



# TOWARDS A BIG, BRIGHT DARK

---

**Practices for resilient response(s)  
in times of uncertainty (pandemic,  
climate change, you get the idea...)**





# **WELCOME. HERE WE ARE.**

**This workbook is intended as a resource to all of us who are looking to navigate these time(s) of uncertainty with our whole selves and with our communities, both old and new.**

May the following frameworks and reflections be supportive to you and your people.

## OFFERINGS, NOT ANSWERS

Dear Friend,

The content in this workbook is shaped by elements and grown from seeds that have found me and that I have sought out in more than 15 years of thinking, learning, reading, coaching, facilitating and navigating. A list of some of these seeds and encounters are included in the following pages. I am deeply grateful to them all.

I do not presume that the cosmologies or perspectives in these pages will be relevant or resonant for all. I look forward to learning together about what is and is not supportive.

On each page is something that I have found illuminating or helpful in my own experience. The concepts will likely change shape and texture, as all living things grow and evolve, over time.

There is much more that could have been said and I look forward to hearing what this sparks in you or what you would add or change.

I wish we were meeting under different circumstances. But I'm glad to be with you.

Olive Dempsey  
[olivedempsey.ca](http://olivedempsey.ca)  
[bigbrightdark.org](http://bigbrightdark.org)



# HOW YOU MIGHT WORK WITH THIS RESOURCE

## **SPONTANEOUSLY, AS YOU NEED**

Start at the end or the beginning. Listen to what you need. It may be different later today or tomorrow. If it offers something of value, dig deeper. Return to activities as often as you need.

Dig in for an hour, connect for 5 minutes. Take your time.

## **AS A CONSISTENT PRACTICE**

Find a regular (daily or weekly) practice. You may choose one reflection at a time, or work through all of them in sequence.

Consider cycling through the same reflection each day for a week or more. Or choose two or three to work with over a period of time.

## **IN COMMUNITY OR IN SOLITUDE**

Work with these activities on your own as prompts for journaling or other forms of contemplation. Or perhaps you will connect with others in shared practice and reflection.

## **WITH COMPASSION, CURIOSITY AND ATTUNEMENT**

You might begin any activity with a simple grounding or centering practice. This could include:

- Breathing in to the count of three and out to the count of six;
- Looking around the room and naming 6 colours that you see;
- Scanning your body and noting sensations, starting with your feet and moving up towards your head.

In each activity, allow your first impulses and responses to be the ones you express or write down. Hold them with curiosity. And let go the voice(s) of judgement or criticism.

Attune to the the right moment(s) for further sense-making, analysis and action.



# HOW THIS RESOURCE IS ORGANIZED

**Each activity or practice is oriented around one or more of these intentions\*:**

Safety / Centering

Gratitude / Grief/ Connection

Authentic Action / Going Forth

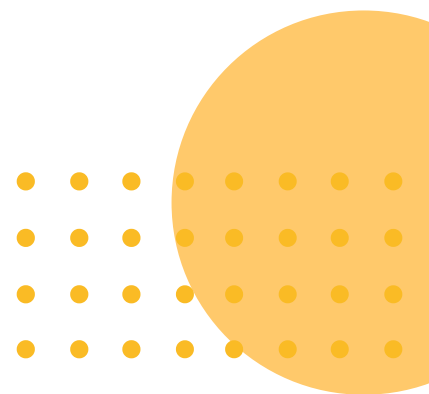
Together, they aim to support our emotional and nervous system regulation so that we are:

- More able to embrace and work skillfully with the various feeling states that arise in us;
- Deepen connection with our unique wisdom and that of our wider-self;
- Take action that nurtures generative and life-affirming patterns in ourselves and our communities.

None of these practices fit neatly into any one category. One is not 'better' than another. Gratitude may move you into action and action may draw you into deep grief and grief may pull you into a deep place of connection.

We need them all. Each aspect of our experience is valid and helps nurture our resilience in this time.

\* With thanks to Erica Crawford for helping me to weave these concepts, from Somatic Experiencing into those of the Work that Reconnects. And to Jackie Larkin and Maggie Ziegler for first mentoring me in these practices.



