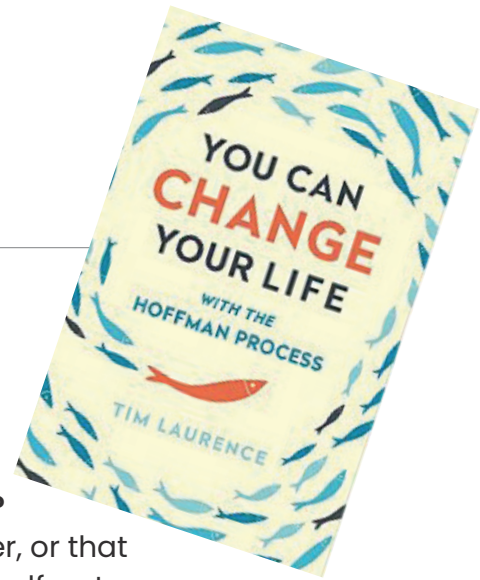


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Patterns: An Introduction

What do you feel are the major problems in your life right now?

Do you feel stuck somewhere, whether in a relationship or career, or that you have no access to certain feelings? Do you experience low self-esteem or feel depressed much of the time? Do you yearn for a deeper spiritual connection, and find it hard to just be? Or is it everything? You would like to trade your life in and get another one, preferably with a larger bank account. Make a mental note of what you feel are your main issues, or write them down so that they become clearer in your mind.

You are learning to confront yourself. Remember that the original meaning of 'confront' is to bring things face to face. You are bringing your own issues right in front of your face – with the purpose of establishing the truth.

How do you feel about how you act in life? Are there behaviours over which you feel you have no control? You get angry at little things. You become uncontrollably sad at times and feel full of despair. You have this self-destructive streak that manages, just as you are on the brink of attaining success, to 'snatch defeat from the jaws of victory'. Perhaps on the other hand you are a perfectionist, so that nothing is ever good enough and you never feel satisfied. Do you have any substances or activities over which you also feel no control? Food, drink, even having to shop or clean or worry compulsively?

Inviting feedback from others

To further up the ante, if you are willing to take the risk, invite other people in your life into an 'awareness circle'. This will be a group of trusted people who together form a loving round-table of honesty. These people do not want to criticise you, but are willing to help you see even more about yourself. Perhaps they have also worked on their issues and are aware of steps they need to take in their own development. Take time over the next few days to talk to people like this who you feel close to – your partner, friends and even children, if they are old enough. Ask them to tell you honestly, and lovingly, what they see in you that could be called a negative behaviour. If it feels safer to you, invite someone skilled in communication to facilitate a meeting between you and the others.

Try just to listen without becoming involved in a discussion about it, and don't put them off by becoming defensive: 'I'm impatient? What about you? Look at how cross you were when I was only five minutes late yesterday!' This exercise may not be easy for you, but it is a marvellous opportunity to start taking down some walls. You may be surprised at the effect it has on opening up some of your relationships. Approach it with the intention of wanting greater awareness and honesty in your life.

Patterns that run our lives

Behaviours that recur again and again we call 'patterns'. Just as with dominant themes that run through the design of a carpet or fabric, you can find dominant patterns that run through your life. They correspond to the over learned and over-practiced neural pathways in your brain. Like the route you always take to work, your mind just takes you there automatically and it's no effort. They may even be so up front that they are all the people around ever see about you. The patterns may have actually become you.

Let's consider some possible patterns that may be running your life. From the list below, choose the patterns that most fit you. Be honest with yourself. They do not have to be ones that you do all the time, but they may have a strong hold on you.

Perfectionist

Quitter

Blamer

Workaholic

Victim

Manipulator

Know-it-all

Seducer

Pessimist

Bossy

Goody-goody

Arrogant

Control freak

Self-righteous

Pleaser

Feeling guilty

Worrier

Fear of success

When you have done that, take time to contemplate the effect of those patterns on your life. When and where do they really kick in? At work or at home? With your lover, with your colleagues, or just with you? You may notice that they have a harmful effect. They arrive as that nagging voice inside your own head that won't let you relax. You become critical of yourself or others and no longer can enjoy yourself. Think of specific situations in your life recently when you have lost your sense of peace or given away your power. If there's been an emotional reaction, there's probably been a pattern acting underneath.

