

# Empathy for the Roots of Rage: Time, Anger and the Brain

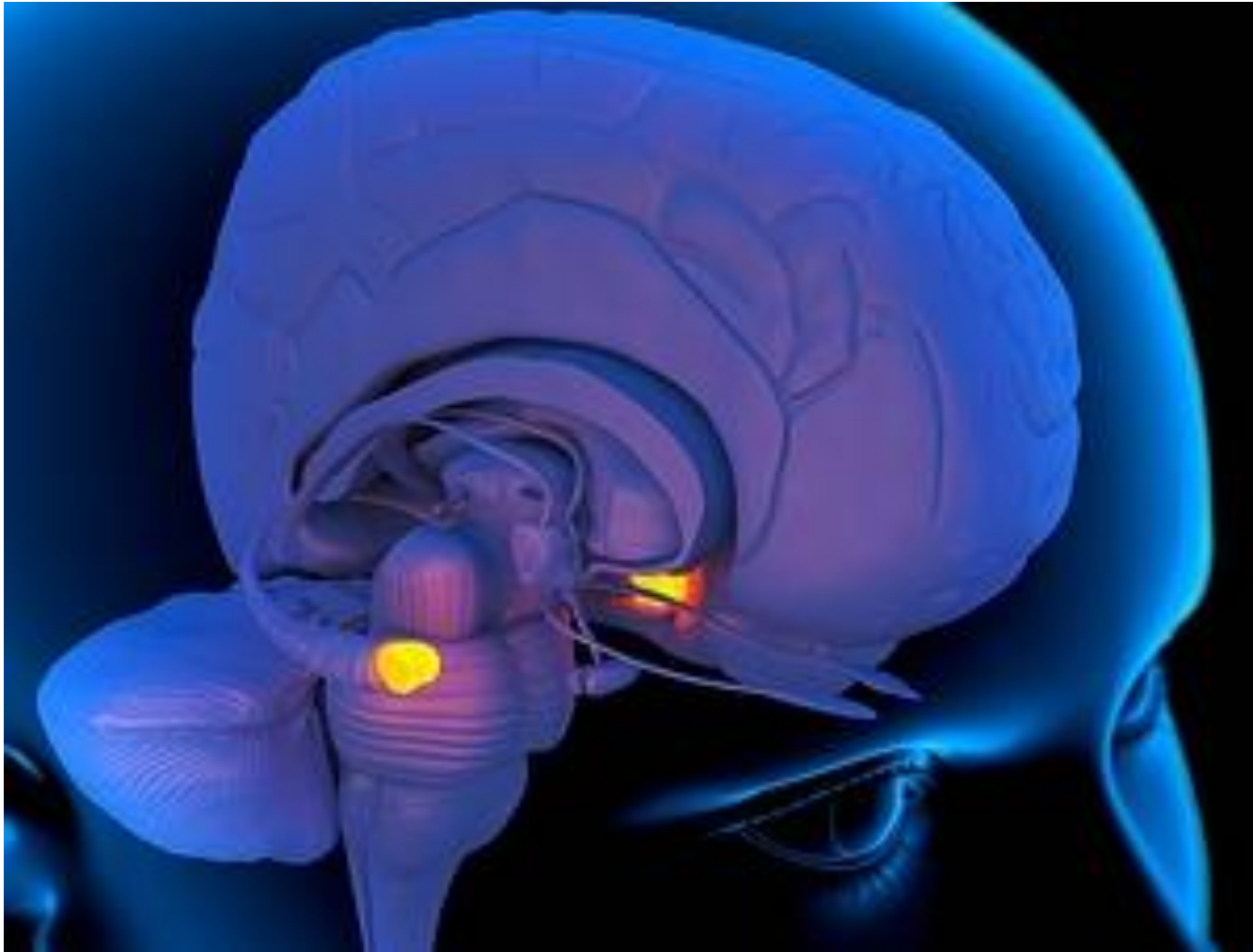
Presented by Sarah Peyton

