WINDING ROAD

WALKING THE PATH WITH SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES



A TRAVEL GUIDE & JOURNAL



As we each come to this circle, may we find the courage to share openly the burdens we carry. May we find the grace to explore our struggles and the strength to expand our understanding of the sacred. Let our words encourage, uplift and challenge each other in ways that move us towards deeper wisdom and insight into our struggles, our journeys and ourselves.

Let's begin.



As our time comes to a close today, take a moment to reflect on the experiences of our time together.

Allow the feelings of today to fill you. See if you can allow yourself to trust in this process and be grateful for the time that you have devoted to this journey today. We hope you'll be open to awareness, peace, and hope as you enter back into your lives.

As you go through the coming week, see if you can allow yourself to continue to take time to slow down and be open to the forks and switchbacks in your paths.

Now, gently and with intention, place your stone under your chair. You will leave your stones under your chair in this room, and with it, we ask you to leave the heaviness of your spiritual struggle, knowing it will be here next week to be picked back up within the safety of our circle.

THE ROAD AHEAD

~ A SCHEDULE OF SESSIONS ~

Session 1: The Journey Begins: An Introduction to the

Winding Road

Session 2: Sharing Spiritual Struggles

Session 3: Understanding Your Spiritual Heritage

Session 4: Your Spiritual Self

Session 5: Sizing Up Your Sacred

Session 6: Forgiveness: A Bridge to Wholeness

Session 7: Acceptance

Session 8: Meaning Making

Session 9: Conclusion: A Light for the Path Before You

SESSION 1: THE JOURNEY BEGINS: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE WINDING ROAD



This journey is not one that starts today, but one you have been walking all your life.

Now the road takes a new turn, and for these next few weeks, we will walk a stretch of the road together.

Watershed

Indigo Girls



Thought I knew my mind
Like the back of my hand
The gold and the rainbow
But nothing panned out as I planned
And they say only milk and honey's
Gonna make your soul satisfied
Well I better learn how to swim
Cause the crossing is chilly and wide

Twisted guardrails on the highway
Broken glass on the cement
A ghost of someone's tragedy
How recklessly my time has been spent
They say that its never too late
But you don't, you don't get any younger
Well I better learn how to starve the emptiness
And feed the hunger





Up on the watershed
Standing at the fork in the road
You can stand there and agonize
Till your agony's your heaviest load
You'll never fly as the crow flies
Get used to a country mile
When you're learning to face
The path at your pace
Every choice is worth your while

And there's always retrospect
(when you're looking back)
To light a clearer path
Every five years or so I look back on my life
And I have a good laugh
You start at the top
Go full circle round
Catch a breeze
Take a spill
But ending up where I started again
Makes me wanna stand still

Up on the watershed
Standing at the fork in the road
You can stand there and agonize
Till your agony's your heaviest load
You'll never fly as the crow flies
Get used to a country mile
When you're learning to face
The path at your pace
Every choice is worth your while





Stepping on a crack
Breaking up and looking back
Til' every tree limb overhead just seems to sit and wait
Til' every step you take becomes a twist of fate

Up on the watershed
Standing at the fork in the road
You can stand there and agonize
Till your agony's your heaviest load
You'll never fly as the crow flies
Get used to a country mile
When you're learning to face
The path at your pace
Every choice is worth your while

Up on the watershed
Standing at the fork in the road
You can stand there and agonize
Till your agony's your heaviest load
You'll never fly as the crow flies
Get used to a country mile
When you're learning to face
The path at your pace
Every choice is worth your while

And when you're learning to face
The path at your pace
Every choice is worth your while



Ground Rules



In order to make our group an environment that is comfortable, respectful, and safe for sharing about our journeys, it is important that we all agree to follow the following ground rules:

We will not disclose personal information that we learn about group members with people outside the group.

∞ SAFE SPACE *∞*

We will make this an atmosphere comfortable for sharing by: respecting each other- even if viewpoints are different and by remembering that this group is to support and listen to one another, not to find or agree upon the "truth".

SO OPENNESS CR

This group is NOT aimed at finding "the truth" or coming to an agreement on the rightness or wrongness of any beliefs. Instead, we are here to listen and support one another's experiences.

We all have different ways to talk about our beliefs and the divine. As a group we will decide on and use a common language to denote "transcendent", "God", and the "divine".

∞ VULNERABILITY ∞

Talking about these topics may be difficult and may make individuals feel vulnerable. It is OK to have these feelings and it is the group's job to listen and be supportive.

∞ ATTENDANCE ∞

Regular attendance is helpful in creating a safe space for other members and will allow you to get the most out of the group.

∞ NOT RESCUING ∞

It can be difficult to listen to others' pain without trying to help them "fix" things. In this group, we will listen to each other's experience and we will allow space for them to struggle without being "rescued.



SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Today is your chance to understand the spiritual journey that has led you to this point. There are no "right" or "wrong" things to share for this activity. Share whatever aspects of your spiritual life you believe will help group members understand your spiritual journey. Although they might come up today as we talk about your spiritual journey, we will focus on sharing spiritual struggles specifically next week.

- 1. What religious affiliation were you born into (if any)?
- 2. What was the religious/spiritual environment that you grew up in (such as parents, extended family, friends, and school environment)?
- 3. What type of role did religion/spirituality have in your life as you grew up?
- 4. Looking back on your life, are there specific events or people that have influenced your spiritual journey (either for positively or negatively)?
- 5. Describe a memorable spíritual experience that you have had- one that made you feel inspired/at peace; or in turmoil. How did this impact your spiritual journey?
- 6. How did going to high school impact your spiritual journey?
- 7. How did coming to college impact your spiritual journey?



A Review of Today's Journey

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Ground Rules

- Discussed ways to make an environment that is comfortable, respectful, and safe for sharing about our journeys. This can be achieved through the following:
 - o <u>Privacy</u>: We will not disclose personal information that we learn about group members with people outside the group.
 - o <u>Safe Space</u>: We will make this an atmosphere comfortable for sharing by: respecting each other- even if viewpoints are different and by remembering that this group is to support and listen to one another, not to find or agree upon the "truth".
 - Openness: This group is NOT aimed at finding "the truth" or coming to an agreement on the rightness or wrongness of any beliefs. Instead, we are here to listen and support one another's experiences. We all have different ways to talk about our beliefs and the divine. As a group we will decide on and use a common language to denote "transcendent", "God", and the "divine".
 - <u>Vulnerability</u>: Talking about these topics may be difficult and may make individuals feel vulnerable. It is OK to have these feelings and it is the groups job to listen and be supportive.
 - o <u>Attendance</u>: Regular attendance is helpful in creating a safe space for other members and will allow you to get the most out of the group.
 - Not rescuing: It can be difficult to listen to others' pain without trying to help them
 "fix" things. In this group, we will listen to each other's experience and we will allow
 space for them to struggle without being "rescued."

Stones of Experience Activity

• For this exercise, there was a pile of stones in the middle of the room. Facilitators read different statements. If the statement was true for you, you picked up a stone and returned to your seat. The stones represented the different life experiences that we have had along the way. They demonstrated how each of us bring unique experiences to the group. In some ways, we are similar; in others, we are different.

Spiritual Autobiography

• For this exercise, we shared about our spiritual selves. Specifically, group members told us about their personal spiritual backgrounds and then described a meaningful spiritual experience. From these spiritual autobiographies, we learned that spiritual struggles are a natural, normal, and relatively common experience for people. They can be related to distress and pain, but also to growth.

Take Home Point:

• A spiritual journey has smooth and rough spots. Both of these are natural aspects to any individual's spiritual life.



Other Guides for Your Journey

<u>Autobiographies and Biographies of Spiritual Leaders</u>

Frankl, V. E. (1984). Man's search for meaning. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Gandhi, M. (1952). Gandhi's autobiography. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Trust.

Hesse, H. (1951). Siddhartha. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation.

Theresa, Mother (1995). No greater love. Novato, California: New World Library.

St. John of the Cross (2003). Dark Night of the Soul. Dover Publications.



Using the space below and any additional pages you might need, describe your spiritual struggle in as much detail as possible. Below are some prompts to help you:

- 1. Explain how your spiritual struggle unfolded. What event(s) triggered your spiritual struggle?
- 2. Describe the feelings and emotions associated with your spiritual struggle.
- 3. Describe any conflict or strain that you feel in your personal relationship with the divine. For example, describe times when you feel angry at or abandoned by the divine.
- 4. Describe any strains in your relationships with friends and family caused by spirituality.

5.	Describe or draw images, colors, and/or pictures that appear when reflecting on your spiritual struggles

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SESSION 2

SHARING SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES



With each boulder in your path, you have choices about how to make it past so you can continue your journey.

TYPES OF SPIRITUAL STRUGGLES



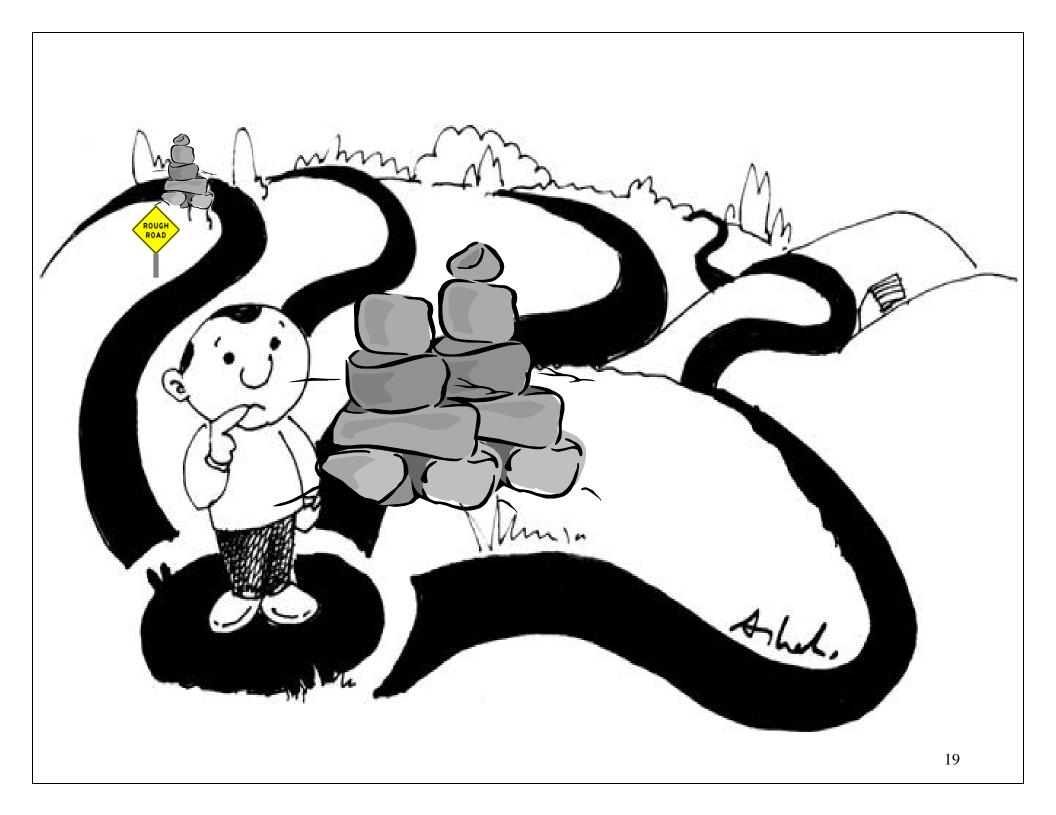
INTERPERSONAL STRUGGLING WITH PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE BECAUSE OF SPIRITUALITY.



<u>INTRA</u>PERSONAL WRESTLING INTERNALLY ABOUT SPIRITUALITY



DIVINE STRUGGLING WITH GOD IN SOME WAY



Self-Care During the Journey

Talking about spiritual struggles may stir up a variety of emotions and thoughts that may affect you throughout the week. Please be aware of this and take time out to take care of yourself. Here are some suggestions on how you can take care of yourself this week.



Reflect on the uncomfortable feelings instead of trying to push them away



Eat healthy foods



Take a walk



Exercise



Meditate



Take a warm bath



Pray



Talk to a supportive friend



Write in your journal

Other ways that you can take care of yourself:



Watch a funny movie

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A Review of Today's Journey

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Reviewed rules to help maintain a safe space (refer to week 1).

Discussed the SEE activity

• We discussed thoughts and reactions to Week 1's SEE activity (writing about spiritual struggles). We talked about the easy and difficult parts of this writing exercise. From this, we learned that spiritual struggles are a normal and natural aspect of a spiritual journey.

Spiritual Struggle Sharing

- We read and reflected on the descriptions of our spiritual struggles from the 1st week. After reflecting, we took turns talking about our personal spiritual struggles. After everyone was done sharing, we discussed what this activity was like. From this, we learned that:
 - o Spiritual struggles are relatively common.
 - o That they are associated with a range of emotions and thoughts.
 - o That they can be powerful influences on our lives.

Understanding Spiritual Struggles

- The facilitators shared information to help us understand spiritual struggles:
 - o Spiritual struggles arise when we are faced with situations that challenge our normal way of understanding the world. These challenges can come from unexpected and traumatic events, such as the untimely death of loved ones, or can be a result of normal life transitions, such as going to college.
 - Often times, spiritual struggles fall within three different categories: internal turmoil or confusion about spiritual beliefs ("intrapersonal spiritual struggles"), tensions with others because of religious or spiritual beliefs ("interpersonal spiritual struggles"), and tensions within personal relationships with God ("divine spiritual struggles").
 - People try to deal with these struggles in a variety of ways. Certain ways of dealing with struggles are better than others.

LOST: Charlie's Struggle and the Story of the Moth

- We learned the story of the moth, as told to Charlie who was struggling with drug addiction. This story had several important points including:
 - We are strengthened by struggle

- o There are no easy solutions to our struggles
- o Being rescued from our struggles might not help us as much as persevering through the struggle ourselves

Memento

• The picture of the boulder in the middle of the trail demonstrates that there are many different paths along the spiritual journey. Occasionally, an unexpected event occurs, which makes it difficult to continue along our original path. This is similar to if a giant boulder was placed in the middle of the path that we were following. When this happens, there are several ways to react: such as trying to climb the boulder, going around the boulder, or just sitting and waiting for the boulder to move. When making these choices, it is important to think about your values and make choices that are consistent with your values.

Take home points:

- Spiritual struggles are a natural and normal part of life.
- There are different types of spiritual struggles and they can be associated with a variety of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.
- It is very important how you choose to deal with your spiritual struggle. Some choices may be difficult to make, they may be painful, and they may lead you farther away from your spirituality. Other choices may lead you towards growth and spiritual richness.



Other Guides for Your Journey

<u>Mindfulness In Plain English</u> by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana This book gives very clear instruction about a style of meditation that is particularly accessible to beginners.

Meditation for Beginners by Jack Kornfield - Audio CD

Four complete meditation exercises teach you how to work with breathing, posture, attention, and difficult emotions - to create tranquility and clarity in your everyday life.

Mindful Awareness Research Center - marc.ucla.edu

http://www.marc.ucla.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=27&Itemid=46 This site offers free MP3 guided meditation, ranging from 3 – 17 minutes.

When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times by Pema Chodron Chodron is a Tibetan Buddhist nun who discusses the sense of groundless we feel in the face of life's great pains. She offers clear and practical wisdom for facing these difficult situations.

<u>The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Loving-Kindness</u> by Pema Chodron "This book is about saying yes to life, about making friends with ourselves and our world, and about accepting the delightful and painful situation of 'no exit.'"



For this weeks SEE activity, we would like you to think about four people that have been a spiritual influence. Please choose people that you have a direct relationship with (like parents, and friends) instead of role models that you have read about (like Mother Theresa). These people can have had a positive or negative affect on your spirituality. Please write about two positive influences and two negative influences. Alternatively, if you have difficulty coming up with this, please write about the four most important spiritual influences in your life.

When writing, please include your relationship with the person (such as friend, family teacher, neighbor) and the ways that they influenced you spiritually. Be as descriptive as possible.						

SESSION 3

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SPIRITUAL HERITAGE



"You are not the child of the people you call mother and father, but their fellow-adventurer on a bright journey to understand the things that are."

Ríchard Bach

Your Spiritual Compass

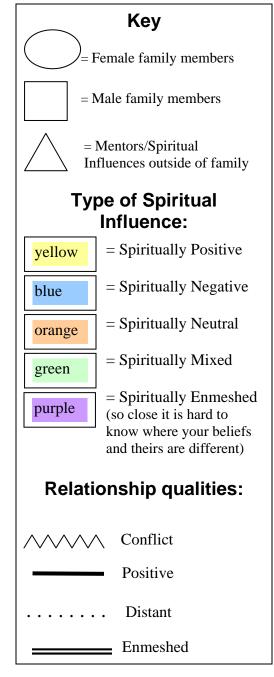
As you move through your spiritual journey, you are guided by the values and beliefs that you hold — both the values and beliefs that you can put into words, the ones that you are not aware of, and the ones that you are struggling to define.

