



Exploring Spirituality

A Personal Journey of Discovery

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Developed by a Spirituality Task Group

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The logo for Vancouver Coastal Health, featuring a stylized mountain range above the text.

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Entering in...

You are invited to take a personal journey of discovery.

As you work through the pages of this workbook, make this book your own. This book is about finding your unique spiritual path; finding language and symbol that resonates with you.

You may choose to work through this book in private or together with someone else, or a combination. We would encourage you to try a combination of individual and communal exploration.

It is advisable to take your time through each chapter. There are seven chapters — perhaps complete the book in seven weeks, one chapter per week. You may also choose to dip into the sections of the book in a different order to how they are presented and then return to earlier ones at another time.

This is your journey and the path you take is yours to decide.

In Preparation

Preparing the Space

The creation and use of a personal sacred space provides an environment of relaxation that helps us focus and gives direction to our spiritual practice. As you work through the chapters of this book we encourage you to find and/or create space that is both nurturing and life-giving for you.

The following are ways that people prepare their spiritual spaces:

- ❖ Silence — shut off all electronic devices that could be distracting (TV, music, telephone, washer/dryer), find a comfortable place to sit, lie on your back, move or stand — be in the stillness for as long as is comfortable for you (anything from a minute upward). Moving is ok, it's the silence that is important.
- ❖ Light a candle/tea light — particularly fitting when setting intentions
- ❖ Enliven the senses — incense, holding stones, immerse your hands/feet in water, smudging with sage/sweet grass.
- ❖ Play reflective music.
- ❖ Draw your personal spiritual symbol and display it. (See Chapter 2.)
- ❖ Decorate an inside space — for example you can create a place of reverence or an altar using statues, flowers, pictures, a Buddha, a cross, a medicine wheel or food.
- ❖ Walk outside in nature — you may collect natural elements to take inside with you to decorate your space (leaves, stones, sticks, flowers).

We invite you to try some of these and any others as a way of preparing for each chapter.

Creating this book...

A group of six people, all at different places on their individual journeys of discovery, came together as a community once a month for 18 months. We spent time reflecting on life, mental health recovery, spirituality, transformation, meaning and community. It is out of these conversations that this book emerged.

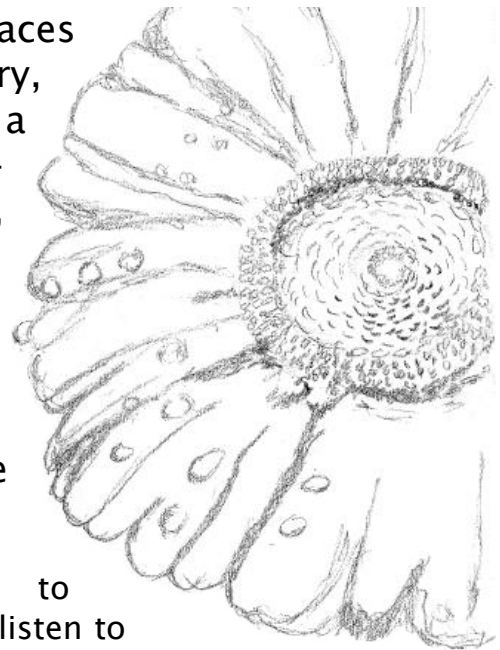
Just like you are doing, each of us took time to reflect on our lives. These are some of our reflections:

Things That Have Heart and Meaning...

I find it easy to get distracted by the tinselly shiny things in life or the dark and troubling parts of life that take me away from my heart. These can be dry and bitter times, where my heart becomes hard. I am learning that these times are a funny sort of blessing, a warning that I am losing my way, that I need to get in touch with my heart again. And when I do get back in touch with my heart, I feel closer to my wife, more accepting of a difficult co-worker or “that person” on the bus, more likely to be at peace with certain difficult situations and more likely to respond to them in helpful ways.

I Make Space For...

I try to make space to ask questions of my heart. Sometimes I make the



time to simply listen to my heart, whether I have questions or not. Sometimes it's hard to make the connection that I seek. But when I do, these connections with my heart just feel good. I feel whole and complete, lovable and loved.

I Find Mystery...

I find mystery... in the synchronicities of life. At first, they seem like coincidences; and now I notice them as indicators of being in the right place at the right time.

My Heart is Motivated...

My heart is motivated... by freedom. Stillness is freedom to me. It gives me a place to come from and I know life's ups and downs are easier to go through with patience and stillness. This kind of calmness helps me be

more centered. This gives me freedom in how I approach any given situation. Meditation is Stillness.

I Am Inspired...

I am inspired when I encounter a person who is living out of a grounded place, a place where they are in tune with both the present moment and yet also hold a bigger picture of life. A person who is so fully present to a moment in time that it takes on greater significance – transcending time, an injection of the Sacred, a visitation of the Spirit, and Someone bigger is all of a sudden with you.

I Find Beauty...

I find beauty in matters of the heart. Kindness and generosity move me. I find beauty in love. Beauty exists all around us. If we know how to appreciate it. And to say thank you when we find it!

I Hope...

I hope we can all live in a world of generosity. Of giving without expecting and offering because we can. I hope we can all learn to care. About everything and everyone. Especially each other.

I Remember...

I remember attending church with my parents when I was young. I loved the organ music, the kind smiles I received from the older women, and the sense of God as bigger than me. These early experiences shaped my spirituality.

I Am Encouraged...

I am encouraged by the nature of art which is a daily ritual for me – drawing, ink, collage and pottery help me experience the environment around me. Relaxing under the sun with billowing clouds surrounded by the sounds of birds and people walking by murmuring in conversation. A slight breeze blowing through my hair.

I Wonder...

I wonder at the many questions that arise in my mind. They lead me to search for internal solutions and a community that will help me grow. I am a curious individual who looks at things in a new light reflecting on information that will give me an open view of the world around me.

