

# Chapter One

## Thriving and Synchronization

Thriving is the visible sign of a well-synchronized life. How well we thrive flows from the ways we synchronize our personal and relational rhythms. Flirting glances, buying and selling stocks, playing in the surf at the beach, making love, playing baseball or golf, taking our vacation and having a baby all depend on synchronized rhythms. Those whose timing is good will thrive.

I <sup>(Jim)</sup> lived close enough to a hospital as a child to hear the screams of the women in labor late in the night. Those days are past. Women now learn to follow their own body's rhythms and not fight against them—even when they are in some pain. Fast paced rhythmic blowing if the urge to push comes before her body has stretched enough, resting between contractions and pushing with the rising strain of uterine muscles has replaced nights of screaming. Training to recognize her body's rhythms now synchronizes a mother with her body and her baby. After the baby is born, the mother learns to secrete oxytocin and milk when her baby nurses. Feedings synchronize their two bodies many times a day. For most of human history, how a baby thrived depended on a mother's success in synchronizing with her baby's needs—perhaps it still does.

### **Synchronization and Thriving**

Thriving flows from keeping the basic rhythms of life. Unsynchronized life is painful. People in pain will use all their energy trying to avoid more pain or making the pain stop. Rarely do we recognize that the way out of pain is through restoring our rhythms. Perhaps because all of our rhythms are relational, the people who break our rhythms become the focus of our pain. Rather than restore our rhythms we look for ways to avoid or control people. Restoring the rhythm removes our pain. We usually try changing the other person or removing them from our lives instead of restoring our own synchronization. Those who do not know they should restore their rhythms will have no clear path out of a life of pain.

Being unsynchronized will tire us out and reduce our energy and endurance. If we try to connect while others are disconnecting we will be lonely and rejected. Giving when we should receive leaves us depleted. Taking when we should give makes us disliked. Missing the rhythm in conversations isolates us and makes us feel misunderstood. We could make a long list of the painful results of being unsynchronized!

All our internal and external rhythms are as relational as they are genetic. We learn our own rhythms by interacting with other rhythmic beings. Our minds and relationships function well when they are synchronized. Thriving means synchronizing our lives with others. If we speak when others are listening and listen when they are speaking we thrive.

Many of our rhythms are connected to the rise and fall of emotions and energy. We smile when someone smiles at us. Our voices rise as we become angry. We grow quiet as we snuggle and excited as we kiss. A cheery greeting when someone is trying to sleep brings anger rather than joy and indicates our interaction was out of synchronization. These rhythms are found on our faces, in our body movements and in the tone of our voice. Only the subtlest hint of rhythms can be found in our words.

We learn to synchronize by having *others who already know how* synchronize with us. Mature people with well-trained minds and strong rhythms can, if they desire, synchronize with younger and poorly trained minds to help bring out, establish or reestablish life rhythms where they are weak. We pass on our basic rhythms as well as our complex patterns in this same way.

Individuals thrive when their trainers' efforts are synchronized to their developmental needs and progress. Musicians do not go straight from picking up a guitar to playing chords, leaping off amplifiers and dancing to fireworks and lights in one lesson. Synchronization is learned in many steps and at many levels. Growth thrives when the next lesson is neither too hard nor too easy. Great music is possible when all the basic skills have been learned and come together in complex ways that makes them look easy.

The part of the human brain that is in charge of synchronizing our outside activities and our inside rhythms is located on the right side of the brain in a multilevel system we call the *control center*. A well-trained control center is the basis for our thriving. A well-trained control center is created over time by the rhythms we share with those who know

the “tune.” People who cannot control their personal and relational life rhythms will spend their days and nights in pain of many kinds, avoidance or rigid control.

## **Synchronization and the Five Dimensions (Hierarchical Processes) of Thriving**

A tree starts growing underground. Without live roots the trunk, branches, leaves and fruit will not grow. If the trunk breaks it does not matter if you have leaves. Without good roots, trunk, branches and leaves there will be no fruit. Thriving is a five level hierarchical process and all five levels of our lives need synchronization for us to thrive. Let us start with the top and work our way down.