One way to catch a pattern, therefore, is to identify when you feel out of sorts. You get more impatient or frustrated, flustered or upset. You 'lose it' when the 'it' is your normal sense of self. If you can identify and name the pattern, then you are able to see the 'brick in your own wall'. You are no longer blind to the reality. Confronting yourself may not make you feel any better yet, but it's a step you simply have to take to start making changes in your life. If you see it, you can do something about it.

Patterns that run specific areas of our lives

The problem is that patterns or traits become so ingrained in our unconscious that they begin subtly to run the different areas of our lives. The result? We actually **become** them. They have control over us, rather than us having control over them. We forget that we might still have a choice.

A pattern is a reaction that is:

- ... negative
- ... compulsive
- ... automatic
- ... emotionally charged
- ... learned!

This last part is the good news because our brains are very capable of learning and forming new neural pathways. Thanks to this wonderful 'neuroplasticity' we can form a new way of responding to a situation rather than again going down the old way and reacting to one.

Patterns in everyday life

Ready to go to work? Consider how patterns appear in different areas of your life. That way, you see the different bricks rather than one solid wall around you. Remember, this is an exercise to achieve a clearer insight into your life. It's not a mechanism to provide greater criticism of who you are! Patterns are what you do, not who you are.

Love Patterns:

Fear of intimacy
Needy
Dependent
Withdrawn
Abandoning

Sex Patterns:

Believe sex is bad/dirty
Fear of performance
Cold/shut down
Don't deserve pleasure
Sexually provocative

Power Patterns:

Has to have own way
Manipulative
Intimidating
Submissive
Plays victim

Money Patterns:

Fear of poverty
Has to spend to feel OK
Manipulates via money
'Money is everything'

Work Patterns:

Workaholic
Feel trapped
Has to be boss
Fear of success
Fear of failure

Image Patterns:

'Appearance is everything'
Needs to be special
Self-obsessed
Status conscious

Responsibility Patterns:

Indecisive
No goals
Avoids commitment
Acts helpless

Invalidation Patterns:

Perfectionist
Critical
Minimiser
Nit-picker

Next, look at how patterns can dominate your emotional state:

Fear Patterns:

Fear the worst, Fear of being abandoned, Fear of engulfment, Fear of change, Fear of confrontation

Anger Patterns:

Loses temper easily, Revengeful, Argumentative, Sarcastic, Lashes out – physically or verbally

How was that for you? Were you able to 'own' some of them, without feeling worse about yourself? Did you manage to take responsibility for them without beating yourself up? (If you are giving yourself a hard time about them, that's a pattern too!)

Now that you're more aware, what do you do with this extra knowledge?

This is where most of us get stuck and then try to make it liveable. As one dear student of mine put it, 'I dug myself a rut, and then comfortably furnished it.' If we are comfortable, why would we want to look for a way out? What we need to do is to understand how these patterns are harming us or the people around us.

Task for the day

What things about yourself would you most like to change? Is it your impatience, your procrastination or your inability to finish a task? Is it that you have lost faith in yourself or in your partner? Is that you do not feel able to experience many emotions, or that you are a workaholic?

Look back on the list of patterns above if you need some ideas.

- * Be aware of these patterns in your life. Do you feel that they take you over, leaving you no choice to respond to a situation? Spend a day with them, simply observing their effect. Do this until you have convinced yourself that they are worth dumping. Repeat this on another day with some other patterns if you want even more clarity about the difficulties in your life.
- * Keep those feelings of frustration inside of you for now. Yes, sit on them today. It's when you realise that you are frustrated that you get the motivation for that next step towards change, expression. Then, when you let the frustration go, the release of the patterns is much more powerful. As an added benefit, your emotions, intellect and body will all really remember the release and reinforce that change.

When patterns become our roles in life

Is this who I really am?

When patterns take over our lives, all aspects of our being are affected. In terms of the Quadrinity, our spiritual selves are no longer our guiding voice. We are run instead by our emotional and intellectual selves, which have taken on all these patterns. We begin to find it more 'natural' to walk around operating behind a mask of patterns.

We grow up and that mask of patterns becomes so entrenched that we forget we have what lies underneath – an essence or spiritual self. We adopt roles to cope with the world. We even come to believe that our roles in life are who we really are.

