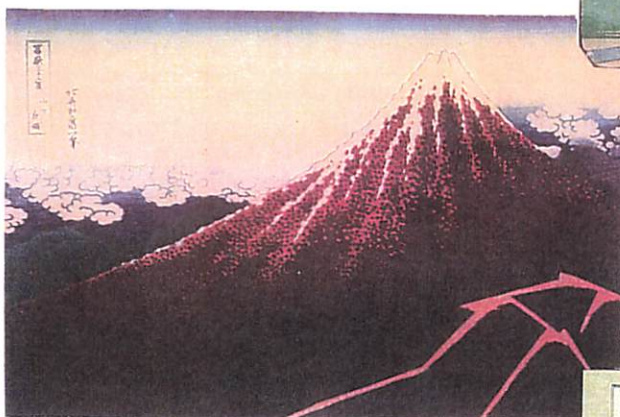


THE OTHER WORLD

IN THE MIDST OF THIS WORLD

...A JOURNEY BOOK FOR SPIRITUAL TRAVELERS...



Welcome to The Other World Journey Book

**This book was created at the behest of Abbey North, Canada
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If you use this book yourself or with any groups or individuals, we'd especially appreciate your feedback. This is an alive, working, and unfolding document.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE OTHER WORLD

*"Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always —
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything) . . ."
— T. S. Eliot*

Purpose

We live in a time when human consciousness is undergoing rapid and dramatic change. A new spirituality is being birthed. Some say we live in a new age or that a new paradigm is being created. Certainly the world is becoming smaller and we are more aware of our interconnectedness as people and our vulnerability as a planet. Millions of persons all over the globe are engaged in a new search for meaning and integrity. As we examine issues like war, terrorism, environmental disasters, economic and political injustice, etc. we realize we cannot solve these problems from within the minds that created them.

Yet how do we create new minds and new hearts for the future? This question lies in the realm of Spirit -- that "Other World" held from antiquity in rites and symbols, myths and legends. Some would say that answers to this question lie in sacred texts from our world religions and there is, indeed, a great and fundamental return to these texts in our time. Yet, as we examine organized religions, we see that many of their tenets were created within a different worldview, one that does not reflect the vastly different reality of life in the twenty-first century. Because that old language of spirit is outdated, many persons have rejected it and immersed themselves purely in the concrete and tangible world.

These persons view "religious language" as dangerous territory, full of codes and jargon that serve to separate rather than unite us. It's a malady because it leads to confusion and "ready-to-fight" misunderstandings. We are all aware of the violent conflicts and wars that result from this malady.

This does not mean that "The Other World" does not exist. Throughout human history our stories testify to the reality of this spirit place or spirit awareness right in the midst of ordinary life. And today we see glimpses of this world in art, plays, films, books, dance and music -- in short, anything that captures the profoundly real and spirit dimension of life.

Millions are engaged in what might be termed "spiritual searching" -- whether it be through meditation or prayer, through body work such as yoga, or through widely varied and continually emerging forms called "healing arts". What seems to unite these diverse efforts is a desire on the part of individuals to create new maps for the inner life. And why? Isn't it an effort to find our way in this increasingly complex world? We are

discovering the necessity of creating, cultivating and guarding an inner life that will be able to sustain us in changing times.

This inner life also holds the promise of helping us realize the true and deep inner-connectedness of all human beings. If we can create a new language that allows us to talk together about the journey of being a human being, perhaps it could be the starting place for new dialogues and the healing of the ancient wounds that have caused so much global strife.

How can such language be created? Surely it must be grounded, first of all, in the experience of day-to-day life. Since human experience is so varied and our cultural differences so significant, we must be careful of labels and "final answers". Instead, perhaps we could approach our task as an exploration of options -- of spirit practices that open new windows and chart oceans of awareness in ways that include but surpass the priests and sadhus of past centuries.

One way to map the internal life of human beings is to describe the universe of our spiritual states of being. What makes up this spirit dimension that we have too often denied in recent decades? Scientific analysis and dictionary definitions fail to capture its richness. Poetry -- metaphor, simile and graphic stories -- do a better job. Poetry that resonates between us across cultures and across ages, genders, races and traditions has to be bold in its expression and heart-felt in its genesis. Soul that encompasses mind, body, spirit, emotions and behaviors alone meets the test.

History

In 1972 the Institute of Cultural Affairs, a global research development organization, created a set of maps of the human interior universe. One of the remarkable things about this work was that over two hundred individuals provided ideas and insights for the maps. Ancient and contemporary literature was studied, many lectures were crafted and many more discussions and workshops were held. During the research phase, several hundred people used the maps for reflection. In the years since, many more persons in villages and towns, businesses and government agencies have found the maps useful.