I Yearn...

I yearn when I feel like I am the only one. I yearn for peace in my heart. For the calmness and stillness that fills me. For the awareness that I am a small part of an immensely large community.

I Dream...

I dream when I'm sleeping as it helps me cope with what's going on in my life — the good and the bad. The dream I dream while I'm awake helps me escape the good and the bad until I fall back to sleep again. Never escaping the eternal narrative I dream hoping to awake again.

I Imagine...

I imagine. I think of John Lennon's song... "imagine all the people"... creating a peaceful place in my mind and soul that provides hope and happiness for me and the whole world that I am part of.

I am helped by...

I am helped by looking at images of flowers that are opening up. I am a person who has a lot of energy for life. There are days when I can complete many tasks with great gusto but without accessing my heart. Images like the lotus flower remind me of re-awakening and my heart opens up to experience the fullness of a present moment.



Your Journey of Discovery...

The Seven Chapters:

1. Exploring Spiritual Symbols and Language
2. Setting Intentions
3. YOUR Story...
4. Balancing
5. Accessing Your Inner Strength
6. Engaging with Your Community
7. Finding Your Way

Chapter 1

Exploring Spiritual Symbols and Language

“To tame a wild horse,
give him a wide pasture.”

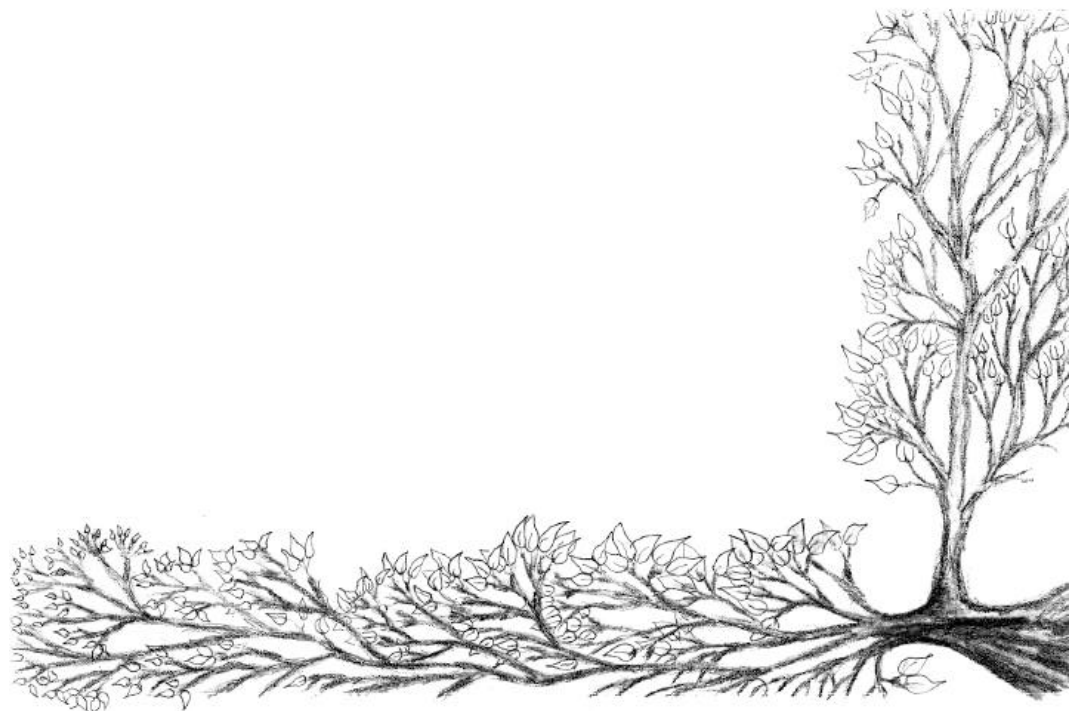
This is your journey of discovery, a time to find your own spiritual symbol and spiritual language. Preparing with silence could help stir creativity as you begin this chapter.

Finding Your Words

“Sometimes a cigar
is just a cigar.”
—*Sigmund Freud*

A place to start: You may want to reread the introductory reflections in the section: ‘Creating this Book’ (pages vi–viii). With a pen in hand, circle words that resonate with you. Write them down below.

Also explore other words that express your unique spirituality. These words will change and shift as you journey on. Revisit this space periodically as you work through this book, you may want to add or change some.



Finding Your Symbol

You may desire to create your own spiritual symbol; it may already live in your imagination. It may even start popping up around you. Or you may choose to borrow a symbol from somewhere, one that resonates with you and inspires you. The following space is for you to draw out a spiritual symbol for yourself. Note that spiritual symbols may shift over time. You don't need to be a great artist. The idea is to express your symbol, and then to see it as created by you, in a way that is meaningful for you.

And yet the
doodle is you...



“An art teacher taught me when I was young that there are no mistakes on the paper and nothing should be erased. Just be confident and unafraid of the blank canvas and let it flow.”

You can use this symbol in the following ways:

- ❖ Close your eyes and imagine it
- ❖ Collage your symbol
- ❖ Write how your symbol changes over time
- ❖ Look for synchronicity (meaningful coincidences)
These are the ways that your symbol shows up in the world around you
- ❖ Write about your symbol in a poem or story
- ❖ As you work through the book we invite you to use your language and/or your symbol to express your spirituality.

“We humans rely on spiritual symbols to reach out beyond ourselves... they are but portals through which spirit may flow without being diminished or fragmented.”

—*Steven S. Pither*



Setting Intentions

An Invitation

“I am not what
happened to me,
I am what
I choose to become.”
—*Carl Jung*

We invite you to work out the heart and meaning of this journey of discovery for you. Your intention can be hopes, dreams or goals.

Lighting a candle or tea light could help prepare you as you begin this chapter.

What are your hopes/dreams/goals in this moment in time?

