

sacred VOWS

From an early age, our nervous system naturally leans toward supporting others. As early as 4 months, a baby will drop an expression or a feeling that worries the mom in an attempt to be accepted and loved. In our attempt to get the warmth and affection we as children so desperately need, we try to regulate the nervous systems of our caregivers.

This often takes the form of unconscious contracts, or sacred vows – contracts that we make with ourselves, others, or the world. We become suspended in a spider web of subconscious contracts that can emotionally and/or physically derail us in ways that are confusing and debilitating.

We enter into these sacred contracts with our primary caregivers and ourselves for two main reasons: to stay relationally connected with our parents, and as a strategy to survive trauma. When a caretaker can't deal with anger, our little body learns that if we make an angry face and mom's response is blank or angry, this is very distressing. She is not reflecting our expression and has moved out of relational connection with us, and our nervous system takes a hit, resulting in a rise in cortisol.

This is a break in our reaching out for love, so we make a rule to preserve connection, e.g., "I will never show anger. I will cry instead. When I cry the parents don't go numb." Our little nervous systems learn to shift and to know what limits our acceptance, e.g., "Does it keep mom and dad safe if I don't have needs?"

We are at our best when we matter, belong, and are held in warm community.

As children, warmth and mattering are the same as staying alive, so these vows are a matter of life or death. **Our intention is to honor, protect, save, follow, and/or survive, and the price we pay shows up as our self-sabotaging patterns.**

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As we journey on the road to self-resonance, an important rest stop is to disentangle and revoke these sacred vows.

Here are some examples of sacred vows we might make:

- "I will stay small or not surpass you so that I can feel that I belong in this family,"
- "I'll be invisible to prevent you from feeling alone/threatened/angry, etc., or to keep you or myself physically safe, no matter the cost to me."
- "I won't be happier than you so that you might love or accept me."
- "I will sacrifice what I most want in order to belong, no matter the cost to me."

The disentanglement process: naming and revoking the vow:

- **1.** Identify the self-sabotaging pattern of behavior, e.g., "I can't seem to be successful."
- **2.** Ask, "Who or what system is my self-sabotaging behavior protecting (e.g. mom, dad, you, the world)?" Or, "Who is my behavior supporting?"
- **2b.** What is the hoped for outcome? e.g., "I'll be ___ so you can feel capable and I can belong, no matter the cost to me."
- **3.** Stepping into the contract to see if that person's highest self (or your own highest self) wanted you to make that vow. If they didn't, say, as that person to you, "I revoke the vow you made to me to _____, and what I want for you instead is ____". If they don't want to revoke it, try to name the vow they may have made to their own parent that prevents them from releasing you from yours.

Note: Sometimes people object to claiming self-sabotaging behavior, thinking that by naming it, it will become true. On the contrary, when a truth is acknowledged, our brain relaxes, changes, and we gain choice.

Conflicting Vows

Sometimes we have multiple vows entangled with each other, e.g., "I won't succeed so dad can be the successful one, and I will succeed in order to save mom." Often one is a vow to do something and one is a vow to not do something. Our survival is dependent on the capacity of our family system (our peeps) to welcome us. For conflicting vows we need to revoke each one separately.