In the mid-1990's Jon and Maureen Jenkins, former staff of the ICA, produced the first imaginal training book on The Other World. This book is a landmark effort in capturing the early work of ICA. In 2000, we produced The River of Consciousness, an exercise book created for The Millennium Connection Conference. Now it seems the time is right to create a new book which provides tools for a larger audience to explore The Other World through poetry and other art forms.

This book is based on the early work of exploring the inner life through a unique topology: The Land of Mystery, The River of Consciousness, The Mountain of Care and the Sea of Tranquility. As you work in this book, you might imagine yourself as taking a "trek" into one aspect of human consciousness or another. The following lays out the poetic approach, a description of states of being, the basic topology, some guidelines for your personal journey, and some hints on how to use the book in a group setting.

Poetry

You cannot look directly into the face of the Divine Mystery or it will burn you to a crisp. This is an old way of saying that words point to a Reality in human experience so basic that it brings all things to be and all things not to be. We need to tread reverently into The Other World. Art forms like theatre, dance, music, and poetry help. And the premise of this book is that poetry is the closest we can come to expressing and conveying to others our experience of the divine in language. In fact, before the 17th century Newtonian scientific revolution people thought, spoke and wrote in metaphor without questioning it.

Poetry and metaphor have a way of cutting through a jungle of intellect that can create misunderstandings. It leaps over the arguments and beliefs and gets to our hearts. It opens our imaginations. And if we are lucky, a poem can reunite us where we have become divided. The science of the left-brain is by-passed along with all its ways of dividing the human experience into camps with diverse self-understandings. Poetry skirts these beliefs and awakens us as whole human beings full of feelings, images, and sensations. Perhaps it can even heal our own internal wars and conflicts.

When you read a line of poetry it might tingle your toes as well as the synapses in your brain. Your mind might become centered in your inner depths that the ancients call our "hara" (two finger widths below our navel). The Chinese say the "hara" becomes your center rather than your eyes, head and brain. It's definitely more right brain.

In this way poetry opens windows to dialogue with your self and with others. Conversing becomes heart level and thus grabs you and the person you are talking to, your life and all that really matters to you. In short you don't have a chance to avoid the address on your life. In fact it becomes exciting and you welcome more and more of it. The challenge becomes your motivation and you look forward to the next step you need to take.

Writing your own poetry is an even greater adventure. You discover images and insights you never knew you had. Your creativity is released. No matter your age, education or inclination there is great poetry within you if you simply have the opportunity to tap that resource.

States of Being

In the original work on The Other World, states of being were chosen as the primary vehicle for describing human spiritual experience. A state of being includes an awareness (or a sense of something), a feeling (an emotional reaction) and lastly a resolve (a newness or decision).

We have chosen to continue to use states of being in this book because the language is primarily metaphorical and allows each individual to enter into the experience with some images while not overly defining or analyzing the experience. States of being descriptors

leave a lot of space for you, the reader, to explore your own experiences and your reactions to them.

Topology

The poetry of this interior landscape goes something like this. In each person there is :

- a **Land of Mystery** that beckons us with fear and fascination; -- an awe filling experience. In the Land of Mystery we meet the inescapable power and mystery of life itself. This mystery transforms and recreates all that we are.
- a **River of Consciousness** which floods our being with freedom and obligation -- motivating and empowering us. The River of Consciousness is our human experience of true freedom. We are free to be aware of life, being conscious of how we live, think, act and be who we are. We are free to be inventive with our lives, inviting others to be free as well. We are free to decide what duties we will honor and not honor and what we will do with our lives.
- a **Mountain of Care** that challenges and caresses our wounds and needs; focusing our energy and compassion. On the Mountain of Care we are reminded of our innate compassion for the world and our desire to serve it somehow. We are called to give ourselves to our world, and to live out our unique purpose in this moment of history.
- a **Sea of Tranquility** that fulfills our highest aspirations and cosmic being itself -- surrounding us and providing a calm center amid life's storms. The Sea of Tranquility celebrates the realization that we can live fully as the spirit beings we are. We come to know who we are and where we stand in this world. We know meaning is everywhere in life. We find the indescribable peace and unspeakable joy of being who we are. And we discover that life itself goes on beyond us into the realm of eternity.

When we are conscious of our consciousness, these areas are within and around us constantly. It is the Other World in the midst of This World, the realm of the sacred in the ordinary world of the day-to-day.

Guidelines

Remember, The Other World is an experience that happens to you, not a goal that you strive for. The Other World is based on poetic language for "states of being". Some language will speak strongly to you and other metaphors may not make any sense. This is all useful information. Do not judge your reactions. Rather, just allow them.