My hope/dream/goal as I work through this book is to:
(This may be different every time you work through this book.)

Sometimes throughout the day when you experience events, interactions, conversations and tasks, you may be unaware of the deeper meaning. Taking the time to reflect may help you discover what is significant. This in turn may shape your hopes/dreams/goals for tomorrow.



Try this spiritual exercise:

1. Sit quietly and reflect on the day. Did anything invite you to take notice today?
2. Think about a moment in the day that was difficult for you, when you noticed beauty, and/or where you experienced freedom.
3. Remember the surroundings of the moment. How did you feel?
4. Take time to write down your feelings, thoughts and intuitions in the space provided.

“Reflect on today and find intentions for tomorrow”

Other questions for reflection:

- ❖ How can your choices further support you on your journey of recovery?
- ❖ What do you want to work on?
- ❖ What do you want to discover?
- ❖ What have you been given in life for your recovery?
- ❖ Did you try or discover anything new?



“A journey of
a thousand miles begins
with a single step.”

—*Lao Tzu*

Chapter 3

A black and white photograph of a wooden bench in a garden. The bench is positioned in the middle ground, surrounded by dense foliage and rocks. The text "YOUR Story..." is overlaid on the lower part of the image.

YOUR Story...

Some Instruction

There are times in our lives when other people are given the power to tell our story. At this time in your life, YOU have the power to put words to your own story. This means you get to choose what you would like to say or write, how you would like to name experiences, or if you would like to leave them unnamed and mysterious. It is a chance to name the people, places and events that have been significant and meaningful for you.

“Help us to be the always hopeful gardeners of the spirit who knows that without darkness nothing comes to birth as without light nothing flowers.”

—*Mary Sarton*

This is your story.

We invite you to think about, write and/or tell someone your spiritual autobiography.



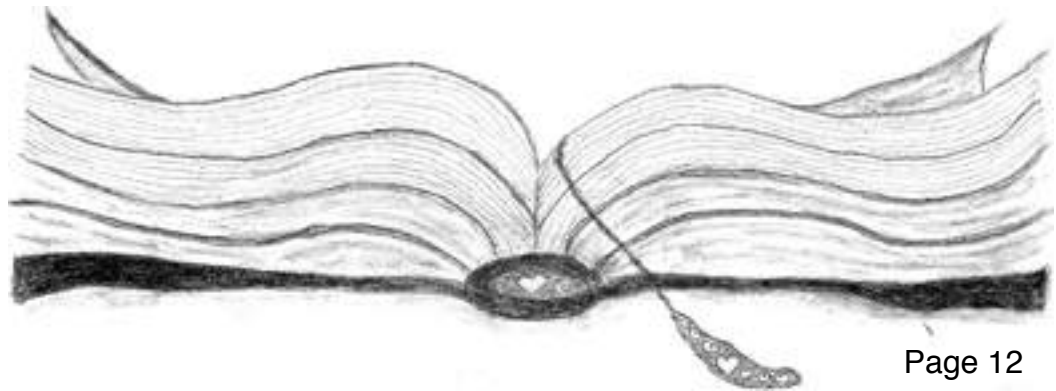
Here is a story of spiritual transformation written by one of the contributors.

Reflect on the words as you prepare to write your own...

I had a transformation in who I was in 1988, which occurred after a physical accident. I didn't understand what was happening at first, I went silent and only spoke when I was spoken to. This lasted one and a half years. My family didn't know how to access resources for me in the community, and I was committed to the In-Patient Unit; where I was able to make a long-time friend from the 7 weeks I was there. I was given medications that helped, but I still wanted to work on myself. I started to get different Alternative Therapies for the physical injuries. I tried Massage, Reiki, Cranial Sacral, Body Talk, and most recently Theta Healing. As time went on, and my body healed, I noticed my Mental Health was also consistently getting better. Throughout this time, I improved my nutritional choices at meals and introduced more walking. One of the real turning points, was when I started to explore my creativity at home and at classes offered through the Mental Health community. When I was able to concentrate better, I brought reading back into my life. I began to start writing poetry and stories — putting in writing some of the themes occurring in my life or thoughts. This allowed me to move through my experiences. I was able to participate in the Peer Support Worker training and practicum, and now work in the community. I continue to take courses through Mental Health that help me to grow. Just recently, I took Spirit Art; which allowed me to experience art after meditation, as is done there. So, when asked to participate as a co-facilitator for a set of classes, I knew it was a fit. Faith has proved to be of great value in this journey, thus far. It has carried me through many experiences in my life. Faith is the cornerstone of my spirituality.

In the space below, we invite you to write part of your story. It may be a story of recovery, wellness, hope, loss or gratitude.

What is a story about yourself that you might tell others?





Balancing

Solitude and Community

Find a place where you can read and reflect on these words. You may wish to go for a walk to a park, a wooded area, a forest or a beach.

Start by being quiet and paying attention to the natural surroundings. When you are ready, read the following paragraphs and reflect on the questions:

As we walk the spiritual life, there is an interplay between solitude and engagement with others, between searching within and learning from our own hearts and learning and hoping to learn from and with others.

Some people may prefer a more solitary route while others might be more inclined to spend time with others. Both the solitary path and the shared path are important in ways that nurture balance, insight, connection, and support along the way. And they both bring wonderful benefits, challenges, and potential.

Where have you had a significant moment of solitude in your life?

Where have you had a significant moment of community in your life?