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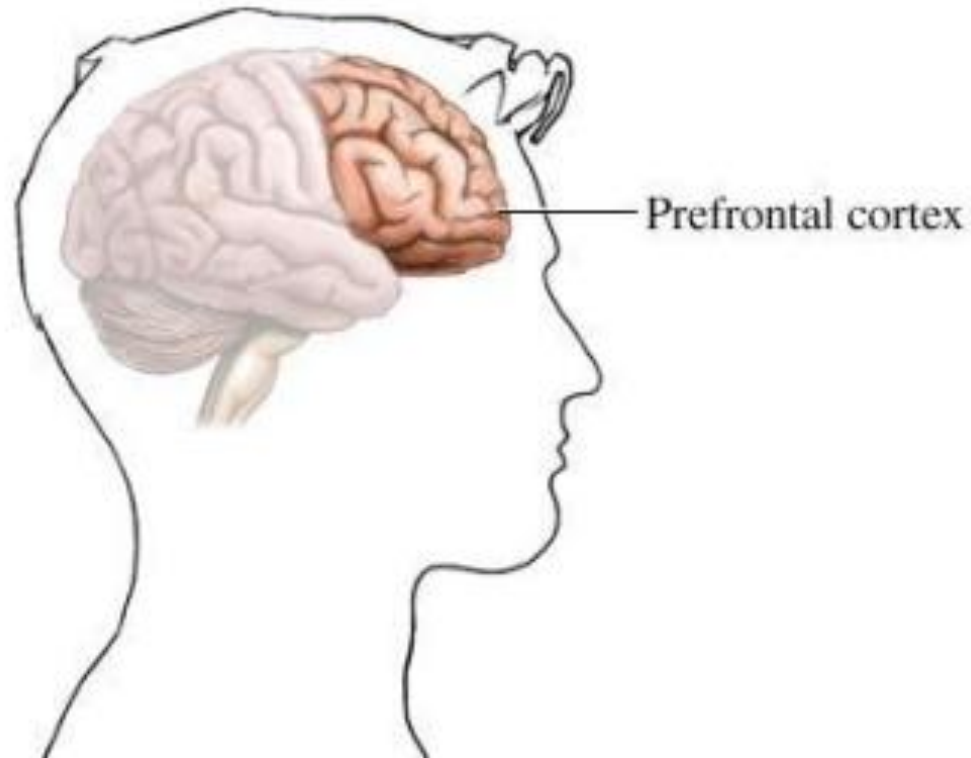
What happens when we are angry?