There is no progression or hierarchical order to The Other World Journey. Each and every reflection is unique and can stand alone. Pick and choose sections as they call out to you or seem appropriate to your journey at that time.

Likewise, there is no "good" or "bad" state of being. The Other World is beyond our general conceptions of morality. No one state is better spiritually or psychologically or morally than another. Visiting The Other World does not guarantee a "better" life or an improved situation. However, it may help you to be clearer, more present, and more real to your life.

The Other World is here in the midst of this day-to-day world and everyone lives in both the everyday world and The Other World all the time. Being conscious of our inner life is a way of saying we are visiting The Other World. It's a metaphor.

The Other World is not particularly religious although elements of awe and reverence may pervade the experience. Some of the poetry you read, and some of the poetry you write may contain religious language. All words, no matter what tradition they come from, are merely pointers to the reality in your own experience and your awareness of that experience. You do not have to be in a "religious" setting to experience The Other World although sometimes those occasions will call it forth.

Format

In each of the four sections (or Other World journeys), the same format is used. There is a context to the section followed by eight exercises that explore aspects of that journey. Each exercise includes a poem, a suggested exercise and a reflective quote. These approaches are merely guides to your own work. Each exercise is an opportunity for you to reflect on your own journey by creating something new for yourself alone or to share with others.

How to Use This Book

The intent of this book is to make possible a quality spirit experience for you. So we invite you to experiment. Use this book as a tool, not an answer. Explore, note what works for you, risk your own intuitions and behavior. Your inner journey is a sacred trust.

Expanded exercises are available in other non-verbal modes such as drawing and dance. These may be helpful to you as an individual. They are also useful to group experience and conversations about The Other World. There are opportunities to use art or films as windows to The Other World, creating stimulating dialogues for your group.

If you use this book as a group resource, you might spend a little time at the beginning of

each session reminding group members of such basics as confidentiality and privacy so that people know this is a safe setting to discuss profound and life-changing events and insights.

The exercises in this book offer you an opportunity to reflect and to create. Play with it. Have fun. Let your imagination go. And see where it will take you. Spirituality can become less a head thing and more a pilgrimage into a mysterious and intriguing realm of living. Feel free to use the suggested exercises as triggers to take your own journey into the inscape as well as the landscape of the world around you. Create your own exercises to rehearse your experience of life's profundity.

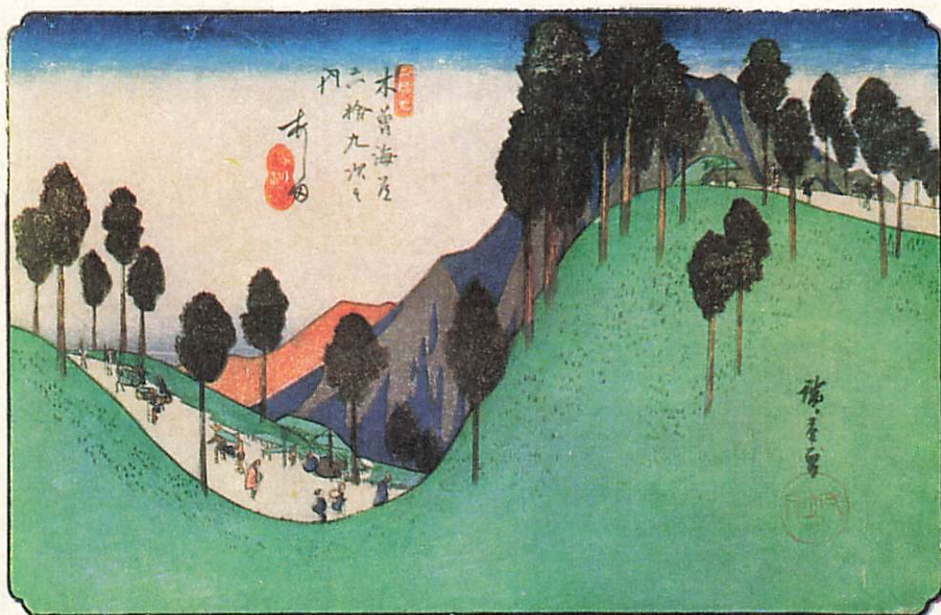
THE OTHER WORLD
in the midst of This World

THE LAND OF MYSTERY
The Encounter with The Ultimate Mystery
Humbly in daily life, I meet the Mystery

THE RIVER OF CONSCIOUSNESS
The Freedom of Radical Awareness
Waking up, I am responsible, boundlessly free, a self

