mind had amazing, barely developed, capabilities when you were very young that enabled you to connect with your parents and form an attachment. In an ideal world, your social abilities would blossom in the loving and attentive environment of a healthy family. But in less ideal circumstances, you may have developed an insecure attachment style if your parents were not loving or if you had social-emotional limitations. Your attachment style may remain fixed for the rest of your life if you do nothing about the default style you developed when you were young and had very limited influence. Or you may reflect (see and recognize your tendencies for interacting with other people) and you may decide to revise your attachment style to serve you better in your current adult circumstances in which you have considerably more influence.

You will need several things to revise wisely: 1) a clear insight into who you are and how you came to be this way; 2) a wise set of values; 3) the courage to make a change; 4) the consistency to live in this new way day in and day out. This example of attachment style illustrates how one facet of your inner world can either grow or remain stagnant. You can also revise many other aspects of your inner world.

Your Divine Companion

Spirituality



*The Material World
and your Social Connections*

Spiritual wisdom and companionship is available

Spiritual sages have found that, when they opened their hearts to God, a Divine Companion seemed to arrive in their inner world, a companion who was an affectionate and intimate friend, not an abstract notion about God. Their Divine Companion was a more-than-human part of their inner world, clearly not an alter ego who they conjured on their own.

Their Divine Companion was extremely loving and tender yet not stifling or controlling; was much wiser yet was not pushy or domineering. Quite the opposite, their Divine Companion seemed to follow the choices made by each person. Amazingly, their Divine Companion desired to partner with them as equals in terms of decision making even though their Divine Companion was clearly much more gifted.

It can make sense to keep your inner garden well guarded against the harshness of the outer world. But such guardedness is the opposite of what's needed with your Divine Companion; a strong boundary isn't needed to prevent intrusions because your Divine Companion never enters without your desire for such companionship. Unlike the outer world that warrants a strong boundary, a warm and appreciative welcome is more appropriate for your Divine Companion. Your spiritual hospitality – your willingness to trust and cooperate – allows your Divine Companion to more easily enter your inner world and enrich it.

Key Question

Each person, each inner gardener, faces a key question:

Who will determine your way of inner gardening?

There are usually three answers:

- 1) Default (osmosis of prevailing ideas)
- 2) Deliberate choice (your personal values)
- 3) Divine Partner (inner cooperation)

Your response may be some combination of these answers. Your answer to this question is the central decision each Inner Gardener must make. Even if you haven't recognized or articulated this question, you are answering it every minute of your life with the values you hold and the choices you make.

The first and common answer means that you have simply accepted by default the ideas and guidance of whoever is nearby and influential. If you were told that children (or girls or boys; or women or men) must behave in a certain way in order to be accepted and not be shunned, you may have simply bought into that particular belief system without really considering whether it is the wisest way of living your life. If that is your situation, then your answer to the question "Who determines your way of life?" is: the random people who happened to be present and seed you with their ideas.

The second answer means that, after considering the prevailing ideas and beliefs, you thoughtfully evaluated them and deliberately choose your own values and formed your own narratives that fit with your discernment. If that is your situation, then your answer to the question "Who determines your way of life?" is: you, yourself, have selected what is valuable to you and revised your narratives of how life works.

The third answer means that, after considering the prevailing beliefs and your own thoughts, you welcomed your Divine Companion's infusions and reordered the values that motivate your life and formed a new hybrid narrative that encompasses your human and spiritual aspects. If that is your situation, then your answer to the question "Who determines your way of life?" is: both you and your Divine Companion have partnered to forge a human life which includes spiritual values and aspirations.

Often, you may not answer this question with finality and instead vacillate between several answers; you delay making a finalized answer, a consecrated choice. You may have chosen to cooperate with your Divine Companion at times but your cooperation falters when your ego wants recognition and adulation; you may waffle until you fully lay down your selfish wishes.

Simple Practice

The inner garden metaphor fleshes out the inner world perspective that you have both very human characteristics and you are host to some wonderful spiritual possibilities. Any perspective needs a practice to implement its ideas in your life in concrete ways. The practice described here is meant to suggest a flexible framework, not a rigid format which can't be customized for each individual.

- 1) Notice your inner garden as deeply as possible: the atmosphere of your inner world, the values you hold and the meaningfulness of your life. Write down what you noticed about the core characteristics of your inner world; include what you consider to be true and helpful as well as what seems erroneous and harmful.
- 2) Consider the inner world as mapped by the spiritual sages: that you have a mixed bag of human aspects (strengths and weaknesses) and that a Divine Companion awaits within you. Decide that you are, at the very least, willing to really consider that this inner map is an accurate and true view of yourself which you can validate in your own experience.
- 3) Welcome your Divine Companion into your inner world by cultivating hospitable attitudes and a desire to know your Divine Companion; express appreciation for this wonderful

companionship (praise your Divine Companion's personality, not the blessings you might get from this relationship).

- 4) Deepen your inner dialogue with your Divine Companion (or start that dialogue if you haven't already). Share more: receive as well as speak; be intimate: be more attuned to your companion; trust that your Divine Companion will always treat you well; savor your experiences of deep dialogue with your Divine Companion.
- 5) Patiently look for any inner changes after you do this practice for a while. Has your inner world changed compared to what you noticed in step 1? Patience means allowing enough time for the practice to affect you; and dismissing the allure of magical shortcuts. Be honest about your sincerity in doing this practice: Were you all in? Did you do the practice unselfishly or egotistically?
- 6) Draw a clear conclusion from this practice, this experiment. Did this practice (if done with sincerity and an open heart) validate the core idea that a Divine Companion awaits you in your inner world? If so, solidify your conclusion as something you really trust as true. If not (and you have really considered the core idea and fully done the practice), you may conclude that this map of the inner world doesn't apply to you at this time.

Beauty, Benefit and Benevolence

Spirit

Divine Companion

Spirit

Psyche

*The Material World
and your Social Connections*

Your inner world can be the source of your spiritual beauty

Knowing all parts of your inner world may give you a sense that it is a place of great *beauty*: that you are a person of ever-increasing spiritual beauty; that God has created you with many beautiful attributes, such as the ability to choose your own values and the ability to live a good and meaningful life. Knowing the fullness of your inner world may help you appreciate that you are a beautiful person. Your Divine Companion's presence and desire for you is evidence of your beauty.

Knowing and using all parts of your inner world may *benefit* you by helping you resolve psychological issues that invariably arise living in an imperfect world. You can make some progress in resolving these issues by your own efforts; you may make amazing progress when you combine your efforts with your Divine Companion's infusions.

Cultivating your inner world deepens compassion and enhances your ability to serve others; a more vibrant inner world makes you a more *benevolent* person. Virtually everyone who experienced the inner embrace of their Divine Companion became much more compassionate and caring than they were before. This is the great circle of spiritual beauty: a most beautiful God reaches out and touches you, awakening you to your own beauty; then you reach out to another person and awaken them to how valuable and beautiful they are.

Introduction

This PDF file is an introduction to a longer version that explores these ideas in more detail. The longer version is available at divinecompanion.org/downloads.