

CANADIAN SCHOOL OF PEACEBUILDING
CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY

Practices for Transforming the Peacebuilder

PCTS 3950C
SESSION II: JUNE 19 – 23, 2017

Course Syllabus

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Lecture times: June 19-23, Monday to Friday, 8:30-5:00

Last date for voluntary withdrawal without academic penalty: July 15, 2017

COURSE DESCRIPTION

To an unusual degree, those involved in peacebuilding operate in environments that impose high stress on peacebuilders, physically, emotionally and spiritually. This often involves high levels of competition and conflict within and between peacebuilding organizations themselves. Given that little support is provided for meeting these stresses, peacebuilders need to equip themselves with strategies for personal growth and coping with stress.

This course will explore self-care and personal transformation of peaceworkers as a fundamental requirement of transformation of our world. Major themes will include acknowledging stresses and distractions/temptations common in peacebuilding work; the development of disciplines for sustaining hope and vision; finding grounding in calling, vision, and faith as motivation for peacebuilding; and developing a repertoire of routines for self-care and personal transformation, including physical, mind-body, and spiritual disciplines. The course will consist of a blend of lecture, participatory group exercises, and practices of personal reflection.

The course is offered either for training or for 3 hours of academic credit.

OBJECTIVES

- To explore peacebuilding as a personal journal, with great challenges and opportunities at emotional and spiritual levels for individuals involved in it; to reflect on these with others preparing for or already underway, and to develop personal practices for navigating the journey.
- To recognize issues of personal growth that are particularly relevant to peacemaking (e.g. needs for credit and power, the role of weakness and suffering in our own lives and the lives of others, dealing with fear and uncertainty).

- To give special attention to egocentrism as a pervasive and disempowering motivation in peacebuilding and explore opportunities for setting ego aside and responding from deeper foundations of hope, vision, and calling.
- To experiment with and develop a personal set of routines for self-sustenance and self-transformation, including physical, mind-body, and spiritual disciplines.

READINGS

Ron Kraybill, *Transforming the Peacebuilding*, Will be provided to participants as a pdf.
 Ron Kraybill, *Daily/Weekly Practices for Transforming the Peacebuilder*. Will be provided to participants as a pdf.

Recommended. Selected readings will be drawn from some of these books; (those available in CMU library are indicated):

- Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Westminster John Knox Press) (CMU library)
- Rachel Harris, *20-Minute Retreats* (Owl Books)
- Barry, William, *God and You: Prayer as a Personal Relationship* (Paulist Press) but we have others
- Cameron, Julia, *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1992) (CMU library)
- Cassou, Michell, and Steward Cubley, *Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, 1995)
- Cooper, David A., *The Heart of Stillness: The Elements of Spiritual Practice* (New York: Bell Tower, 1992)
- **de Mello, Anthony, *Awareness: The Perils and Opportunities of Reality* (Image Books) but others
- de Mello, Anthony, *Sadhana: A Way to God* (New York : Image Books, 1984) but others
- Diamond, Louise, *The Courage for Peace: Daring to Create Harmony in Ourselves and the World* (Berkeley: Conari Press, 1999)
- **Hughes, Gerard, *The God of Surprises* (Dortan, Longman, and Todd)(CMU library)
- Kornfield, Jack, *A Path with Heart: A Guide through the Perils and Promises of Spiritual Life* (Bantam, 1993) (CMU library)
- **Leonard, George and Michael Murphy, *The Life We Are Given: A Longterm Program for Realizing the Potential of Body, Mind, Heart, and Soul* (Tarcher/Putnam, 1995).
- Merton, Thomas, *Contemplative Prayer* (CMU library)
- Miller, Wendy, *Learning to Listen: A Guide for Spiritual Friends* (Nashville: Upper Room, 1993)
- Moore, Thomas, *Care of the Soul* (Harper, 1992) (CMU library)
- **Palmer, Parker, *Let Your Life Speak* (CMU library)
- Straub, Gail, *The Rhythm of Compassion: Caring for Self, Connecting with Society*

