

Peeling Back the Layers – The Onion Exercise

A Journey to Uncover Hidden Wounds and Reclaim Your Essence

Introduction: Why an Onion?

Like an onion, our identities are built in layers. Each layer represents beliefs, experiences, and coping mechanisms formed over time—many shaped by trauma, loss, or unmet needs. This exercise helps you peel back these layers gently and with curiosity, revealing truths that shape who you are.

You are not broken—you are unfolding. This process invites you to uncover, understand, and release what no longer serves you, bringing clarity, healing, and wholeness.

Step 1: The Outer Layers – Family Influence

Visualize the Onion:

Draw a large onion with multiple layers on a sheet of paper. Start from the outside and work inward. Each layer represents a different part of your identity.

Outer Layer 1: Family Messages (Beliefs and Rules)

- Write in the first layer the spoken and unspoken rules you inherited from your family.
- Examples: "Always be strong," "Don't show weakness," "Put others first," "Work hard to deserve love."

Questions:

- What rules did your family live by?
- How did these rules shape your identity?
- Which of these rules still influence you today?

Outer Layer 2: Roles You Played in Your Family

- Write down the roles you took on to survive or be accepted.
- Examples: The Caregiver, The Achiever, The Scapegoat, The Peacemaker, The Rebel.

Questions:

- What role(s) did you play in your family?
- Did this role keep you safe, loved, or unnoticed?
- How does this role still influence your relationships today?

Step 2: Moving Inward – Early Experiences and Pain Points

Layers of Emotional Memory:

Begin peeling back the layers by marking key experiences from childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Each layer gets closer to the core of your being.

Exercise:

1. Write down painful memories or moments of wounding—neglect, betrayal, loss, fear.
2. Represent them as marks, symbols, or words in the layers closer to the center.
3. Reflect on each experience:
 - How did this shape your beliefs about yourself and the world?
 - What coping mechanisms did you develop to survive?

Example Prompts:

- What is a memory that made you feel abandoned?
- When did you first feel shame or unworthiness?
- Who or what made you question your value?



Step 3: The Inner Layers – Hidden Beliefs and Core Wounds

Getting Closer to the Core:

List the beliefs and fears that these experiences planted within you.

Examples:

- "I am not enough."
- "People always leave."
- "I must earn love."

Questions:

- What belief about yourself still echoes today?
- How has this belief limited your choices, relationships, or dreams?
- Where in your body do you feel this belief when you focus on it?

Step 4: The Core – The Seed of Truth

Unearth the Core Story:

At the very center of the onion, write the belief or fear that feels like the root of your pain.

Exercise:

Write the story of your life as shaped by this core wound. Begin with:

- "Life is..."
- "People are..."
- "I am..."

Example Mission:

- "Life is unpredictable. People are unreliable. I am unsafe. Therefore, I will always stay in control to protect myself."

Step 5: Rewriting the Story – Your True Essence

Peeling Off the Layers:

- Imagine shedding the outer layers of this onion and letting go of the burdens they carry.
- Visualize yourself standing in the light, free of these weights.

Rewrite Your Truth:

- "Life is...beautiful, even in uncertainty."
- "People are...capable of connection and growth."
- "I am...worthy of love, exactly as I am."



Final Reflection:

What does it feel like to release these layers?

What part of yourself do you feel ready to reclaim?

What will you carry forward as your truth?

Closing Ritual:

Write an affirmation or declaration to anchor your growth.

Examples:

- "I honor my journey and release what no longer serves me."
- "I am whole and evolving."
- "I trust my unfolding and embrace my light."

Why This Works

- Peeling Back Layers mimics the process of uncovering hidden wounds in stages, respecting the depth and complexity of trauma.
- It integrates body awareness and reflection to make healing a full-body experience.
- The final rewrite anchors transformation, empowering you to live from authenticity, not fear.



