

Our Five Core Capacities

A Compass for Navigating Life's Transitions



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“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly.
What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

~ *Antoine de Saint-Exupéry*

1 ATLANTIS, TIRAMISU AND A CARIBOU

1.1 Atlantis unveiled

“What is Atlantis?”

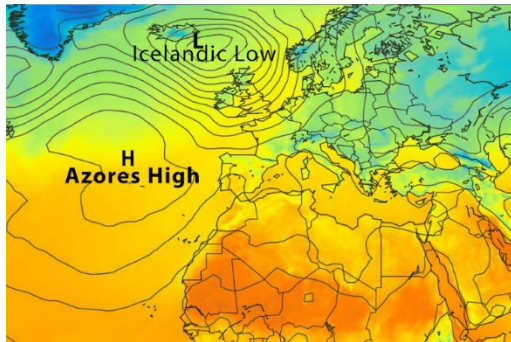
Dad, bent over his salad, looked up and said, “That was some lost continent that sank. A Greek philosopher, I think it was Plato, once spoke of such a mythical place, where people lived in harmony.”

“What is a continent? And why did it sink?”

Ah, my little sister was at it again with her endless questions. And she hadn’t even started her salad yet. I had finished my appetizer, and the tempting aroma of the main course was already rising to my nose. I looked forward to Mom’s homemade Sunday meatloaf with rich brown gravy, and fresh mashed potatoes from our own garden. There was nothing better in the world!

“Be quiet now, the news is starting!”

Dad’s strict command was law, and I tucked into the meatloaf on my plate, which Mom had just served us. The grand World Expo in Osaka meant nothing to me anyway.



“And now we come to the weather”, came the announcement at the end of the broadcast. The presenter concluded, “The Azores High will bring us beautiful spring weather next week.”

Mom turned off the radio, and Regula immediately fired off the next question across the lunch table:

“Hey, where are the Azores?”

“They are between Europe and America, in the middle of the Atlantic.”

“But you said earlier that the Atlantic had vanished beneath the waves!”

“No, my dear, Atlantis sank—the continent. You know, the land that once existed. But the Atlantic is the great ocean between Europe and America. And in the middle are the Azores, nine small islands far away from the mainland. And that’s where the sunny weather comes from.”

“So, Atlantis didn’t completely sink, then?”, my sister wondered aloud, as though the thought stirred some distant memory.

“We simply don’t know,” said Mom, as she placed the delicious dessert on the table, a tiramisu, “Plato’s story has been passed down to us in an incomplete form.”

“But I *know* it! Come on, Urban, when we grow up, we’ll journey to the Azores, and together we’ll find Atlantis again!”

A premonition rose inside me: *She’s spot on!*

And so, fate took its course, and what had to happen happened. We grew up, and we grew older, and through careers, relationships, responsibilities, and challenges on different paths around the globe, we also became more mature and experienced in life. And yet this childhood memory of doing something together remained ever-present—quiet, patient, waiting for the right moment.

For my fiftieth birthday, my sister surprised me with an invitation: “Urban, what do you think about us exploring the Azores together—just you and me—to find out if this could be the place where we could do something meaningful together later on?”

“I’d love to. I don’t know this archipelago yet either. You think we should just go there and soak up everything like two sponges?”

“Yes, we don’t have to chase change; we can lead the way.”

That’s typical! She’s so bubbly, full of energy, and eager to discover new things—no one else would come up with such a brilliant idea!



Visualization of the center of Atlantis based on Plato's description.

1.2 The holistic compass of life

What began as a birthday trip soon revealed itself to be a gateway into another world. The rugged, untouched nature, surrounded by the endless expanse of the ocean, felt astonishingly close to our childhood images of Atlantis: *I feel a quiet, grounding force and smell the iodine-rich sea air that stimulates the metabolism.*



I feel a quiet, grounding force and smell the iodine-rich sea air that stimulates the metabolism.

In some places, the screeching of various seabirds reaches my ears. Deeply moved, I gaze out over a sea of hydrangeas and azaleas blazing in every colour imaginable, competing with crater lakes and spectacular coastal landscapes. I particularly enjoy the traditional [Cozido](#), slow-cooked for hours

in underground volcanic heat. *Wow, this landscape is phenomenal. This reminds me of a blend of Ireland and Hawaii.*

Over the next ten years, we returned to this paradise in the Atlantic time and time again. I recorded my visits to all nine islands in a [60-page compendium](#) so that other curious travelers could discover this Atlantic paradise as well.

During this time, we walked, exchanged ideas, observed, and listened to ourselves, to each other, to nature, and to the universe. Gradually, the idea from our childhood began to take shape and form, and a concept evolved. Regula made a suggestion:

“Listen, we should create a space that enables fellow human beings to find their own answers during a week filled with different experiences involving meditation, conversation prompts, and exploration of this unique island. You also talk about personal responsibility, which is so central to life transitions.”

“Of course, change and transitions are a natural part of life. They allow us to experience more deeply who we are and thus to grow.”