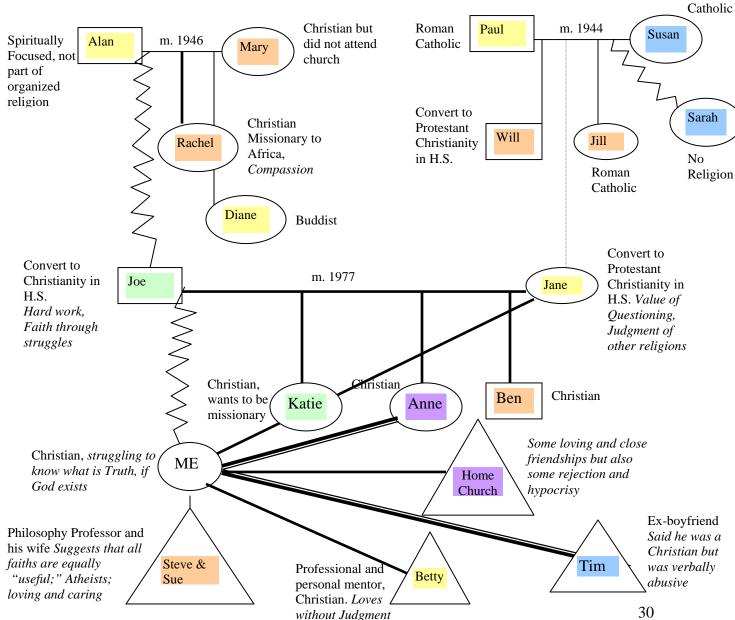
In many ways, these values and beliefs act as your compass, guiding you through life events. One task that you face as a young adult is identifying and owning your own compass. In other words, you are in the process of deciding what beliefs and values will guide your life.

This process can be a source of spiritual struggle. At times, you might feel that you have your direction defined and that you are headed towards your spiritual goals. However, at other times, it can easily feel as if your direction is pulled off course by family disapproval, peer rejection or cultural influences.

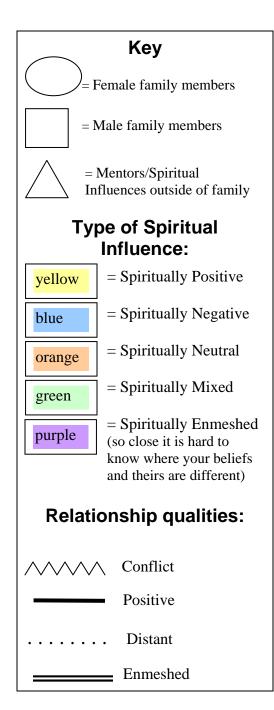
One way to better understand the confusion that comes when you feel pulled off course is by intentionally mapping out the spiritual influences — positive and negative — in your life.

Spiritual Genogram

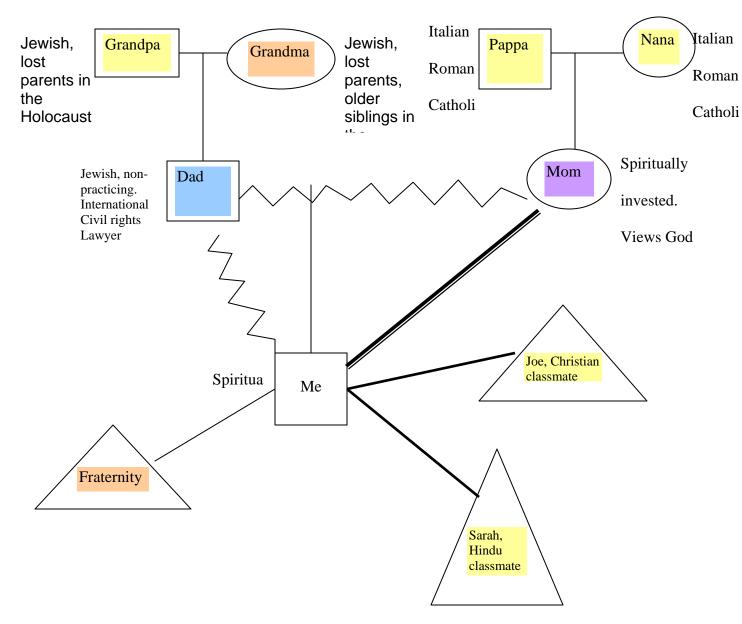




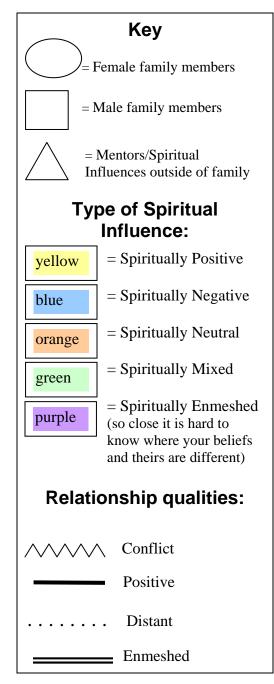
Roman



Spiritual Genogram



MY SPIRITUAL GENOGRAM



In making your own spiritual genogram, you will use a combination of different shapes, lines, and colors to represent people in your life (family and others), your relationships with them, and their influence on your spiritual self.



People are designated using shapes and colors:

- ° Circles are female family members
- Squares are male family members
- Triangles are people outside your family who have had an influence in you spiritually
- ° Color each person according to how you would represent your relationship, in terms of its spirituality
 - Use lines to indicate the quality of your relationship with each person

MY SPIRITUAL GENOGRAM

Discovering Your Spiritual Heritage

What role if any did religion/spirituality play in your life when you were growing up?



Family

Where do you stand in relation to your <u>family's perspective</u> on religion and spirituality?

Religious/Spiritual Tradition

What kinds of questions do you have about your religious/spiritual tradition?

What are the things that bug you about your religious tradition? What are the things that you value in your tradition?

Spiritual Struggle

How does your family and/or religious/spiritual tradition respond to spiritual struggle?

How have you resolved any conflicts or tension between your personal beliefs and those of your family or friends?



Spiritual Support:

Are you in harmony with the beliefs of your Family, Church, Peers?

Where do you experience the most support and agreement regarding your spirituality or religion?

Where do you turn for advice or guidance?

Your Spiritual Self

What role does your religion and spirituality play in your life now?

What specific religious/spiritual beliefs do you consider most important for you now?

How are those beliefs a source of connection or conflict between you and other family members?





The Big Picture

Do you notice any patterns of religious rituals/behavior or spiritual beliefs in your Genogram?



A Review of Today's Journey



Spiritual genograms

 We discussed the forces that influence our spiritual paths, including the role of family and friends. To help us better understand the influence of these people on our spiritual lives, we created spiritual genograms that mapped out who was in our life and how they influence us. We then discussed our genograms and their relation to our spiritual lives.

Discussion

- In our discussion of the genograms, several points were emphasized:
 - One developmental task of young adulthood is to move towards "religious ownership" through differentiating from others and internalizing one's own religious/ spiritual beliefs and perspective.
 - There are many different ways to react to family history including: rejecting, reacting so strongly against your family that you do the exact opposite of everything they do, passively accepting, and intentionally accepting and internalizing family beliefs.
 - o Some aspects of relationships identified in the genograms might be linked with family history and current struggles.
 - "Growing pains" are a normal part of spiritual development and this process typically does not occur quickly
 - As a young adult, you have a choice of which values and beliefs form your compass.
 - o Forming your compass takes place by intentionally exposing yourself to resources (people, readings, experiences) that are consistent with your values. This choice is a reality even if it sometimes feels that you can't let go of some aspects of your spirituality that you would like to.

Take-home Points

- There are many different people in life that influence our spirituality and religious beliefs
- One task of young adult hood is to try to sort out those influences
- As a young adult, you have choices over which values/beliefs you want to make your own



Other Guides for Your Journey

Beattie, M. (1990). *Language of Letting Go: Daily Meditations for Codependents*. HarperCollins Publishers, New York, New York.

Hodge, D. R. (2001). Spiritual genograms: A generational approach to assessing spirituality. *Families in Society*, 82(1), 35-48.

Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Cole, B., Jewell, T., Magyar, G. M., Tarakeshwar, N. et al. (2005). A higher purpose: The sanctification of strivings in a community sample. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 15(3), 239-262.

Spiritual Enhancement Exercise (S.E.E.)

Often times when people are in a place where they are feeling pulled in different directions by their family members, friends or own struggles, it can be hard to think about or put words to the values and beliefs that you do hold.

What we would like you to do for next week is to take some time and write down some of the values that you hold and some of the spiritual goals that you are striving towards. We refer to values, strivings, and goals interchangeably as things you hold sacred and would like to accomplish or achieve. These can be things that you have an emotional investment in and may be qualities or ideas that you think are most important in life.

For example, you could be striving to be a loving, accepting person. Or, you could be striving to live more closely in line with YOUR religious tradition. We realize that it might be hard to come up with specific STRIVINGS so we have included some prompts on the SEE activity in your Travel Log, such as being connected to a Higher Power (theistic) or transcendent qualities (non-theistic), religious goals, altruistic endeavors, family relationships, and existential concerns, to name a few. These prompts represent different areas of life that people VALUE TO DIFFERENT DEGREES.

This activity might take some thought so we encourage you to take some time by

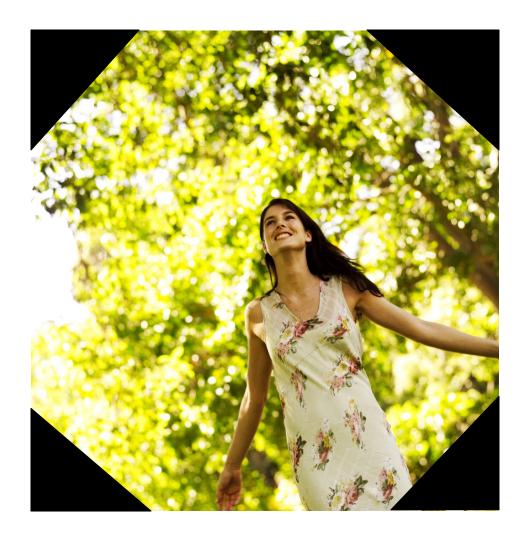
to think about to would like to st	and to write d	own your value	s or spiritual goals

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SESSION 4

YOUR SPIRITUAL SELF



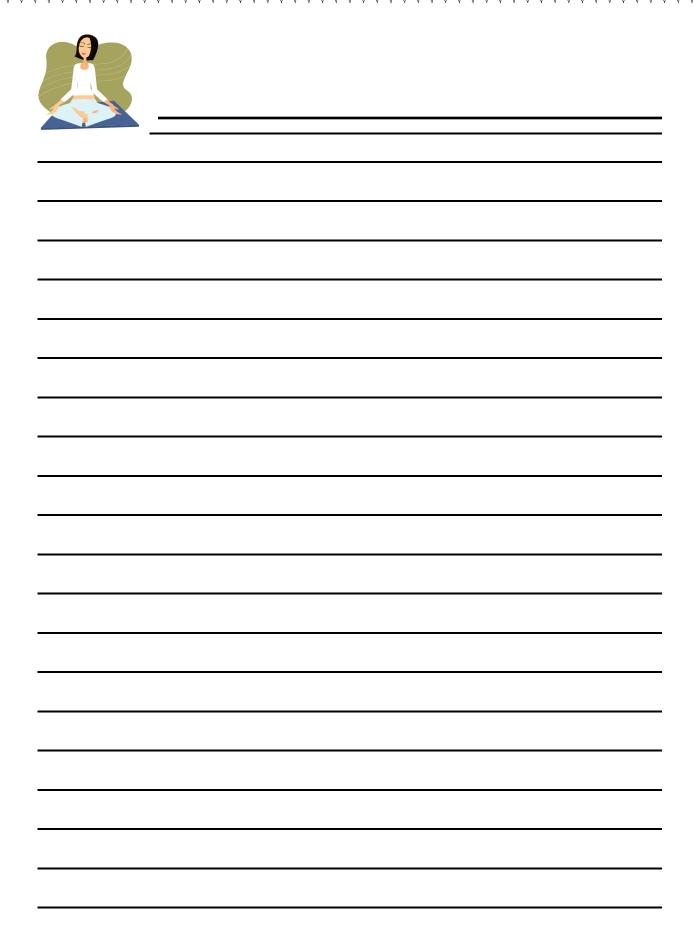
"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

Anais Nin

The Spiritual Self Meditation



•	•	•	?or example, self have?



Spiritual Self Exercise: Wind

We all have things that help lead us towards or get in the way of living in line with our spiritual goals, our values, and Spiritual Self. The forces that can pull us away from living a life in line with our values can feel like the wind, blowing us off course. Our job is to identify and talk about these forces. Take some time now to identify internal and external "winds" in your life. To start this process, consider these questions to help you identify the winds in your life::

When do you find it hardest to make choices consistent with your values?
What are the "windy" times of your life? When do you get pulled away?
What do you find that gets in the way?
What are sources of confusion in your life?
LIST SOME EXTERNAL "WINDS" (Some examples: college culture, messages from the media, busyness)
LIST SOME INTERNAL "WINDS" (Some examples: self-criticism, anxiety about future, jealousy of others)

The Winds in Our Lives

Forces that pull at us can be

- **മ** Actions
- ກ Thoughts
- **Feelings**
- ∞ \ People

Barriers can be internal or external

∞ Some internal barriers could be:

- ശ Fear
- **G** Guilt
- ്യ Materialism
- **B** Lust
- ് Jealousy
- **ය** Laziness
- **്ദ** Judgementalism
- **G** Perfectionism
- Medonism (drinking, drugs, sex)
- Mot acknowledging own feelings honestly
- **Mostility**
- **Rationalizations**

Some external barriers could be:

- Media (TV, movies, music) that reflect competition or non-valued living
- Peers or people that act in ways not in line with values (e.g., drunkenness, aggression towards others, cheating, stealing, etc...)
- Busyness or scheduling self so that you have limited resources to intentionally develop spirituality/values

Spiritual Self Exercise: Wings

The forces that pull at us work much like a strong gust of wind. At times the wind can be too strong and we allow it to move us away from our intended direction. Other times, we may realize that we have wings and can choose to propel ourselves in a different direction than the wind may want to take us. We recall that wings are stronger than the wind. In order to live a life that reflects our values and nourishes our spiritual identity, we can build on our strengths, our "wings." Take some time now to identify personal strengths that propel you through windy times in your life. To help you identify the winds in your life, consider these questions:

When do you find yourself living in line with your values?

What resources reflect consistency in your spiritual goals? How do you use these resources to counteract the forces that pull you away from your strivings?

What are some moments of success? When have you lived in line with your values and spiritual goals and how did that feel?

What can you do to strengthen your spiritual muscles to help you make choices to counteract the forces pulling at you?

How can you celebrate your successes?

				\
ernal "Wings" (Son	ne examples: di	iscipline, trust,	, gratitude)	

The Wings the Carry Us

Sources of strengths can be internal or external

Some internal sources could be:

- **Discipline**
- **S** Patience
- **Gratitude**
- Perseverance/ Fortitude
- **ශ** Peace
- **Manual** Humility
- ് Trust
- ശ Love
- **Grace**

<mark>ജ Some <u>external sources</u> c</mark>ould be:

- **ദ** Role models
- religious/spiritual values
- Religious/spiritual community
- Religious or spiritual writings
- **Song/** music that bring peace
- **G** Prayer
- **Meditation**



A Review of Today's Journey



Review Values and Spiritual Goals

• We discussed values and spiritual goals. Values and spiritual goals help guide our behavior. Some of these values are deeply ingrained in you and are things that you live in accordance with. However, there are some values that you may think are important, but that you don't live consistent with in your daily life. As an activity we discussed our personal strivings.

The Spiritual Self Visualization and Drawing

• Using a visualization activity, you explored who you would be in 40 years if you were living in a way that was consistent with your values. In our discussion we emphasized that developing values and living in line with them are ongoing processes that are never "fulfilled," and that everyone's image and story is unique.

Wings and Winds

• Forces in our lives can impact how well we are able to live in accordance with our values and spiritual goals. Some forces can blow us off course (like wind), whereas others can be important resources that can help pull us back toward our values and strivings (wings). You identified your own "winds" and "wings" that impact you in your life.

Take-home Points

- ➤ Each of us has a spiritual part of our being that we can connect with. We may gain a better sense of direction on our winding road by spending time connecting with our "Spiritual Self."
- ➤ We can use the image of who we spiritually strive to become as a way to make decisions towards or away from that person in our every day lives.
- ➤ It is important to identify forces that pull at us so that we can be better equipped to make a choice as to if or how they affect us. Remember, these forces can be internal or external, such as actions, thoughts, feelings, or people.
- ➤ It is also important to know your strengths so that you can continue to build on them. Strengths can be internal or external, such as peace, forgiveness, loving role models, etc. It will be helpful to use your resources in hard times and as a way to help propel you to live a life in-line with your values and long term spiritual strivings.



Other Guides for Your Journey

Beak, S. (2006). The Red Book: A Deliciously Unorthodox Approach to Igniting Your Divine Spark. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.