**5) Coherent identity:** Thriving means synchronizing our autobiographical story with our experiences in progressively more intricate ways. When our *explanations and words* fit with our *experiences and feelings*, our minds become more complex and coherent. We become authentic, transparent, spontaneous and broadminded. It is difficult to exaggerate the painful, dismembering effects on our identities of an incoherent identity. When our experiences do not match our explanations we feel inadequate, become mentally rigid, inflexible, small-minded and our emotional wounds do not heal. Unhealed identity wounds stay painful and easily triggered for life leading to a painful existence or a rigid avoidance of new experiences.

**4) Maturity:** Thriving means the demands placed on us are synchronized to our development so we remain hopeful, intentional and in control as we learn new abilities. Each stage of our development is undertaken in the right order so the development of each new capacity is synchronized with the best age for that ability to grow. Instead of reacting to others or to our circumstances, we creatively act like ourselves. Our *control centers* are well trained.

**3) Recovery:** Thriving means recovering quickly when we fall into a distress state. From every desynchronized distress state we return rapidly to joy and from joy to peace.

**2) Receive and give life:** Thriving means synchronizing a) what we receive with our needs and b) what we give with our nature so our life is full of goodness and not dominated by fear.

**1) Belonging:** Thriving means synchronizing with the right people in our lives so that our personal reality is meaningful rather than painful.

We will briefly examine how these five levels of synchronization help us thrive and then look at the *five to thrive* one at a time in chapters two to six. We will examine the recovery issues in chapters seven through twelve. In the second half of this book we will examine five painful failures to thrive and how the loss of synchronization at these crucial levels cripples us for life unless we can restore our life rhythms.

While thriving is best built from the bottom up by establishing our basic rhythms before we learn more complex patterns, our pain is best understood from the top down starting with our current lives. Only if needed do we go all the way back to our infancy. To promote thriving we begin with belonging, add the rhythms of receiving and giving life, include patterns of recovery from distress, time our maturity tasks and finally, weave the intricate patterns of a coherent identity.

Restoring our joy to be alive begins at the opposite end by examining the rhythms and patterns of our current life for signs of a dismembered identity. Most of our problems will readily resolve if our experience and expressions are synchronized. Should that not be enough to resolve our difficulties, we take the next level of synchronization and look for immaturity. Correcting the results of a disorganized growth through the maturity tasks lets us repair the characteristic immaturity patterns. Usually these include a reactive or hopeless personality style.

Whatever does not correct when our maturity is examined leads us deeper into restoring the joy and peace rhythms. Those stuck here find themselves in distress. For those who are still in pain after learning how to return to joy and peace, the next deeper step means restoring the receiving and giving rhythms blocked by fear. When addressing the fear is still not deep enough, we must visit the very foundation of our personal reality. Here, at the center of our consciousness, our disrupted rhythms of belonging have left a painful and meaningless existence behind. Let's examine these levels of pain in a bit more detail before we start.

## **Five Painful Failures to Thrive**

Failure to thrive means lives spent in pain, fleeing pain or rigidly avoiding any risk of pain. Failure to thrive means a small comfort zone or, in some cases, none at all. Failure to thrive accompanies both rigidly controlled and chaotic thoughts and emotions. Failure to thrive emerges from a badly developed and trained control center in our minds. We will look at this control center after we examine the five levels at which we can lose our synchronization and the exquisite pain each one produces.

### **Dismembered Identity – Level Five**

The best indication of a thriving brain is a steady increase in complexity across life. As our identities grow, more and more parts of our lives begin to fit together and work smoothly. We act and feel the same inside our homes as outside our doors.

When we were younger we were different at school, at play or at home. We changed when we are being watched. We feared standing before a large group or lost our composure if our clothes or hair were not right. Stress, anxiety, guilt, confusion and worry are indicators that our identities are not coherent. When our explanations of who we are and how life works must change based on circumstances, we are inconsistent. When powerful emotions come into play, they place enormous pressure on our faulty explanations. Our explanations no longer work for something we cannot ignore. Now the

two halves of our brain will not synchronize. Our explanations (in our left brain) are not complex or consistent enough to match all our experiences (in our right brain) and the problem is too intense to ignore. We feel pain and confusion.

Faced with the need to correct the symptoms of a left and right brain that are not synchronized to each other, people will often try to believe harder. As a direct result they become rigid, narrow, inflexible or controlling. Others will try to synchronize their thoughts with their emotions and experience. Synchronizing does not mean we let our emotions and experience become our whole reality, it means we reach more inclusive explanations of reality. By synchronizing with our emotions we learn to suffer well and stay consistently the same person through increasingly complex and difficult situations. Paradoxically, those who synchronize with their emotions develop better structure than those who try to structure their thoughts.