“At the same time, there are transitions that require special attention—especially when something ends, sometimes abruptly, and something new is still a long way off, until eventually a new chapter in life begins,” said Regula, adding: “I ask myself a fundamental question: how can we as humans live more fully, consciously, responsibly and holistically in a constantly changing world?”

“You’ll have to ask the indigenous peoples; they lived and still live as far as possible in harmony with nature, which is sacred to them. When native people hunted a **caribou**, they used every part of it. Nothing was wasted. Their behaviour was not only driven by scarcity, but by a deep reverence and gratitude towards Mother Earth. Every part had value; every part served the individual life and the community.”

“Accordingly, we should treat our own inner resources with the same respect, in order to serve the whole.”

“What do you mean by inner resources?”

“I’m referring to the five core capacities. Are you familiar with this **holistic principle**?”

“You mean the *physical*, *emotional*, *mental*, *spiritual*, and *creative*? How do you know this **compass to the heart of being**—to the very essence, the heart of the matter?”

“I heard about it during a lecture at a UN event. It was about sustainable, inclusive development, where holistic human capacities in their entirety were discussed as the basis for future-oriented action. What about you?”

I replied: “For me, the five core capacities are an integral part of my shamanic path, in other words, they come from an ancient tradition. And they also served as inspiration during the preparations for the founding ceremony of ‘[Integral Politics](#)’—you know, following [Ken Wilber](#)’s integral ideas.”

“Yes, if we learn to recognise, appreciate and consciously use all five of our core capacities—instead of developing some one-sidedly while neglecting or suppressing others—challenges can be met in a holistic way.”



“Then it’s clear that we dedicate our project to the five core capacities, use them as a compass—our practical tool—and ask each guest questions from the five fundamental perspectives!”

“And we make the caribou our guiding principle and symbol—as a metaphor for holistic, personal development—by incorporating and consciously nurturing all five areas of being.”

1.3 The Convento – a timeless oasis

Now we had to find a suitable location in the Azores. Serendipity led us to the **Convento de São Francisco**. As soon as we entered the courtyard with its ancient plane trees, we were



struck by a profound sense of tranquility, as if the spirit of times past were inviting us to pause and trace its echoes, preserving the quiet dignity of its history. The silence is enhanced by the imposing stone walls and seems to draw its power from the living source of the fountain in the cloister. Only when taking in the breathtaking 180-degree view of the deep blue Atlantic Ocean from the large terrace does time seem not to stand still—but, on the contrary, to open up. Contrasts are a sign of being very close to *the essence* of life.

1.4 Experiential weeks for life transitions – an avant-garde concept

For this transition to unfold, we thoughtfully and intentionally design the experiential weeks for bereaved and retirees, striking a balance between stillness and movement, contemplation and connection with the island's unique nature. This concept is avant-garde because it embraces the [intangible aspects](#) of life.

During this experiential week, guests engage all five core capacities—*physical*, *emotional*, *mental*, *spiritual*, and *creative*—as an inner compass through thoughtfully curated, immersive days set in the unspoiled beauty of the Azores. This enables guests to experience a deeper sense of presence again and to navigate their life transition in a manner appropriate to the situation.

“Yes, it's wonderful when our guests return home feeling strengthened and with new clarity, inner peace, and a sense of renewed direction. They are ready to rediscover their lives as creative explorers.”

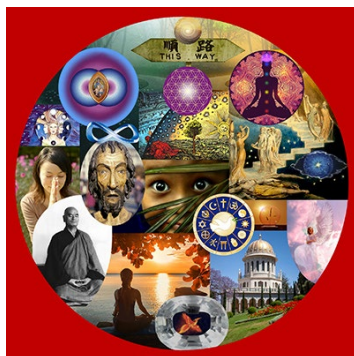
I feel we are rediscovering the spirit of Atlantis.

It’s this **creative** spirit and belief in a passionate project that turns visionary ideas into reality. He says: *Follow your intuition, stay true to yourself, and trust in the process! Put your vision on paper early on and write a first sketch of a rough business plan. Think big, but pace yourself as to what comes early to get to a solid head start. Build on your life experience and be disciplined. Try out things, learn from your experiences, and don't get discouraged by setbacks. Execute your plan without getting distracted. Never take rejection to heart and ignore all the “naysayers.” Continuously refine your original vision and make it happen by setting priorities. And modelling for others the courage to trust themselves and to hold on to their own inner power.*

In this way, the **creative** spirit of the five core capacities acts as a compass for navigating all life’s transitions.



2.4 The spiritual core capacity



Mindful awareness leads to wonder and **love**, the sustaining power of lived spirituality. It can be felt in connection and trust, affection and touch, and recognised in the beauty of many things and situations. It’s the origin of all existence, an inexhaustible source of inspiration, longing and desire, wildness and joy for life, which we have all carried into this life as a guiding light.

Before departing, a widower expressed: “Each morning’s meditation, with the energy of the fountain, offered calm and connection, and strengthened me to truly imagine continuing to live

without my beloved wife.”

