

Greetings!

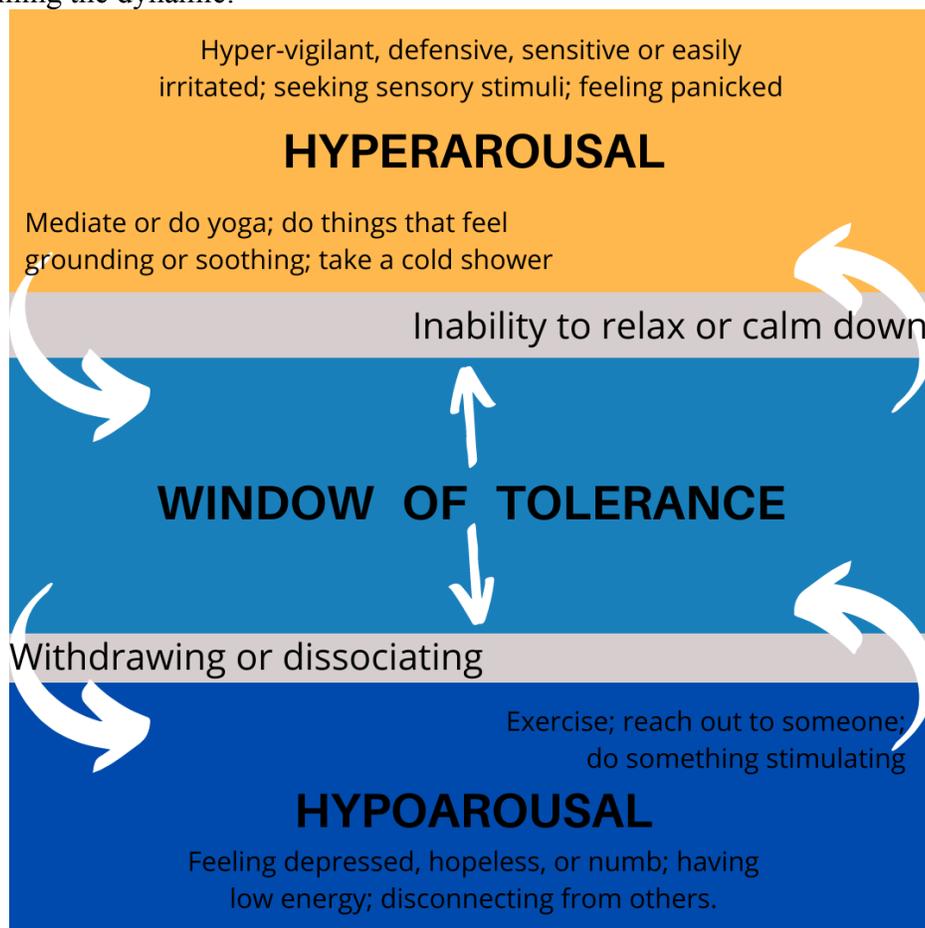
I continue to think about loneliness and friendship, considering more deeply how friendship is conceptualized in the idea of “embracing the other.” Embracing our friends leads to exciting possibilities. In October, the Pope wrote an [encyclical](#) on friendship calling it a “splendid secret.” The splendidness reveals itself in the fact that friends support us through tough times, directing our vision forward to hope; the secret lies in the power of this bond, enabling us to face adversity, and be O.K.

The Topic at Hand: Possibility and Friendship

The bonds of friendship empower us to face whatever confronts us. Friendship also connects us to greater meaning. Being a friend expands our world. Friendship includes giving and receiving energy, time, and resources in a spirit of mutual affection. This action brings satisfaction, happiness, and hope. On the one hand, friendship is full of possibilities.