McLennan, S. (1990). Finding Your Religion: When the Faith You Grew Up With Has Lost Its Meaning. HarperCollins: New York, New York.

Morgan, M. (1991). *Mutant Message Down Under. HarperCollins Publishers*, New York, New York.

Paulus, T. (1972). Hope for the Flowers. Paulist Press: New York, New York.

Spiritual Enhancement Exercise (S.E.E.)

Just as a muscle grows stronger when exercised, so do our ability to make choices that reflect living in line with our personal values and spiritual goals. The more we make choices that are in-line with our values, the "stronger" those muscles become. At the same time, the more often we allow ourselves to be propelled by forces that pull us from our values, the more power they can gain in our lives. The direction of our journey can be a reflection of how we live our day-to-day lives. A series of small choices/ small steps helps guide us away from or closer to our long-term spiritual goals. So, how do we do this? Well, we each have wings that help us navigate what is pulling at us – but in order to do so, we need to strengthen our wing "muscles." Therefore, we are going to invite you to spend time daily to Stretch and Strengthen your wings.

Pick one of the resources from the list we discussed today that you would like to build into your life. Make a plan on when you plan on using this resource. For this week's SEE, we would like you to work on this resource as a concrete behavior toward the goal of living in accordance with your own values. We will follow up with each of you next week to see how the process of stretching and strengthening your wings through using this resource has influenced you.

We are also asking that, in the coming week, you think about what the sacred means to you and bring in an object that captures this. Next week you'll have an opportunity to share your object and how it symbolizes the sacred.

SESSION 5

SIZING UP YOUR SACRED



One traveling can always use the North Star to orient oneself. Although it may not always be visible, it is there and can be used as a guide when the path is not clear.



SPIRITUAL QUESTIONS

Write down your most troubling questions relating to the Sacred that have arisen amidst your spiritual struggle.

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SPIRITUAL FEELINGS

Write down your most troubling feelings related to the Sacred that have arisen amidst your spiritual struggle.



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Knowing the Sacred

(Taken from *The Red Book: A Deliciously Unorthodox Approach to Igniting Your Divine Spark* by Sera Beak)

I [don't care] what or who represents the divine to you, but [I do care] very much about how your view of the divine affects your inner and outer life. Does your view of the divine allow you to explore and be creative and remain open to diverse people and beliefs? Does it give you inner strength and peace and promote

love and deep belly laughs and the desire to help others? Or does your view of the divine make you feel fearful, guilty, small, narcissistic, or overly critical? You'd be surprised at how other traditions or trendy movements – basically others' Gods – have influenced or even created your ideas, sometimes to the point of blocking your own personal experience and preventing you from exploring further.

Maybe you choose not to believe in any sort of God or divine force whatsoever, and that's just fine. But then, what God are you not believing in? A Judeo-Christian God? A New Age God? A Buddhist nothing? Your mother's God? (Some of the most colorful ideas of what God is or isn't come from my atheist friends.) What if you just respectfully kissed all of those external notions of divinity good-bye and set out to find out who you really are, and by doing this, lo and behold, you found out who God has always been? In other words, what if you decided to know God from the inside out? What would She (or He) look like? What would She feel like? Who would she actually be?

What if you saw God or the divine as nothing more than you living your life with all you've got? What happens to you, down at

the cellular level, in your very core, where the meanings are, when you experience deep love for someone or something? What's the feeling you get when you look up at the stars or into a newborn's eyes or when you see a dog romping freely and joyfully in the park or when you are enjoying a hysterically funny dinner with friends, or running freely, muscles pumping down a sandy beach, or just sitting silently alone in the woods, awake and aware? What is the sense you have about death? About art? About nature? About clawfoot bathtubs? Keep asking new questions, and keep listening for new answers. You might be surprised at how God or the divine comes through.

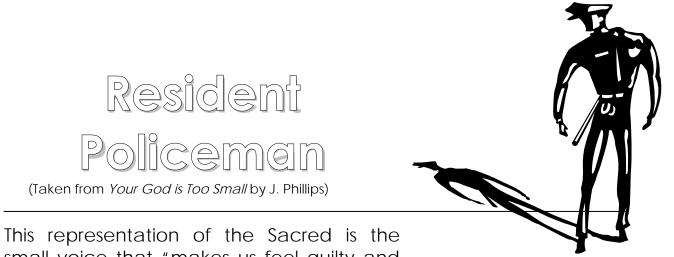
It's vitally important to nix any old-school ideas for the divine that weigh you down, squash your inner knowing, dampen your desire to ignite your inner flame. Let the divine reveal itself to you, opening yourself up to it in your own, in your own time, through any means. Let yourself get creative in your expression. And please don't let the divine be just a mental construct. After all, divinity is experiential, not intellectual. You feel it, you sense it, you intuit it, far more than you need to think about it and analyze it. Don't box it up. Don't plague it with set beliefs. Be willing to create a brand-new relationship.

And even if you feel totally clueless about what/who/where/why divinity is, it doesn't change the fact that something's still there, twinkling your world, illuminating meanings, urging you this way and that, winking and whispering and just waiting to contradict, to surprise, to undress. All you have to do is get quiet inside, hear that whisper, resonate with that sunset, and allow yourself to realize, Aha, Here I Am. Here We Are.

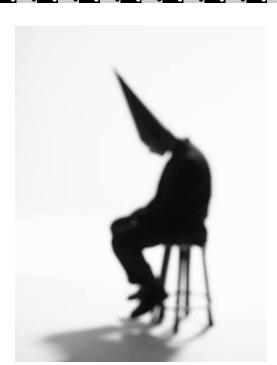


Resident Policemen

(Taken from Your God is Too Small by J. Phillips)



small voice that "makes us feel guilty and unhappy before, during, or after wrong-doing". Certainly there is nothing wrong with having a conscience or with having a moral compass to guide our actions and thoughts. When people see the Sacred as the resident policeman, however, the Sacred is equated to conscience. There are several ways in which this can be dangerous. Conscience can be so easily perverted or morbidly developed in the sensitive person, and so easily ignored and silenced by the insensitive, that it makes a very unsatisfactory sense of Sacred. For example a person brought up in accordance with stringent dietary practices (e.g. kosher, vegetarianism, days of abstinence) may suffer with a 'bad conscience' when as an adolescent or adult s/he eats a previously restricted food. As another example, a sportsman who has been trained that it is wrong to shoot a sitting bird will feel a strong sense of guilt and wrongdoing if he does so, even if accidentally. This same person will not feel this pang of conscience in shooting a bird flying 40 yards away (whereas a vehement animal rights person may). Our sense of conscience can be trained, affected by propaganda and by upbringing, and therefore cannot be equivalent to the Sacred.



Absolute Perfection

(Taken from Your God is Too Small by J. Phillips)

This perspective takes the position that if the Sacred is perfection, then the best way to follow/ serve /worship the Sacred is to be a perfectionist in faith. This rigidity of belief can become tyrannical, requiring adherence to only the highest standards, and result in extreme guilt, intolerance for aspects of the self (and others) that do not conform to these "100% standards". Even if the Sacred is perfect, this is not to say that we are only worthy of interest and support when we are perfect.

Secredalinaea Box (Taken from *Your God is Too Small* by J. Phillips)

When people have this conceptualization of The Sacred, their religion or spirituality is compartmentalized and separate from the rest of their lives. They may say they go to church on Sundays, or that they think of the Sacred when they are in a church, synagogue or temple, but not very much at other times or in other situations. Being faithful is thought of as being a 'good churchman/woman', and living this type of religiosity is following a prescribed set of rules and regulations. Outsiders can easily be identified and are tolerated only with a sense of superiority and separateness. In this view, others' expectations and approval, and adhering to clear cut principles are important in validating one's own sense of being 'of the flock'.



The Beatitudes

(Translated by J. Phillips in Your God is Too Small)



Happy are those who realize their spiritual poverty; they have already entered the kingdom of Reality.

Happy are they who bear their share of the world's pain; in the long run they will know more happiness than those who avoid it.

Happy are those who accept life and their own limitation; they will find more in life than anybody.

Happy are those who long to be truly "good"; they will fully realize their ambition.

Happy are those who are ready to make allowances and to forgive; they will know the love of God.

Happy are those who are real in their thoughts and feelings; in the end they will see the ultimate Reality, God.

Happy are those who will help others to live together; they will be known to be doing God's work.





A Review of Today's Journey



Sharing our images of the Sacred:

• You were asked to bring in and share with the group an object that captures your image of the Sacred.

Most troubling questions:

• You identified and wrote down your most troubling questions (and accompanying feelings) relating to the Sacred that have arisen amidst your spiritual struggle. These questions were re-visited toward the close to the session.

Who is your Sacred?

- In the discussion of our concepts of the Sacred, leaders emphasized that each person has a different conceptualization of the Sacred. Our perceptions of the Sacred can be beneficial to us, or harmful and limiting.
- Leaders presented several common conceptualizations of the Sacred and you were asked to identify your own conceptualization of the Sacred.
- You were then asked to identify ways that your conceptualization of the Sacred has 1) helped you on your spiritual journey (e.g., given you peace, assurance, love) and/or 2) hindered, restricted, or limited you on your spiritual journey (e.g., feeling judged or abandoned).

Broadening concepts of the Sacred

- Leaders suggested that, in addition to your current conceptualizations of the Sacred, there are additional ways of thinking about and experiencing the Sacred. Here the focus was on the more expansive aspect of the Sacred: benevolence, immanence, mystery.
- In his book *Your God is Too Small*, Phillips (1986) provides a translation of the beatitudes that was read to the group.

Most troubling questions for the Sacred revisited:

• You were asked to spend time thinking about and making notes about how your most troubling questions might be different in light of what was discussed about the Sacred in this session. Considering that your concept of the Sacred may have been stretched, broadened, and deepened, do you see different questions now? Do you see your original questions differently now?

Take-home Points

- We all have different conceptualizations of the Sacred.
- The way(s) we think about the Sacred affects our experiences and spiritual struggle.
- It may be helpful in dealing with your spiritual struggle to more closely examine your ideas, beliefs, and feelings about the Sacred.
- It is possible to broaden your conceptualization of the Sacred in ways that facilitate your personal and spiritual growth.



Other Guides for Your Journey

"A meditation on Loving-Kindness" found in:

Kornfield, J. (1993). *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life.* Bantam Books: New York. (pp. 19-21)

Mindfulness In Plain English by Bhante Henepola Gunaratana

This book gives very clear instruction about a style of meditation that is particularly accessible to beginners.

Meditation for Beginners by Jack Kornfield - Audio CD

Four complete meditation exercises teach you how to work with breathing, posture, attention, and difficult emotions - to create tranquility and clarity in your everyday life.

Other resources:

Beak, S. (2006). The Red Book: A Deliciously Unorthodox Approach to Igniting your Divine Spark. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco.

Phillips, J.B. (1986). Your God is Too Small. Touchstone: New York.

Spiritual Enhancement Exercise (S.E.E.)

In addition to continuing to practice your wings exercise, what we would like you to do for next week is to practice a meditation called the loving kindness meditation for next week's session. The meditation is summarized below.

The Loving Kindness Meditation

(Taken from A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life by Jack Kornfield)

"Sit in a comfortable fashion. Let your body relax and be at rest. As best you can, let your mind be quiet, letting go of plans and preoccupations. Then begin to recite inwardly the following phrases directed to yourself. Begin with yourself because without loving yourself it is almost impossible to love others.

May I be filled with loving-kindness. May I be well. May I be peaceful and at ease. May I be happy.

"You may also wish to use this image: picture yourself as a young and beloved child, or sense yourself as you are now, held in a heart of loving-kindness. Let the feelings arise with the words. Adjust the words and images so that you find the exact phrases that best open your heart of kindness. Repeat the phrases again and again, letting the feelings permeate your body and mind.

"When you feel ready, you can gradually expand the focus of your loving-kindness to include others. After yourself, choose a benefactor, someone in your life who has truly cared for you. Picture them and carefully recite the same phrases, *May he/she be filled with loving-kindness*, and so forth. When loving-kindness for your benefactor has developed, begin to include other people you love in the meditation, picturing them and reciting the same phrases, evoking a sense of loving-kindness for them.

"After this you can gradually begin to include others: friends, community members, neighbors, people everywhere, animals, the whole earth, and all beings. Then you can even experiment with including the most difficult people in your life, wishing that they, too, be filled with loving-kindness and peace.

May I be filled with loving-kindness.

May I be well.

May I be peaceful and at ease.

May I be happy.

When you are ready, come back to this room and open your eyes.

"Try practicing this loving-kindness meditation for 15 to 20 minutes at a time this coming week. You'll notice that you will be able to include many being in your meditation, moving from yourself, to a benefactor and loved ones, to all beings everywhere.

"And you can learn to practice it anywhere. You can use this meditation in traffic jams, in buses and airplanes, in doctors' waiting rooms, and in a thousand other circumstances. As you silently practice this loving-kindness meditation among people, you will immediately feel a wonderful connection with them—the power of loving-kindness. It will calm your life and keep you connected to your heart."

SESSION 6

FORGIVENESS: A BRIDGE TO WHOLENESS



When we are wronged (either by ourselves or someone else) we often experience anger, bitterness and resentment, which are all separated from peace and contentment. Forgiveness provides the opportunity to bridge this separation, reconnecting us with inner peace and the chance to move beyond our pain.

Forgiveness & Struggle

Your spiritual struggle may include some unresolved feelings of shame, bitterness, anger, resentment, or hardness around your heart. These feelings may be a result of something someone did to you. They may also be feelings you have toward yourself because of things you did or perhaps things that you don't do.

Think about these issues as they relate to your spiritual struggle. Keep in mind that forgiving in and of itself can be a spiritual struggle. If you would like to jot down your thoughts during this time, feel free to do so.



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FORGIVENESS IS

- * A response toward an offender that involves letting go of negative feelings, thoughts, and behavior
- * Something that happens inside the person who does it (not the transgressor)
 - * We need to have borne the wound ourselves;
 - * We need to know we have been wronged;
 - * We need to have an inner push to forgive.
- * Forgiveness is a *PROCESS* in which we
 - * Rediscover the humanity of the person who hurt us;
 - * Surrender our right to get even;
 - * Revise our feelings toward the person we forgive.





- Forgetting what happened or inviting our transgressor to hurt us again;
- * Condoning or excusing what was done to us;
- Surrendering the right to justice for our transgressor;
- * Tolerating the wrong that was done to us;
- * Restoring us to where we were prior to the wrong:
 - * "A wise judge may let mercy temper justice but may not let mercy undo it"
- * Reconciling or reunion, which is sometimes:
 - * Impossible
 - * Harmful
 - * Such a threat that it prevents a wounded person from healing: by turning forgiveness into an obligation to reunite with a transgressor, one can be robbed of a chance to heal the wounds that still scar us;
- * Taking the edge off of the evil that was done to us;
- * Inviting the person who hurt us to hurt us again.



What sorts of things do we forgive?

- ❖ We forgive people (not organizations, governments, institutions) to whom we ascribe blame for wronging us. This can be ourselves or others.
- ❖ We forgive people for what they do, not for who they are
 - * "We are not called to forgive people for being bad people we like them, accept them, leave them, and sometimes weep over them and try to help them improve on their characters – but we don't forgive them for this." (pp 17-18) We forgive them for things they have done to us, ways in which they have wronged us, trespassed against us, etc.
- * We forgive people who have wounded us seriously.
 - * "Forgiving is for the truly serious wounds of life, for the inner pain and boiling resentment brought by the deeper cuts that we cannot ignore when they happen and cannot forget after they have been sliced." (pp 18-19)
- We forgive people for what they do to wrong us when they wound us.
 - * There is a difference between being pained and being wronged. People annoy us, cause us costly inconveniences, but there is a difference between pains in the neck and those who betray us.
- * "Sometimes we may experience feelings of anger toward the Divine, the idea of forgiving the Divine might occur to us. Depending on your belief system, this may be a completely new thought to you, may sound somewhat absurd, or may not apply. The main point we want to make is that it is okay to be angry with the Divine -- because Divinity/the Sacred can handle it.



WHAT ARE YOUR OBSTACLES TO FORGIVENESS?

(Photograph taken by Erin Price.)

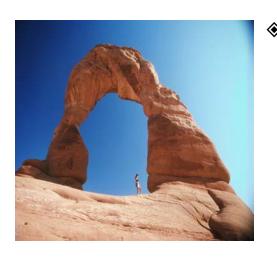
WHY IS IT HARD TO FORGIVE?

Forgiveness involves looking at the pain of being wronged in the face, acknowledging how deeply you've been hurt. There is no forgiveness without first recognizing the presence of the hurt, which can be an extremely painful process. Recognizing the degree to which we have been hurt causes us to feel a great deal of shame. You can't forgive yourself or someone else, meanwhile pretending that the pain isn't there.

Forgiving may cause you to wonder if you are letting the person who wronged you "off the hook." You might be temped to think that, upon being forgiven, this person no longer has to take responsibility for his/her actions. It's important to keep in mind that, although it seems that the person benefiting most from forgiveness is the wrong-doer, forgiveness most benefits the person offering the forgiveness. Forgiveness allows you to move past the hurt, making room for peace and wholeness in your life.