THE MOUNTAIN OF CARE
The Passion for Service to the World
I discover how I can uniquely serve this world

THE SEA OF TRANQUILITY
The Fulfillment of Life
I find peace in the here and now



*The
Land
of
Mystery*

The Land of Mystery

Living in the spirit dimension of life is like entering a terrain that is mysteriously bedecked with strange people, creatures and landmarks. It is eerily familiar like the very air we breathe and at the same time alien and foreboding. Yet we meet spirit everyday of our lives. We simply have few words that adequately convey what we are experiencing. We also have few images to portray it to our satisfaction. We may have brief moments of knowing such mysteries but they are fleeting. We may even feel guilty if we dwell too much with mysteries, for isn't modern life all about the bottom line and that which is tangible and verifiable?

In the journey of The Other World, the purpose of all four treks is to create poetic language for the spirit dimension. In The Land of Mystery, we are confronted with the paradox of life: it's dread and its fascination. The four areas of The Land of Mystery can be stated as:

**The Awe-filled Encounter - The Way Life Is
Enveloped by Mystery- Inescapable Power
Recreated by Mystery - All is Transformed
Seduced by Mystery - The Adoration of Being**

The language may sound unusual, even "religious", but it will be used in our exercises to help us touch base with very ordinary human experience. For isn't it an "awe-filled encounter" when we face a moral difficulty in our life? Perhaps a child of ours is in trouble with drugs or an employer is causing harm to the company with destructive behavior. We might be confused, shaking our heads and saying "it just can't be that way" or "nothing makes sense". We aren't sure what our response will be. We are in The Land of Mystery.

We have met mystery in the way life is for us at that time. We feel vulnerable and aware that we are not in control. Yet the question comes: What do I actually control in this situation? We may have one foot in chronic weakness and another in eerie strength as we build a path with our own choices in the situation. We may sense that we have suddenly become co-creators with an unknown force that is busily re-inventing the world.

You know what we're talking about. While feeling very weak and out of control, you find you're also strangely more alive than ever before. We say to ourselves: "Gosh, if I don't crash and burn I might actually emerge stronger from this experience." Though the outer circumstance might not change, our inner reality is undergoing a major shift.

In The Land of Mystery we can find new ways of talking to ourselves about our situation, thus planting the seeds for personal transformation. The paradox of The Land of Mystery is that while security is gone, the pavement beneath our feet has never felt so solid.

Though shaken, we experience inner calm. If you know what this poetry is pointing to, you have journeyed in The Land of Mystery. It's the place where miracles occur.

When you are fully alive and conscious of the way life is, infinite passion emerges in your inner being. It can give you a meaning for being alive in the first place. It's as though you fall in love with the way life is. You are one with the One that creates life and takes it away. When you live in The Land of Mystery, even the most ordinary people and situations become sacred.

A Word About the Exercises

These exercises set out to notch a trail for us through this Land of Mystery. The phrases of each poem become stepping stones to our own images about the way life is. Remember, in The Other World we are not interested in ideas but in actual human experiences.

We have the opportunity to write our own poetry and tell our own story about our personal encounter with dread and fascination. Poetry invites us to express what that was like. The quotes at the end of each exercise are like sign posts that might lead us to other pathways we hadn't considered. Come on. Join the game. It's playful and deadly serious at the same time.

Exercise One - The Awe-filled Encounter

I live my life
in dread and fascination

Children ten years old wake up and find themselves here I woke in bits, like all children, piecemeal over the years. I discovered myself and the world, and forgot them, and discovered them again. I woke at intervals until, by that September...the intervals of waking tipped the scales, and I was more often awake than not. I noticed this process of waking, and predicted with terrifying logic that one of these years not far away I would be awake continuously and never slip back, and never be free of myself again.

-Annie Dillard, An American Childhood

Your Experience:

Arriving in The Land of Mystery is like suddenly waking up. As you reflect, jot some notes in answer to the following questions:

How do you know you are awake? What signals tell you that you are conscious?

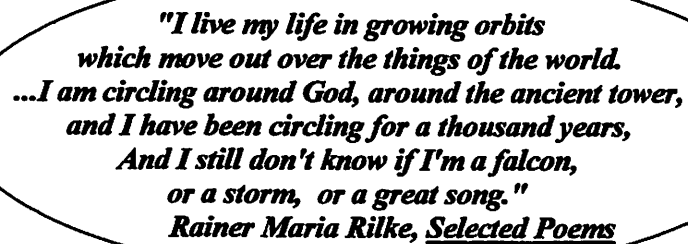
What things do you tend to fear or to dread?

What things tend to fascinate you?

Have you ever had a life event that called forth both fear and fascination at the same time? What was the event?