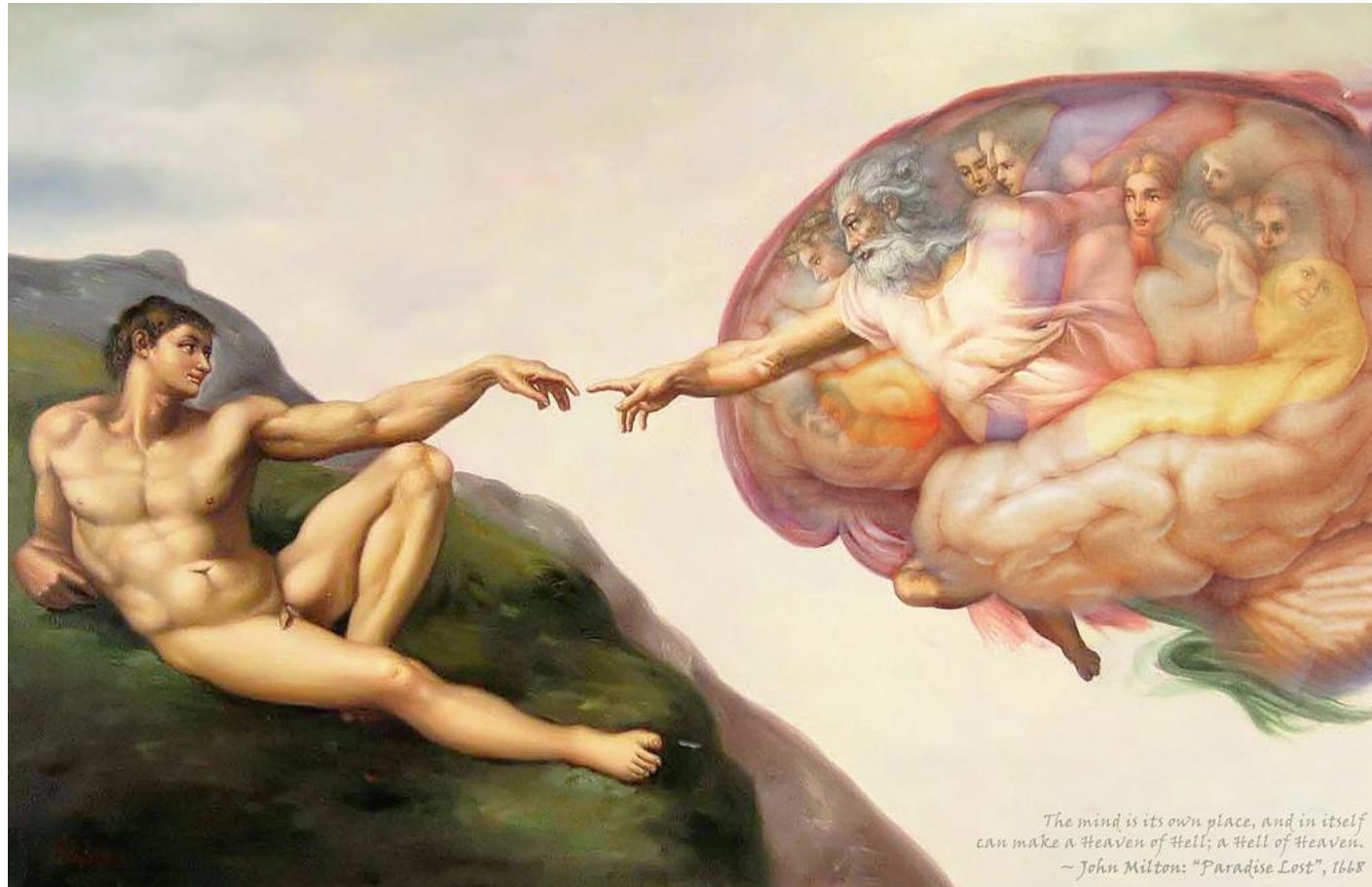
Depending on the amount of anger we feel, our amygdalae start to seize our brain's available fuel



Even to the point of disabling our  
anger control center, our PFC



Not only does our PFC manage our anger, it is also the NVC part of our brain



*The mind is its own place, and in itself  
can make a Heaven of Hell; a Hell of Heaven.  
~ John Milton: "Paradise Lost", 1668*

MIDDLE PREFRONTAL CORTEX



LIMBIC REGIONS:  
HIPPOCAMPUS  
AMYGDALA

Place your thumb in the middle of your palm as in this figure.