# SEEDS AND ENCOUNTERS THAT GREW THESE PRACTICES

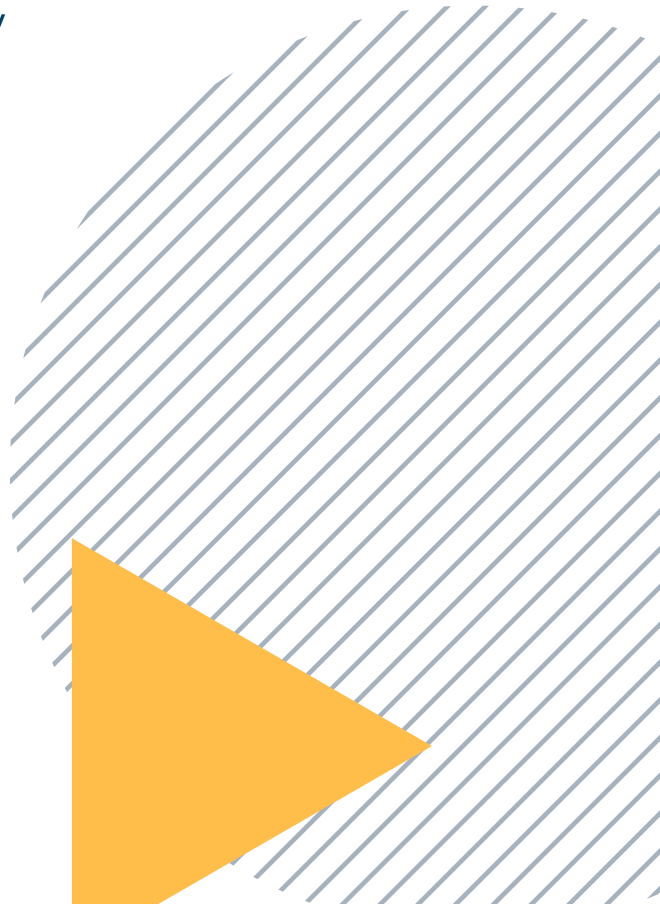
The root frameworks for these practices found me primarily through teachings in:

The Work that Reconnects  
Human Systems Dynamics  
Somatic Therapy  
Co-Active Coaching

Of course there are many books, articles, workshops and more (too numerous to list here) that have influenced my thinking. This is an incomplete list, but offered as a sampling of places and spaces that have informed this work.

Books and websites such as:

- Braiding Sweetgrass - Robin Wall Kimmerer
- [Climatepsychologyalliance.org](http://Climatepsychologyalliance.org)
- Dancing on our Turtle's Back - Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
- Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth/Healing the Mind - Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, Allen D. Kanner
- Emergent Strategy - Adrienne Maree Brown
- The Great Derangement - Amitav Ghosh
- Mourning Nature - Ashlee Cunsolo and Karen Landman
- Navigating the Tides of Change - David La Chapelle
- World as Lover, World as Self - Joanna Macy





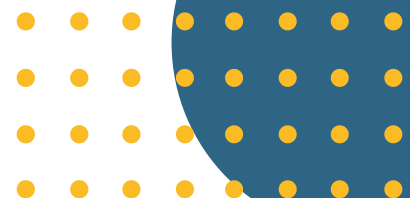
# LOCATIONS & COMMITMENTS

I write this from the location of a settler with white privilege, living on the unceded territory of the Musqueam, Tseil-Waututh and Squamish people . I write this as someone whose ancestors, as Jews, left places in which they were not welcome. I write this as someone, whose ancestors made an uneasy 'home' on land that was not theirs, on land that was forcibly taken from those who stewarded and belonged to that place for millenia.

In my own sensing journey I work actively to respond to the imperative for decolonizing and for unsettling our inner and outer worlds. I hope to weave connection between these processes and our relationship(s) with Earth and all of Life.

The elements of this workbook bear the mark of these perspectives. They are necessarily 'incomplete.' But maybe they are doors or windows or pathways.

**I look forward to hearing what it is like for you, to hearing your feedback about how this work can and needs to evolve.**





# RIGHT NOW

FREE WRITING,  
PROMPT FOR SHARING IN A GROUP  
OR ONE-ON-ONE

I am **grateful** for...

A loss or **grief** I want to honour is...

A **connection** I feel is...

Because of this, I **recommit** to...