You might not think that stress, guilt, anxiety, confusion and worry sound very painful and you would be right. At the far extreme of dismembered identities are even more painful conditions we will examine in Chapter Eight. These painful conditions are often disabling but respond to counseling techniques like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR®) and TheoPhostic Ministry® both of which resolve traumas and intractable emotional pain with amazing speed. Both of these methods are believed to get results by resynchronizing the left and right brains. EMDR® does its work through rhythmic movement or sounds while the mind reprocesses unsynchronized experiences. TheoPhostic® allows God to resynchronize the mind by revealing truth to the left brain while the right brain revisits the original experience used by the left brain to draw its conclusion. Dr. Smith calls this process “removing the lie.” The wide range of severe emotional pain resolved by these two techniques is an indication of what kinds of severe suffering our souls endure when our experiences and explanations are not synchronized and our minds lose their internal rhythms.

### **Immaturity – Level Four**

Hopelessness, disorganization and reactivity characterize immaturity. The immature control center does not know where or how to direct our attention thus squandering our mind’s most valuable commodity—our attention. Immaturity is built on bad timing—paying attention to the wrong things at the wrong time.

Immaturity develops from presenting developmental tasks at the wrong time or sequence. In other words, training is not synchronized to development. Properly sequenced training with well-timed introduction of developmental tasks creates a hopeful and creative mind. Although each new task is too hard at first, because the mind is ready for the next step, success follows our creative persistence. This way our mind directs its attention to problem solving and mastery, not problem avoidance and escape.

Badly timed developmental steps lead to hopelessness and disorganization. Instead of persistence, the brain prefers to escape problems without trying to solve them. Words become clubs or bait to get results and not the path to understanding. Immature people

frequently get locked in a reactive interaction with others or with their circumstances. Some immature people give in too easily while others resist too much. As a result, circumstances determine what gets their attention rather than what is really important to them. Goals, values, creativity, preference and personal style get lost reacting to circumstances.

In addition to a global lack of direction and a narrow or hopeless reactivity, there are many specific skills missing from the capacities of immature people. These skills are covered in great detail in other LIFE Model books and tapes<sup>1</sup> so we will not examine them here. We will take an extensive look at how to address immaturity problems in Chapter Nine.

### **Continuing Distress – Level Three**

Not recovering from distress is what we typically think of with emotional pain. The big six distress feelings are anger, fear, sadness, disgust, shame and hopeless despair. Being stuck in one of these feelings is painful. We avoid even landing in one of these six feelings too frequently. While a normal brain rhythm would return our minds to joy in less than two minutes and restore our peace soon after, a badly trained brain does not know its way home from one or more of these six states of distress.

Joy, at least as far as our brains are concerned, means we are glad to be together. Not returning to joy means our relationships are disrupted by distressing emotions. Practically speaking, this means that our relational rhythms become disrupted during one or more of the six distressing emotions. Not only are we in pain, our relationships are jeopardized at the same time thus making the path back to joy and peace even harder to find. Most of us know what it is like to be stuck in anger and alienated from the very person who should bring us joy. We know the lack of peace this tension brings. We will look at ways to repair these disruptions in Chapter Ten where we learn how to restart the non-verbal rhythms that link our minds internally and relationally.

### **Pervasive Fear – Level Two**

Fears keep us off elevators, from asking for promotions, from voicing our ideas, from expressing our desires and from trusting others. Our lives become restricted when our fears begin to direct and govern our choices, when we spend increasing effort to avoid the situations that frighten us or when our own emotions and reactions make us afraid of others and even ourselves. A tight, cold fear-clamp keeps our lives from adapting and thriving. While there are a few fears “hard wired” into our brains like the fear of falling, angry faces and loud noises, most fears are learned. We learn to fear any experience that is too intense for us to handle. When an emotional experience becomes more intense than

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<sup>1</sup> The best single source of material on maturity stages is *The Complete Guide to Life With Men*, by E. James Wilder currently in progress. The *Quiet Place Teachings* series (also in progress) has video teachings by Wilder as well. Chris Coursey leads *THRIVE* seminars for practical experience training the control center. Other information is available in the *Life Model Study Guide* and the *Life Model: Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You*.

our capacity to stay synchronized we become afraid and just want it to stop. People get stuck on receiving or stuck on giving when they lack the capacity to handle the intense emotions of life. This fear usually derives from “too much too soon” experiences early in life.