CEREBRAL CORTEX



MIDDLE PART OF THE PREFRONTAL CORTEX

BRAIN STEM  
SPINAL CORD

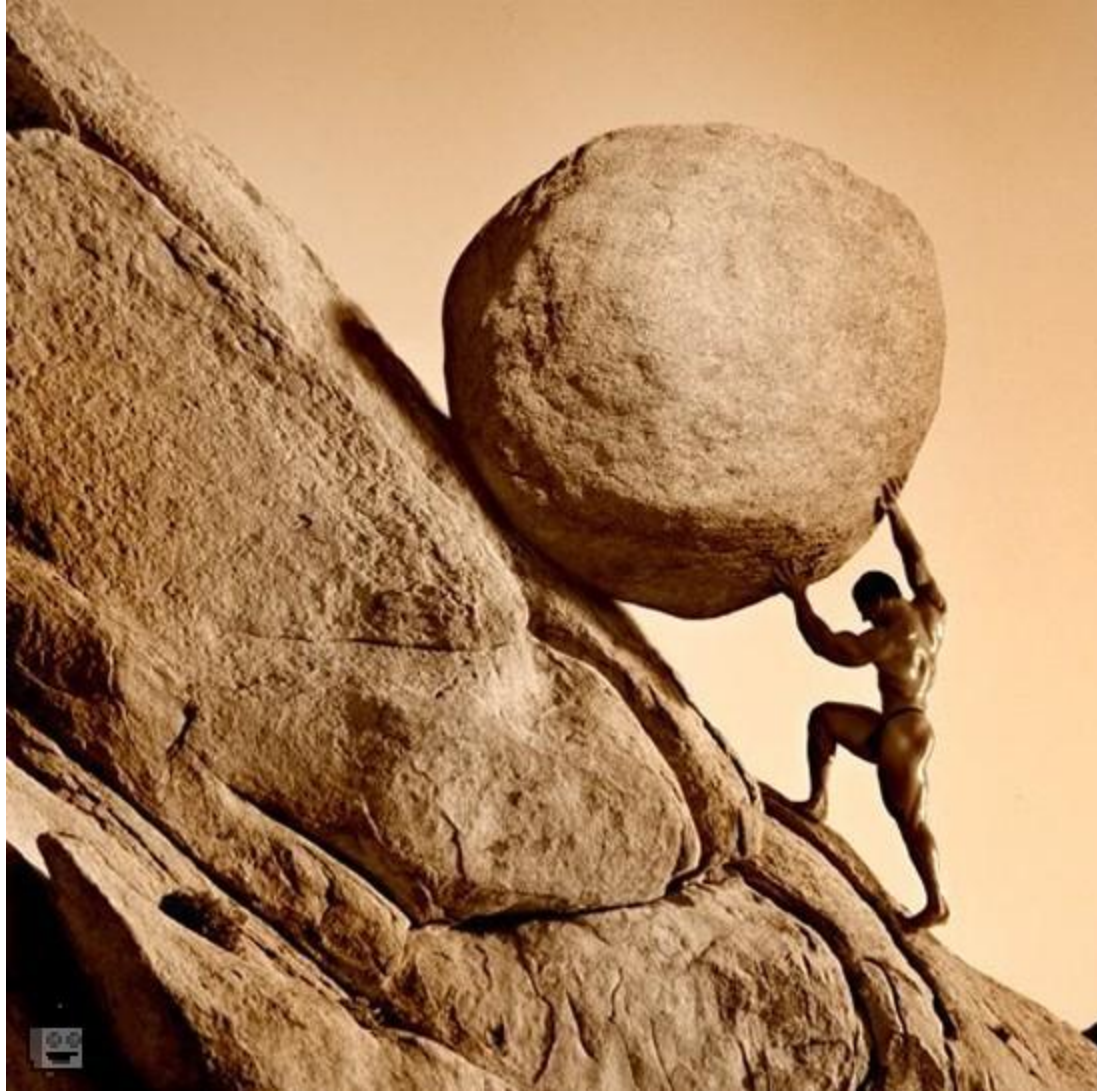
Now fold your fingers over your thumb as the cortex is folded over the limbic areas of the brain.

This makes our question for today:

"How do I better practice  
compassionate  
communication when I  
am highly charged with  
anger?"



# A little tricky...





# This answer has three parts:

- Expanding our window of tolerance for anger and emotional intensity
- **Clearing the minefield of the past of moments when our system knew or believed we were in danger**
- Increasing the power and resonant precision of our compassionate self-witness

# Our Compassionate Self-Witness



# The Importance of Matching Resonance



In trauma, we lose our Hippocampi:  
the brain's search engine and time-  
stamp.