- Forgiveness is a choice. We might be temped to think that forgiveness would be easier if it was an obligation or somehow required of us. But the reality is that forgiveness is a choice and is offered only when you decide to offer it. Forgiveness then becomes very difficult in the case that you don't feel ready to forgive.
- You and I live in a culture that emphasizes getting even with those who do us wrong. It goes against our culture to surrender the need to get revenge. Because of the way our culture has shaped us, it is our first inclination to want to get even. In order to forgive we must actively work against this cultural value.





We may have an especially difficult time forgiving a person who never says he/she is sorry for what happened. In reality, you can forgive someone even if they don't apologize for what they did. And the person may not ever find out that you've forgiven him/her. Again, forgiveness is mostly for you—it allows *you* to let go of the hurt and pain and move on with your life. Sometimes the person who benefits the most from forgiveness is the person who does the forgiving (Smedes, 1996).

Forgiveness may be especially difficult for people who have a misconception of what it means to forgive. It is important to have a clear understanding of what forgiveness is and is not. For example, people may not be willing/able to forgive if they believe it means that they must continue having a relationship with the people that wronged them.





- When we are wronged, we may feel we are on a moral high ground and that we have the right to take revenge on the person who caused us wrong. Forgiveness involves us stepping off this moral high ground, giving up control of our need to seek revenge.
- We might feel that, in order to forgive, we must understand the reasons why a person has wronged us. But the fact of the matter is that we may never understand why someone acted in a way that was so hurtful toward us. Forgiveness surrenders the need to understand the wrong-doer's motivation for his/her actions.

(Rock and moss photographs taken by Erin Price.)

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTA TO FORGIVING?	GES
(Photograph taken by Erin Price.)	



Forgiveness opens the door to a better future.

If we chain ourselves to pain from our past, we are denying ourselves the chance of a fuller, more whole life. Forgiveness is the only thing that enables us to move beyond our pain. Forgiveness is the only way that we are able to reconnect with inner peace and move on in life.

By forgiving we break the cycle of pain.

When we are unfairly wronged, we may want revenge. Many people tend to think that the only way to get life back to the way it was is to cause as much pain to the offender as he/she caused us. But getting even is not in our best interests in the end. Revenge only perpetuates the cycle of inflicting pain on one another. Getting even is impossible because the victim and victimizer never weigh pain on the same scale. One person is always behind in inflicting pain on the other. If we insist on getting revenge, we must be ready to exchange pain for pain forever. This only creates more unfairness than the initial unfairness we experienced when we were first wronged.

Forgiving allows us the opportunity to stop the unfairness we may be causing ourselves.

Although what happened when we were wronged is unfair, it is unfair to ourselves to keep ourselves stuck in our pain. When we choose not to let the pain of the past die, we are allowing ourselves to be trapped in the bondage of anger, bitterness and resentment. Sometimes the person who benefits from forgiveness the most is the person who does the forgiving.

It is through forgiving that we express our true and best nature.

Although contrary to what we might initially think, it is natural for humans to forgive. In his book "The Art of Forgiving," Lewis Smedes writes,

'If it is human to be free for the future, unshackled to pasts we cannot change, then forgiving in natural. If it is human to create new paths out of old ruts, forgiving is natural. If it is human to see beyond what was to what can be, forgiving is natural. If it is human to want to heal our unfair pain and make things fairer than they are, forgiving is natural. Forgiving is contrary to human nature only if it is truly human to follow a blind animal instrinct for prolonging unfairness and the pain that goes with it."

Smedes suggests that one example of this is Nelson Mandela. It was human nature that Mandela decided that reconciliation, and not vengeance, was the way out of the unfairness of apartheid in South Africa. When he made the choice to surrender his right to get even, he moved out of the old unfairness and into a new and nobler society.

Where are you on the journey to forgiveness? What are your greatest obstacles to forgiveness right now?__ What scares you about forgiving? What would it feel like for you to forgive right now?

Steps Toward Forgiveness

Sometimes, forgiving someone who has hurt us deeply seems like an impossible task. It can be helpful to draw upon our higher power to help navigate the challenging waters ahead. Prayer can be a wonderful way to left up our concerns and to communicate with God on a personal level. There are many different ways to pray. It is important to find a style of prayer that you are comfortable with. Listed below is a brief description of 4 types of prayer, as described by Poloma and Gallup (1991).

Petitionary Prayer:

* Asking God for what we need or want.

Conversational Prayer:

* Speaking to God as though we were having a conversation with another person

Ritualistic Prayer:

* Reciting prayers that have already been prepared for us.

Meditative Prayer:

* Communication with God through silence and contemplation. Meditative prayer can be thought of as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

Which type of prayer do you think might be most helpful to you right now?

Prayer Resources

Christian Prayer:

Online guide to Christian prayer: http://www.prayerguide.org.uk/

Healing Light by Agnes Sanford. Publisher's Description: The classic book on healing in America by one of our most renowned spiritual writers. Filled with practical advice, it is dedicated to helping people everywhere tap the creative energy that God offers to people of faith -- a love both limitless and available, if only we seek it.

Pray with Purpose, Live with Passion by Debbie Williams. Publisher's Description: With an enthusiastic invitation to use her book as an interactive guide to deepen our prayers, Debbie Williams sets out to redirect the focus from us to God, who is divine, and who can accomplish all things. Using the acronym PRAY for Praise, Repent, Ask, and Yield, she encourages a study of God's attributes with an A-Z exploration which ranges from Almighty to Zealous God. Each chapter reveals more of who God is and how He alone is capable to meet our every need as we recognize who He truly is.

Discovering How to Pray by Hope MacDonald. Publisher's Description: If you think there's nothing new that can be written on prayer - think again! In this practical and inspiring book, Discovering How to Pray, Hope MacDonald gives refreshing new insights into a perennial problem of Christians - how, when, where, and why we should pray. %The author distinguishes two kinds of prayer - "arrow" prayer (the kind we shoot up to God all day long) and the prayer of worship and intercession. Although arrow prayers are an important part of Christian life, says MacDonald, we cannot live on them unless they are "grounded upon the foundation of our prayers of worship and intercession." MacDonald outlines nine steps that can lead you to a meaningful life of prayer and worship: Making time to pray Finding a quiet place Worshiping and meditating Confession Time of thanksgiving Saying a prayer of protection Inner listening The prayer of faith Picturing the prayer as answered

Everything Starts from Prayer: Mother Teresa's Meditations on Spiritual Life for People by Mother Teresa. Product Description

At the Home for the Dying in Calcutta, Mother Teresa often cared for the residents as they approached the end. As she was ministering to one illness-ravaged man, a visitor overheard her whisper a few words to him. These few words embody some of Mother Teresa's most wonderful wisdom. This is what she said: You say a prayer in your religion, and I will say a prayer as I know it. Together we will say this prayer and it will be something beautiful for God.

Spiritual Prayer

Extraordinary Guidance: How to Connect with Your Spiritual Guides by Liza M. Wiemer. Book description from Library Journal

Although Wiemar draws on her Jewish background, she writes about God without denominational reference and teaches workshops on connecting with spiritual guides to people of all faiths. By "spiritual guides," she means spiritual beings outside the self who teach about God's unconditional love. Wiemar doesn't make it clear how they differ from

angels. Prayer is singled out as an important preparation for making contact with spiritual guides. Wiemar's approach is practical, outlining step-by-step techniques for communication that vary depending on whether seekers prefer visual, auditory, or kinesthetic contact. Although the author doesn't adequately address concerns such as unconscious self-projection or the problems of receiving negative guidance, this is nevertheless a topic in current demand.

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Opening to Channel: How to Connect with Your Guide by Sanaya Roman. Book description from The Midwest Book Review

Channeling is a skill that can be learned. Sanaya Roman and Duane Packer, with the help of their guides, Orin and DaBen, have created a definitive, inspirational, and easy-to-use guide to the art of channeling. *Opening to Channel: How to Connect with Your Guide* includes practical hands-on instruction in how to know if you are ready, how to attract a high-level guide, how to going to trance, how to channel for friends, how to use channeling to open to the higher dimension, and much more.

Judaism

A Guide to Jewish Prayer by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz. Book description from Amazon.com For readers who wish to learn about Jewish prayer, A Guide to Jewish Prayer is the first book to read, and the one that will be the cornerstone of any collection of books on the subject. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, a world-renowned scholar of Judaic studies and the editor and translator of Random House's 22-volume edition of the Talmud, has written this Guide in order to "open the gates of Jewish prayer for those who want to know and comprehend both its essence and its structure, and the numerous details concerning the various prayer services." Beginning with magisterial essays on the nature of prayer and the history of the Siddur (the common Jewish prayer book), Steinsaltz then moves to a detailed description of the prayer services conducted over the course of the Jewish year, and ends with a series of essays about communal prayer, including chapters on the synagogue, prayer accessories, and the music of prayer. With a comprehensive glossary and short biographies of the many rabbis who have influenced the history of Jewish prayer, Steinsaltz's Guide provides every necessary resource for understanding prayer, for every conceivable reader--from the curious gentile to the devoted Jew. -- Michael Joseph Gross

Jewish Meditation: A Practical Guide by Aryeh Kaplan. Book Review from Library Journal: Kaplan, Orthodox rabbi and author of Meditation and the Bible (Weiser, 1978) and Meditation and Kabbalah (Weiser, 1981), shows that meditation is consistent with traditional Jewish thought and practice. He then presents a guide to a variety of meditative techniques: mantra meditation (with suggested phrases and Bible verses to use as mantras); contemplation; visualization; experiencing nothingness (which he does not recommend for beginners); conversing with God; and prayer. His instructions are clear and explicit, and his advice is informed and sound, advocating that a simple 20-minute-a-day program can indeed help make the practitioner a better person and a better Jew, and develop a closer relationship to God and things spiritual. Recommended for general collections. Marcia G. Fuchs, Guilford Free Lib., Ct. Copyright 1985 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Yearnings: Embracing the Sacred Messiness of Life by *Irwin Kula*.

Book review From <u>AudioFile</u> Rabbi Kula explores the human condition and asks age-old questions before opening his "spiritual toolbox" of Jewish wisdom. He poses questions about seven common human yearnings and then merges ancient Jewish wisdom with

contemporary insight to provide answers. Examples and scripture are taken from the Old Testament. He teaches by using stories to illustrate the in-depth problems of the human condition. Speaking with sincerity in a mellow voice, he discusses teachings that have evolved over three thousand years from the lives of biblical characters. Listeners with a philosophical bent will enjoy Kula's even delivery and slow, methodical approach. Those without such interests may find this slow going. G.D.W. © AudioFile 2007, Portland, Maine-Copyright © AudioFile, Portland, Maine

Islamic Prayer

Online Guide to Islamic Prayer:

http://www.bahagia.btinternet.co.uk/index.htm

The Islamic Prayer from A to Z by Mamdouh N. Mohamed. Book

description: It is perhaps the most uniquely designed book, which presents the Islamic prayer in full details. It introduces the FIVE daily prayers in a step-by-step approach. These prayers are the true sources of Islamic Spirituality. In addition, it illustrates all other prayers. People of other faiths and cultures find it beneficial to learn about Islamic Culture in depth and in a very presentable format. The full colored book includes 85 illustrations, 25 tables and charts, 35 golden spiritual tips, 40 supplications, 175 common errors, 150 questions and answers, and a comprehensive glossary.

A Simple Guide to Prayer for Beginners by Yusuf Islam. Book

description: Step-by-step and in easy to understand language, you will be taught the Arabic words and actions of the Selah together with their meanings. You will also learn how to perform Wudu', or ablution in preparation for prayer; the Adhan or Call to Prayer and everyday expressions and greetings used by Muslims.

Buddhism

The Energy of Prayer: How to Deepen Your Spiritual Practice by

Thich Nhat Hanh. Book Description In order to understand why people pray, The Energy of Prayer examines the applications and effectiveness of prayer in Buddhist and other spiritual traditions. Arguing that prayer is not about asking some external force for what we need, but about creating an internal environment in which it is easier to get what we want, the book introduces several methods of prayer. These methods are meditative in nature and reenvision prayer as an inclusive, accessible practice that is not tied to a particular religious or spiritual affiliation, but rather that can help anyone create a healthy life through the power of awareness and intention. Ultimately, author Thich Nhat Hanh presents prayer as more than just relaxation: is it a way to satisfy the basic human need to make a connection with something larger than our everyday self. Included are visualization and breathing exercises as well as a rich sampling of prayers, chants, and invocations from the Buddhist tradition.

How to Practice: The Way to a Meaningful Life by The Dalai Lama.

Book Description: As human beings, we possess one common desire: the need for happiness and a meaningful life. According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, the ability to find true fulfillment lies within each of us. Now, the spiritual and temporal leader of Tibet, Nobel Prize winner, and bestselling author helps readers begin the path to enlightenment in a very special book -- an easy-access reference for daily practice as well as stunning illumination of the timeless wisdom of His Holiness. How to Practice will guide you toward

opening your heart, refraining from doing harm, maintaining mental tranquility, and more. Divided into a series of distinct steps that will lead spiritual seekers of all faiths toward enlightenment, this accessible book is a constant and daily companion in the quest to practice morality, meditation, and wisdom. The Dalai Lama shows us how to overcome our everyday obstacles, from feelings of anger and mistrust to jealousy, insecurity, and counterproductive thinking. Imbued with His Holiness' vivacious spirit and sense of playfulness, How to Practice offers the Dalai Lama's own sage and very practical insight into the human psyche and what binds us all together.

Tantric Grounds and Paths: How to Enter, Progress On, and Complete the Vajrayana Path by Kelsang Gyatso. Book Description

The mysteries of Tantra have engrossed countless meditators for centuries. Since the time of Buddha, these secrets have been passed down from accomplished master to disciple largely by word of mouth. Now drawing from his own experience and the works of Je Tsongkhapa and other great Tibetan Yogis, Geshe Kelsang clearly sets out all the stages of the four classes of Tantra, giving a full explanation of generation and completion stages. Tantra is revealed as the gateway to a blissful new world. The book represents a significant milestone in revealing these profound mysteries to the contemporary world.

Hinduism

The Yoga of the Bhagavad Gita: An Introduction to India's Universal Science of God-realization by Paramahansa Yogananda. Product

Description With penetrating insight, Paramahansa Yogananda sheds a clarifying light on the deeper meaning of the Bhagavad Gita's symbology, and the true intent of India's timeless and universal scripture. He shows how the warriors doing battle on the field of Kurukshetra represent the negative tendencies of the human ego pitted against the divine qualities of the soul, and how the science of Yoga can help us achieve the joy of material and spiritual victory on the battlefield of daily life. An inspiring and concise introduction to the spiritual truths of India's most beloved scripture, these selections from Yogananda's critically acclaimed two-volume translation of and commentary on the Bhagavad Gita (God Talks With Arjuna) explain the step-by-step methods of yoga meditation and right action to achieve union with Spirit and ultimate liberation. Features Paramahansa Yogananda's original translation of the Bhagavad Gita for the first time in sequential form. Topics include:

- * Using self-analysis and introspection for continuous personal growth
- * Yoga methods for creating a life of peace and inner harmony
- * Understanding the psychological forces that help and those that hinder -spiritual progress
- * Creating an ideal balance of material and spiritual goals
- * How to experience the deeper states of meditation and divine illumination.

Metaphysical Meditations: Universal Prayers, Affirmations, and Visualizations by Paramahansa Yogandanda Product Description

This little book offers definite metaphysical methods of meditation for the student who has already struggled through the mobs of rowdy thought and has entered the portals of silence. The meditations are of three types: prayers or demands addressed to God, affirmations about God, and those spoken to the individual consciousness. Contents: devotion and worship; meditations on God; expansion of consciousness; on finding God; on material concerns; on self-improvement; Christmas meditations.

How You Can Talk with God by Paramahansa Yogandanda Product Description: none given but self-explanatory with good product reviews



Recall the Hurt:

First you **recall** the hurt objectively, without blame or self-victimization.

$\underline{E}_{mpathize:}$

Empathize by trying to imagine the viewpoint of the person who wronged you.

\underline{A} ltruistic Gift:

Think about a time you were forgiven and how that felt.

Commitment to Forgive:

Next it is time to commit to forgiveness; this can be difficult.

\underline{H} old onto the Forgiveness:

Finally, once you have committed, you must hold on to forgiveness.