The capacity to tolerate intense experiences grows out of practicing the basic life rhythm of receiving and giving joy. Trying to handle intense experiences, even happy ones, before the emotional rhythms are well developed overwhelms an infant’s brain. Infants’ brains have limited capacity to stay synchronized. Because repeated overwhelming events are frightening and disorganizing, early experiences can become patterns. If interactions with caregivers are not synchronized to the baby’s capacity to handle the interaction the infant will become frightened and avoid trying to synchronize minds with others. A fearful mind will get stuck receiving or giving rather than cycle back and forth in rhythm with the moment-by-moment needs of a relationship.

There are two frequent expressions of a fearful mind. The first is the fear of giving. This first group fearfully consumes, unaware that having, buying, eating, drinking, getting higher and having more makes their problem worse. The second fear is a fear of receiving. Perhaps you could say this latter fear is a fear of not giving. This second group gives, cares and loves hoping to receive love and care in return, all the time unaware that giving only makes their situation worse. Both groups have their receiving and giving rhythms stuck—one is stuck in give and the other in receive. We call both of those fearful reactions “low self esteem.” Neither group is likely to admit or even know that they are afraid unless a crisis hits. Addictions, codependence, procrastination and many fearful ways of life develop in this underworld that we will visit in Chapter Eleven.

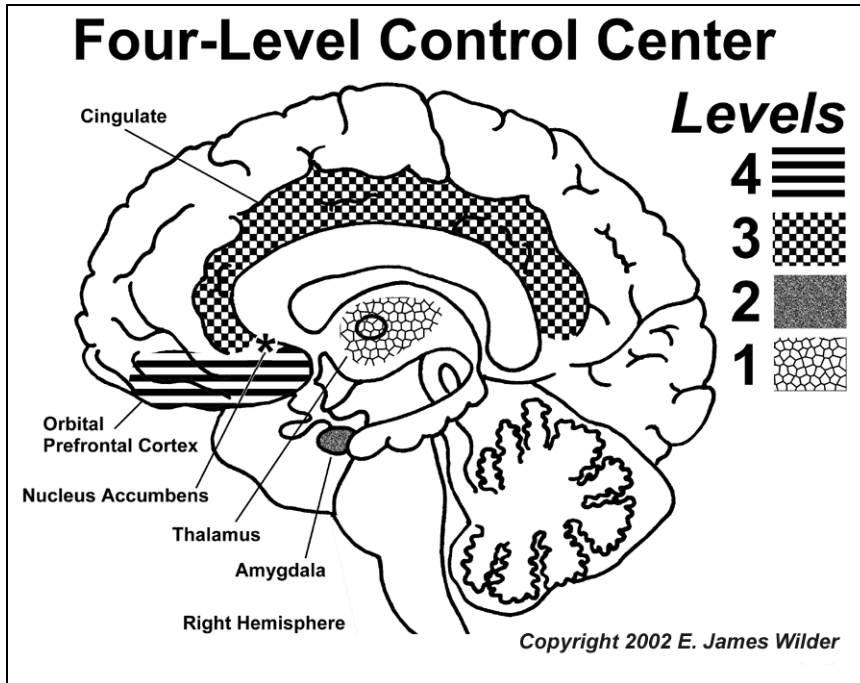
### **Painful Existence – Level One**

Lonely, unloved, unwanted, uncaring, impersonal, untouched and unreachable feelings all grow out of damage to our personal reality. My personal universe takes shape around the faces and bodies that are personally meaningful to *me*. When these faces do not sense my needs and respond to my rhythms, my personal reality begins to feel dangerous, painful or cold. My distorted personal reality can either be overrun by emotions and pain or become cold and meaningless. Those whose personal reality is compromised because they lack a synchronized, predictable and good interaction with a “joy face,” find their very existence is disconnected from others. Some find their disconnection makes life and people cold and meaningless. Others find their aloneness painful and lonely. They feel left out and unloved. We will look at these miserable levels of existence and how to restore these rhythms in Chapter Twelve. First we must examine the brain structure responsible for synchronizing our emotional, relational and mental rhythms.

### **Synchronization of the Well-trained Control Center**

The right hemisphere of each brain holds an emotional regulation structure called the control center. This four-level control center tops the command hierarchy of every brain.