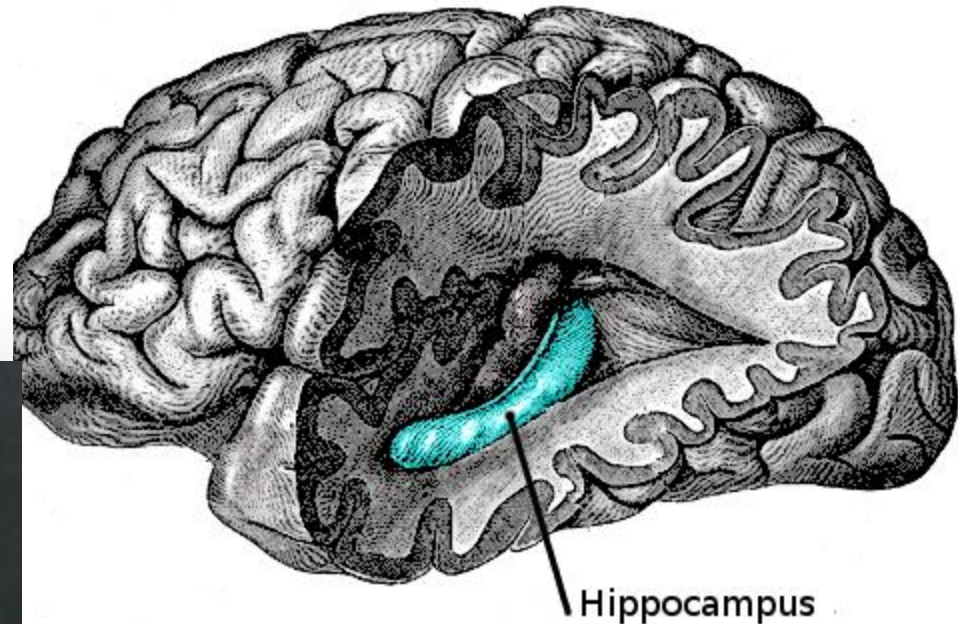
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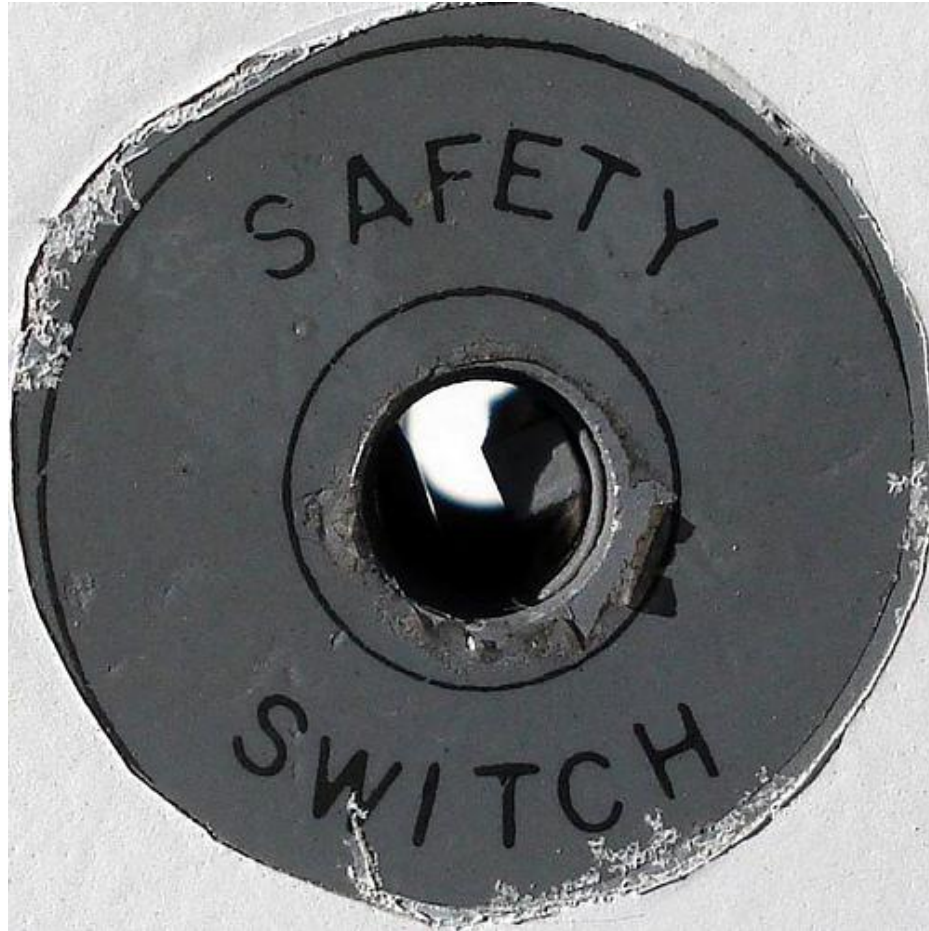


When we believe we're in danger





The Amygdala grabs the brain's energy and shuts down the Hippocampus to survive.