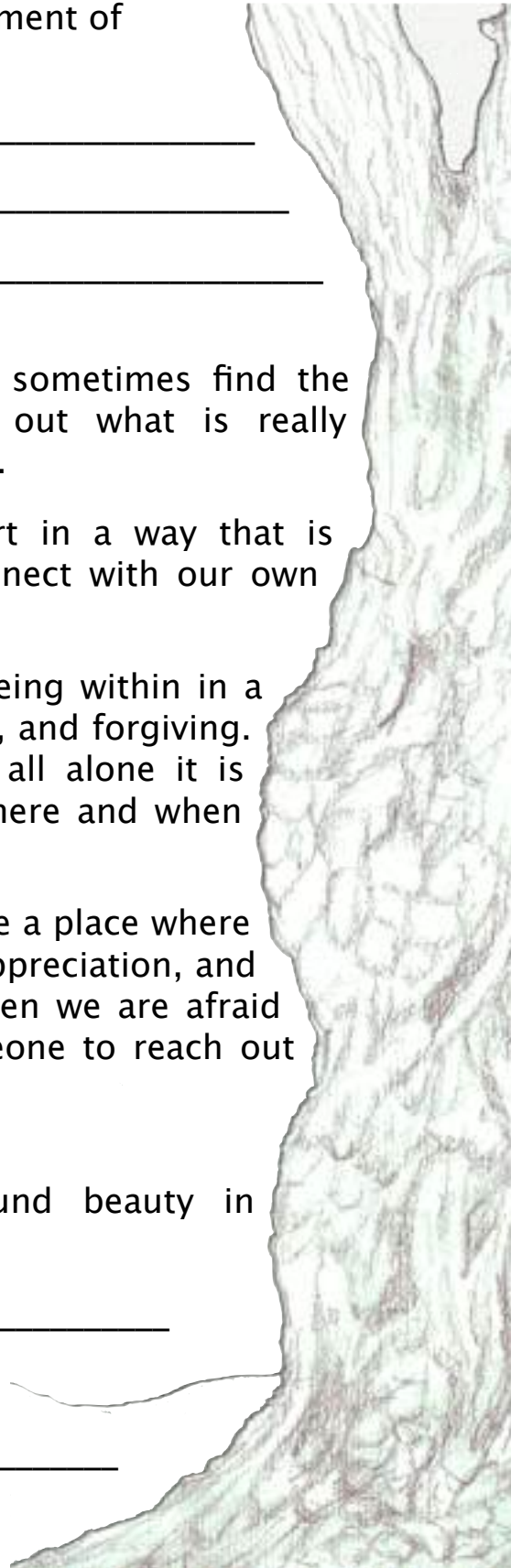
When we are on our own, we can sometimes find the time, space, and privacy to find out what is really important to ourselves as individuals.

We can roam within our own heart in a way that is undistracted and where we can connect with our own inner truths, meaning, and purpose.

We can learn about ourselves by seeing within in a way that is loving, honest, accepting, and forgiving. However, when we travel the road all alone it is sometimes very difficult to know where and when we have gotten lost along the way.

We can become isolated and not have a place where we can share love, understanding, appreciation, and respect. It is difficult sometimes when we are afraid or painfully alone to not have someone to reach out to.

Reflect on a time when you found beauty in solitude.



How do you know when you need to reach out for others?

When we are unintentionally wandering off the path we might find someone who will help us find our way again. When we are feeling bad about ourselves someone might remind us of the good things we are and have to offer.

When we have questions, or encounter an unexpected situation or obstacle, it can be so helpful to have someone to talk with, or to offer us a different and fresh point of view.

And we can also 'be there' for others in the same way. But we have to remember that none of us have all of the answers. So, what may work for some people might not work for us.

Reflect on the beauty of community.

How do you know when it is time to be alone with yourself in solitude?

We can take time to really get to know someone, to let familiarity and trust grow naturally over time. In this way, when we take the time to really know people we are more likely to thoughtfully choose people who really have our best intentions in mind.

It is perhaps sad to realize that there are people who may mislead us, either intentionally or unintentionally. With this trust of ourselves and others we can make better choices in every area of our lives.

Reflect on how you trust your intuition in the presence of others.

So find the balance of solitude and togetherness that works for you, but be sure to include both in your lives. During time with ourselves we can connect with the beauty and splendor of life. During time with others we can connect to that same beauty and splendor, but in very different and equally meaningful ways.

Having both in our lives brings a beauty, a fullness, and a completeness that neither can provide by themselves.



Following this reflective exercise, think about these last three questions:

1. What aspects of community might you choose to surrender; let go?
2. What aspects of solitude might you choose to surrender; let go?
3. At this time, how do you see the balance in your life of community and solitude?

At the beginning we suggested you put yourself in places of nature. You may also consider being in places in the community, such as a coffee shop, a mall, walking on a sidewalk beside a busy street, or a playground.

Take moments this week in a variety of contexts to reflect on the balance of solitude and community.

Draw or write your reflections here:



A black and white photograph of a sailboat on a lake. The sailboat is in the middle ground, with its white sails fully deployed. In the foreground, a large, dark tree trunk curves from the right side towards the center. The background shows a calm body of water and a range of hills or mountains under a clear sky. The overall mood is serene and peaceful.

Accessing Your Inner Strength

Spiritual Practices

“What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Each of us holds strengths within us, some named and some hidden. At times we may not recognise these strengths or be able to access them. Spiritual practices (such as breathing, smudging, meditation and prayer) can open us up to our inner strengths.

In this chapter we invite you to participate in four spiritual practices: Breathing, The 7 directions, Gratitude and Generosity.

These are best practiced alone. You might like to understand this chapter as a time of preparation for you to engage with others.

Breathing

Spiritual practices that focus on breathing are present in almost all spiritual traditions. Concentrating on breath connects each person with her/his primal life force. Breathing facilitates the process of making the unconscious, conscious. Breath is always with you. Breathing is free; it costs you nothing.

To Begin

1. You may want to set a quiet alarm (clock or cell phone) for 5 minutes (initially).
2. Sit down with your feet flat on the floor and your back comfortably upright.
3. Close your eyes gently or keep them only slightly open.