Identity, *who I am*, resides at the top (level four) of the control center in an area called the prefrontal cortex. Below *who I am*, the third level, or cingulate cortex, synchronizes our life rhythms. The lower two levels control our *basic evaluations* (level two) and our *personal reality* (level one.) While it is not important to remember locations at this point, level two is in the amygdala and level one in the deep limbic structures of the thalamus and basal ganglion.



Distress pops the control center into action. The right hemisphere takes charge of the brain. If the distress is intense enough the control center shuts down the left brain with its words and explanations. The control center's earned capacity to maintain synchronization determines whether we stay relational during times of distress and pain. A well-trained control center knows our rhythms and can keep us synchronized even when we become quite upset. Relational failures and "losing it" greet the unprepared. Maintaining our brain synchronization depends completely on receiving adequate training at each of our brain's four control levels. Staying relational under distress and having a well-trained control center go hand in hand.

Our control center develops spectacularly during the first 24 months of life. These first two years develop crucial internal and external synchronization. Predictable interactions with caregivers provide the rhythmic practice that creates synchronization. Rhythmic exchanges between mother and child train the control center. Well-timed interactions with mom prepare her child to begin synchronizing with dad and others. Thriving during the first years of life creates our potential for prospering throughout life. A healthy control center builds relational joy and an increasing capacity to handle distressing emotions. We build good emotional centers one level at a time.

## Level One of the Control Center

The excitement begins at level one where the thalamus and basal ganglia create our personal reality. When our senses encounter a person we know and love our basal ganglia flashes *YOU are the one*, while our thalamus shouts *NOW is the time*. These deep limbic system structures, or as we prefer to call them the *attachment light*, turn on when we want to attach. When we arrive home to be greeted by cold, dead, empty eyes and a distracted partner, we know their attachment light is off creating one of the most painful conditions we know and lots of work for lawyers. What our attachment center craves, in fact practically can't resist, starts with a glance, a sparkle, a turning of the head and a warm smile that says, "I want you now. I want you so much." When their attachment light and ours switch on together our attachment rhythms synchronize. This "chemistry" is powerful. The next spark of our response ignites at level two of the control center.

## Level Two of the Control Center

Level two lives in an almond-shaped structure called the amygdala. Operational before birth, the amygdala forms its own subjective evaluations and emotional opinions. Level two dominates a baby's emotional brain until the infant reaches two months of age. Level two opinions are entirely subjective because they form below the cortex, that is, below conscious thought. No persuasion or logic can reach them and level two never forgets its opinions.

The amygdala reacts with one of three opinions—good, bad or scary—to anything it notices. The amygdala fears an angry face. Angry is "BAD." Angry is "SCARY." We move away from bad and scary. Joyful expressions create warm feelings and the amygdala says, "GOOD." We move toward good. We always feel a "move toward" urge with good things. The opinions of the amygdala about what is good, bad and scary never change once they are formed although new opinions can be added.

So, level two synchronizes our movement toward or away from whatever becomes our personal reality at level one. If the spark of recognition handed on from level one gets a "good" green light from the guard at level two, we move toward those smiling eyes. Familiar faces provide a disproportionate amount of input to these subcortical functions. When the amygdala says life is good, our receiving and giving rhythms flow undisturbed. Synchronization is immediately disrupted by bad and scary feelings. The control center unleashes four powerful reactions when frightened:

1. Armed response – fight or flight
2. Disaster shutdown – dissociation
3. Fire department – stress
4. Further study – activate memories

The **armed response** activates adrenalin in reaction to alarm, producing enough energy for a fight or flight. A **disaster shutdown** occurs when adrenalin-based action fails to bring safety. By shutting down every possible body and brain system, level two produces

an energy-conservation-withdrawal state. If the threat continues for hours a third response from level two calls the **fire department**. A series of chemical messengers release the stress hormone cortisol that chemically dissolves new growth and learning from the brain thus insuring that the brain won't want to repeat whatever got us into this mess. Whenever it is upset, level two can also send significant information to the brain's library (hippocampus) for **further study**.

### **Above and Below Conscious Awareness in the Control Center**

The upper half of the control center is cortex while the lower two levels are not. The lower levels (one and two) function separate from conscious awareness, choice and will.