Memories of such events have no time-stamp  
and exist in the “Ever-Present Now”



# How Anger Lives On In Us (vastly oversimplified)

- Amygdala is running the show
- Hippocampus shut down by flow of cortisol
- Memories can't be stored in a way that is fully consciously accessible
- Trauma is unprocessed, uncontextualized memory
- Part of healing involves moving memory from amygdala storage to hippocampal storage

# Time Travelling Empathy



# Appendices

(An IPNB bibliography and a bit about somatically based empathy)

# Bibliography 1.

- **BOOKS ON THE BRAIN:**

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- [The Neurobiology of "We": How Relationships, the Mind, and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are \(Sounds True Audio Learning Course\)](#) by Daniel J. Siegel (Audio CD - May 1, 2008)

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- [The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment And the Developing Social Brain](#) by Louis Cozolino (Hardcover - Nov 17, 2006)

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- [The Mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-Being](#) by Daniel J. Siegel (Hardcover - April 1, 2007)

# Bibliography 2.

- [The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are](#) by Daniel J. Siegel (Paperback - Oct 22, 2001)
- [The Mind and the Brain: Neuroplasticity and the Power of Mental Force](#) by Jeffrey M. Schwartz and Sharon Begley (Paperback - Oct 14, 2003)
- [Being a Brain-Wise Therapist: A Practical Guide to Interpersonal Neurobiology \(Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology\)](#) by Bonnie Badenoch (Paperback - Jul 17, 2008)
- **BRAIN RESEARCH:**
- Matthew Lieberman: <http://www.scn.ucla.edu/papers.html>



# Reviewing the Use of NVC Empathy for Neuroplastic Change and Healing of Boundary Issues

- Observation
- Feeling
- Need
- Request

# Observation



Step 1: What is your observation?

**What is the starting point for your empathy?**

*(What was the worst moment? Can you describe what happened dispassionately, as if you were giving directions to an actor?)*

# Feelings



## Step 2: Finding your Feelings

- In order to take advantage of our brain's capacity for neuroplasticity, our emotions need to be alive without flooding us.
- In addition, the initial read of our physical experience gives us a benchmark that lets us know if the needs guesses are landing.

# Help with Finding Your Feelings

*If your experience is alive, and you have access to your body sensations, you will be feeling things happening in your body when you think of your observation. What emotions are connected with these body sensations?*

*If you know you feel your body, but nothing is happening when you think of your observation, you are not neuroplastic, you are either flooded, and may need empathy to even reach a solid observation, or to come out of freeze; or you need an observation that packs more of a punch.*

*If you do not have access to your body sensations, list your judgments of this person and relationship, i.e. “He should...,” “She shouldn’t...,” “If only I...,” etc. Make some guesses as to what emotions are alive in these judgments.*



# Needs



# Step 3. Making Needs Guesses

- What are the deep values and longings that lie behind your feelings? What depths of meaning motivate your sense of needs met or unmet as reflected in your emotions?
- When you identify the truest need, the need that makes your body relax, allow yourself to sink into the living energy of that need, and let it radiate through your body and being.

# Help with Needs Guesses

- Make sure we've moved out of Strategy into pure Needs by checking our Need as follows: "If everyone else in the world met my need for..., but Jack (insert your friend's name here) couldn't and never would, would my need be met?" If your answer is no, you haven't yet reached the gold, the transforming Need.\*
- \*thank you to Conal Elliott for this process

# Requests



# Step 4. Making Requests

- Now that you have identified the deepest need, and allowed it to resonate within you, do you have any requests of yourself or others?
- If you are making a request of another, have you checked to make sure their feelings and needs are also known to you before making a strategy request?

# Help with Requests

- If you can't hear a "no," in response, you have not made a request, you have made a demand. You may need more empathy support before you can enter a shared power relationship.