Your Poem:

Looking at your own notes in answer to the foregoing questions, select some key words and write a short poem about your own experience of Awe-filled Encounter. Add any other words that help your poem make sense. Use your imagination to create images that express the reality and the feeling of "waking up".



*"I live my life in growing orbits
which move out over the things of the world.
...I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,
and I have been circling for a thousand years,
And I still don't know if I'm a falcon,
or a storm, or a great song."
Rainer Maria Rilke, Selected Poems*

Exercise Two - The Way Life Is

**Life is
an unending cloud
of awe**

*Birth, old age,
Sickness, and death:
From the beginning, this is the way
Things have always been.*

*Any thought of release from this life
Will wrap you only more tightly in its snares.
The sleeping person looks for a Buddha,
The troubled person turns toward meditation.*

*But the one who knows that there's nothing to seek
Knows too that there's nothing to say.
She keeps her mouth closed.*

- Ly Ngoc Kieu (11th Century Vietnamese nun)

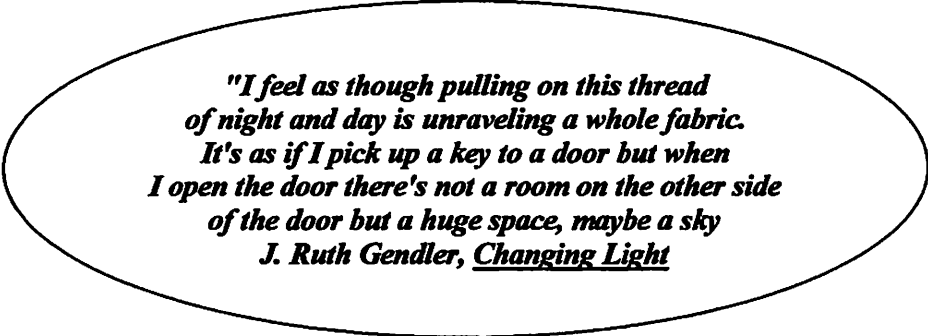
Your Experience:

Pretend you're the oldest and wisest person on Earth. You have an opportunity to share The Way Life Is with a class of students much younger than you. In your own words, answer the question: "How have things always been?"

Your Writing:

Create a short list of the best advice on how to live a life that is filled with the spirit of awe and wonder. You might construct it like a set of proverbs or other short sayings, something like "Things I learned in kindergarten."

If you are working in a group and wish to do so, share your list, hear others, and compare notes.



*"I feel as though pulling on this thread
of night and day is unraveling a whole fabric.
It's as if I pick up a key to a door but when
I open the door there's not a room on the other side
of the door but a huge space, maybe a sky
J. Ruth Gendler, Changing Light*

Exercise Three - Enveloped by Mystery

I meet Mystery
in everyday life.

*And I thought over again
My small adventures
As with a shore-wind I drifted out
In my kayak
And thought I was in danger.*

*My fears,
Those small ones
That I thought so big
For all the vital things
I had to get and to reach.*

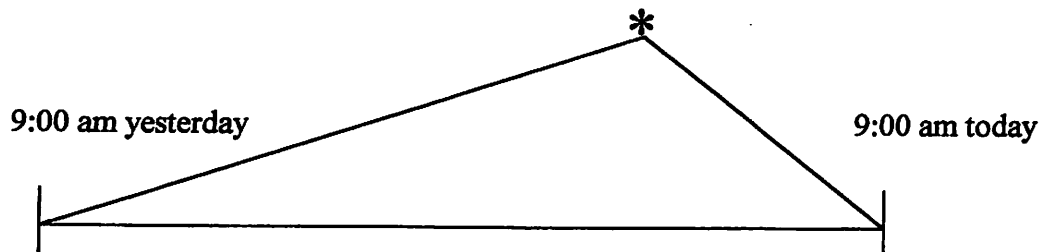
*And yet, there is only
One great thing,
The only thing:
To live to see in huts and on journeys
The great day that dawns,
And the light that fills the world.*
— Inuit Song

Your Experience:

Draw a line one third the way down on a piece of paper turned length wise. On the right hand end of the line put down the hour when you are doing this exercise (like 9:00 am today).

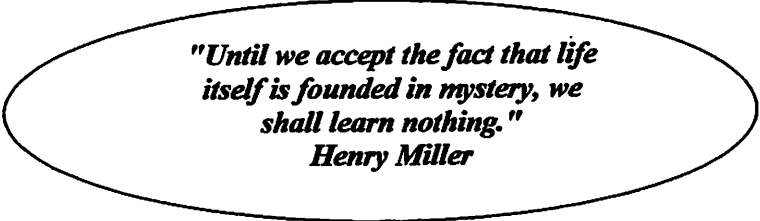
On the other end of the line put the hour of time 24 hours earlier (like 9:00 am yesterday). Under the line jot down the activities you remember during that last day of life you have lived.