What I Know

On the other hand, and from my experience working with trauma, within the intimate bond of friendship, we must recognize when we are worn out or endangered. Sometimes friends (or family) might set us off, triggering a set of unpleasant sensations – these reactions can lead us toward hyperarousal or hypoarousal (hyperactivity or depression). But our nervous system doesn’t like this. Like animals, we are at our best balanced and in homeostasis. In trauma lingo, we are capable of handling stress when our nervous system is regulated or within the “window of tolerance.” Here is a diagram outlining the dynamic:

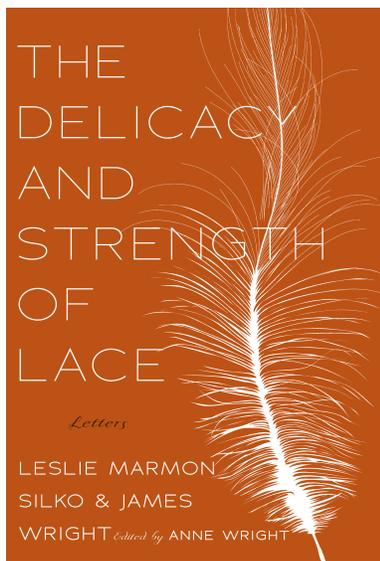


When we are hyper-aroused, we are at our most intense. Emotionally stimulated, we are not fully grounded in the present environment. Being hypo-aroused is the exact opposite. Instead of heightened emotion we feel nothing. Emotionally this state is characterized by helplessness, hopelessness and despair. When we are in the window of tolerance we experience a broad range of emotions, but they do not overwhelm our system. And while feeling this range of emotions – anger, fear, joy, sadness, shame – we are capable of being present, maintaining eye contact, and experiencing spontaneous connections with others. Which friends (and family as it were) help you stay within the window of tolerance, and which friends or family members don't?

I'm Confident That

When we give ourselves the gift of awareness, we are able to see others and what they need. This actually makes our bonds with friends stronger. We can truly embrace the other. Being outside of the window of tolerance does not signal that a friendship is “bad,” instead it gives us information about ourselves. If we can identify where we are at any given moment (aroused, calm, or depressed), we can enjoy the “splendid secret” of friendship.

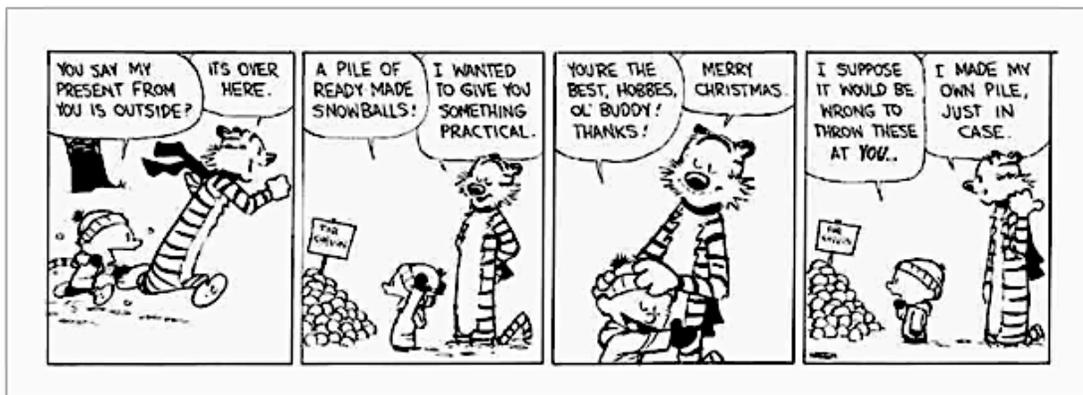
A Reading that I Love



This is a book I read years ago. It chronicles an exchange of correspondence between two extraordinary writers: Leslie Marmon Silko, a poet and novelist, and James Wright, who won the Pulitzer Prize in 1972 for his collected poems. After meeting (just once in person) at a writer's conference in Michigan, they began exchanging letters, until James Wright died of cancer in 1980.

The lessons about friendship I learned in reading this book have stayed with me. Jim says to Leslie at one point, “Our correspondence is one of the finest things I have ever had anything to do with in my life, and I trust that it will continue.”

Just for Laughs:



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Join me to explore how friendship can help you have a healthy holiday!

December 9th at 12:00 noon, I will be hosting an online workshop about strategies to have a healthy holiday. It's FREE. And you can register here. Please share!