### **Level Three of the Control Center**

Once the lower levels of the control center pick our "target," our level three begins tracking movement, emotions and energy in the person who attracts or repels us. When the target is seen as good by level two, the dance begins. Hundreds of nonverbal cues tell us if the focus of our attention has noticed us or doesn't know we are alive. She smiles—he smiles back. His voice gets animated—she glances away. He eyes his watch, his hand moves to his cell phone—desynchronization—she is losing him. What's wrong? You look sad—the tracking goes to bad instead of good.

A large portion of the cingulate is devoted to tracking where eyes are looking. We "feel" we are being watched. Level three is exquisitely tuned to facial expressions of emotion and tracks both the emotion and its intensity. When two people look at each other their faces and bodies begin to send emotional signals back and forth thanks to the cingulate.

The communication between two brains that are synchronized at level three goes back and forth at six cycles per second. The messages pass too quickly for conscious awareness even though the cortex is involved. We are aware when others brighten to see us. When they are on a different "wavelength" we are bothered but can't exactly say why. These reactions are the right cingulate cortex at work synchronizing two minds into a mutual state of consciousness.

The cingulate cortex receives its major development and training between 2 to 9 months of age. Mother and infant synchronize their mental rhythms by matching energy states of arousal/joy and quiet together/peace for hours a day—if they have the chance. For this to work, mother (with greater capacity) must synchronize to her baby (with lesser capacity.) This process passes on a duplicate of the mother's level three development to her baby's developing control center through synchronized, mutual mental states of right-hemisphere-to-right-hemisphere communication.

#### **Level Three Nonverbal Communication:**

- Six complete cycles of communication every second
- Synchronized brain chemistry
- Matched brain structure growth

- Authentic, truthful, rapid communication
- Emotions are amplified each cycle
- Subjectively experienced as produced by the other

From its central location, level three not only synchronizes our minds with other important people but it also synchronizes the four levels of the control center itself. We will look at this in more detail in Chapter Four.

### **Level Four of the Control Center**

Conscious identity, “me” exists in a highly complex area of the brain known as the prefrontal cortex (PFC). Hierarchically arranged at the pinnacle of the emotional center, this structure relies on synchronization of the three previous levels for smooth operation. The prefrontal cortex administers a wide variety of activities within the brain from the immune system to pain control. The prefrontal cortex directs our attention, values, creativity, social behavior and personal preferences. Level four takes us where we want to go and brings us back to normal afterwards. At level four, the emotional rhythms of our mind become plans, patterns and purposes. Perhaps its most important function is individual and mutual emotional regulation.

Even in distress, maybe especially then, the prefrontal cortex takes charge to insure that my emotions and yours get settled and that I act in the ways I have trained to act. The fourth level of our control center must help us resolve the “big six” feelings of anger, fear, sadness, disgust, shame and hopeless despair while keeping our relationships intact. A good resolution depends on a well-trained control center. The prefrontal cortex learns by imitating what others do during these same emotions. This non-verbal brain synchronizes our actions to the energy and actions of our models. Let’s hope we had well-trained control centers around us from which we copied our patterns.

We also do emotional simulations in the prefrontal cortex. I picture myself brushing against you. I test drive my desire to be close to you and feel us talking over coffee before I ever make the call asking you to meet me. I pick what I’ll wear and, as long as my prefrontal cortex stays in charge, I’ll be myself whether this turns out well or not.

### **Synchronization and Hierarchy**

Synchronization is not just a matter of timing but of putting first things first. Because the brain is a non-linear organ, small differences can have big effects. Small defects early on in brain training or development have far-reaching impact. All these are ways to say that our development has a hierarchy that requires careful attention. In order to thrive we must ensure that our bases are covered, our foundations laid, our basic skills in place before the time comes when we must use them to build new and more complex skills.

### **Synchronization and Limited Capacity**

Jim's wife decided to take Polka lessons and really enjoyed herself but when the music and dance reached a certain speed Jim found himself flung against the gymnasium wall. He had limited capacity and lost his synchronization with his body, the music, the other dancers and his wife in a catastrophic failure.

Synchronization builds capacity and capacity allows synchronization. This cyclical process builds itself so that the more you synchronize the better you resist a loss of synchronization. Synchronization with other people and their minds builds internal capacity to synchronize our own minds. But the other side of this process is that at all times we have a limited capacity to synchronize ourselves and synchronize with others. If we are to thrive we must respect the limits of our capacity and only stretch them slightly for growth otherwise we risk catastrophic failure.