A Review of Today's Journey



The relation between forgiveness & your struggle

• You explored and we discussed whether and how forgiveness is relevant to your spiritual struggle

The process of forgiveness

- We reviewed information about what forgiveness is and is not
- We discussed who we forgive
- You identified obstacles to forgiveness in your life and we discussed why it is hard to forgive
- You identified advantages to forgiving in your life and we discussed advantages that can occur with forgiveness
- We discussed the fact that forgiveness is a decision, not an obligation.
- You explored where you are with forgiveness in your life

Take-home Points

- It is important to understand what forgiveness is and what it isn't.
- Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves, not to the person who hurt us.
- Forgiveness is not an obligation; it is a choice.
- Forgiveness is a *process* that takes time, deliberation, and effort. Do not expect yourself to move past the pain of being wronged instantaneously after you make the decision to forgive. Remember to be patient with yourself. If you "slip up" and your feelings of bitterness and anger return, trust that you have not lost all the progress you have made. This is just a part of the journey toward forgiveness.
- As you work toward forgiveness, remember that **you are not alone.** There are many people who have gone before you on this difficult road. Take courage, knowing that you can draw strength from others who have journeyed (or *are journeying*) on the road to forgiveness.
- Although working toward forgiveness is a very difficult, the pay offs make all the hard work worthwhile. The inner peace that comes with forgiveness is priceless and may not be attainable any other way.



Other Guides for Your Journey

Kornfield, J. (1993). *A Path with Heart: A Guide Through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life*. Bantam Books: New York. (pp. 284-286)

McCullough, M., Pargament, K.I., Thoreson, C. (2007) Forgiveness: Theory, Research, & Practice, NY: Guilford Press.

McCullough, M., Sandage, S.J., & Worthington, E.L. (1997). *To forgive is human: how to put your past in the past*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Smedes, Lewis, B. (1996). The Art of Forgiving. NY: Ballantine Books.

Worthington, E.L. (2001). *Forgiving and Reconciling: Bridges to Wholeness*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

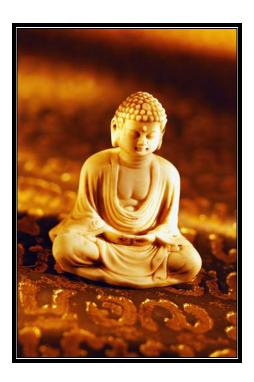
Spiritual Enhancement Exercise (S.E.E.)

In addition to continuing to practice your wings exercise, for this coming week, try practicing the Loving Kindness meditation that was introduced last week.

Jack Kornfield says that the quality of loving-kindness is the fertile soil out of which an integrated spiritual life can grow. With a loving heart as the background, all that we attempt, all that we encounter, will open and flow more easily. While loving-kindness can arise naturally in us in many circumstances, it can also be cultivated.

"This meditation is a 2,500-year-old practice that uses repeated phrases, images, and feelings to evoke loving-kindness and friendliness toward oneself and others. You can experiment with this practice to see if it is useful for you. It is best to begin by repeating it over and over for fifteen or twenty minutes once or twice daily in a quiet place for several months. At first this meditation may feel mechanical or awkward or even bring up its opposite, feelings of irritation and anger. If this happens, it is especially important to be patient and kind to yourself, allowing whatever arises to be received in a spirit of friendliness and kind affection. In its own time, even in the face of inner difficulties, loving-kindness will develop.

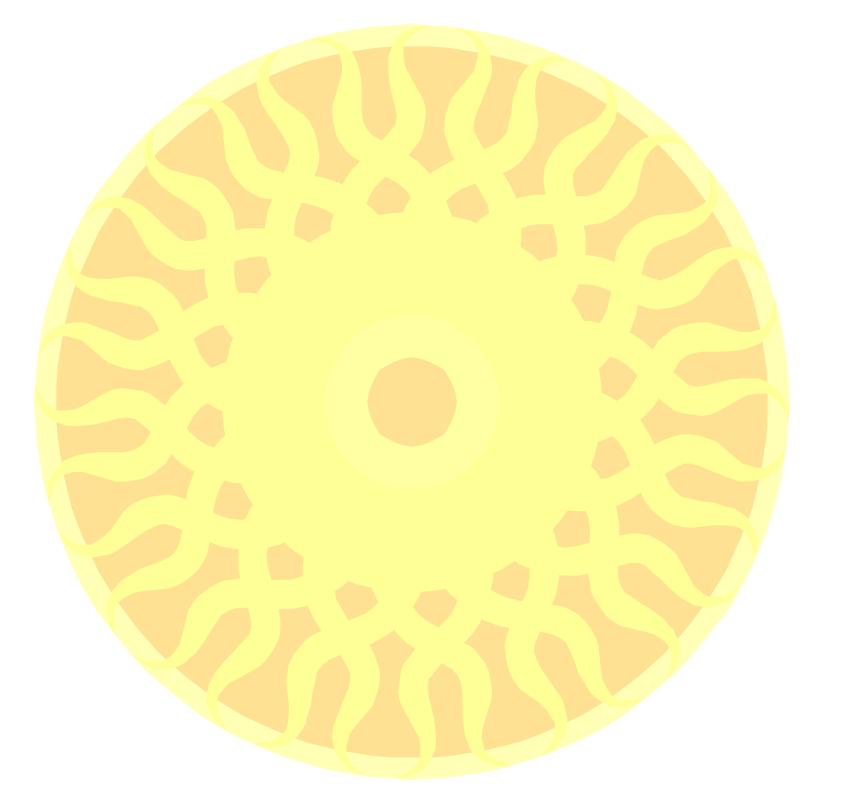
You can find the meditation at the end of session 5 in this manual.

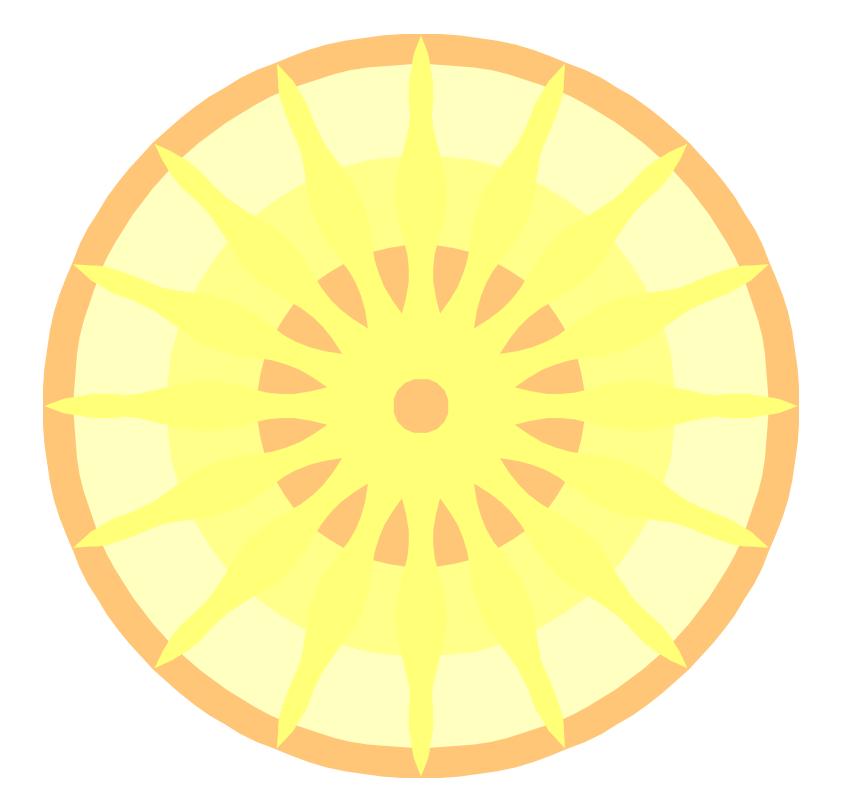


SESSION 7 ACCEPTANCE



Like a backpack, spiritual struggles can get very heavy to carry around. Many times, we are carrying things that we need mixed in with things that we don't really need. To help lighten our load, we can take breaks along the journey and discard unnecessary items along the way. We can surrender these things, the things that we leave behind, to the Divine. It is our decision what we want to carry along with us and what we want to let go as we continue on our journey.







On My Feet Dancing The Story of Joni Eareckson Tada

Joni was a teenager who had many dreams for her life. One day she and her sister went out for a swim, and Joni dove off a raft. Her head crashed into a large rock at the bottom of the water, and she was unable to move. Her sister swam her to shore and called an ambulance. Doctors at the hospital who stuck her with pins to see what she could feel found that she could feel only her shoulders.

After awakening from surgery, Joni found herself strapped into a bed with a small opening for her head. She couldn't move. Nurses and family had to take care of all of her needs. After some weeks passed, another surgery was performed on Joni's spinal cord, with the hopes that she would be able to regain some movement in her body. The surgery was not successful and Joni learned that she would be a quadriplegic. As the news began to sank in, Joni was devastated. She noted "And suddenly I found myself all alone, just a bare, immobile body between two sheets. My hobbies and possessions were meaningless to me."

Several days later Joni saw her reflection for the first time in a mirror. After looking at herself, she began to scream. The reflection in the mirror was horrifying, with bloodshot sunken eyes, skin that was yellow, and teeth turned black. Her head was shaved with metal clamps on both sides and she had lost nearly 45 pounds. She yelled



out, "Oh, God, how can you do this to me!" At this point, Joni wanted to die, but there was nothing that she could even do for herself. She learned that she was even "too helpless to die on her own."

During her recovery in the hospital, Joni thought of all of the things she wouldn't be able to do in her life. Dreams that were so important to her--being able to play tennis, make love, get married, make her contribution to the world--all gone. Some of Joni's visitors would talk to her about God and read her verses from the bible. At first, she responded very bitterly. She doubted that she would ever be able to live her life to the fullest.

Over three difficult years Joni started to see that it may be possible for her to have a "fullness of life.", her outlook began to

change. The first step she took was to accept her condition and its limitations. She began to see that it was pointless to waste energy complaining about her physical condition. She realized that she needed to "accept herself as a quadriplegic and search for new ways of coping."

This process was very painful. Joni had to fight the frequent temptations to close her eyes and fantasize what it might be like if she were well again. Joni found that "normal" people appeared to be uncomfortable around her. Sometimes people would lean over her wheelchair and speak loudly to her in simple words, as if she couldn't understand.

At first, Joni found it impossible to reconcile her condition with her belief in a loving God. It seemed that all God's gifts, the good things she had enjoyed as an active teenager, had been stolen from her. For what reason? What did she have left?

One night, when she was in a tremendous amount of pain, one of Joni's closest friends, Cindy, was beside her bed, searching desperately for some way to encourage her. Finally, she clumsily blurted out, "Joni, you aren't the only one. Jesus knows how you feel—why, he was paralyzed too." Joni glared at her. "What? What are you talking about?" Cindy continued, "It's true. Remember, he was nailed to a cross. His back was raw from beatings, and he must have yearned for a way to move or change positions, or shift his weight. But he couldn't. He was paralyzed by the nails."

The thought intrigued Joni and, for a moment, it took her mind off her own pain. It had never occurred to her that God might have felt the same piercing sensations that now racked her body. The realization was profoundly comforting. Joni noted: "God became incredibly close to me. I felt myself being transformed by the persistent love of my friends and family. And eventually I began to understand that, yes, God too loved me.

Few of us have the luxury—it took me forever to think of it as that—to come to ground zero with God. Before the accident, my questions had always been, "How will God fit into my

situation? How will he affect my dating life? My career plans? The things I enjoy?" Many of those options were now gone. I had only a helpless body, and God. Maybe that's the kind of state that mystics strive for. I got mine unwillingly.

I had no other identity but God, and gradually he became enough. I became overwhelmed with the phenomenal possibility of a personal God, the same God who created the universe, living in my life. Perhaps he could make me attractive and worthwhile. I knew I



could not do it without him.

The first few months, even years, I was obsessed with the question of what God was trying to teach me. Secretly, I probably hoped that by figuring out God's ideas, I could learn my lesson and then he'd heal me. "Is that what God wants?" I wondered. My focus changed from demanding an explanation from God to humbly depending on him. Okay, I am paralyzed. It's terrible. I don't like it. But can God still use me, paralyzed? Can I, paralyzed, still worship God and love him? He began to teach me that I could.

Maybe God's gift to me is dependence. I will never reach a place of self-sufficiency that crowds God out. I am aware of his grace every moment. My need for help is obvious every day when I wake up, flat on my back, waiting for someone to come dress me. I can't even comb my hair or blow my nose!

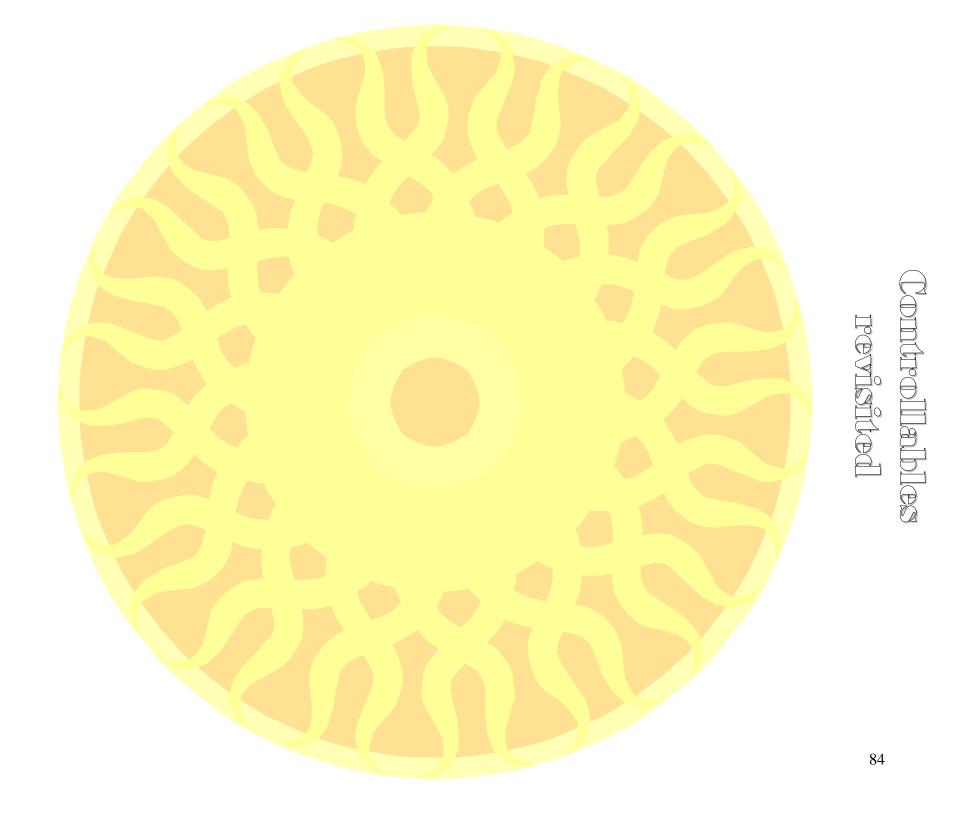
But I do have friends who care. I have the beauty of the scenery I paint. I can even support myself financially—the dream of every disabled person. Peace is internal, and God has lavished me with that peace.

There's one more thing. I have hope for the future now. The Bible speaks of our bodies being "glorified" in heaven. In high school that always seemed a hazy, foreign concept to me. But now I realize that I will be healed. I haven't been cheated out of being a complete person—I'm just going through a forty- or fifty-year delay, and God stays with me even through that. I now know the meaning of "glorified." It's the time, after my death here, when I'll be on my feet dancing."

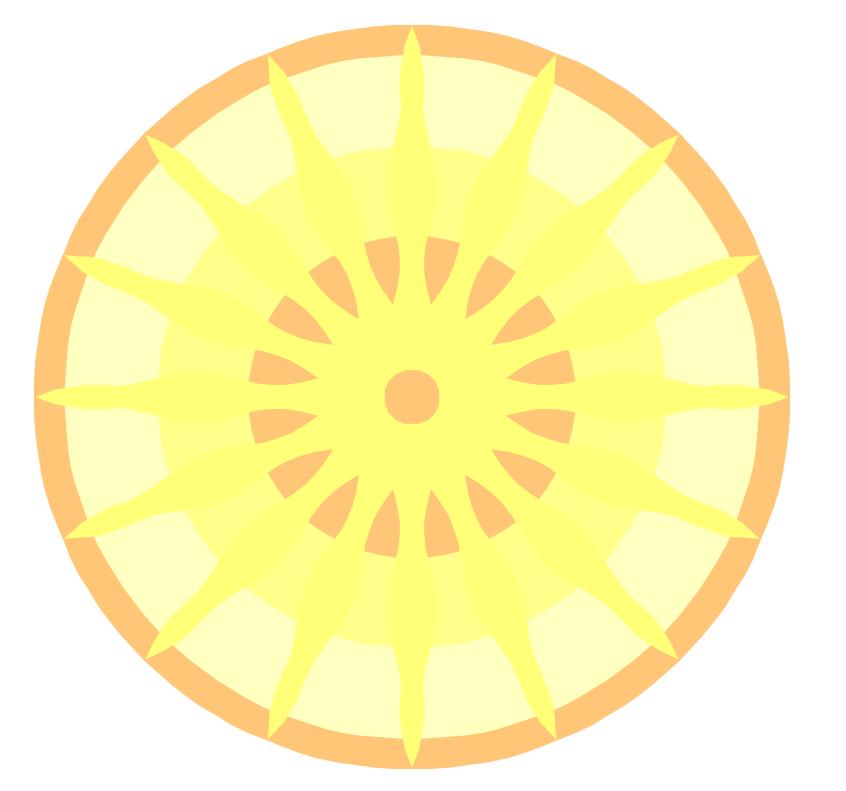
After a great amount of time reflecting and working to make positive changes, Joni was able to successfully create new dreams for herself. She began to gain some functioning in her arms and learned not only to maneuver her motorized wheelchair, but also to drive a car. She became a public speaker and has written several books. She also began producing artwork by holding a brush in her mouth. She got married and also directs a ministry called "Joni and Friends," where she works on projects to benefit the disabled.