4. While you are breathing in, simply be aware of breathing in. While you are breathing out, simply be aware of breathing out.
5. The mind may wonder, try not to judge or evaluate what the mind does.
6. Simply/gently bring it back to breathing in and out.
7. Continue.
8. When the alarm goes off, gently move the body (stretch, wiggle your toes, shake your hands).
9. Open your eyes when you are ready.

The “7” Directions Practice

This practice represents a collection of Indigenous practices.

Choose a specific strength you would like to enhance within. It may be love, courage, patience, joy, forgiveness, humour, or something else that comes to mind.



Sit on the floor or lay flat on your back (make use of cushions/mat as needed).

Repeat these words to yourself silently or aloud. Fill the space with the specific strength you have chosen. We have put the strength “joy” in parentheses as an example.

_____ (Joy) is above me

_____ (Joy) is below me

_____ (Joy) is to the left of me

_____ (Joy) is to the right of me

_____ (Joy) is in front of me

_____ (Joy) is behind me

_____ (Joy) is within me

You may choose to imagine someone or something in your life that represents the strength you have chosen. Picture them above, below, to the left and right, in front and behind and with you as you repeat the words.

Following the first two practices, you may have become more aware of your inner strengths.

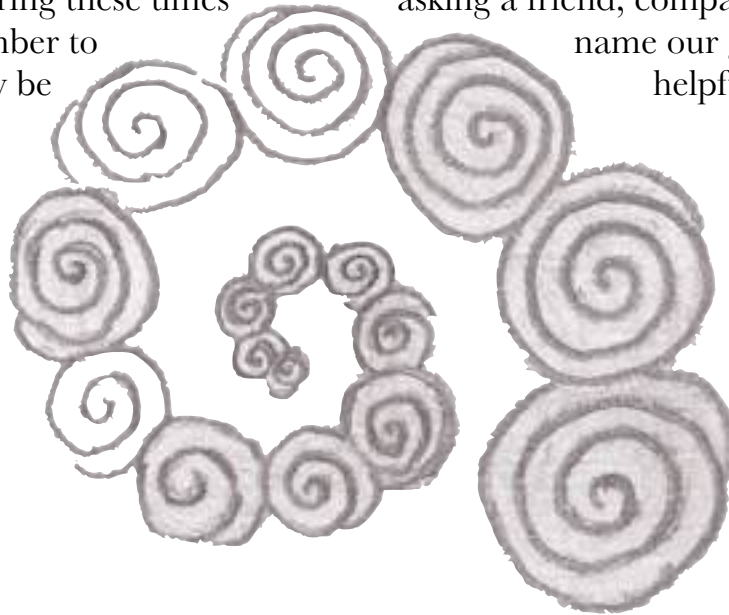
An Exercise

We invite you to name and write down your strengths.

As an example, you might start with “courage.” Use as many words as you need. The process of recognising our inner strengths is a life long journey of discovery.

Courage

There can be times in our lives when it is really hard to name our strengths, during these times asking a friend, companion, family member to name our good qualities may be helpful.



Gratitude

Gratitude can take many forms and be for many things:

Gratitude... involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude... I can choose to speak about goodness and beauty, even when my inner eye still looks for someone to accuse or something to call ugly. —Henri J. M. Nouwen

Start by naming ten people, places, objects and/or experiences in your life:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Which items on this list you are you grateful for?

You can name some of these aloud using the following words:

“I am grateful* for _____
_____”

*Some people acknowledge a higher power when they are grateful by saying thank you.

Many people include this into prayers or rituals.

Here are some examples:

Gratitude Prayer from a Cree Health–Care Worker

Creator, Creator, Grandfather of the four directions, hear my humble prayer:

Oh Creator thank you for this beautiful day Creator,
Thank you for the cool air, the green trees and the nice cleansing rain,
Thank you for the sunshine you have provided for us today Creator.

Creator I send a special prayer for my loved ones –
the ones closest to my heart.

Guide them, give them strength Creator,
Let them know that I think of them in a good way.

Creator give me the strength to do the work for my people today Creator,
Guide me in a good way today Creator,
Ho ho all my relations.

Part of a Pagan/Wicca Gratitude Ritual

I am thankful for my health, because it allows me to feel well.
I am thankful for my children, for keeping me young.
I am thankful for my career, because each day I get paid to do what I love.
I am thankful for my job, because I am able to feed my family.
I am thankful for my garden, because it provides me fresh herbs.
I am thankful for my coven sisters, because they make me feel
spiritually complete...

Jewish Prayer: Upon Waking Up

מודה אני לפניך מלך חי וקיים שהחזרת בי נשמתי בחמלה,
רבה אמונתך.

Translation (from Hebrew):

I give thanks before You, Living and Eternal King, that You have returned within me my soul with compassion; [how] abundant is Your faithfulness!

How would you like to express your gratitude?