## **Synchronization and Critical Periods**

If we combine the concepts of synchronization, hierarchy, limited capacity and growth together we arrive at critical periods. We must synchronize training with the moments when development is possible. Trees can only be pollinated when they are in bloom not when they are dormant. We also see the necessity to grow and train when the conditions are optimal if we want to thrive.

Rhythm creates structure. We don't build the structure in our minds directly. We learn rhythms and the structures follow. What fires together wires together inside the brain. We do not repair the structures in our brains directly either. We restore our rhythms and our brain's structures rearrange.

## **Four Plus One Levels of Synchronization in the Brain**

The four levels of synchronization we have looked at so far are in the control center on the right side of the brain. These nonverbal rhythms tie together our body, emotions and relationships. Words and explanations live in our other brain on the left side of our heads. As long as our words and our explanations on the left side match our experience on the right side, our brains will run at 4+ levels of synchronization simultaneously. We say 4+ instead of five to avoid confusion between the four levels of the control center and the five levels of brain synchronization. Four levels of synchronization are in the control center in the right brain and the fifth (4+) ties the control center to the left hemisphere.

"How about Starbucks?"

"Sure!"

Now that she said yes, he thinks she likes coffee. Actually, she hates coffee but her level two likes his smile. His 4+ level is out of synchronization but he does not know it yet. When he gives her a pound of dark roast for her birthday and her face registers disgust instead of joy his control center will notice her disgust and there will be a crisis between his left and right brains. That loss of synchronization may spoil the day for both of them.

“I’ll meet you there at 5:30” she says, thinking her clothes are why he found her attractive. Actually, her face was flushed and he thinks she works out. (His left hemisphere has landed on the wrong explanation again. This is an opportunity for future problems.) She seems healthy—more alive. (His control center found nonverbal signs of health and life.)

“Do you like this dress?” she says over a Chai tea.

“Actually, I like how women look in their work-out gear. How about working out after this? ”

Now her explanations are not working and she starts to lose 4+ synchronization. Does she let him know she hates working out because she overheats so easily? Regulating her feelings takes center stage in her brain as the control center takes over to work things out. Her face shows emotion for an instant but her voice comes out light and disconnected from her real emotions.

“Maybe another time.” This interaction has desynchronized for now.

If these two people can synchronize at the four levels of their control centers, they will eventually get the 4+ level of synchronization to work better. Words and explanations are just too slow to really keep us stable emotionally.

We will return to look at synchronization many times in this book. First, we must make another connection between thriving and the brain. The five dimensions of thriving mirror four plus one (4+) levels of brain synchronization. Let’s see how they fit together.

## **Five to Thrive**

Five crucial ingredients insure that everything in you and everyone around you becomes fully alive. All five ingredients are needed to thrive and they must be added in the right order. Who are people you would love to see thrive? Like you, they must start with belonging and add the other four ingredients.

### **Belonging – Level One**

More than anything else in the world, thriving requires a foundation of personal people around us. They single us out (and we them) as important people to each other. Our family brings us the meaningful connections we need to live. Family teaches us who we are. Our earliest identities are the reflections of how our people see us—whether good, bad, pretty, ugly, fat or skinny. Bonds give us belonging. Relationships build our individual identity, family identity, group identity and community identity. Meaningful connections to others grow from having them present in our lives at critical and important times.

Belonging is important every day. Hearing our parents are getting a divorce, finding our lover with someone else, losing custody of the kids and having our family killed in a car accident are shocks to our belonging. Nothing hurts more.

Family and community provide a roof over our heads, food on our table, and smiles for our eyes. Not everyone, however, has this privilege. The poor souls who have no people or place to call their own are strangers and wanderers. Few know what it is like to be completely without belonging and lose family, home, country only to live in a world where no one knows who they are—or cares. Life-giving families and communities have room for them too.

### **Receiving and Giving Life – Level Two**

Wherever we may belong, unless the relationships around us bring what is really good for us we will not thrive. When the people we love give us life, the amygdala sees life as good. We receive and give without fear. When the attention, love and goodness we receive is well timed to meet our needs, we blossom. If we give the people we love what they need when they need it, everyone around us will thrive too. We need daily showers of life poured into us during our early years. This receiving precedes our giving. As we grow older, we give more life to others.