Look at those activities (including ones in sleep or dreaming) and put a star or asterisk toward the top of the page over one key activity when you experienced joy, fear or meaning. Then draw a line from each end of the line to the star.



Your Writing:

Each day is filled with many small things, yet the major events can stand out because there is, in them, a bigger "thing" -- Take the key event of your last 24 hours and describe how it was mysterious or how it altered you in some way.



*"Until we accept the fact that life
itself is founded in mystery, we
shall learn nothing."
Henry Miller*

Exercise Four - Inescapable Power

**My frail life is exposed
before all of creation**

*The only true wisdom lives far from mankind,
out in the great loneliness,
and it can be reached only through suffering.
Privation and suffering alone can open the mind...
to all that is hidden to others.*

-Eskimo shaman

Your Experience:

In this section of The Land of Mystery, we come upon the fact of pain and suffering and its role in our human journey. Do you agree with the above saying that suffering can open the mind to all that is hidden to others? If it is true, what in your own life experience has been opened (or revealed to you) in a situation where you suffered? This might be physical suffering (as in an injury), mental suffering (as in confusion), or emotional suffering (as in change or loss).

Take a little time to select one life event in which you suffered and decide how you might write a very short Fairy Tale about the event. Fairy Tales have a beginning, middle and end. They use symbolic language and they are usually written in the third person. Relax and try your hand at this type of story.

Example:

Once upon a time, there was a young princess who wanted to change the world so she traveled far to a distant land where she had heard there was great famine. The princess was full of her own virtue and certain that she could help the people in that land. However, when she arrived she discovered that the situation was much worse than she had imagined and, actually, very little could be done to help the people. She immediately fell into a deep and troubling depression.

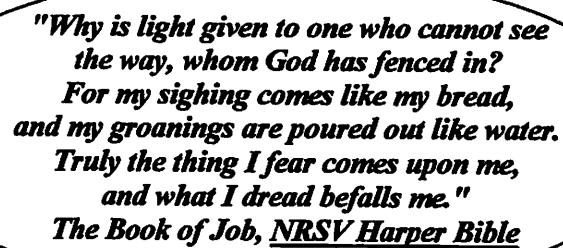
The poor people all around her noticed her low mood and began to try to cheer her up, bringing her small gifts, singing to her and bathing her feet. The princess was touched by their kindness and wondered how such unfortunate people had the time and the will to care for her.

She saw that these "unfortunates" whom she had intended to help were in fact great beings who were helping her. Humbly, she left that land and took with her Hope in the form of a simple song which she sings to this day.

Your Fairy Tale:

Have fun. Be fanciful yet profound.

If you are in a small group, you might share your Fairy Tales and discuss common themes of suffering and discovery.



*"Why is light given to one who cannot see
the way, whom God has fenced in?
For my sighing comes like my bread,
and my groanings are poured out like water.
Truly the thing I fear comes upon me,
and what I dread befalls me."
The Book of Job, NRSV Harper Bible*

Exercise Five - Recreated by Mystery

A wellspring of life
bubbles from the very rocks

*For when it is quite, quite nothing, then it is everything.
When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out,
every vestige gone, then I am here
risen and setting my foot on another world
risen, accomplishing a resurrection
risen, not born again, but risen, body same as before,
new beyond knowledge of newness, alive beyond life....
living where life was never yet dreamed of, nor hinted at,
here, in the other world, still terrestrial
myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new....
-D.H. Lawrence, Complete Poems*

Your Experience:

Our reaction to events can recreate us, making us new over and over again in life. On the line below, put your birth date on the left end, today's date on the right end. Select three events in your life of great significance. You might star their general location on the life line and put a few words to describe them. (i.e. *baby boy, I begin motherhood, or lost my job*)

#1 _____ #2 _____

#3 _____

Pick one event to look at today and answer these questions:

What was trodden out or left behind?

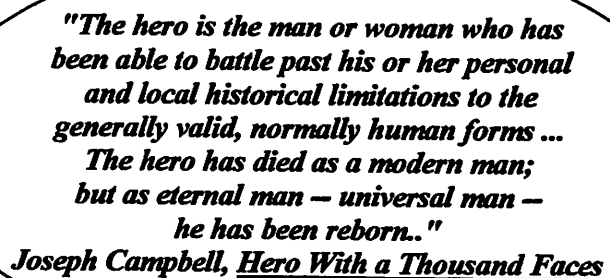
What was the "new world" you entered into?