When one pattern takes over a large part of your life, it becomes your main role. Can you see this yourself? Think of the main role you play out in life. Do you get labelled, for example, the oversensitive one, the authoritarian, the problem, the wild one, the charmer, the boss, the crazy one? Do you get trusted with all the difficult jobs – the strong one, perhaps? Or does everyone beat a path to your door when they have problems: you get to play therapist. The point is that it's worth seeing and dealing with if it's getting in the way of who you really are.

Who do you ask if you are not sure what role you play in life?

Just as you did in the feedback exercise to expand your 'awareness circle' set yourself a new challenge and ask the people close to you in your life, and then your work colleagues. You may even have two opposing roles, one at home and the other at work; for example, complainer and motivator.

Here are some of the perennial favourites. Which ones most fit you?

Special One	Rebel	Entertainer
Black Sheep	Genius	Fighter
Perfect One	Lazy One	Damaged Goods
The Sensitive One	Troublemaker	Peacemaker
Star	Baby	Victim
Dreamer	Loser	Scapegoat
Sick One	Needy One	Complainer
Misfit	Angry One	Rescuer
Wild One	Disappointment	Teacher
Spoilt One	Invisible One	Goody Goody

As a way of loosening their grip on you, think of where you might have started playing these roles. You may have evolved and become more subtle over the years, but I bet you began way back when you were a child. First, think of your position in the birth order. If you were the eldest child, you may have been given the responsibility of taking care of others, and now this feels completely natural to you. You just expect to have to take care of other people and the details in their lives. Meanwhile, other people expect you to be responsible, which allows them to forget things and drives you crazy. If you were the youngest child, on the other hand, you may have always been looked after so that you never needed to take responsibility. Someone will always be there to pick up the pieces. The role of the youngest child may be 'Special' or 'Princess', which is fine until they leave the family for the real world. Do you know anyone who acts like that all the time?

I learned to get attention by being clever. I could come home from school and show my mother or father my work with the teacher's comments on it, and receive their praise. Aha! I thought, this is how I can make them spend more time with me. I'll become the best in the school. And I did. I routinely got the highest grades and became teacher's pet. I don't recommend it, though, as a way of being voted most popular among your peer group. As you can imagine, I lost out on friends. Being the clever one became my firm role throughout my school and university career. I then took this into my work life and immediately got frustrated. How come I have to take orders from others? How come they are so much slower on the uptake than I am? Again, I wasn't winning any popularity contests, nor long-term employment contracts.

So patterns can become the roles we play again and again. They become **automatic**, **compulsive**, and very hard to step out of.

The romance of the rebel

Sometimes we believe we are being different, when actually we are just acting out patterns. Again, it's not a choice, but a reaction.

A great friend of mine called Janey grew up as the third of four children with a school principal as a father. She even attended his school. He was a stern disciplinarian and expected his children to obey all the rules. Janey's brothers and sisters did exactly that, which left her with an interesting choice. Her emotional self as a child started thinking, 'If I want more attention in this family, I won't get it by being good. So I'll act out and then I'll get to spend some time with Dad.' She became the black sheep of the family, routinely being invited into his study to spend some 'quality time' with him, which meant, of course, being told off.

When she grew up, Janey put her energy into writing. Her passion for life was unbounded by the normal constraints of society and she established a good reputation for wonderfully original screenplays. However there was a downside. Her internal radar was so attuned to rules, and she was so vigorously opposed to accepting them, that even helpful suggestions became orders from above. Producers and other writers simply could not work with her and she developed a reputation for being difficult. Being the black sheep was no longer serving her. Her work dried up. With no money coming in, she had a very practical motivation to change, and change she did. Bit by bit, she came to understand how she operated. She really worked on the subconscious pattern of rebellion and made a commitment to replace it with new, positive behaviour. She regained her reputation, but with a big difference. She was motivated by an internal creative spirit, not by wanting to break the rules and be different.

Completing the first step of the process

If we live in a role or hard-set pattern all the time, it no longer helps us. Instead it becomes our prison. We have to get in touch with how fed up we are in order to drive our bid to break out of that prison.

The way out starts with having a good look at the reality we live in. By doing this, we identify the individual bricks in the walls around us. This 'Awareness without compromise' is a great catalyst, for it makes it impossible to continue to act blindly in the same old ways. So now that you have identified the roles you play and the patterns that run through your life, you have completed the first major step of the process. You may already be experiencing far greater clarity and resolve in your life.

Now you know what it is you have to fight **against**. You are ready to look at what you want to fight **for**.