Joni had to learn to accept that she would never be physically healed. Although this may be true, Joni was able to gain spiritual healing. She replaced old dreams with new ones. Doing this was not easy for Joni. She struggled, but was able to succeed. Not only has she developed a sense of hope for herself, but she has also made it her goal to also bring hope to others.

Adapted from: Yancey, P. (1990). Where is God when it hurts?: A comforting, healing guide for coping with hard times. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



Umcontollables revisited



Divine Light Meditation

Close your eyes and begin to focus your attention to your breathing. Let your body become more and more relaxed as I count to five—1...2...3...4...5.

As you continue breathing deeply and slowly, visualize the Divine as a beautiful light surrounding you. With



each breath that you take notice that you are breathing in this beautiful Sacred Light. This light fills your lungs and as you exhale you feel the light of the Divine permeating your entire body, and flowing out your fingers and toes.

Breathe in...filling your lungs with light, and breath out, feeling the light flowing through your body and out your fingers and toes...Continue focusing on your breathing for a few more moments allowing your body to relax completely, surrendering to the Divine.

Now that you are completely relaxed continue to visualize a Divine presence within you. And when you are ready, ask the Divine "What do I most need to surrender?

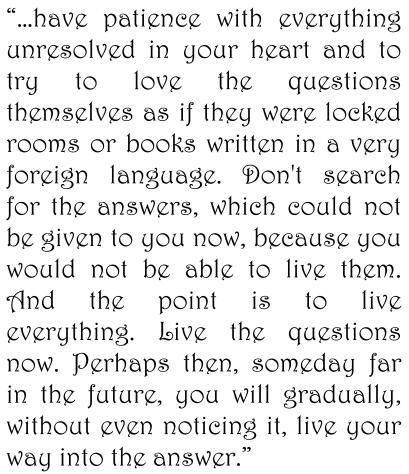
When you are ready to surrender these aspects into the Divine, visualize this aspect of your struggle becoming lighter and floating out of your hands. As you let go, feel yourself bathed in the circle of light, feeling acceptance, peace, and protection.

Remember that the circle symbolizes wholeness, completion, harmony, and oneness with /the Scared/Divine. Allow yourself to feel the healing power of this light as you breathe it in with each breath. With each inhale, visualize compassion, understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness pouring into your body, your mind, and your spirit. It is this abundance that upholds you in times of trouble, and equips you with the strength you need to take your next step of faith.

Allow yourself to accept the sacred gift of extravagant mercy that gives you courage to accept that struggles, questions, and doubts are a part of life's spiritual journey. Gently remind yourself that encountering spiritual obstacles along the way is okay and that there is no need to be spiritually "perfect." Through the gift of mercy, you have everything that you need to embrace your doubts, questions and struggles, and continue moving forward with them and through them. You may experience this deep sense of peace whenever you wish, by closing your eyes and visualizing the "sacred light" entering your body.

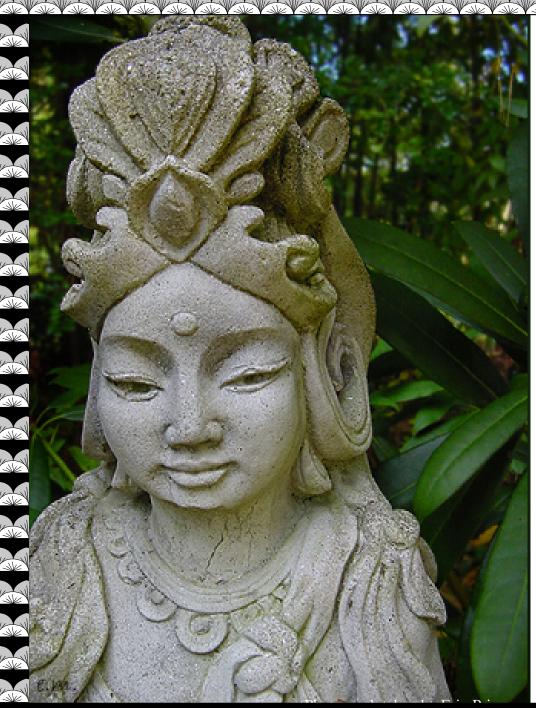
But for now, prepare to bring your attention back to this room as I count backwards from five—5...4...3...2...1. When you are ready open your eyes feeling comfortable and relaxed.





Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903 in Letters to a Young Poet







A Review of Today's Journey



Circles of Control:

• For this exercise you were asked to list aspects of your spiritual struggle that are under your control in the Controllables circle and aspects that are outside of your control in Uncontrollables circle. You were then asked to think about what it's like when you attempt to control the things you listed in your Uncontrollables circle.

Acceptance Vignettes:

• We read a vignette about Joni who found acceptance in the midst of her spiritual struggle. Time was provided for you to reflect on whether there was anything from this vignette that you might be able to apply to your own spiritual struggle.

<u>Circles of Control Revisited:</u>

• You were asked to re-do your circles of control, and notice any changes in your circles (e.g., Did you add anything new to either of the circles? Did you switch anything over to the other circle? How have your circles changed in light of talking about these vignettes?) Leaders highlighted that some things still remain in the Uncontrollables circle. It is important to recognize that these things may always remain in that circle. The goal is to reach a point at which some ambiguity, some struggle can be tolerated—it is all a part of each of your spiritual journey. We may never reach the point of "spiritual perfection," where we can control everything around us and never again experience spiritual doubts, questions or struggles. Encountering spiritual roadblocks, challenges, doubts, and struggles along our spiritual paths are a part of our spiritual lives, so it is important to keep in mind that it is okay to settle for less than spiritual perfection."

Divine Light Exercise:

• You were led through a "Divine Light" relaxation and guided visualization exercise to help you identify what you specifically may want to surrender, experience surrender through relaxation, turn the uncontrollable over to the Divine, and recognize that encountering spiritual obstacles along the way is okay. There is no need to be spiritually "perfect." ("Divine Light" was adapted from a meditation by Cole, 1999.)

The Rite of Release:

 As a physical representation of the spiritual and emotional act of releasing spiritual struggles, you were given the opportunity to place uncontrollable circles in a box in the middle of the circle in which the group is sitting.

Take-home Points

- There are some things in life, including spiritual struggles that we encounter, that we may never have control over.
- However, some spiritual ambiguity and struggle can be tolerated. It is all a part of our spiritual journeys. We may never reach the point of "spiritual perfection," where we can control everything around us and never again experience spiritual doubts, questions or struggles. And this is okay!
- Remember that, with help from the Divine, you possess all the grace you need to embrace your doubts, questions and struggles, and continue moving forward with them and through them.



Other Guides for Your Journey

Gilbert, E. (2006). *Eat, pray, love: one woman's search for everything across Italy, India and Indonesia.* New York: Viking.

Tada, J.E. (2001). Joni. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI.

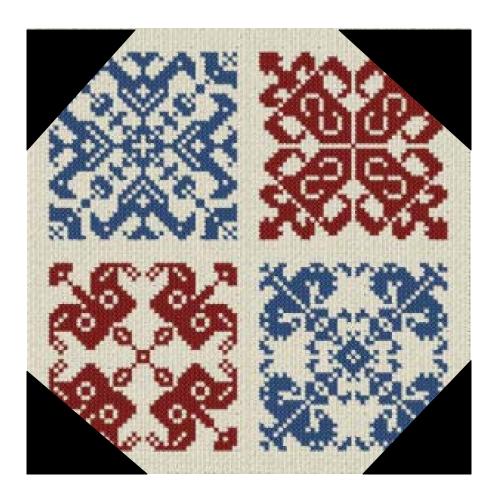


We ask that you continue doing a 'wing' activity, which could include the loving kindness meditation or the divine light meditation that we did today. You can use the space below to share any reactions or thoughts about this experience.

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SESSION 8

MEANING MAKING



A cross-stitch looks chaotic and messy from the back, but has a clear pattern on the other side. This can be true of our spiritual struggles, as well. On the one hand, they seem confusing and nonsensical. However, it is possible that if you look at them from another angle, you might find that there is a reason for them. We discussed as a group the ways that you find meaning in your spiritual struggles.



Miller's struggle with God's existence

When I was in high school, this simple god stopped making sense to me. I renounced my faith as soon as I stopped toeing the party line and started asking questions...[F]or the first time in my life I had questions, and they weren't surface-level questions either; they were deep, emotional questions...I grew up hearing about God, hearing that He had created the universe, some animals, the Grand Canyon, and we weren't supposed to have sex or drink whiskey or go to

dance clubs, that sort of thing, you know...Maslow's God, like the one I believed in, was a bridge for the psyche, and invention to calm our nerves and keep us in line...The small church I had been raised in, and from which my framework for God had been hoisted, provided no bulwark of protection from this attack, but rather an unfortified access to a straw man... I didn't have a relationship with God; I had a relationship with a system of simple ideas, certain prejudices, and a feeling that I and people who thought as I thought were right...It took me three weeks of thinking to get up the nerve to tell God He didn't exist...I could, if I wanted, walk away from God. I mean, if God didn't answer the serious questions about life, then I didn't' have any responsibility to believe he existed. At first it was frightening, but I could feel in my heart that I wanted to dissociate, that if I walked away from God I would have a kind of freedom...I told myself that when [the light] turned red I would say it: I would tell God I no longer believed in Him, that I wanted to dissociate because He didn't explain anything, He was too simple and so He was a myth, a teddy bear; that Abraham Maslow was right and I would rather spend my life in dark truth than leaning against the crutch of feel-good propaganda about good people and bad people. The world was more complicated than that and I knew it. I am not going to pretend this was an easy thing to do. It wasn't easy at all. Part of me wanted God to continue to exist. He had brought me a great deal of comfort and an identity and a community of friends who were quite kind and endearing and inclusive. My heart beat out blood and I could feel it thump so strongly I thought it was going to break my skin. The light turned red and I said it. "you don't exist," I told Him.

Donald Miller. (2004). Searching for God Knows What. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 29-33.



Quote of a 14-year-old Nicaraguan girl

"Many times I wonder how there can be a God – a loving God and where He is ... I don't understand why He lets little children in Third World countries die of starvation or diseases that could have been cured if they would have had the right medicines or doctors. I believe in God and I love Him, but sometimes I just don't see the connection between a loving God and a suffering hurting world. Why doesn't He help us – if He truly loves us? It seems like He just doesn't care. Does He?"

Kooistra, W. P. (1990). The process of religious doubting in adolescents raised in religious environments. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Bowing Green, OH, pp 91-92.

Selections of letters written by Mother Teresa

From letters written by Mother Teresa during the 1950s and 1960s to Fr. Van Exem, Archbishop Périer, and Fr. L. T. Picachy, S.J., and Fr. J. Neuner, S.J.

"In the darkness... Lord, my God, who am I that You should forsake me?.. I call, I cling, I want, and there is no one to answer... Where I try to raise my thoughts to heaven, there is such convicting emptiness that



those very thoughts return like sharp knives and hurt my very soul... I am told God lives in me—and yet the reality of darkness and coldness and emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul."

"They say people in hell suffer eternal pain because of the loss of God... In my soul I feel just this terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me, of God not being God, of God not really existing. That terrible longing keeps growing, and I feel as if something will break in me one day."

"The damned of hell suffer eternal punishment because they experiment with the loss of God. In my own soul, I feel the terrible pain of this loss. I feel that God does not want me, that God is not God and that he does not really exist."

"My smile is a great cloak that hides a multitude of pains... Because I am forever smiling, [people think] my faith, my hope and my love are overflowing and that my intimacy with God and union with his will fill my heart. If only they knew."

"I have begun to love my darkness, for I believe now that it is a part, a very small part, of Jesus' darkness and pain on the earth."

Zaleski, C. (2003). The Dark Night of Mother Teresa. First Things A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life, 133, 24-27. (published by the Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010)

The Old Man and the Horse



A long time ago an old man lived in a village. He had an extremely beautiful horse. All the people in the villages across the land had heard of this horse. It was a magnificent animal with a long, shining mane. Its muscles rippled with sheen and glory every time it moved. The Great Chief heard of this horse and sent a messenger to the old man asking if he could purchase it. The warrior messenger raced to the old man's teepee and jumped down from his horse. Where his moccasins landed, the dust swirled in all directions, "Old man, I am here on behalf of the Great Chief. He sends his greetings and asks that he may buy your horse." The old man was silent. He was a man of gentle dignity and quiet

manners. Finally he said, "Please give my regards to the Great Chief, and please thank him for his kind offer to buy my horse. However, this horse is my friend. We are companions. I know his soul as I feel he knows mine. I cannot sell my friend."

The messenger rode away. Two weeks later the old man's horse disappeared. When the villagers heard that the horse was missing they all gathered around the old man. "Oh, old man, this is very bad fortune! You could have sold your horse to the Great Chief. Now you have no horse and no payment for the horse. What bad fortune!" The old man looked at each villager with kind, soft eyes and said, "It is not bad fortune. It is not good fortune. We don't know the whole story. Just say the horse ran away." The villagers went away shaking their heads because they knew that this was very bad fortune.

A month later the old man's horse returned, followed by twenty other magnificent horses. Each one was spirited and bursting with vitality and exuberance. The villagers ran forward to the old man. "Oh, old man. You were right - it was not bad fortune that your horse ran away. It was good fortune.



Now not only do you have your horse back, but you have twenty more beautiful horses. This is good fortune!" The old man slowly shook his head and with utmost compassion said, "It is not good. It is not bad. We don't know the whole story. Just say that the horse returned." The people went away shaking their heads. They knew that it was very, very good fortune to have so many beautiful horses.

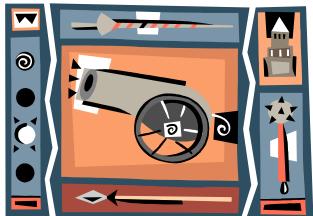


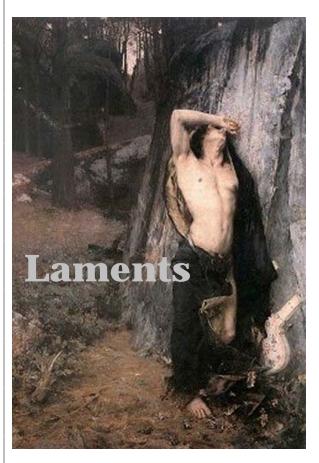
The old man had one son who started to break in the horses. Every day the son would wake early to continue his work. One morning the old man came to watch his son. The young man had a natural grace as he swung on to the bare back of a wild Pinto. The horse bucked violently to the left and twisted to the right. Suddenly with a ferocious kick of his hind legs the horse tossed the son high in the air. The old

man's son landed in a crumpled heap in the dust. Both of his legs were broken. All the inhabitants of the village gathered with great moaning and commiserating. "Oh, no! Oh, no! Old man, you are right. Your horse returning to you was very bad fortune. Now your only son has both legs broken and is crippled. Who is going to take care of you in your old age? This is very bad fortune." The old man pulled himself upright and with respect said, "It is not bad fortune. It is not good fortune. Just say my son broke his legs. We don't know the whole story." The villagers walked away, shaking their heads. They knew it was very bad fortune for the old man.

A great war broke out across the land and the Great Chief called all the young men of the villages to battle. It was a bad war and the villagers knew they

would never see their sons again. Once more they gathered around the old man. "Old man, you are right. It is not bad fortune that your son broke his legs because, even though he is crippled, you have your son. We will never see our sons again. It was good fortune for you." And once again the old man said, "It is not good fortune. It is not bad fortune. We don't know the whole story."





Psalm 13 For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- 1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?
- 2 How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?
- 3 Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;

- 4 my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- **5** But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- **6** I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me.

An incest victim's address to God

"How could you in all your greatness have abandoned me, a little girl, to the merciless hands of my father? How could you let this happen to me? I demand to know why this happened? Why didn't you protect me? I have been faithful, and for what, to be raped and abused by my own father? I hate and despise you. I regret the first time I ever laid eyes on you; your name is like salt on my tongue. I vomit it from my being. I wish death upon you. You are no more. You are dead. (Flaherty, 1992, p. 101)"





"She weeps bitterly at night,

the tears flow always on her cheeks;

no one of all her lovers now seeks to bring her comfort."

Oh, God, how

true. And I can't

even wipe my own

tears away!

"For the Lord has afflicted her

because of the greatness of her transgressions."

Yes! I broke His moral

commandments.

Now punishment.

"Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,

which is being dealt out to me,

which the Lord has inflicted

in the day of His fiery anger."

No one else is being punished like this. Why

did God do this to me?