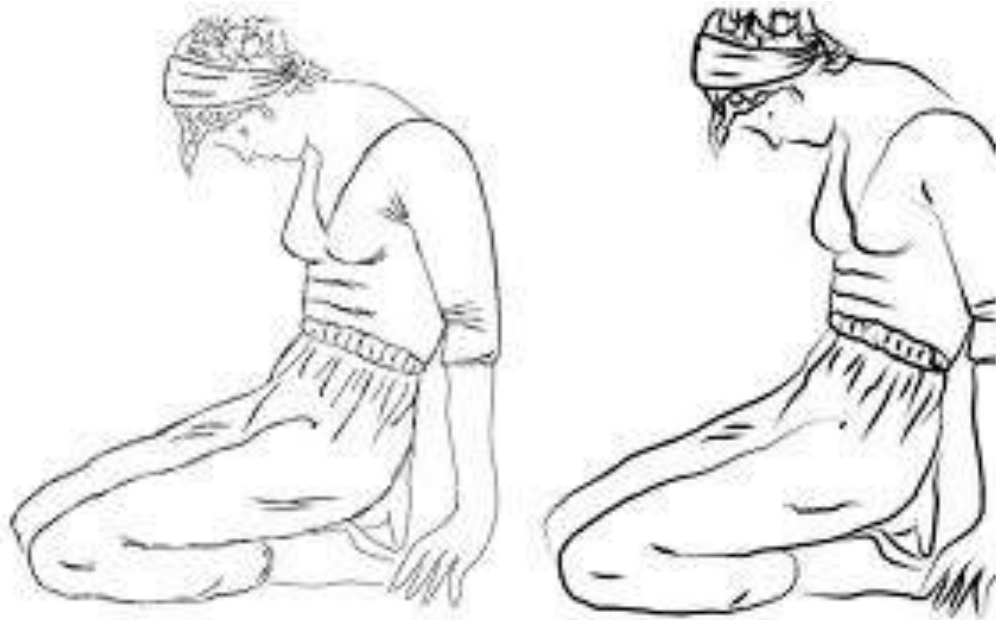
Generosity

Generosity is a practice that moves a person toward connecting with others.

You may already be practicing generosity.

This may involve intentional acts, like:

- ❖ Offering your strength to help another (such as offering a listening ear or offering compassion)
- ❖ Offering your time
- ❖ Offering something tangible to someone (such as a book, an article of clothing, a keep sake)



This next week:

1. Offer your strength, time and /or something to someone you care about.
2. Reflect on how you felt in the act.*
3. Reflect on how you felt following the act.

* If your offering is not accepted fully, please note people may be at various stages in their readiness to receive.

Next time you are offered something, pay attention to how you respond. Offering and receiving is a process and grows in ourselves over time and within community.

Last night as I was sleeping,
I dreamt — oh marvellous error,
That I had a beehive here inside my heart,
And the golden bees were making white combs
And sweet honey
From my old failures
—*Antonio Machado*

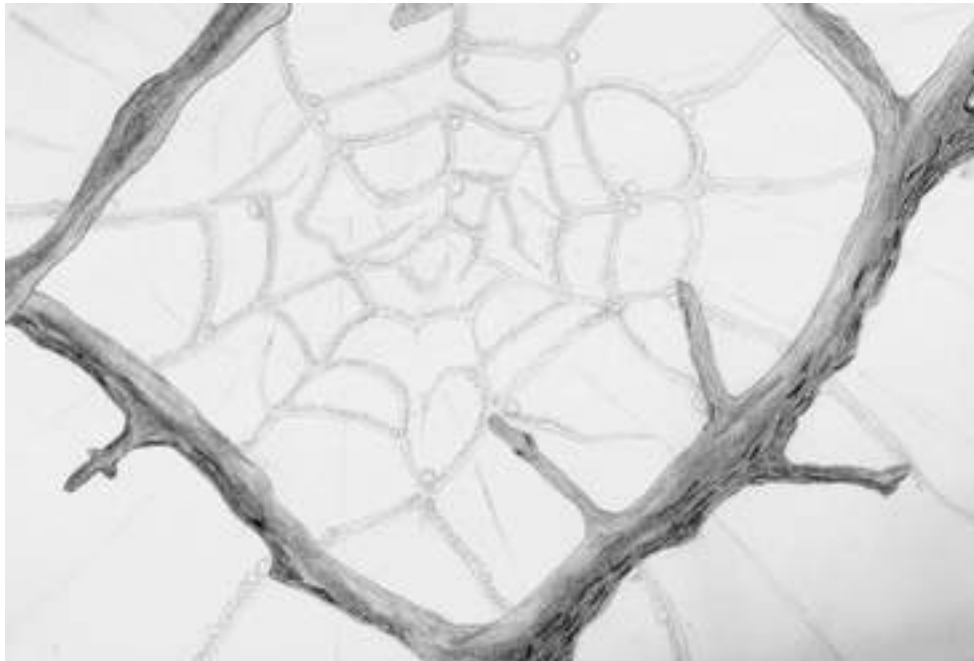


Engaging with Your Community

Noticing and Engaging with Your Daily Surroundings

We invite you now to explore a basic human need:

to connect with
places and people
outside of ourselves...



In this chapter, we encourage you to notice your surroundings, engage with your community, consider participating with an organised group, and reflect on relationships that offer you support. Possibilities for connection are all around you. They are waiting to inspire you.

Pick a day to take notice of the spaces you regularly move through.

(e.g. when you wait at a bus stop, walk past a creek, cycle on a path through a park, or line up in a grocery store).

- ❖ Observe the surroundings as they change with the seasons.
- ❖ Reflect on how the space makes you feel inside, or what you think of...
- ❖ Do you feel comfortable? Why? Why not?
- ❖ Continue to go there a few times during the week...
- ❖ Notice how your feelings/thoughts change as you make that space part of your routine... Do you feel safe being there?
- ❖ What does safety feel like?
- ❖ Are you starting to trust the space and the people in it? Even the people you do not yet know?

Write your reflections here:

An Exercise

We invite you to explore ways to engage with others in spaces that feel safe and comfortable for you...

Try this.

The next time you are in a safe/comfortable space:

Hold a different disposition — relax your shoulders and your hands, unfold your arms, keep your head up, and make eye contact with a few people;

Give a friendly gesture — try smiling at someone, or waving, or giving a thumbs up;

Say something — a simple “hi”, “hello” or “nice day” is a good start.

Taking a risk to connect with another person is an important step in spiritual growth. It takes courage and it takes time. When we take a first step, we may need to take deep breaths and repeat words or a mantra in our minds that will help us take the risk

For more on mantras see Appendix C.



For example one woman when she climbs onto the bus and thanks the bus driver, thinks repeatedly of the quote from Chapter 2.

“A journey of
a thousand miles begins
with a single step.”
—*Lao Tzu*

Here is the story of someone who risked engaging with their community:

I have been living here for several years now. Waiting to go to my new place. I can't remember how many times I have moved. Hospitals, shelters, short term housing. I've met and lived with so many people. Lived in so many different places in BC and Vancouver. Some really good places. Some places not so good.