Each of these is a kind of classic with a different angle on depth and soul. If you're interested in buying a few, numerous are available as used books on Amazon.com for quite reasonable prices. I've marked with ** the ones that I'd particularly recommend. Straub, Kornfield, and Diamond are Buddhist; Cooper a progressive Jewish rabbi. Cameron and Cassou are the most "secular" of these authors. Moore uses exclusively language of "soul" and "depth". Thompson, Barry, Merton, de Mello, and Hughes are Christian.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES (for credit)

The following are the general outlines of requirements for those taking the class for credit. Others are encouraged to read as much as possible, however, in order to receive maximum benefit from the course. Assignments can be submitted in person during the course or via email to the instructor.

ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES (for credit)

COURSE EVALUATION

<u>Assignments</u>	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Marks</u>
1. Self-care and practice paper	June 19	20%
2. Spirituality/Philosophy Reflection paper	August 10	25%
3. Course Reflection paper	August 15	35%
4. Participation		<u>20%</u>
		100%

1. Self-care and practice paper. Read Chapter 3 in my manuscript and the Appendix on Daily/Weekly Practice. Then develop an outline of your own routine. Start as early on this as you can. It's not a disaster if you are only able to put together an outline the day before class, but the experience will be richer if you start weeks or even months before class. The big challenge in self-care is not coming up with ideas, it's doing them in the midst of life. So having a base of conscious effort when you come to class will increase your learning, and the longer the better. Starting two months before the class would be ideal but even a week or two will put you in the soup of reality long enough to already experience the complications that arise there. If you want, you can send your outline to me at ron.kraybill@gmail.com at any time and I may have comments or suggestions.

Write a reflection paper on the following two topics listed below. You can do this in journal form with a series of entries across many days or as one unified paper. In total length of 2000-4000 words:

1) **Review of your personal assets and challenges related to self-care as a peacebuilder.**

List in an appreciative way those things in your life that are strengths and resources in your quest to be deep, centered, principled, and grounded in your peacebuilding work. What about you, your commitments, your gifts and resources as a person, your personal networks, etc., will work to your benefit in being such a person in your peacebuilding work?

Next, list things that are likely to get in the way of being the deep, centered, principled, grounded person you would like to be in your peacebuilding work. Include here tangible things like busy schedules, demands of family, financial restrictions, lack of health club venues, etc. Also include non-tangible things such as ambition and ego, competitiveness with other people and agencies, personal insecurities, your longstanding crisis of faith, your workaholism, your dislike of exercise or quiet space or whatever.

2) **Your proposed routine of self-care in its current form.** Emphasis on "current" since such a routine is a work in progress, especially in early stages.

Read Chapter 3 in my manuscript (which will be sent to you upon registration for the course) and the Appendix on Daily/Weekly Practice at end of this syllabus. Then develop an outline of your own routine. Start as early on this as you can. It's not a disaster if you are only able to put together an outline the day before class, but the experience will be richer if you start weeks before class.

The big challenge in self-care is not coming up with ideas, it's doing them in the midst of life. So having a base of conscious effort when you come to class will increase your learning, and the longer the better.

To the extent that you are able, think about how to integrate your chosen practice with your interest in peacebuilding. If you are in a peacebuilding practice now, you're already living in the issues you must think about. If you are at the outset of your career and only expecting such a career in the future, you will need to use your imagination.

A question that people answer in differing ways is what elements and how much of their practice of self-care to blend into other things. For example, you might be able to get a lot of exercise in the course of your daily work. Depending on your context, you might be able to satisfy large elements of your spiritual reflection in things you do with colleagues. Then again, you may find that physical exercise or spiritual experiences are not fulfilling unless they are separated from a work context.

Regardless to when you start, even if it is after you return home from our class gathering, try to apply the routine for at least a month so as to have a basis on which to write parts of the final paper. See instructions for the final paper about that, noting the suggestion to keep a journal about your routine. This will greatly assist writing the final paper.