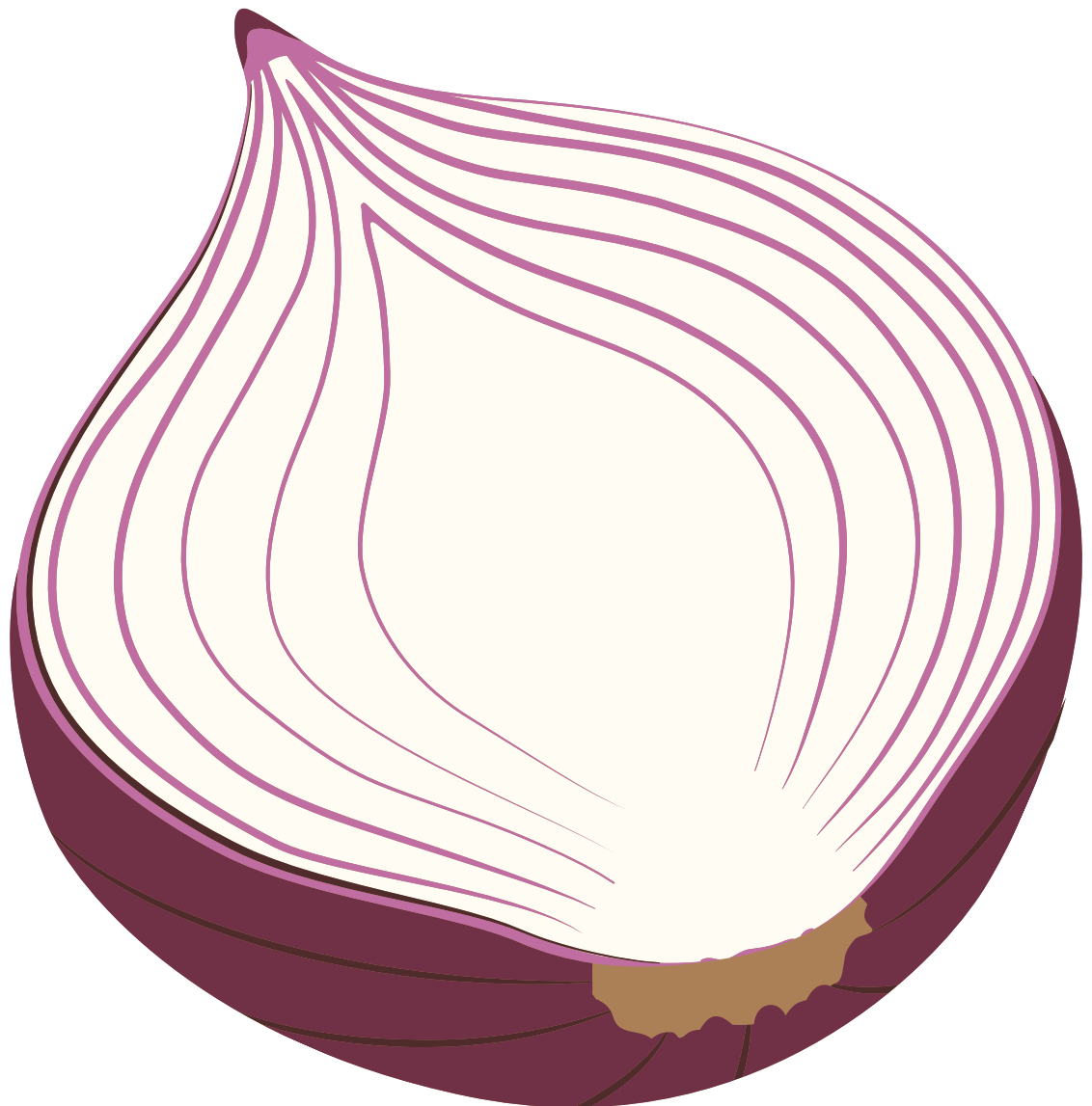
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Step 2: Moving Inward – Early Experiences and Pain Points

Outer Layer 1: Family Messages (Beliefs and Rules)

Layers of Emotional Memory:

Outer Layer 2: Roles You Played in Your Family



Step 3: The Inner Layers – Hidden Beliefs and Core Wounds

Getting Closer to the Core:

Step 4: The Core – The Seed of Truth

Unearth the Core Story:

Step 5: Rewriting the Story – Your True Essence

Peeling Off the Layers:

Rewrite Your Truth:



Guide. Facilitator. Alchemist.

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Metamorphosis: The Alchemy of Self