Now I have to move again. I'm starting to get anxious about this move again. All different people. I'm suppose to move to an area of the city I never lived before. I've never even heard of it. New roommates, new Mental Health Team, new to me workers that will help me. I'm unsure if I will like it. I hope it is a good safe area of town. I don't have much choice. I'm now wishing I could stay here. I'm comfortable and don't feel like moving again...

Well today I have moved. Driving to this new place I've never seen these buildings before. It looks like I'm far away from downtown. The house looks very nice and clean. I'm feeling very defensive though not wanting to talk. Everything is new. I'm not sure I like it. I don't want to do anything. I think I want to move to a different place. I will just stay here in the house and be by myself....

Well I've been here for over a month now. Haven't done too much. Just watch TV and sit on the patio. I see my roommates coming and going. One goes to McDonalds. Others go for exercise walks. I think I will go to McDonalds for a drink. I get directions and it's not that far. Feels kind of scary leaving but it will be worth it once I get a drink. I look around and I see a park. I will have my drink at the park. Wow can't believe I am here starting over again...



Next day I decide I am going to go everyday to McDonalds. I'm starting to get a routine going. I don't feel like drinking my drink at McDonalds but I'm starting to notice a few familiar faces in McDonalds. An old man is always there having a coffee and a woman and her friend like to have a coffee there doing a crossword. Seem like nice people....

I've been more comfortable at home now. I'm feeling kind of lonely though. My roommates are nice but I don't really know them. I've been going for walks in the neighbourhood and sitting in the park with my pop for a while now...

One day I went to McDonalds and decided to sit in the seated area of the same old man having coffee and the woman with her friend doing crossword. They smiled at me. I wonder why they smiled. It felt good to sit there though. I think they have recognized me since I come here so much. I'm going to come back tomorrow and see if they are here...

I'm kind of excited going to McDonald's today. I hope I see those people again. I will sit in the same area. I sit down and the woman smiled at me and said "hello." I'm pretty shy so I just smiled. It felt good to be recognized though...a couple of weeks has passed and I haven't seen the same people at McDonalds for a long time...

Then one day I see the woman and her friend so I decided to sit a few tables beside them. She smiles and says "hello." This time I replied, "hello." She says, "I see you here often." I reply that I am new to the area and I like McDonalds pop. We laugh. It feels good to meet new people and not be alone. I finished my pop and as I was leaving she says, "see you tomorrow". I thought it was safe and ok to say, "see you tomorrow. Have a nice day". She smiled....

Over the months now I have sat in the same area at McDonalds and even have met a few more people. I'm so glad that I got over my shyness. I proud of myself that I took a chance and said "hi" to those people. It feels good to be social.



Engaging with other people may not always turn out how we would like it to.

Taking a risk to connect is a form of generosity.

Remember that generosity of any kind may or may not be received. People are at different stages of their receptivity (see Chapter 6).

Don't be discouraged.

Release any tendency to take it personally.

Try again.

We can find deep meaning when we engage in these everyday moments.

The sacred moments, the moments of miracle, are often the everyday moments, the moments which, if we do not look with more than our eyes or listen with more than our ears reveal only... a gardener, a stranger coming down the road behind us, a meal like any other meal. But if we look with our hearts, if we listen with all our being and imagination... what we may see is "spiritual." —Frederick Buechner

In the evening, think about the spaces you were in that day.

Express gratitude (see Chapter 6) for all the things that you noticed in these spaces and for each person you connected with.

Write it here...



Reflecting on Spiritual Relationships



When we meet with people over time, we may experience spiritual connection. As strangers become acquaintances and acquaintances become friends, these friendships may provide nurturing space for us to explore spirituality. As we grow in our trust and comfort with others, we find ways to share more vulnerably with each other.

Take time to reflect on the people who are already in your life or who you would like to see in your life:

- ❖ Who can I laugh with?
- ❖ Who can I cry with?
- ❖ Who can I sit quietly with?
- ❖ Who inspires me?
- ❖ Who challenges me?
- ❖ Who can I confide in?
- ❖ Who would I go to for guidance?
- ❖ Could you see yourself offering this to someone else as a gift of generosity?

We may, at certain times in our life, require a specific relationship for the sole purpose of spiritual enrichment.

This may involve structured meetings with a sponsor, elder, guru, spiritual companion or director, priest or guide. These relationships may only last for a season of your life and then there is permission to leave.

If you are seeking someone to enrich your spiritual life, you may want to look for individuals with the following qualities.

Someone who...

- ❖ Offers you respect
- ❖ Is present to you when you are with them
- ❖ Doesn't hold power over you
- ❖ Has the gift of listening
- ❖ Is not afraid to ask you insightful questions
- ❖ Is not afraid for you to ask them insightful questions
- ❖ Acknowledges their limits and capacity

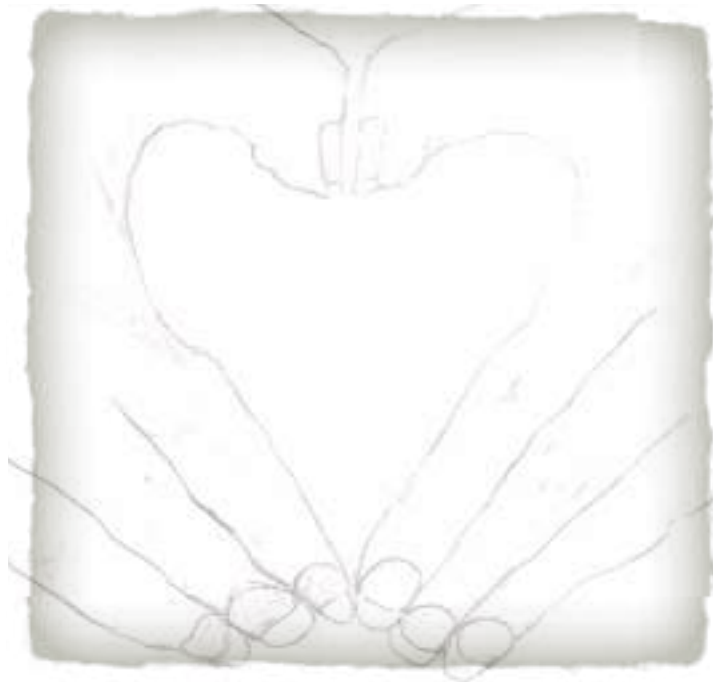
In the space provided reflect on any other qualities that may be important to have in a spiritually nurturing relationship:



The Practice of ‘Spiritual Holding’

In Chapter 4 we explored the importance of finding balance between solitude and community. It is valuable to have times with others and time alone in solitude. Also, giving space to others we are in relationship with helps these relationships grow.

The practice of Spiritual Holding is a practice that helps us when we part company from friends and spiritual companions.



This ancient spiritual practice recognises that even at a great distance from others we remain connected as part of the great human web.

You may want to remind yourself that you can continue to hold each other in your thoughts even when you go your separate ways and part company.

Participating in an Organised Group

In our community people may join structured groups so that they can engage with others regularly and focus together on a creative activity or task.

There is a mysterious transformation that happens when people meet together regularly.

A participant in an art group wrote: “For the short time that the group is together, I feel connected to the others by the space we share, the sacred time we spend together, our creative activity, and our common intention.”

Groups may at first seem daunting and a little scary. You may want to try dropping into a group with a trusted friend or peer. This way, you can talk about how you feel before you enter the group and you can debrief the experience with her/him when you leave.

The following types of groups may be helpful for your spirituality:

- ❖ Creative art groups
- ❖ Dance, exercise or yoga groups
- ❖ Groups at faith communities
- ❖ Choirs or music group
- ❖ Meditation/prayer groups
- ❖ Cultural groups
- ❖ Support groups



In a Vancouver Coastal Health survey, participants of groups in the community said that:

The group was helpful in breaking isolation, in knowing others share your challenges, seeing people bloom, grow together.

The members are very supportive and the practices, contemplations, and teachings are very meaningful to me.

Art is very calming and relaxing. Making art learning to open myself to discovery in art has helped to open my soul to other things in life.

We invite you to explore connecting with a group.

See Appendix A for resources and Appendix B for discerning a healthy community.

As you have explored in this chapter:

- ❖ You may be ready to join a group. Go for it!
- ❖ You may not be ready to initiate joining a group at this time. BUT the next time someone asks you to participate in a group activity... consider it...
- ❖ You may already attend a group. If so, we invite you to consider taking new steps towards engaging with others in the group. There might be someone you have not spoken to yet. Explore some new possibilities.
- ❖ You may want to extend an invitation to a friend to join a group that you attend.
- ❖ You may be part of group that you are feel is not the right fit for you. If after going two or three times, you feel this isn't the group for you, you can always decide not to return. And explore another group...

Chapter 7



Finding Your Way



Congratulations

You did it. You made it through a process of exploring spirituality at this time and place in your journey.

We invite you now to take time to reflect on your process of becoming and self growth as you have worked through the pages of this book.

Remember, that each time you work through this book it will be different. Revisit these pages and reflect on where you have come from. Or start again and work through it at another time in your life.

“You are the expert.
Trust your gut.”

Appendices



Appendix A

Connecting with a Group in the Community

Canadian Mental Health Association:
Get Set & Connect Program

Website: <http://www.vancouver-burnaby.cmha.bc.ca>

Email: leisure.volunteer.vb@cmha.bc.ca

Phone: 604-872-4902

Open Door Group – Leisure Services

Website: www.opendoorgroup.org

Email: leisure@opendoorgroup.org

Phone: 604-879.0773

My Artists Corner (MAC)

Website: <http://myartistscorner.ca/>

Email: myartistscorner.1@gmail.com

Phone: 604-526-9606

Spirituality resources

Website: <http://www.spiritofrecovery.ca>

Banyen Books

Website: <https://www.banyen.com/>

Email: thefolks@banyen.com

Phone: 604-732-7912

Iona Pacific Inter-Religious Centre

Website: <http://www.ionapacific.ca/>

Email: info@ionapacific.ca

Phone: 604-822-9031

Appendix B

Discerning a Healthy Community

Here is some guidance for you if you are interested in choosing a supportive community:

1. Ask your friends or loved ones who you trust which spiritual community they are part of. Remember that though the specific community is helpful to them, it might not be the right place for you.
2. Take your time and go to a handful of places before deciding on a specific community.
3. Once you have decided, take more time. Observe the community honestly.
4. Take note of the following things:
 - ❖ The community values openness and honesty;
 - ❖ The community gives you time to consider joining and doesn't rush you;
 - ❖ The community celebrates your other connections to friends and loved ones and doesn't expect you to split from these relationships;
 - ❖ The leader/s is not preoccupied with money and does not overly pressurize the community to support her/him more than you wish or feel you can afford;
 - ❖ The leaders are able to take criticism and are kept accountable for their actions; and
 - ❖ The community do their best to practice what they preach.

Appendix C

Mantra

A mantra is a sacred word, chant, or sound that is repeated to facilitate spiritual power and transformation of consciousness.

Mantras are found in most major spiritual traditions... some use it —

- ❖ in meditation,
- ❖ as a repeated prayer (e.g. rosary),
- ❖ or affirmations.



Reflections on the Knotted Tree

Seeing the knots
remind me of bumps in the road,
my journey of experiences
as I want to see it
both good and bad
the times that left a mark
have smoothed with hard work
and loving support