Due: June 19

Length: 2000-4000 words

Value: 20%

2. Spirituality/Philosophy Reflection paper. Choose a recognized framework of spirituality or philosophy that provides guidance about personal decision making and motivation and write a reflection paper on it. You can focus the paper within your own present framework of religion or belief by reading within that framework. Or you might choose a framework different from your own that you find intriguing and wish to benefit from.

Why such a topic and paper in a course on transforming the peacebuilder? Peacebuilding requires a lot of decision-making with big implications, for ourselves and for others. Working in conflict puts us in roles that can be highly influential, yet we are often semi-outsiders and thus are rarely accountable in ways that traditional leaders are. Even more than most people, we should be thoughtful and aware about decision-making.

Then too, in groups as with individuals, decision-making encapsulates many things. Many people do decision-making blindly, with little thought about the values reflected in the way we go about making decisions. If we are *conscious* about our own processes - about the factors and values that we consider when we make decisions, about what and with whom we consult, about where we look for info and guidance that we consider authoritative - to this extent we are positioned to make better decisions.

This assignment does not require you to lay out your own framework for decision-making. You are welcome to do that if you want in the paper, but the expectation is more modest: Interact with a framework, author, or tradition in a way that deepens your insight about making good decisions. The experience will make you more conscious of your decision-making processes in the future.

You can choose a specific person (e.g.: Thomas Merton) or a tradition (e.g.: Islam or Ignatian spirituality). To get ideas for reading I suggest you do a web search on: (your selected author or tradition) plus the search terms "ego personal decision-making practices". For example, if you seek resources related to Theravada Buddhism, enter the following into the Search field as one search string

with no quotes: Theravada Buddhism ego personal decision-making practices

I think you will be best served by looking for routines, practices, disciplines, and techniques that guide and train heart, mind and soul in dealing with issues of ego, priority setting, and decision-making. Concepts and theory are great; “learning about” is good. But doing, *praxis*, is where the rubber meets the road. You will likely learn and retain more if you seek out and actively employ practical techniques, disciplines, and routines from the reading you are doing.

In this assignment:

- a) Explain why you’ve chosen the particular author or tradition of your choice; no academic or otherwise profound reasons required, just a personal explanation.
- b) Identify some readings - books, web readings, scriptures, whatever, that you’d like to explore that appear to offer the kind of praxis-oriented things described above.
- c) Dip into the above far enough to pick out one or several practices that you want to experiment with in your own routines and describe how these might be relevant to issues that you might face as a peacebuilder. Examples of issues: how to set priorities, from whom to accept funding, whom to work for, what goals to choose for your work, how to cope with competition from other individuals or organizations, what level of visibility to seek for yourself or your organization, whom to consult with or partner with in peacebuilding processes, etc.
- d) Reflect on situations you might encounter as a peacebuilder. What would it look like in practical terms for you to use these practices? My question is not what answers you will apply to the dilemmas you face but rather what steps will you have to take to apply this approach to guidance or decision-making?
- e) Comment on your inner response to what you are doing thus far. Excitement, butterflies, hopes, fears, worries, doubts, etc. If time allows for you to begin the use of some of the techniques, comment on the experience. If not, comment on your inner response to the process of search itself.

Note: As an alternative to this reflection paper, I would welcome having you present the above orally in a class presentation of 15-30 minutes. If appropriate, it would be great to lead the class in an exercise or practice that gives others an experience of what you are learning.

Due: August 10

Length: 2000-4000 words

Value: 25%

3. Course Reflection paper. Write a reflection paper about the course. This should have several components:

- 1) Your assets/challenges in regard to self-care and personal growth as a peacebuilder. The first part of the first paper will be an initial component here. You can copy and paste it in or edit it as you wish. Add to this some issues/insights gleaned from our class discussions. How do you see this as connected to your peacebuilding work?
- 2) Reflection on your experience with a routine. The first part should be a description of what actually happened as far as a routine. What was the routine and how did it evolve? It takes most people a fair bit of experimentation to settle on a blend of things that are both personally renewing and that they can sustain over time. It is possible that you will only have a month to reflect on, but even if it is that short, don’t hesitate to adapt and change it across that time.