## INVITATIONS & INSPIRATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE


Please do all of these together. Consider exploring them in the order they are written. They are meant to support a rounding of experience. Please cycle through these reflections as many times as you are called to. What do you notice as this happens?

GRATITUDE/GRIEF; CENTERING; GOING FORTH

🕒 5-20 MINS







# WHEN I OPEN MY HEART TO...

FREE WRITING,  
ONE-ON-ONE SHARING/ WITNESSING

When I open my heart to joy what I find is...

When I listen to my sadness what I hear is...

When connect to grief, what I notice is...

When I connect to my centre, what I encounter is...

## INVITATIONS & INSPIRATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

This practice brings together the heart-expanding aspects of gratitude and grieving, with the grounding of returning to your centre. By honouring these experiences, we might release some of the energy we were using to 'manage' away our painful feelings.

Write without your hand leaving the page. Return to the prompt and begin again, as needed. Allow what wants to emerge, releasing the voice of assessment or analysis.

GRATITUDE/GRIEF; CENTERING; GOING FORTH

🕒 5-20 MINS





# WHAT I SEE...

FREE WRITING  
PROMPT FOR SHARING IN A GROUP  
OR ONE-ON-ONE

What I am seeing (in my community, in the wider world, in my own heart) that is really good is...

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

Consider responding to this question at the smallest scale you can see, taking just 10 seconds (a healthy bee is gathering pollen in my garden). Consider it at the largest scale you can imagine (millions of people are demonstrating in climate strikes). Explore it at any scale in between or beyond.

GRATITUDE; CENTERING

🕒 5-20 MINS





# LIFE & ITS MANY EXPRESSIONS

SILENT CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE  
JOURNALING/FREE WRITING

Ladybug.  
Rain.  
Tuft of grass.  
Wind.  
Moss.  
Yellow leaf.

What do you **see/experience/sense of life** in its many expressions in this moment?

What happens when you stay with one of them?  
And listen? What tiny detail(s) or big energies do you love about this life expression? What do they teach you?

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

This can be explored in any time frame; in a moment, as you wait to cross the street, as a pause while standing in your kitchen, as an hour-long contemplative experience in the forest, or something else entirely. What happens when you atune to the life breathing around you? To the breath breathing you? Who are you? What resourcing does it bring?

GRATITUDE; CENTERING

🕒 5-20 MINS





# YOUR CENTRE & YOUR EDGES.

PART ONE

JOURNALING; COLLECTIVE VISUALIZATION



WHAT IS STABLE &  
KNOWN TO ME..

WHAT I WONDER OR  
FEELS LESS CERTAIN...

WHAT I CAN'T CONTROL  
& IS UNKNOWN TO ME...

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

This practice is built on two parts. **Please complete Parts One and Two.**

In times when we feel overwhelmed or incapacitated by the waves of uncertainties around us, this resource can be a way to centre ourselves and see where we might respond, take action or find connection. It's important to reflect on these questions together and complete both Parts One and Two.

**Part one:** Respond to the prompts in each circle in Part One. Begin at either the centre (what is stable and known) or the outer edge (What is less stable or known). Consider the scale of your reflection. You do not need to list all that you can't control or all that is known. What is the right scale, at this moment, for you to reflect on?

**CENTERING & SENSE MAKING; GOING FORTH**

🕒 10-60 MINS





# YOUR CENTRE & YOUR EDGES.

PART TWO

JOURNALING; COLLECTIVE VISUALIZING



I CAN NURTURE  
THIS STABILITY BY:

I CAN DEEPEN MY  
UNDERSTANDING  
BY:

I CAN LET GO OF THIS  
BY CONNECTING TO:

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

**Part two:** Just as you did with part one, take some time to reflect on the prompts in each circle. Consider focusing on just one or two aspects of your experience, or make a long list of all that nurtures stability, or all that you might work to understand more deeply.

Allow yourself to be steadied by the responses in the stability circle, to be curious about what arises in the place of wonder and to release the unknown in the last circle.