"From on high he sent fire into my bones,

and it has subdued them."

Diving accident...

Paralysis...

"He has given me over to frustration

and faintness all day long."

Rage...

weakness and fear.

"He has made my strength to fail.

The Lord has delivered me into hands

which I am unable to withstand."

In bed for a year,

completely dependent

on orderlies and nurses.

"My eyes are exhausted with weeping;

my emotions are deeply disturbed;

my grief is poured out on the earth."

How much more can

I take? I'm at

the end of my rope!

"Surely He has turned away from me; He has turned His hand against me all the day."

Why, God...

why?

why?

"He has made my skin and my flesh turn old:

He has crushed my bones."

The bedsores, stitches,

bone surgery...

"He has piled up against me, and surrounded me

with bitterness and distress."

And I'm still

surrounded by canvas,

catheter tubes.

and urine bags.

"He has caused me to dwell in dark places,

as the dead of former times."

I'm trapped in this

gloomy hospital where

we sit like zombies

waiting to die.

"He has built a wall around me, I cannot go forth;

He has weighted me down with chains."

I'm trapped!

Stryker, straps,

and Crutchfield tongs...

"Even when I cry aloud and call for help,

He shuts out my prayer."

and God doesn't care.

"I have forgotten what enjoyment is."

He doesn't even care.

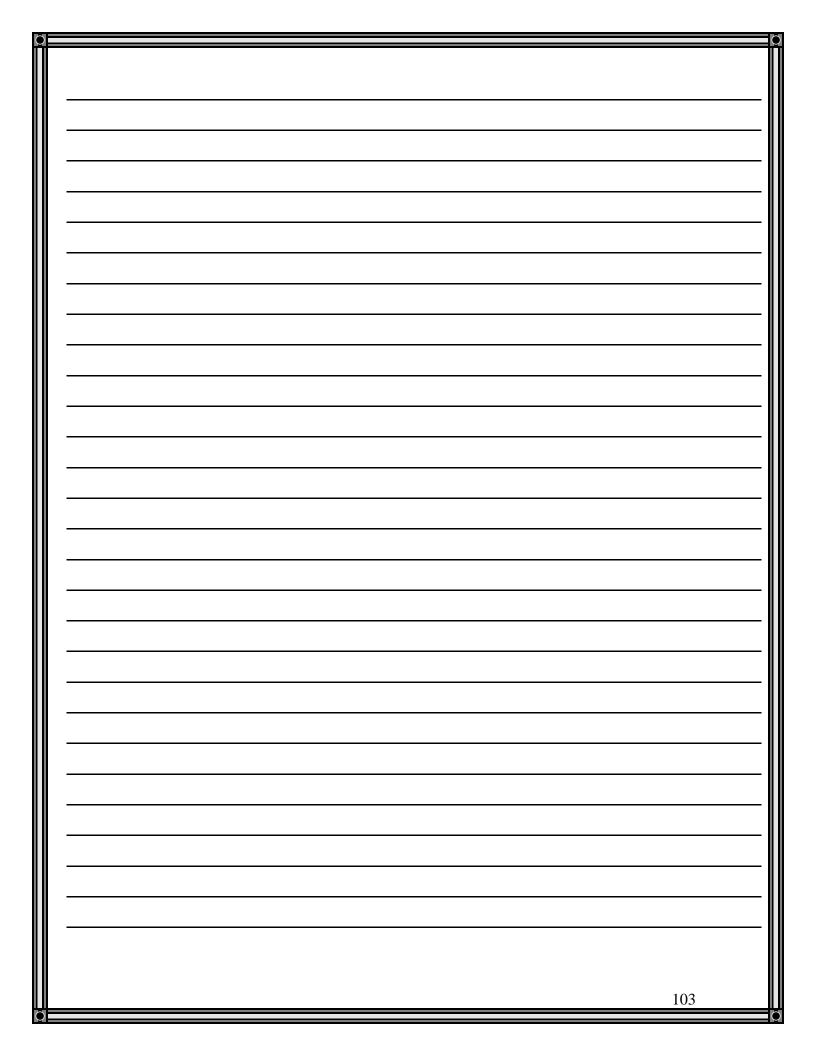


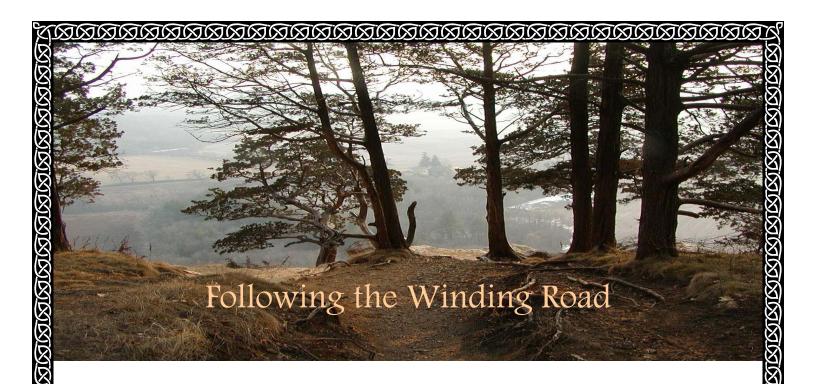
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One way to gain a different perspective about struggles is to think about how God would respond to your lament.

- How would the presence see you as you poured out your heart in this lament?
- How would the presence feel towards you as he heard and saw you cry out about your spiritual struggle?
- ❖ How would the presence react to hearing your lament?
- How would the presence respond to you about your spiritual struggle?
- What might the presence want you to know about your spiritual struggle?
- ❖ What might the presence want you to take from this struggle?





Suppose you are taking a hike in the mountains. You know how mountain trails are constructed, especially if the slopes are steep. They wind back and forth; often they have "switchbacks," which make you literally walk back and forth, and sometimes a trail will even drop back to below a level you had reached earlier. If we asked you at a number of points on such a trail to evaluate how well you are accomplishing your goal of reaching the mountaintop, we would hear a different story every time. If you were in switchback mode, you would probably tell me that things weren't going well, that you were never going to reach the top. If you were in a stretch of open territory where you could see the mountaintop and the path leading up to it, you would probably tell me things were going very well. Now imagine that we are across the valley with binoculars, looking at people hiking on this train. If we were asked how they were doing, we would have a positive progress report every time. We would be able to see that the overall direction of the trail, not what it looks like at a given moment, is the key to progress. We would see that following this ... winding trail is exactly what leads to the top.

(taken from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) by Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson, 2003)



Parable of the Cross-stitch

• A cross-stitch looks chaotic and messy from the back, but has a clear pattern on the other side. This can be true of our spiritual struggles, as well. On the one hand, they seem confusing and nonsensical. However, it is possible that if you look at them from another angle, you might find that there is a reason for them. We discussed as a group the ways that you find meaning in your spiritual struggles.

Examples of Spiritual Struggles

 Together we explored examples of other people who have experienced spiritual struggles and at times found meaning in them. There are many important religious figures and every-day people who have been enriched by their experiences of spiritual struggles.

Two-way Lament

• A lament is an expression of hard emotions such as grief, sorrow, regret, disappointment, frustration, etc. There are many different examples of laments, such as certain Psalms in the Bible, people's diary entries, or songs. As a group you wrote a lament that captures a range of emotions and thoughts. Then you were able to reflect on how God or your future self might respond to your lament.

Take home points

- Sometimes meaning can be found in spiritual struggles
 - o spiritual struggles can lead to personal and spiritual growth
 - o spiritual struggles can create positive changes in the way you think about and treat yourself, others, and God.
- Often,
 - it may take TIME to get meaning
 - o it may take a different PERSPECTIVE to get meaning
- However.
 - o sometimes you may never see any meaning in your spiritual struggles
 - o Understanding the meaning in your spiritual struggles does not take away all of the confusion and unpleasant feelings of the struggles



Other Guides for Your Journey

Hayes, Strosahl, & Wilson (2003). *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)*.

Kooistra, W. P. (1990). The process of religious doubting in adolescents raised in religious environments. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Bowing Green, OH, pp 91-92.

Miller, D. (2004). Searching for God Knows What. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 29-33.

Tada, J.E. (2001). Joni. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI.

Zaleski, C. (2003). The Dark Night of Mother Teresa. First Things A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life, 133, 24-27.



In addition to continuing to practice your wings exercise this week, we also ask that, without looking back at previous homework assignments, you write about your current experience of your spiritual struggle. Describe your spiritual struggle in as much detail as possible. Below are some prompts to help you:

- 1. Explain how your spiritual struggle unfolded. What event(s) triggered your spiritual struggle?
- 2. Describe the feelings and emotions associated with your spiritual struggle
- 3. Describe any conflict or strain that you feel in your personal relationship with the divine. For example, describe times when you feel angry at or abandoned by the divine.
- 4. Describe any strains in your relationships with friends and family caused by spirituality.
- 5. Describe or draw images, colors, and/or pictures that appear when reflecting on your spiritual struggles

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SESSION 9

A LIGHT FOR THE PATH BEFORE YOU



We have walked a piece of the road together, but now it is time for us to say goodbye and to continue our journeys along. The winding road extends before you, yet you cannot see exactly where it goes. Going it alone can be both exciting and anxiety-provoking. Hopefully, our time together will provide you with some light to illuminate the path as you continue to walk the winding road.





Session 1: Introduction to Winding Road

 A spiritual journey has smooth and rough spots. Both of these are natural aspects to any individual's spiritual life.

Session 2: Sharing Spiritual Struggles

- Spiritual struggles are a natural and normal part of life
- There are different types of spiritual struggles and they can be associated with a variety of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
- It is very important how you choose to deal with your spiritual struggle. Some choices may be difficult to make, they may be painful, and they may lead you farther away from your spirituality. Other choices may lead you towards growth and spiritual richness.



Session 3: Understanding Your Spiritual Heritage



- There are a lot of people in your life who may have influenced where you are now on your spiritual path: your family, peers and others you've encountered in life.
- None of us would be who we are without those influences. But it's also important that we form our own personal perspective and beliefs rather than just accept those of others. This involves some active exploration and facing what barriers might be in the way of forming our own beliefs.

Session 4: Your Spiritual Self

- In session 4 you had the chance to examine your personal values and spiritual strivings
- By acknowledging the forces that pull you away from, and resources that lead you towards living in accordance with your values & strivings, you will be able to live more in accordance with your personal values and spiritual strivings





Session 5: Sizing up your Sacred

- We all have different conceptualizations of the Sacred.
- The way(s) we think about the Sacred affects our experience/spiritual struggle.
- It may be helpful in dealing with your spiritual struggle to more closely examine your ideas, beliefs, and feelings about the Sacred.
- It is possible to broaden your conceptualization of the Sacred in ways that facilitate your personal and spiritual growth.

Session 6: Forgiveness: Bridge

- It is important to understand what forgiveness is and what it isn't.
- Forgiveness is a gift to ourselves, not to the person who hurt us.
- Forgiveness is not an obligation; it is a choice.
- Forgiveness is a **PROCESS** that takes time, deliberation, and effort. Do not expect yourself to move past the pain of being wronged instantaneously after you make the decision to forgive. Remember to be patient with yourself. If you "slip up" and your feelings of bitterness and anger return, trust that you have not lost all the progress you have made. This is just a part of the journey toward forgiveness.
- As you work toward forgiveness, remember that you are not alone. There are many people who have gone before you on this difficult road. Take courage, knowing that you can draw strength from others who have journeyed (or are journeying) on the road to forgiveness.
- Although working toward forgiveness is a very difficult, the pay offs make all the hard work worthwhile. The inner peace that comes with forgiveness is priceless and may not be attainable any other way.



Session 7: Acceptance: Backpack

- There are some things in life, including spiritual struggles that we encounter, that we may never have control over.
- However, some spiritual ambiguity and struggle can be tolerated. It is all a
 part of our spiritual journeys. We may never reach the point of "spiritual
 perfection," where we can control everything around us and never again
 experience spiritual doubts, questions or struggles. And this is okay!
- Remember that, with help from the Divine, you possess all the grace you need to embrace your doubts, questions and struggles, and continue moving forward with them and through them.



Session 8: Meaning Making: Cross Stitch Pattern



- Sometimes meaning can be found in spiritual struggles.
 Spiritual struggles can lead to personal and spiritual growth. Spiritual struggles can create positive changes in the way you think about and treat yourself, others, and God.
- Often it may take TIME to get meaning; Often it may take a different PERSPECTIVE to get meaning.
- However, sometimes you may never see any meaning in your spiritual struggles. Understanding the meaning in your spiritual struggles does not take away all of the confusion and unpleasant feelings of the struggles

Session 9: A Light for the Path Before You

- Spiritual struggles are not a static stage in life but are a dynamic process that involve change over time
- It is important to periodically reflect on where you've been, where you are, and where you are going in relation to your spiritual struggles
- Even though our journey as a group is at its end, you have likely gained new knowledge and experience that you can carry with you
- The personal journey of your spiritual struggle continues forward from here





A Review of Today's Journey



Review of the Journey

By comparing your recent description of your spiritual struggle to the description
you wrote at the beginning of our sessions you were able to consider your journey
thus far. We discussed the ways in which you and your experience of your spiritual
struggle have changed over the past several weeks.

Review of Sessions

• By looking at the items that represent each of our sessions together, we reviewed the topics that we have covered in our journey. Remember that you are continuing on this journey and that the things you learned will go with you.

Fire Ceremony

• You had the opportunity to share your gratitude and contribute to the campfire. As we sat around the fire created by each one of us, you were able to reflect on your hopes and concerns for the future. We ended this leg of our journey, but you take a part of the group with you to light your path into the future.

The next steps:

- You will be contacted by a Winding Road team member to schedule a 30-minute interview so you can share your feelings about this experience and provide us with feedback. You will also be asked to complete the closing survey at that time (approximately 1 hour).
- Finally, we will get in touch with you in approximately 3 months to schedule a follow-up survey.

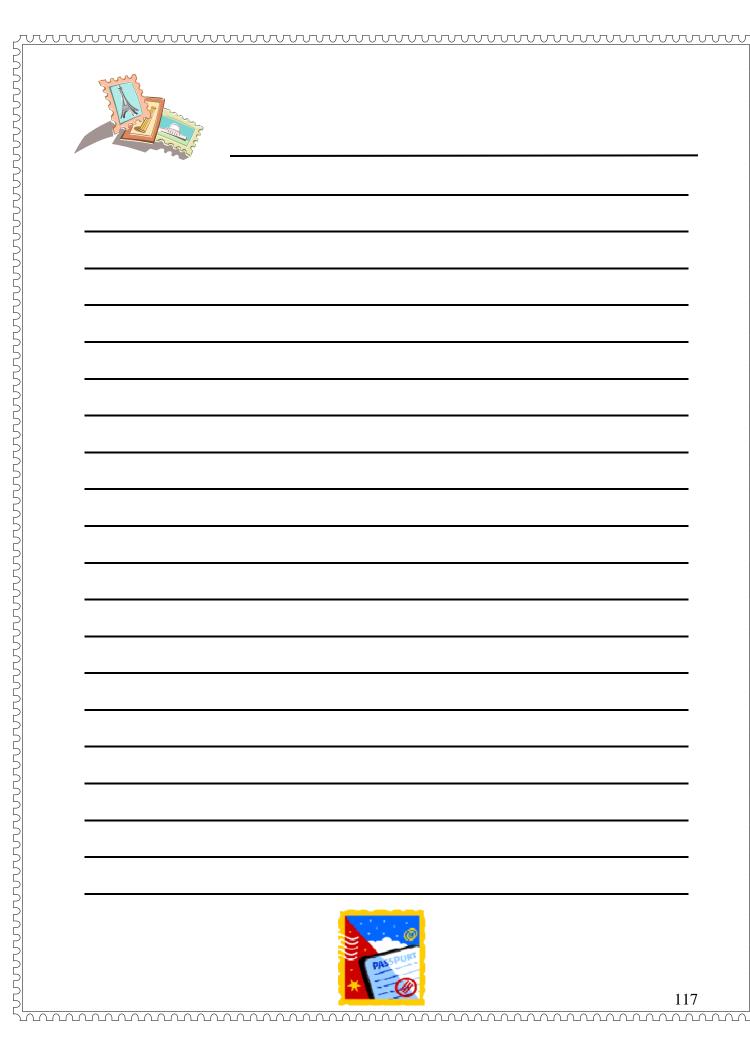
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Travel Log Thoughts from the Road

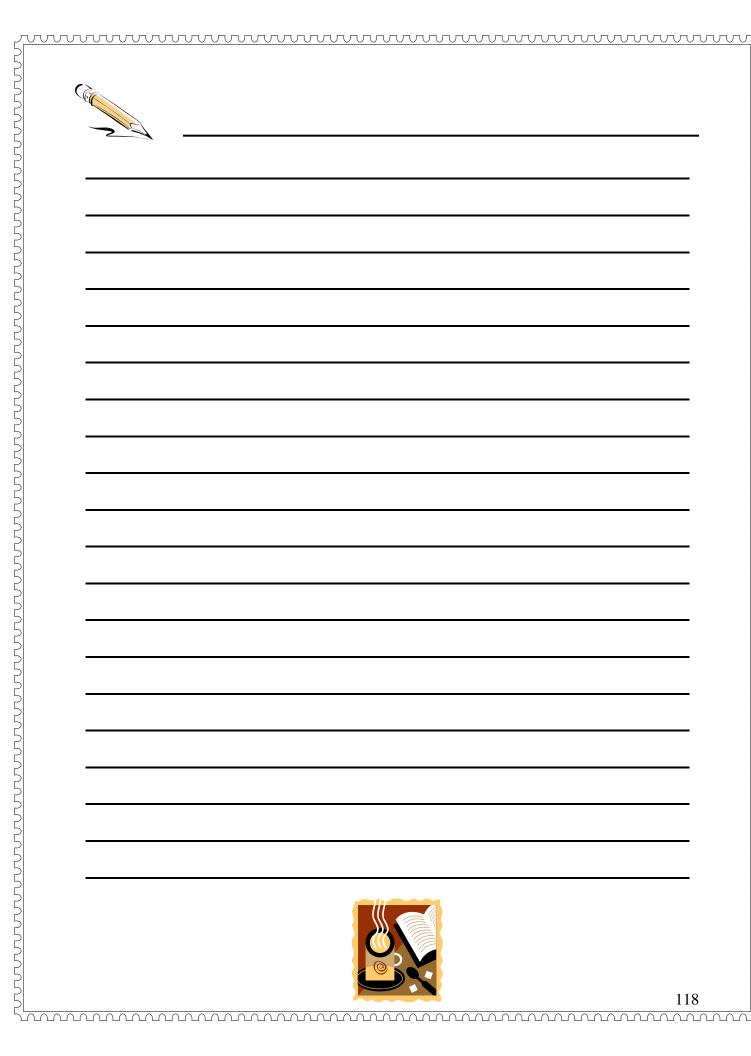


Please use these pages for any reflections, thoughts, or comments that come up as we travel the winding road.