I am much more interested in you being honest in this reflection than in being “successful.” Establishing and maintaining a routine is hard and humbling. If you aren’t able to achieve the one you set out for yourself, treat that as opportunity to learn rather than constitute a mark of failure. What different choices

would you have to make to maintain a routine? Do you choose to make those choices at this time?

Virtually all of us have extended periods where our sustaining routines fall away partially or entirely. Give yourself permission to do this without guilt. It's just not possible to always do what we wish. Long-term you're more likely to stay with your routine longer if you are gracious towards yourself and your life in times when you just can't pull it off.

About journaling.

I suggest you make a chart or set up a journal in such a way that every day or two you can make some notes about how your routine is going. This will make writing the final reflection paper much easier because you can then more easily see the patterns. You do not need to include the journal in your final paper but you are welcome to draw quotes from it and/or attach the whole journal if you want.

Remember that the goal is not for you to demonstrate how fit you're becoming or how well you've followed your routine. The goal is to authentically experience and reflect on the ups and downs that come with routines of self-care.

When you feel guilty about not doing the things you aim to do, set aside the guilt as best you can. View your experience, good or disappointing, as information useful in establishing a sustainable routine rather than as a mark of failure. Use journaling as a mirror to help you see honestly what you can and can't sustain, and adjust your routines accordingly.

In addition to serving as a mirror of what is working and what is not, I suggest you use journaling to engage the question: What brings me a sense of increased life and joy, and what brings me a diminished sense of these? When your inner response is substantially positive, take that as a sign of rightness regarding the practices you are engaged in. When negative, continue the search. (For Christian students, you can learn more about using our inner response as guide from the tradition of Ignatian spirituality. See for example, this [outline of Ignatian principles for decisionmaking.](#))

We should not draw hasty conclusions of course. Someone who is badly out of shape who begins to exercise will find this tiring in the beginning and perhaps not very life-giving. But after you get past the initial adjustment period, you should find yourself energized, renewed, and encouraged by an activity you choose. If you do not, perhaps this particular activity is not right for you.

The second part of this final paper should consist of a plan for the next year. Part of the challenge of sustaining and transforming ourselves is being proactive: assessing where we are and where we want to be, and making plans for how to get there. Begin this section of the paper by describing what you will be doing related to peacebuilding or other activities in the next year, and what challenges you foresee arising from this context. Then describe your goals for yourself in terms of personal sustenance and transformation, and outline the specific steps you would like to undertake to accomplish these.

Due: August 15

Length: 4000-8000 words

Value: 35%

4. Participation. Given that this course is oriented to developing practices that can sustain someone for their peacework, class participation is essential. It is expected that students will come prepared to listen to others, discern areas for their growth and put effort into the experiences of the classroom.

Value: 20%

Grading: Students taking the course for course for PCTS or PCD credit may arrange with the instructor and the CSOP office to take the course for Pass/Fail. Please note that a Pass is a B in the grading scale. Notify the CSOP office by **Monday noon** of the course that you will take the course Pass/Fail.

STYLISTIC REQUIREMENTS

CMU has adopted the following as its standard guide for all academic writing:

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Sixth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

The final paper should follow an accepted academic format for citations, bibliography, etc. (e.g. APA, Chicago). You may choose the format but whichever you use, be sure to use it properly and consistently.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

1. All material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced. Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU's website (<http://www.cmu.ca/students.php?s=registrar&p=policies>) and in the CMU Calendar (also available online: <http://www.cmu.ca/academics.php?s=calendar>).
2. Assignments are due as scheduled, unless previous arrangements have been made with the instructor.
3. I encourage all students to take up any concerns/questions regarding grades, first with the instructor, then with the Associate Dean of Program, Ray Vander Zaag. The CMU Calendar outlines its appeals process clearly.
4. Email: Substantive discussions are best done person to person, not electronically. During the CSOP, participants are encouraged to engage in substantive discussions in person.

Each completed assignment will be given a numerical grade (according to its value toward the final grade) and the corresponding letter grade. The final mark for each student is determined by the sum total of all numerical grades, which is then assigned a letter grade according to the scale below.