How did you feel?

Who are you now as a result of that change?

Your Poem:

Looking at your answers above, give an image and a title for the "new world" you arrived at during that time of change. Create a word string of adjectives that describe the recreated you.



*"The hero is the man or woman who has
been able to battle past his or her personal
and local historical limitations to the
generally valid, normally human forms ...
The hero has died as a modern man;
but as eternal man – universal man –
he has been reborn.."
Joseph Campbell, Hero With a Thousand Faces*

Exercise Six - All Is Transformed

Life is vibrating
all around me

*I thank you God for this most amazing day
for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything
which is natural which is yes
(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings; and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any-lifted from the no
of all nothing-human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?
(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)
—e.e. cummings, Complete Poems*

Your Experience:

Sit quietly, eyes closed for 10 minutes.

As you sit begin to imagine yourself in the most vibrant place you've ever been.

Notice what you feel or touch . . . see . . . smell . . . touch . . . hear.

Add more sensations letting your imagination go freely around the space. Who else is there? What are they doing? saying? What else do you see? feel? taste? touch? hear?

Breathe deeply. How do you feel in this vibrant space? What do you know about your true self?

When you are ready, come back to the present moment. Slowly open your eyes.

In the space below, make a few notes about what you were aware of.

Your Writing:

Spontaneously write to complete one or both of the two following phrases:

Life is vibrant and alive for me when

OR

I'm most truly my best self when

*"There is in us an instinct for newness,
for renewal, for a liberation of creative power.
We seek to awaken in ourselves a force which really
changes our lives from within. And yet the same
instinct tells us that this change is a recovery of that which
is deepest, most original, most personal in ourselves.
To be born again is not to become somebody else,
but to become ourselves."*

—Thomas Merton

Exercise Seven - Seduced by Mystery

**I'm hopelessly captured
by the unknowable**

*What are these mysteries that are revealed with such subtlety?
Where to be, how to live, who to love, how to be sick, how to die.
In a psychological era these issues are often presented as problems
to solve, but they are our mysteries....we usually advise
weighing the pros and cons and making a timely and firm decision about them,
but in a spiritual context these are mysteries to ponder and enter with circumspection.
What we are looking for lies far in the mist of the unknown....*

*I have seen many different kinds of people
make the discovery that their original questions were only tickets to enter the theatre.
Once inside, the tickets were no longer necessary or interesting....*

*In these odd and paradoxical excursions into mystery, I believe
we are getting to know the reality of the soul and in particular
its eternal qualities....*

— Thomas Moore, The Soul's Religion

Your Experience:

Write down a question you are currently trying to answer. (It may be about work, relationship, etc.) Imagine taking this question into a large theatre. Take your seat. Close your eyes and imagine a screen in front of the theatre that presents "answers" in scenes, sounds, feelings, colors, impressions. Take a few moments to allow whatever comes.

When you are ready, open your eyes and jot down any notes about the words, messages, pictures or feelings you experienced.

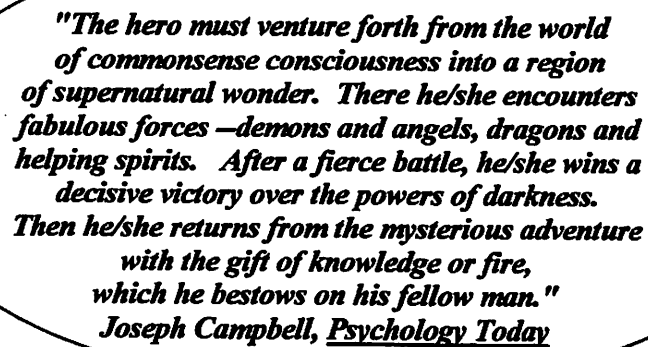
Your Writing:

In reference to your question, what today seems totally unknown to you?

What seems known to you?

Did new questions arise?

If your soul could speak, what would it say is the "ticket" to getting answers?



*"The hero must venture forth from the world of commonsense consciousness into a region of supernatural wonder. There he/she encounters fabulous forces —demons and angels, dragons and helping spirits. After a fierce battle, he/she wins a decisive victory over the powers of darkness. Then he/she returns from the mysterious adventure with the gift of knowledge or fire, which he bestows on his fellow man."
Joseph Campbell, Psychology Today*

Exercise Eight - The Adoration of Being

Love has won
the day

*Our soul makes constant noise,
but it has a silent place we never hear.
When the silence of God enters us,
pierces our soul and joins its silent place,
then God is our treasure and our heart.*

*And space opens before us like a fruit
that breaks in two.
Then we see the universe
from a point beyond space.*

*— Simone Weil
translated by Carol Cosman*

Your Experience:

Read the above poem and then reflect on your own experience:

Name a time in your life when you were sure that love had won the day.

