

Of Animals and Avatars

This is Lincoln Stoller of Mind Strength Balance speaking a piece called “Of Animals and Avatars.” This is a hypnotic piece that requires your full attention. Do not listen to this piece if you are driving a car, operating machinery, or doing anything that requires your attention.

The purpose of this piece is to create a trio of allies who can grow in strength and stature as you work with them. They represent energies that can act on your behalf in realms where your conscious mind does not go. They can appear in dreams. They will grow into guiding archetypes, and you can grow their form out of what already exists.

These allies contain and further attract the strengths you need, which you already possess to some degree. They will grow to more greatly embody these strengths. They will be the repository of strength, skill, and insight and by imbuing them with these powers you will not need to carry them as protection for yourself. Weighed down by your own armor and anticipation. Their presence, separate from you, will allow you to go incognito into the weaker, thinner, more needy realms of yourself where old things are, and have existed for a long time.

I will lead you on a program to create these allies. It has three stages, the first works with your body, the second works with your intellect, and the third with your emotions. At each stage, we’ll fill in the picture of these allies, as seen from these perspectives, so that when we’re finished--but we have not started yet--you will be connected physically, intellectually, and emotionally.

To begin, let’s drop down to a deeper level of awareness. Let’s drop down to a level where you can feel your body more and the world around you is less. Let’s count down the steps to immersion with yourself, stepping away from looking out and stepping in.

- Starting at **five**, imagine your body is a castle and you are raising the drawbridge and lowering the gate and you are entering the castle.
- At **four** you are passing through doors, entering the base of the tower, and facing a long and winding stair.
- **Three**, you are climbing the circular stairs, floating up the stairs, going around and around.
- **Two**, you are reaching the top of the tower, the round, cone-roofed room at the top.
- And **one**, you sit in a comfortable chair, couch, or bed and gaze out the small windows over a broad and distant landscape.

Over forests and meadows, hills and valleys, to distant mountains, clouds, and hazy skies.

Close your eyes to imagine this landscape. If you cannot see it in your mind’s eye, then imagine your eyes are closed in your imagination, and you are sitting or reclining in the tower’s top room

with your eyes closed, and how it might feel in such a high and exposed place, with landscape stretching to the horizon in all directions.

I'd like you to tiptoe through your body--keeping it relaxed, loose and quiet--reviewing the feelings you store and the residual tensions you feel in different places. Let me direct you to locations and suggest the sensations you might have, for you to ask those places to reveal their feelings to you.

Your scalp is like a thinking cap, thin and tight. It always carries a certain strain, always shuttling thoughts and memories up and down, like a never stopping elevator. Consider what drives your mind to always be thinking or sensing or being present and aware. And consider how you must always be holding and releasing thoughts and memories, always vigilant and ready to react, like a trap that's always set, like a squirrel that's always looking for what they might not see.

There is a star above your head, radiating like a lighthouse. It announces your location and projects in the direction of your thoughts, illuminating your way forward and making clear your path for others. Turn that light down, release your vigilance, see your way by the light of the stars.

Imagine or feel your desire to release your mind, to be able to stop thinking with no need for caution. What would that relief mean and feel like? An energy in yourself that's never nervous, worried, or threatened; always safe, calm, and in control.

As you sink into that feeling--safe, calm, and in control--what character or personality best represents it? Can you recall a person you once knew, or the ideal of a person you could imagine: a leader, a saint, an athlete, or an artist? Maybe there is an animal that you've seen, imagined, or made up, like a bear, a mammoth, or a big cat.

Maybe it's a famous historical figure, or someone you looked up to in your childhood. You are not trying to be accurate, this does not come from memory, it's a character inflated by your sense of how things could have been, or how you could be. A character of strength, focus, and ability.

Any feeling that you have of limit, boundary, or limitation, this character does not have: they are free and powerful by their nature. They are the image of all you could be or hope to become, even if that would be difficult or impossible.

Scan further through or down your body, following the lines of movement, energy, or support, looking for other areas where there is some kind of burden, compression, or tension. This could be anywhere, as every recess and prominence stores experience of something, from some time. Some memories and adventures are greater and newer, others are lesser and older, farther away.

There is the collarbone, neck, and throat. Your back that holds you present, your shoulders that advance your arms, and your chest that plows forward like the bow of a ship. Stop where you find a memory waving to you, a word or phrase that comes to mind unbidden. A sudden surge or swale in memory, recollection, or electricity. Find it now, and settle into this place, caught like a billiard ball in a corner pocket, or a marble on a roulette wheel.

What source of limitation or vigilance lies here, in this spot? What kind of perfect strength and presence would be its opposite? Imagine that strength and let it grow, amplifying and attracting greater skill, speed, and vision until it becomes a foundation of abilities that could be. A master sage or musician, a visionary strength of character and insight. What body and face would be appropriate? What aura or ambiance would they radiate?