LETTER GRADE/PERCENTAGE SCALE

Letter Grade	Percentage	Grade Points	Descriptor
A+	95-100	4.5	Exceptional
A	88-94	4	Excellent
B+	81-87	3.5	Very Good
B	74-80	3	Good
C+	67-73	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60-67	2	Adequate
D	50-59	1	Marginal
F	0-49		Failure

<u>Criteria</u>	A - Excellent	B - Competent	C - Below Expectations

CONTENT (quality of the information/ideas and sources/details used to support them)	- has clarity of purpose - has depth of content - displays insight or originality of thought -demonstrates quality and breadth of resources	- has clarity of purpose - has substantial information and sufficient support - contains some originality of thought -uses quality resources	- has clarity of purpose -lacks depth of content and may depend on generalities or the commonplace - has little originality of thought -uses mostly quality resources
STRUCTURE (logical order or sequence of the writing)	- is coherent and logically developed -uses very effective transitions	- is coherent and logically developed -uses smooth transitions	- is coherent and logically (but not fully) developed -has some awkward transitions
CONVENTIONS (appearance of the writing: sentence structure, usage, mechanics, documentation)	- has virtually no errors of conventions	- has minimal errors of conventions	- is understandable <u>but</u> has noticeable problems of sentence structure, usage, mechanics or documentation
STYLE (personality of the writing: word choice, sentence variety, voice, attention to audience)	- is concise, eloquent and rhetorically effective -has nicely varied sentence structure -is engaging throughout and enjoyable to read	- displays concern for careful expression -has some variation in sentence structure -is generally enjoyable to read	- has some personality <u>but</u> lacks imagination and may be stilted and may rely on clichés -has little variation in sentence structure -is not very interesting to read

NOTE: The *CMU Student Handbook* is a useful guide for further information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, and appeals. Grades are not final until vetted and approved by the Dean’s Office.

FINAL DATE FOR WITHDRAWAL

Final date to withdraw from this course without academic penalty is July 15, 2017.

If a student is unable to complete the requirements of a course by the end of the semester, the student must submit a written appeal for an “incomplete” to the Registrar’s office: spenner@cmu.ca. The student should seek the instructor’s support for the appeal and submit the appeal before the last day of classes. If the student’s appeal is granted, the instructor will enter a grade of I (for incomplete) accompanied by a temporary grade (which is based on completed work and assigns a value of zero for uncompleted work). Instructor grades are due by August 17th. If the student completes the remaining work within the extension period, the grade will be recalculated and the incomplete status will be removed. If the student does not complete the work within the extension period, the incomplete status will be removed and the grade will

remain as originally entered. The maximum extension is: December 1, for courses ending in August.

SCHEDULE AND TOPICS & Readings List- DRAFT

June 19 – 23, 2017

Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00

Each day will include experiences and exercises for centering and renewal.

Monday

Introductions

Overview of course syllabus and Assignments

Why this Course?

River of Life - Personal life journeys

Principles of Sustainable Practice

Tuesday

Intro to the Kata as one integrative tool

Peacebuilders and the Brain - Insights from Neurobiology about Trauma, Stress and Self-Care

Rest - A personal and familial assessment

Awareness, Awareness - Attunement to the Present as Pathway to the Future

Trust as a Lifestyle

Imagination as Opener of the Path

Wednesday

Letting Go - The Quest for Power and Credit as Obstacles in Peacebuilding

Living from Sustainable Power - Personal Power, Calling, and Community as Alternatives to Egocentrism

Accompaniment as Sustainable Modality for Empowerment

Thursday

Pain and Vulnerability as Essential Companions to Authentic Peacebuilding

Feedback as A Tool for Sustainable Empowerment

Friday

Time and Timing - Making Peace at the Pace of Guidance

Recognizing and Living with Realities of Rank

Review of Assignments

Note: Coffee Breaks are normally 10:30-11:00 am and 3:30-4 pm.