A deeper awareness of our surroundings and ourselves nurtures our **spiritual** core capacity: what do I feel when I open myself up to what is happening right now with all my senses, be it an enriching conversation, the soft forest floor beneath my feet (*haptic*), fresh, simple food (*taste*), heartfelt music (*hearing*), a moving sunset (*sight*) or the scent of a sea breeze or freshly cut grass (*smell*)?

As my awareness increases, I feel a growing need for silence and meditation. An original sense of connection and bond returns, and as a result I feel more **love**, devotion and also gratitude for each of these emotional, sensual “encounters”.

2.5 The creative core capacity



In this core capacity, all four other core capacities strive together in the most comprehensive harmony and balance possible, as can be seen in [art](#), for example. During the week for the bereaved, a widower recounted how he put together a collage of photos of his late wife and how this helped him bring more peace to his troubled emotions and thoughts.

It combines *emotional* expression, *mental* concepts, and *physical* mastery. It’s not uncommon for *spiritual* experiences, insights, and interpretations to flow into it, for example, in the music of [J. S. Bach](#), in the paintings of [William Blake](#) or in the

dance of [Isadora Duncan](#).

Imagination and **creativity** are helpful and in demand everywhere. They tend to manifest when one is focused and relaxed in one’s own *inner centre*, in the free flow of the **moment** and **love**, for example, in a state of timelessness, *emptiness*, and *fullness* at the same time—in the **flow**. In this present moment, aha-moments easily arise, and pearls of inner wisdom and healing reveal themselves.

2.6 The Five Core Capacities in Practice

Each capacity deserves attention, structure, and a supportive framework because they influence each other and *never* exist separately.

The physical capacity asks: How do I inhabit my body? Do I listen to its signals? Do I move, rest, and nourish it with respect?

The emotional capacity asks: Am I willing to open myself even more to my feelings? Can I accept, name, and regulate my emotions instead of being ruled by them or suppressing them?

The mental capacity asks: What thoughts shape my reality? Which values and beliefs empower me, and which limit me? Do I want to trust my intuitive sense as much as my rational mind?

The spiritual capacity asks: What gives my life meaning? Where do I experience a sense of connection beyond the individual self? How do I relate to the mystical?

The creative capacity asks: Where do I allow myself to express, experiment, and play? Where do I create something new, not to achieve or perform, but to explore?

2.7 An Invitation to the Reader

As you read this, you may be facing a question, a transition, or a quiet sense that “something wants to change.” Instead of searching for or rushing toward answers, we invite you to pause and to ask yourself a different kind of question.

Take your current issue, challenge, or longing, and look at it through five lenses:

- **Physically:** What is my body telling me about this situation?
- **Emotionally:** What do I feel, beneath the surface?
- **Mentally:** What story am I telling myself? Is it true or just familiar?
- **Spiritually:** How about entrusting this situation to a greater, universal realm and trusting in guidance?
- **Creatively:** What new possibility wants to emerge here?

You don’t need to solve everything at once. Often, awareness alone is enough to begin the shift and bring you closer to the heart of the matter.

Every one of our core capacities carries wisdom. When we learn to honour them *all*, life becomes richer, more grounded, and more whole.

And perhaps, in doing so, we come a little closer to our own ‘*inner Atlantis*.’



3 BIOGRAPHY

Urban Waltenspuel is Co-Founder of the not-for-profit organization [Caribou Azores](#), which he established with his sister Regula. He is a multifaceted Zen meditation guide, composer and pianist, author and teacher, dedicated to blending contemplative practice with artistic expression.

His approach is rooted in a lifelong fascination with presence, imagination, and inner maps, such as mandalas. Since childhood, both siblings have felt connected by their shared dream of the lost continent of Atlantis.

For over a decade, they explored the Azores, a place that comes as close to a mythical land as one might find, deepening their commitment to mindfulness, sound, and the transformative power of music and traditional knowledge. Through meditation, presentations, and performance, he creates spaces for reflection, emotional grounding, and shared holistic resonance.



In 2022, they founded *Caribou Azores* as a not-for-profit association and have been offering thoughtfully curated experiential weeks that combine time in nature with structured reflection, creating space for guests to pause, reconnect with purpose, and move through life transitions such as [retirement](#), bereavement, or other profound changes, and also offers a [week for creative explorers](#) seeking a meaningful pause. They also conduct weeks in German, one of which addresses [The co\(s\)mic human](#), a week exploring existential questions.

Their experiential weeks take place in a former 17th-century Franciscan monastery, now a small guesthouse. In this oasis, guests could unplug from the outside world, leave their everyday lives behind, and quickly feel at home.

Anyone who walks through these ancient walls and learns about their age-old symbolism can feel the special charge between history and spirituality, because in it, there is something that defies words: a space for what is essential, for a quiet metamorphosis of the self.

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This text will be published in summer 2026 in the United States as Chapter 19 of the book “Om La La – The Power of Positivity Guidebook”, which focuses on healing support for people – without the colours, images or links except for the last four included in this document.

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