Imagine they were to open their eyes, standing or floating in front of you, and how would you see them, as they will be looking into you. If they spoke, what would be the sound of their voice? As they are dressed in skin, cloth, leather, fur, or armor, see it in a momentary flash or let it grow in depth and clarity.

Pass down further to contemplate your ribs and then your belly. Consider all the abuse our ribs get, stretched and jogged, wrenched and twisted. What would it take to be free of all that, what sort of oversized and overpowered rib cage could be our cover, such that we could always run back to it if we got in trouble?

We carry some of our self-image in our belly, always afraid of looking fat, to appear fatter than we are. From this negative create the positive, the energy of never worried, never concerned, beyond the body image, attuned, indexed, and affirmed. A possessed and muscular entity all of whose attention flows outward into action, or sideways to arrangement, never hobbled by self-doubt; the opposite of self-doubt. What does that spirit look like? What familiar or unfamiliar abode does it inhabit?

Move down to your genitals, an encyclopedia of feelings and associations of kinds that are genetic, social, hormonal, aroused, aggrieved, proud, mournful, motivating and independent. What figure would carry the best of these, a kind of sexual consciousness that was leadership and unity beyond a vision of just your own.

And there are your joints which turn, flex, and rotate. They've all experienced stress, sometimes damage linked to action and intention. Their limits are clear and you're always aware of what might be too much movement, pressure, torque, or leverage. What would it be like to never worry? Do you remember never worrying about your body when you were a kid? Who can you picture that is so flexible and strong, with such quick reflexes so as never to sprain, or strain, or twist?

Put into this image of a person or animal all the strength and agility you once had, you wish you still had, and which you might regain. The more likely it is, the closer it is to you; the less likely the more distant but still there, still present, and still possible. Like a helper or an aid, this image of safety and support watches for things you might not see, and is sensitive to suggestions and protections you overlook.

Release, now, and relax. Take a breath and settle back. Inhale... and exhale...

Let your creative mind go blank like a washed slate, a blackboard wiped as clean as early morning quiet. Ask your three characters, your avatars, your ideals, to emerge from your lineup of

possibilities. The three carriers of your three most important strengths. A team of three heroes who are totally you and perfectly unique. Each carries a different skill, name, energy, and appearance.

Now we'll descend into the world of labels and ideas, and there you will find words and symbols for these characters. Dropping down out of body and sensation, looking for a deeper connection.

- Five, float above your sense of body and self,
- Four, back in your tower room, imagine looking out over the landscape,
- Three, below you things labeled like a map
- Two, the landscape is a map of your personal terrain, history, and ideas
- One, sounds, colors, boundaries, and descriptions.

Focus on your first character. Let their properties be strong and solid, rooted and impregnable. Call them forward in your mind. Give them a name or let them speak their name. It might be a sound, something you can speak or hear, or there might be no sound. Identify their properties, the ones that first come to you. They may be words, or signs, or sounds. A grunt, a roar, a twang or speech clearly spoken, a sentence from the air.

Focus on the second character. Let their character be lithe and languid, flexible and extensive. Shape-shifting camouflage extrovert but also subtle, smart, and attentive. Let other words, symbols and phrases drop from above, as if whispered from backstage. Things you think about them or names they give themselves. Robinhood-like, thinker, agent, artist, creators, dancer, weaver, explorer, craftsman.

Focus on the third character. Let their character be wise and incisive, certain, no questions, no weakness, no hesitation. Intuitive, deep and connected. They know with the certainty of experience all you wish you did. And stepping aside from their insight, you can hesitate without pressure, consider possibilities whose differences you can't discern, explore for novelty and be open, vulnerable, and uncertain.

These characters let you be open and accepting. They are your guards, protectors, and parents and you can be a child again. You have the freedom and the latitude to be safe and return to the field of unknowing and no responsibilities. To learn freely and play amid the forest of a safe world, taking all bruises and scrapes in stride. Discover new feelings, take on new ideas, make new constructions.

Now move to our last stage of emotions, to imbue our characters with feeling. Settle down, now, out of the ether of ideas like a leaf falling from the sky, blown into the sky by a cyclonic wind, high above the landscape now settling, spinning down past the tall tower room of your castle.

- **Five**, spinning, blowing, falling, touching the roof and being blown off again,
- **Four**, descending down past the towers tall walls, the small room now far above,
- **Three**, swept and skidding along the ground's spotted shadows,

- **Two**, caught in an open vent shaft, swept down into a dark tunnel toward the subterranean,
- **One**, into lower realms, caves below foundation, an aquifer of black rivers and quiet streams.

Here, there is only feeling and words are never full enough. Here, everything is wide and long. Things flow in layers, layers of meaning, porous and perforated with possibilities. This is a realm of complements and contradictions. Strength in weakness, security in indecision, and the possibility of change and alternatives.

The archer sheathes their bow and dissolves into the foliage. The bear goes to ground, disappearing into the cave entrance hidden in the underbrush. The magician returns to their cottage in the wilderness, to their library and their kitchen, back to unruly books and magic tea cups to rest, cogitate, and consider. And in these spaces wider feelings emerge, older memories, and past experiences, visions of the past and hopes for the future.