Appendix on Daily/Weekly Practice

I recommend developing a set of routines in two areas, Care of the Body and Care of the Soul. This essay sketches out a large number of ideas to stimulate your thinking in developing routines in each of these.

Care of the Body

Caring for the physical body is a powerful metaphor for care of our whole being. In care of the body we experience both the rewards and the challenges of personal transformation. I suggest you establish a routine involving 1-3 hours invested in two kinds of body work:

1. *Active body work* that exercises the body and elevates heart and respiratory rates to a moderate extent such as brisk walking, running, swimming, biking, etc. Studies show that 30 minutes of moderate exercise (this can be broken up into several blocks throughout the day) if done most days of the week will bring significant payoffs in physical and emotional health. No other choices have greater consequence for your long-term physical and emotional health than those that you make in regards to exercise.

If shortage of time is your biggest obstacle to getting exercise, look for ways to build exercise into your other routines. Eg: take the stairs rather than the elevator wherever possible. Do exercises while playing with your kids at the park, etc.

High Intensity Interval Training offers another way to greatly reduce the time required for exercise. Recent research shows that you can get the same level of cardiovascular benefit from about 10 minutes of HIIT as from an hour of jogging. A websearch on the term will bring you a whole variety of HIIT routines so you can easily pick one that appeals to you. For example, this [New York Times article on HIIT](#) gives numerous options. However, there are emotional and physical benefits from longer periods of exercise that HIIT cannot replicate. Personally I aim for at 2 HIIT sessions and one longer round of exercise per week.

2. *Integrative body work* that focuses on the mind/body connection such as yoga, the kata (see handout), relaxation exercises, or forms of running, walking, swimming, etc., that specifically include centering of the mind).

You may wish to do both forms of body work every day, or alternate the two (eg: walk on one day; do yoga on the second).

If you have any doubts about your ability to enjoy physical exercise, it is important not to push yourself to exhaustion, for in doing so you place yourself in danger of discouragement. Walk or exercise just to the point of feeling a sense of pleasant tiredness and then stop. Do this on a regular basis for several weeks and your endurance will grow rapidly. You don't have to make yourself uncomfortable to get huge gains from exercise!

Care of the Soul

I suggest a blend of disciplines chosen for the purpose of simplifying and purifying the mind and heart and connecting to well-springs of deep meaning and joy. As you read the ideas below, be attentive to your inner response. Note the ideas that stir the deep joyful attraction that reflects appetite of the soul. Choose several of those for inclusion in a set of daily or weekly practices.

Avoid the temptation to decide day by day what you will do. I suggest putting your practices in a list or a chart and trying to stick with the program. Part of the goal is to develop a framework that is larger than whims of the moment and weighty enough not to be constantly jostled aside by the ceaseless demands of life.

If you discover after a week that in fact you're not sticking to the program, don't be discouraged. That's part of the learning process! What needs to be changed to come up with a realistic set of goals? Maybe you've set your sights too high. Maybe you need to start saying no to certain distractions. Maybe you've chosen the wrong practices. The point is not to be perfect - the point is to learn from your failures and adapt.

Feeding Joy and Passion

Do something that is creative and fulfilling and brings you deep joy, such as reading or writing poetry, singing, playing music, pottery or other crafts, woodworking, caring for plants, hiking, etc. Whatever you choose, do it in the awareness that the purpose is not to produce something, even though you may be involved in production activity. Rather it is to experience a sense of connection to the Source through creative activities. Arrange the activity in a way that facilitates this.

The activity you choose should leave you feeling energized, centered, renewed, and grateful for life. If it does not, explore other possibilities, think about ways to restructure or refocus whatever you are doing, or if you so choose, continue with the activity and try to gain insight about the meaning of the inner disturbance you are encountering. You may wish to explore possibilities for making this activity a time of prayer as defined by Barry, that is, any activity which is done with a conscious awareness of the presence of God.