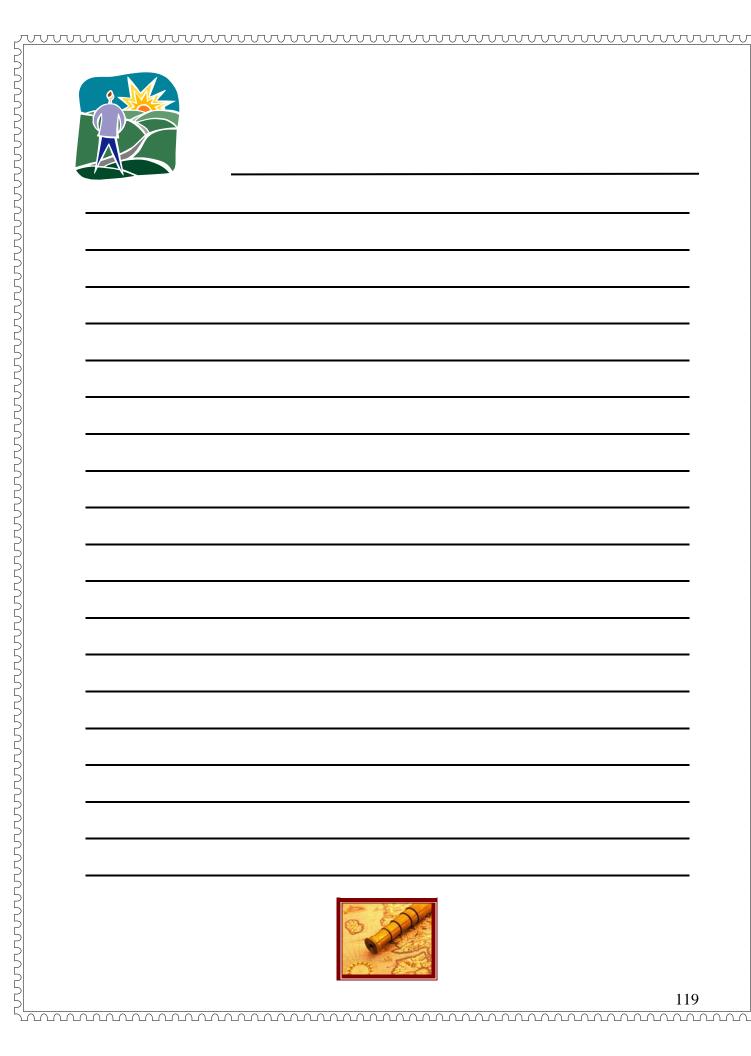




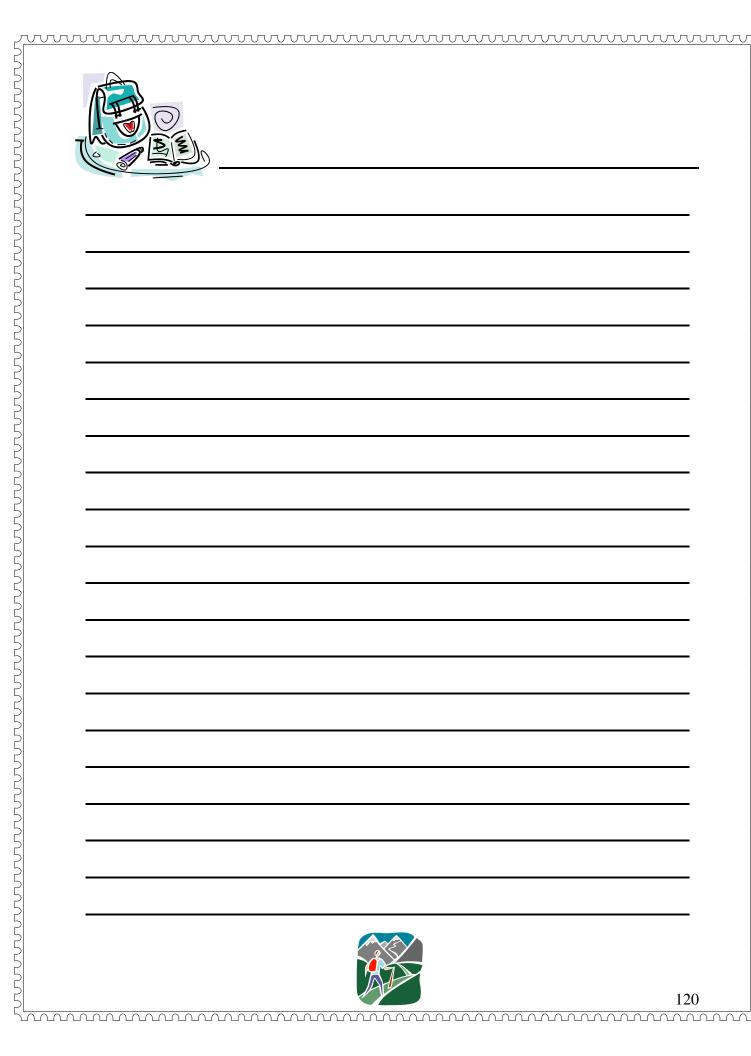
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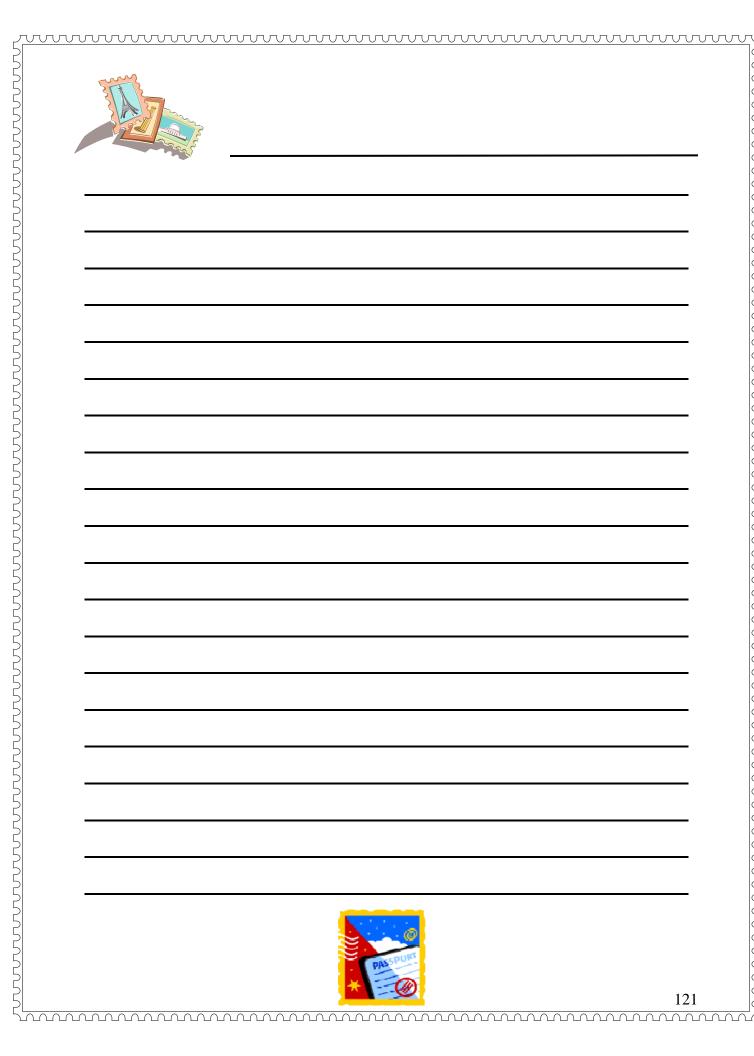




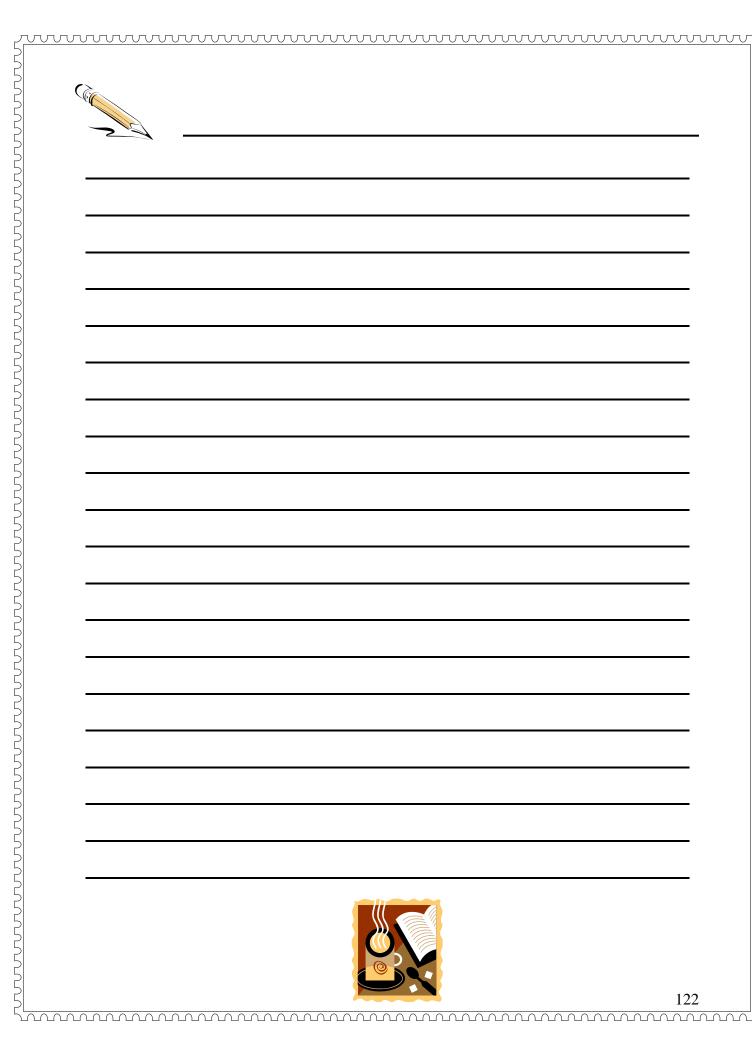




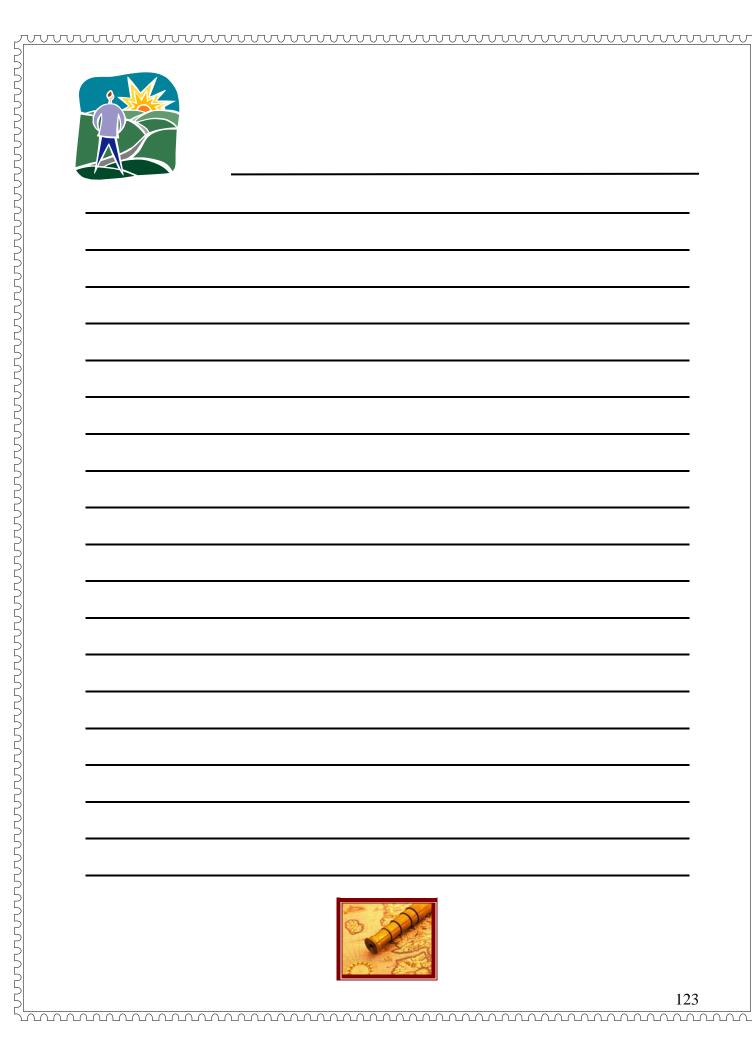




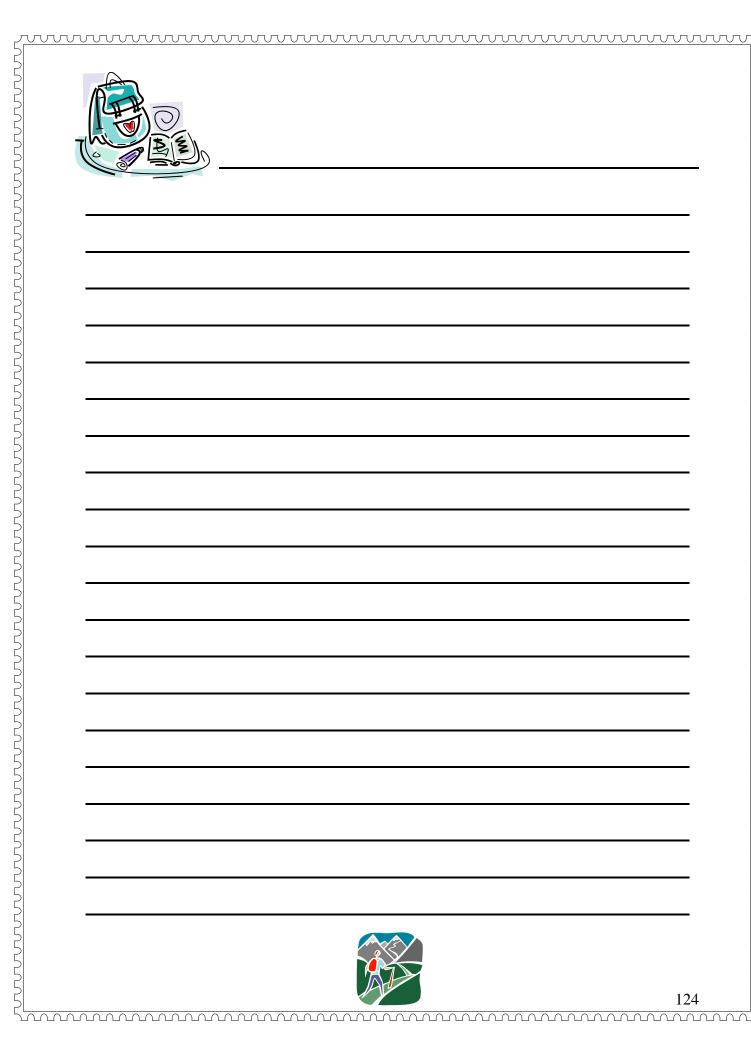














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