Open up to the heart of your characters. What is it that they feel? How might that make you feel? When you were a child, your parents had feelings they didn't tell you about, and they should have if they could have spoken in ways you would understand. Now, you are building relationships with yourself, and you can communicate, maybe not perfectly but you have patience.

There is a difference between the feelings that you do carry and the feelings you could carry, the feelings you can imagine or create in the hearts and minds of your guides and protectors. Imagine how each of these figures would feel in times of contemplation. Would they be unconcerned, guarded, curious, strategic, maybe even competitive? Would their skill mix with courage in steps toward novelty and creativity? Could they ever fail and would they be concerned if they did?

Can you feel this way yourself: invincible, indomitable, endowed with a power that cannot be diminished? You don't need to have confidence because your heroes hold your confidence for you. You can be your weaker self because weakness has its potential, just as the victim is sooner to see the truth.

Don't guard against what you cannot vanquish, explore it. You can't explore it as the hero; you must explore it in its true role. Maybe there are elements in you that bear weakness. They can learn strength and they will gain insights that are just as valuable.

Consider your models one by one: guides, mentors, prophets, or protectors. See them as a trio, now that you've given them a presence and the power of thought. Consider what they feel and what feelings they relieve you of.

You don't have to be the hero, gird yourself as the hero, or think heroic thoughts. What are the constraints on feelings that they lift from you? They hold the space that allows you to go deep into the empty places, the rejected places that feel desolate but hold answers you've overlooked.

Focus on the first character, whose form is strong and solid. Who is rooted, balanced, and impregnable. Call them forward and let their attentions turn inward, and follow them to their home, lair, studio, or mountain top where their power grows. What do they feel in their own times of integration? What do they dream about? How do you appear in their dreams?

Focus on the second character, lithe and languid, flexible and extensive; shape-shifting, subtle, and attentive. When they settle down, what do they settle down to? Is there one native, original form, are they always traveling, comfortable only in change and movement? Is there one form that's neutral, maybe formless? Imagine them in their shapeless essence, pure light and energy. How would you feel in such a form? Let them rest in formlessness knowing they can teach you this.

Focus on the third character, wise and incisive, certain, Intuitive, deep, and connected. When you are carrying their opposite, what freedoms does that avail you or them? What options does a certain person consider? Are there decisions? Certainly times change fostering new possibilities.

Is there a part of wisdom that doesn't change in the field of change around it? How does the wise and certain person fancy the things that could emerge from the chaos of shifting powers? Does that leave you more free to consider things less likely, or to regret what can't be changed? Do they sleep well? Can they consider things you can't resolve, and if they can or do, how does that free you?

Let yourself settle into that space of rest and wide appreciation. Large enough for the lions and lambs, enmities and alliances, friends and foes. A break from the set, an intermission, a pause in the drama of things. A bell rings, the lights cut, and motion stops. Conversation and commotion dissolve and you feel the tension leave the air. The tension evaporates and the world becomes a stop-frame, activity stilled in time.

Relax, take a breath. Break the set and let the actors go. Let your own plot take a pause as natural forces prevail. Imagine a refrigerator large enough to hold the problems of your life, so that when you want to stop some problem's progression you just put it in this refrigerator and it will keep until later.

You can open this refrigerator and consider what's in it, as you do when looking for food, and pick the issue that's most digestible, and mix a recipe that matches your taste and what your body needs. There is more time than you think. There are more choices than you're aware of.

- **One** might be all that you see at any moment, especially when you feel pressure.
- But there are always **two**, just through the act of contrast, and no option is as black and white as it might appear.
- More likely **three**, the opposites and their compromise. Compromise may be no solution, but it gives you time, and it allows further conference.
- What emerges beyond that with the opening of mind and the juggling of the elements?
What fourth option appears, and does it lie on the spectrum of opposites or does it split from the center as another direction?

- **Five**, and you're back to the star above your head. Five rays radiating from the center.
- Make it **six**, just for the symmetry: one triangle pointing down atop a second triangle pointing up. The three options seen both ways.

Beyond that we might reach seven, at the limit of our minds, the limit of the number of things we can hold simultaneously and juggle. It's enough to stretch, and maybe you have all the power you need.

Back in the castle tower above the spreading landscape. Raising from your imaginary chair, there is a low door that leads to the stairs and you pass through it, closing the door behind you.

Down a circular, tower stair, counting the revolutions, leaning to the left in circles you can count.

Ten... nine... eight... passing a window in the wall.

Seven... six... five... reaching the courtyard's level.

Four... three... two... crossing the courtyard, raising the gate, lowering the drawbridge, and crossing the bridge.

And **one**, being out in the fields and forests that surround you.

On the start of a road that leads off toward the hills. Back in the present: centered, released, relieved, and still connected.