One author well-known for her work in restoring people's sense of connection to creativity asks her students to schedule a weekly "Artist's Date". This is a weekly date with oneself to do something that is joyful and creative. It may be a creative activity at home or it may be going to a museum, play, exhibit, etc. The point is to actively set aside time to do something that is creative, fun, and nurturing to the imagination (See *The Artist's Way*, 18-24)

Numerous spiritual traditions recognize that active cultivation of gratitude contributes powerfully to spiritual growth. If the creative activity you choose so lends itself, you might want to experiment with including cultivation of gratitude as an element.

Typical strategies for cultivating gratitude include making lists of things we are grateful for, directing thoughts to people and things we appreciate, sending thank you notes, expressing appreciation to others, etc. Do a web search on “cultivate gratitude” for many more ideas. The hard part, the part that requires discipline, is simply remembering to do these rewarding things!

Clearance of Self, Connection to Guidance

A major challenge in the transformative journey is clearing away inner distractions and deepening our connection to the often-subtle voice of Soul that brings us wisdom, compassion, and insight. Many tools are available for this. Choose one or two that seem of greatest interest to you and work with them for a time. Ideally, you should have several you are comfortable with to assist in reflection. When you are comfortable with one tool, experiment with another that intrigues you.

- **Morning pages.** Artist Julia Cameron recommends the “morning pages” as a tool for clearing and focusing the mind. (See *The Artist’s Way*, 9-18) Fill three pages with handwriting expressing whatever is going through your mind as you write. Your bad week, your struggle with self-esteem, your gratitude to be alive, your frustration that you don’t know what to write about in the morning pages. The point is to fill three pages with words, not to produce quality prose. Cameron recommends this as a daily exercise for people involved in creative activities, and it is a powerful tool for anyone to help clear away mental junk. And of course, scattered with surprising frequency amidst the junk are important insights and guidance for issues at hand.

The Morning Pages are for your eyes only. If you share them with others you will later begin to anticipate this and to edit your writing, thereby reducing the effectiveness of this tool to purge you of distracting thoughts and feelings. Put the pages in an envelope in a private place. Many artists and writers use Morning Pages every morning as a tool to open themselves to the creativity they need in their work. Anyone can use it to clear cobwebs from the heart and mind. If you are in a time of seeking special guidance, you might devote at least the last page of the Morning Pages to reflecting on things for which you seek guidance.

- **Meditation.** In my first book thirty five years ago I sarcastically described meditation as a technique for lowering blood pressure. Today I know it as one of the oldest and most widely used spiritual practices. Its power, I have come to see, lies in its ability to return us to that place of uncluttered inner simplicity where we are able to experience awareness of God.

In my view, restful awareness of God rises naturally into human consciousness all the time. But our cluttered, fearful mind occupies our awareness and blocks ability to experience awareness of God. Jack Kornfield speaks of the mind as an unruly, never-resting puppy that constantly chases after anything in sight. Meditation brings the mind to rest by focusing attention on one thing and suddenly peaceful awareness of God is within reach.

One common meditation exercise is focusing on the breath. Sit comfortably in an upright position, with feet flat on the floor and hands on your lap or legs. Relax your whole body by starting with the muscles of your lower legs, tightening them as hard as you can for a few

seconds, then relaxing. Proceed upwards to the head - doing the same thing with upper legs and pelvic muscles, then abdomen, shoulders, hands and arms, and finally face and scalp. Sit for a minute or two in a state of complete relaxation.

In this relaxed state, turn your attention to your breathing. On the inbreath, say silently to yourself, "in one" and on the outbreath, "out one". On the next breath say "in two" and "out two". If you lose track of the numbers, just start from one again. When your attention wanders, as it usually does, simply bring it back to your breathing, as firmly but gently as you would a straying puppy. Do this for at least five minutes. Many practitioners meditate in this way for 15 or 20 minutes daily, and some for longer periods.

Meditation has been scientifically proven to have many payoffs, including lowered blood pressure, greater sense of peacefulness, and increased ability to maintain mental focus. It is highly effective both as a means of resting as well as praying or preparing the mind and heart for challenging work.

