

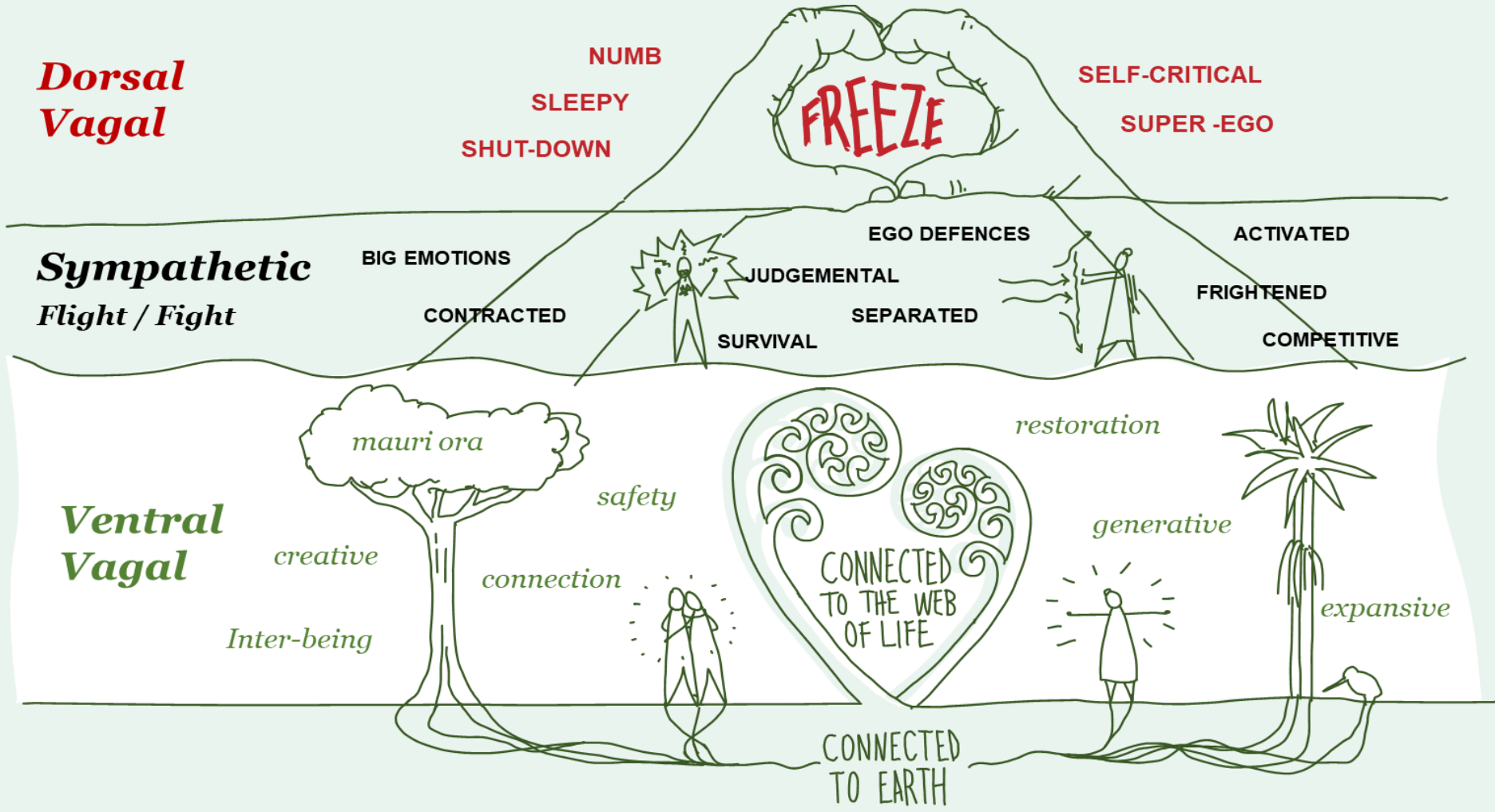
# HAUMANU RESTORATION

*Restorative systems mahi*

*Working with our  
central nervous  
system/s*



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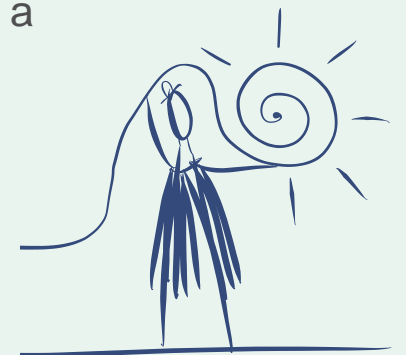
# Working with our central nervous system/s

Our central nervous system (brain and spinal cord) is how we receive, process and respond to sensory information. Our approach is informed by American psychologist and neuroscientist [Stephen Porges](#)' work on [Polyvagal Theory](#). Polyvagal Theory explores how our bodily state influences how we experience the world, and how we can cultivate physiologies of calmness and safety, through our individual bodies, in groups and through our social systems.

[Put simply](#), Polyvagal Theory frames our physiology through three responses – a relational response from our essential self (ventral vagal), fight or flight response from our activated self (sympathetic), and freeze response from our numbed, overwhelmed self (dorsal vagal). All of these are intelligent and adaptive responses, and more than one can be in play in any situation.

We have developed the image below to show how we can understand and work with our central nervous systems more skilfully in system change work. We seek to operate from and design our systems from a place of mauri ora (connection, life force and wellness), by resourcing ourselves to feel calm, safe, connected and relaxed.

*We are a sea of sensations with these fluctuating states all the time. If we can start to bring awareness and love to them we can be a healing agent in life.*



The central nervous system provides a strong foundation for helping people to build a literacy for what is happening in them, and for what they need. It is also the way trauma arrives through our bodies to be healed. The sympathetic zone shows us what needs to be healed, as triggers and activations from the past arrive to be received, felt, seen and heard, in order to be released.

When we are traumatised, stressed, anxious or busy, we are not in an optimal space to support restoration. Neither the sympathetic or the dorsal vagal are the places to design systems, run organisations or change the world from; they are places that need love and healing. We come and go from the mauri ora or ventral vagal space but we can learn the art of coming back, the art of resourcing, of supporting ourselves and groups to operate more from that space.

Seeking to work from a place of mauri ora and restoration means activating spaces of tau (calm), safety and connection, where flow can happen and where triggers and challenges can arise and be addressed in respectful ways. People are encouraged to be fully themselves, to bring all of their strengths and shadows. This requires skilful facilitation, with participants agreeing principles for working together and choosing to develop capacities such as poutama (continuous learning). In this approach, systems change work becomes less about the job you do and more about the capacities you can bring or develop to support restorative work.



[Peter Levine's](#) approach to healing trauma through somatic experiencing has also informed our practice. Somatic experiencing is a body-oriented approach to healing trauma, restoring the self through self-regulation, relaxation, wholeness and aliveness. For Haumanu we have trauma therapists supporting our group processes, helping people to navigate their personal trauma histories and how they show up in the collective. We have developed written and video resources for [individuals](#) and for [teams](#), which share tools and processes to support working from a place of mauri ora.