CENTERING & SENSE MAKING; GOING FORTH

🕒 10-60 MINS



# DANCE WITH OUR TENSIONS

## PART ONE

### SOLO REFLECTIVE WRITING PRACTICE, COLLECTIVE VISUALIZING

INDIVIDUAL  
ACTION



COLLECTIVE  
RESPONSE

ACCEPTANCE  
& GRIEF



POSSIBILITY  
& ACTION

ATTENTIVE TO  
SELF CARE



RESPONSIVE  
TO THE WORLD

URGENCY



EVENLY-PACED

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

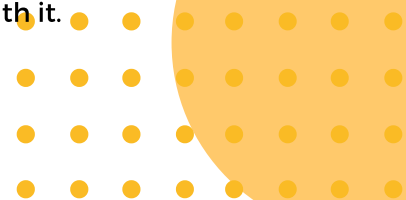
This practice is built on two parts. **Please complete Parts One and Two.**

**Part One:** This list reflects and example of some of the tensions or energies you might experience that are leaving you feeling stuck or spinning in circles. It may feel as if they pull in opposing directions, as if you have to choose one or the other. Choose one or two that feel most alive to you or identify and explore unique tensions of your own that aren't listed here.

What shifts when we see each of them, not in competition with one another, but in dynamic balance? Each side has a truth and a wisdom. Each side can be over-emphasized and pull us off balance. The questions in Part Two help you identify the right balance for you in this moment and how you might work with it.

CENTERING & SENSE MAKING

🕒 10-45 MINS





# DANCE WITH OUR TENSIONS

PART TWO

SOLO REFLECTIVE WRITING PRACTICE,  
COLLECTIVE VISUALIZING

Which of these tensions feels most alive for me at this moment? This week? This month?

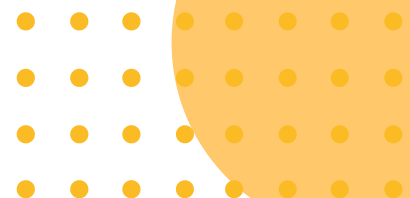
Which end of the spectrum have I been emphasizing?  
What is that like for me? What feels out of balance?

What wisdom from each end of the spectrum will I draw on?  
Which balance is right for me at this time?

What will I do to bring myself into a balance that feels good for right now?

CENTERING & SENSE MAKING

🕒 10-45 MINS



# CIRCLES OF ACTION & CONNECTION

## ON THE NEXT PAGE:

**1) Choose an area of uncertainty or complexity you want to explore.**

**2) Name or draw your circles of connection.** These are the spaces (physical, geographical, relational, etc...) with which you are embedded in some way. Some ideas include: Community(ies); Family (chosen or born into), Work (paid or volunteer), Geograph(ies), Access Points of Power & Privilege, and More (be creative!)

**3) After listing them, choose one or more that call your attention.**

**4) For each circle, you might explore questions such as...**

- What is happening in this space right now?
- What do I wish was different?
- What do I want to be a part of?
- What do I want to influence?
- What is my hope for this circle?
- What role do I play currently?
- What role do I feel called to play?
- What are the relationships among the circles?