You can easily adapt meditation practice to your own preferences and beliefs. You could repeat a name or a short prayer instead of a number with each breath. E.g., a Christian might use the "Jesus prayer": "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God," on the inbreath, and "Have mercy on me" on the outbreath. You could imagine with each breath that you are inhaling golden light that radiates from the divine. You could imagine hearing a particular sound. Some people simply focus on the sound of air rushing through the nostrils, noticing the different sound on the inbreath and the outbreath. The impact of meditation seems to be due to response of the mind to a discipline that interrupts the flow of thoughts, and holds the focus on one simple thing.

- **Daily quiet time, listening for divine guidance.** From Initiatives for Change, formerly known as Moral ReArmament, I learned the practice of regularly setting aside time for higher guidance. Sit in a quiet place for ten or fifteen minutes with pen and paper at hand. Begin with a prayer, dedicating yourself and your thoughts to God. If you have practiced meditation, use it to focus the mind for a few minutes. Then seek to open yourself to receive guidance on the issue at hand. Often many thoughts will come. Jot them down as they come. After some minutes, turn your attention to the thoughts on the paper. Listen for inner promptings as you review them. Some of those may be uninspired, others may carry trustworthy guidance. If there are several people doing quiet time together, you can make a common list of thoughts and discuss them as a group. Initiatives of Change includes quiet time in all major decision-making processes.
- **Contemplative prayer** (see book by Barry for ideas)
- **Inner journey exercises** (Hughes, Barry, de Mello, and Kornfield are all valuable resources here)
- **Journalling.** There is an [excellent essay on general purpose journalling](#) on the website of Day One, which will also be pleased to sell you a web app if that appeals to you. (Personally I think the archetypal act of scribing personal thoughts by hand on paper is so richly rewarding that I'm not so drawn to the app.)

You could choose to narrow your journaling to a deep question such as: “Where is God in my life right now?” or “Where and when do I experience life most richly just now?” or “If my calling were the voice of a wise elder, what would it be saying to me now?”

Or you could take a wide open listening approach: “What’s on my mind these days?”

- **Silent retreats**
- **Fasting**, which temporarily removes a pillarstone of life in order to experience greater awareness of God in the resulting gap.
- **Spiritual direction or spiritual friendship**, the primary purpose of which is to help us to listen to God
- **Worship and soulful directing of attention or imagination.** Feeding the imagination with materials that inspire hope and joy is a time-proven method for care of the soul:
 - reading uplifting materials, autobiographies, devotional materials, etc.
 - reading Scriptures that inspire hope and trust in God
 - visualization is a technique found in a number of spiritual traditions for using the imagination to create vivid awareness of the reality we seek and thereby attuning ourselves to it. We can imagine conversations with God, imagine ourselves being as we long to be, imagine ourselves or others surrounded by healing energies, etc.
 - affirmations
 - conversation or worship with people who are committed to maintaining an imagination dedicated to the hope of just peace.

Practicing Contribution While Caring for Others. People whose work is “helping others” face special challenges in maintaining awareness of the spirituality of caring. Often, caring service is focused on *results* and asks: “How many people can we help?” Soon we are overwhelmed with the needs around us; we lose the joy of connection to others and life itself that makes our work sustainable

Undertaken as a spiritual discipline, contribution has a different focus: How fully can I engage my heart in a simple act of care? The goal is simply to engage in caring actions with attention joyfully focused on the delight of contributing to others. When we delight in caring for others, we open our heart to the spiritual dimensions of our work and we feed ourselves in the process.

Like most disciplines, contribution can be conducted on a routine basis or spontaneously. Examples:

- Volunteering an evening on a regular basis to serve in a soup kitchen.
- Choosing to drive with a special commitment to generosity to other drivers.
- Deciding to do everything possible to brighten a grumpy colleague or shopkeeper, and to be pleased with ourselves even if the effort appears to bring no results.
- Determining to actively seek, for one hour during the course of a normal day, for any opportunity to affirm or assist people around us.
- Committing fifteen minutes each day to bringing joy or special well-being to any living being.
- Selecting a public place to clean on a regular basis, or to decorate with flowers, etc.