### **Recovery of Joy and Peace – Level Three**

Because things will always go wrong sooner or later, being able to recover is more important than preventing problems if we want to thrive. Our timing is often off, our connections break down, we end up in the dumps instead of in joy and bad things happen. Recovery restores our joy and peace and with it the synchronization in our cingulate. Restored relationships make us feel better. When our rhythms break down we fix them. When belonging, receiving and giving life are well established we can recover from the not-so-perfect process of growing up.

### **Maturity – Level Four**

Belong where life is freely given and received, where mistakes can be made without fear, where important people around you always work out upsets with you (whether they get distressed or you did) and you will mature. Maturity helps us reach our potential and act like ourselves with satisfaction. At each age new capacities develop and our identities become more rich and varied. Physical age and gray hair don't produce maturity; rather, maturity springs from a synchronized effort between our people and us. With the help of our relationships, family and community, we stretch, transform and mature throughout life. The prefrontal cortex retains the capacity to grow across our lifespan.

### **Coherent Identity – Level Four Plus One (4+)**

We must mature like everyone else, belong like everyone else, receive and give like everyone else and then become unique individuals like no one else. Thriving means my sense of humor, my ideas, my spirit and my personal story are fun and alive. A coherent identity lets me be a person of destiny.

We enjoy people who communicate well. We trust people who speak clearly and authentically about themselves. We appreciate people who remember what we have said to them. Good long-term marriages grow when couples regularly tell each other the “stories of us.” Reminiscing and telling emotionally important stories about our day brings families together, raises good kids and builds memories.

Our autobiographical memory is located in the left prefrontal cortex. The left-brain is the verbal explanation side that becomes active when the brain is at 4+ synchronization. This left hemispheric activity puts words to our feelings. When it all comes together upstairs, we are expressive people who remember and tell the stories about our important moments and relationships. We remember, see and feel, and tell as if the past were right in front of us. Our stories carry listeners along and into our world. Our energy, humor and emotion draw people close to us and we enter just as readily into their stories. We tell of old dogs and campfires, moments with God, new discoveries and the joy of being together. We share the rhythms of joy and quiet, love and loss, connection and ecstasy, struggle and achievement, even falling and getting back up.

In the rest of this book we will learn to thrive and restore our life rhythms. We have life to talk about and rhythms to experience. Take a deep breath and let’s go dancing!

## **Principle Concepts in Chapter One**

**Summary** – Each human brain contains a *control center* that develops across our lifetime and provides our resilience and capacity to grow, thrive and recover. Synchronized to and by our relationships, this essentially non-verbal control center provides our peace, joy and strength of character.

**Synchronization** – The careful timing of events, minds and processes so that the rise and fall of our energy levels coincide. We require other minds to synchronize with our minds before we can learn to 1) synchronize our own minds or 2) synchronize with others at our initiation.

**Hierarchy** – There is order, sequence and timing to the construction of a well-functioning mind. Stages, steps and levels of development are built on previous accomplishments. Small effects early in a hierarchy can have huge results higher up in the structure or later in the process.

**Maturity** – Growth has a predetermined sequence to follow and an optimal expression at each stage of development. The ideal characteristics of individuals change as they grow and age.

**Critical periods** – Certain aspects of a person grow very well at some times and very poorly or not at all at others. Optimal development (thriving) requires us to synchronize training with critical periods.

**Limited capacity** – All people at all times have only so much they can take and still stay synchronized internally or relationally. This capacity can be developed or lost and is constantly in flux.

**Control Center** – Each working human brain contains a multilevel control center in the right hemisphere. This control center is responsible for maintaining the internal synchronization of brain activity as well as synchronizing interactions with others and the environment. The control center is largely nonverbal and has four levels: 1) attachment level, 2) subjective evaluation level, 3) synchronization level, and 4) a personal identity level.

**Right-hemisphere-to-right-hemisphere communication:** The right cingulate cortex sends emotions to the face, voice and body where they can be perceived by the right hemisphere of another person. When the right hemispheres of two people become tuned to each other the resulting nonverbal communication is both rapid and powerful resulting in a mutual state of consciousness. Perhaps an even more profound effect is that rapid communication allows duplication of brain capacities and structures from mature brains into younger brains.

**Five to thrive** – The five elements of thriving are: belonging, receiving and giving life, recovery, maturity, and identity.