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

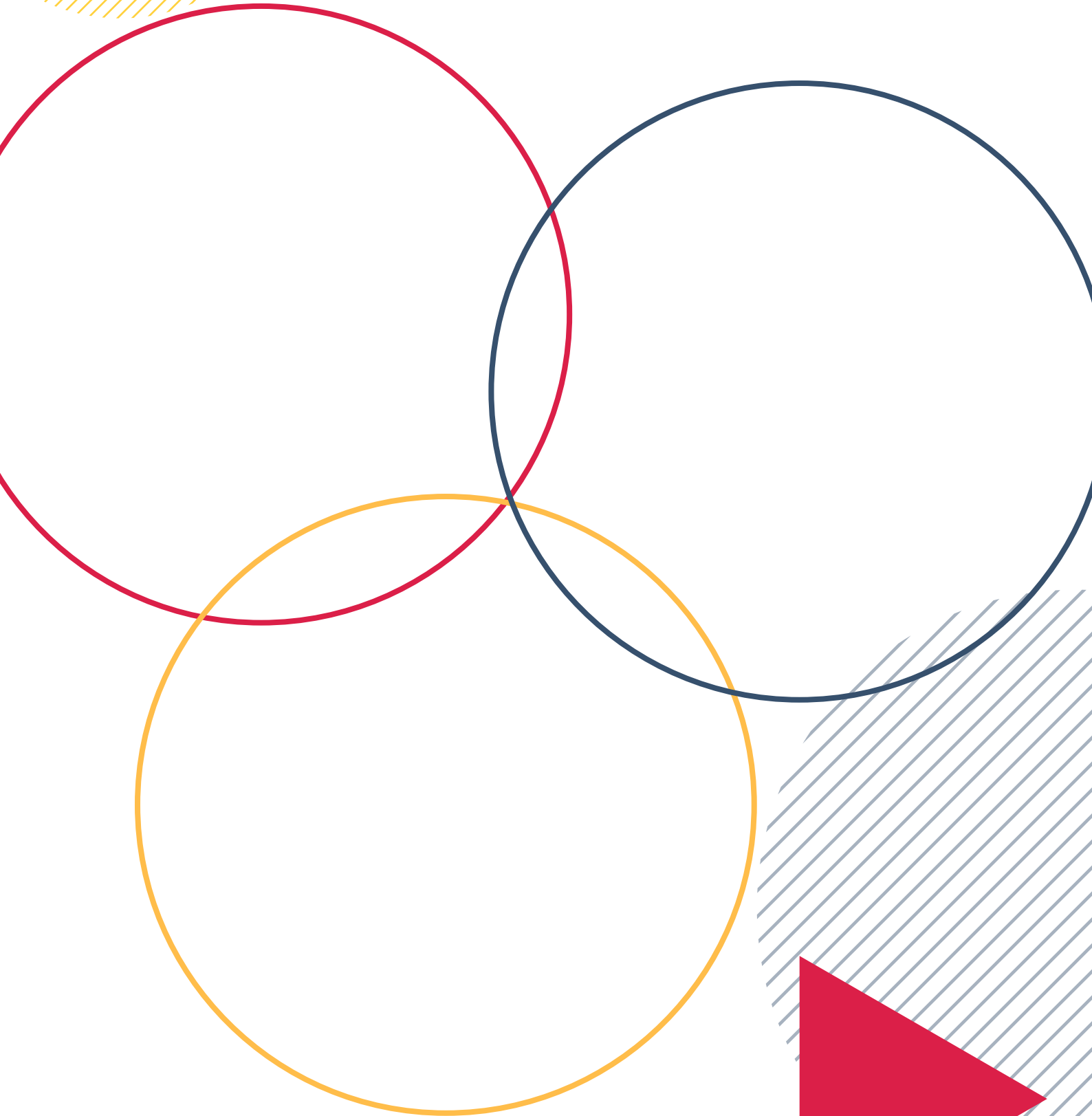
In times of uncertainty, it can be easy to lose sight of the places where we do have power, privilege and agency. It may be supportive to consider the circles or containers in which we live and act. How are these both sources of connection and places in which we can act and respond? How do they weave a web of relationship(s) that hold us and are shaped by us? What is our response as active agents in these systems?

**ACTION/GOING FORTH**

**🕒 10-45 MINS**



# CIRCLES OF ACTION & CONNECTION



ACTION/GOING FORTH

🕒 10-45 MINS



# RESPONSE.

FREE WRITING,  
PROMPT FOR SHARING IN A GROUP  
OR ONE-ON-ONE

What is ripe for action now?

What calls for my attention?

What surprises me?

What am I pretending not to know?

How am I being changed by this time?

What am I releasing?

A risk I can take is...

The time is right for...

A resource I can draw on is...

I will support my next wise action by...

I act with intention to...

## INVITATIONS FOR THIS PRACTICE

Work through these questions in sequence, or choose one or two that draw your attention and dig deep. Allow yourself to write without letting your hand leave the page? Set a timer for 5 minutes (or longer) and pause only when it ends. Review your reflections and notice what stands out to you. What will you do now?

**ACTION/GOING FORTH**

🕒 5-10 MINS





# IN GRATITUDE & ONGOING COLLABORATION.

If you would like to share or build on these activities, please do so with attribution. This draft will have many iterations. Contact [olive@olivedempsey.ca](mailto:olive@olivedempsey.ca) with ideas, reflections and insights.

[OliveDempsey.ca](http://OliveDempsey.ca)

[Bigbrightdark.org](http://Bigbrightdark.org)

Graphic Design: Krisztina Kun, KunStudios