When has your noisy soul been pierced by a higher power?

What have you seen from that point beyond space?

Your Poem:

Read over your answers to the questions and circle key words. From these words and others, create a short poem about your experience of "adoration of being". Remember, poems do not have to rhyme and may, in fact, be strings of words on the page. Example:

*At last, rosy sunrise
And I am here to see it,
To observe its color and its shape
To hear birdsong, feel cool air-
Put my feet on solid ground.
After long winter, I bud out
Green and tender, glad like a tree.
Life wins.*

The Rapture

*"...my boots touching suddenly the tops of weeds,
the blue silky air – listen,
passion did it, called me forth, addled me, stopped me clean
then covered me with the cloth of happiness – ...
At the edge of sweet sanity
open wild, blind wings."
– Mary Oliver*



*The
River
of
Consciousness*

The River of Consciousness

Consciousness flows through a human life like a river that runs across many terrains, down hills and around bends until it reaches a lake or ocean. And human consciousness flows throughout history shaping our thoughts and actions as we create our lives in the larger world around us.

In The Other World journey, we use the river image as a metaphor for our winding awareness -- the shifting understanding we have of who and what we are and our place in the world about us. Anytime we encounter something new --a person or an event-- our consciousness might shift. We might be profoundly stunned, merely baffled, or sometimes suddenly enlightened with a sense that at last we "get it." We understand what's going on and act accordingly. Whether we are "in the flow" or "swimming against the tide" we are fully living our lives at every moment.

As we live our lives consciously or mindfully, we also discover how we shape, mold, and give form to our work, our families, our communities, our larger society and even Planet Earth herself. We can appear to be simply drifting along with the currents pushing us or we can choose to design our lives by where we put our energies. Choices inevitably have to be made: what training we receive, what occupations we enter, who we marry, how we raise our children, and how we will influence the society in which we live. These decisions may seem a burden at times. But burdens can also be exciting challenges for our own growth and creativity.

And we are accountable for how we live our lives. To be an aware human being we know that our choices have consequences. Sometimes we know right away whether we've helped or harmed a situation or a person. At other times we only know much later, or maybe not even in our lifetime. But our life does make a difference.

The River of Consciousness exercises give us a chance to explore just a few facets of the freedom we experience as we own our own thoughts:

The Freedom of Awareness and the Pain of Consciousness
The Freedom of Inventiveness and The Original Invention
The Freedom of Decision and the Self as Delight
The Freedom of Obligation and Living Life's Mystery

These exercises are intended to help you explore your consciousness -- where you are today in the ebb and flow of life, what decisions are crucial, and how you will approach them. The poetry may put you in touch with an awareness that is very familiar or open up parts of your awareness you haven't known before. Writing your own poems will call out the creativity you need for when, where, and how you'll flow next in the river of life.

Exercise One - Freedom of Awareness

**The freedom of knowing
that I am my awareness**

Oceans

*I have a feeling that my boat
has struck, down there in the depths,
against a great thing.*

*And nothing
happens! Nothing ... Silence ... Waves....
— Nothing happens? Or has everything happened,
and are we standing now, quietly, in the new life?
- Juan Ramon Jimenez*

Your Experience:

This poem is a metaphor for the human experience of meeting our own awareness through a life event. Take some time and write your response to the questions below:

When, in your life, have you felt that your boat struck "a great thing"? What was the great thing? How would you describe it both literally and figuratively?

How would you describe your response -- did you experience the sudden stillness of nothing happening? Was there an awareness of something totally new happening -- a New Life emerging?

Your Poem:

Read back over what you have written and circle key words that have power for you. Using those words, create a short poem. Example:

New Life in India

Brown skinned fish in an ocean of awe & wonder.
Altars, shrines and statues lined its shores --
Immersing me in care and love.
Amidst poverty, misery and daily suffering,
This frail, weak person felt a strange energizing power.
We all breathed water without fins.

***"The first step to preserving the soul
in our individual lives is to admit that the world has a soul also,
and is somehow participating with us in our work and destiny....
Looking at the mountain for its own sake opens up a life that can be described
only in the numinous effulgence of poetry or
the essence of firsthand experience."
-David Whyte, The Heart Aroused***

Exercise Two - Pain of Consciousness

**My Awareness
Sometimes Brings Me Pain**

*A chickpea leaps almost over the rim of the pot
where it's being boiled.*

"Why are you doing this to me?"

The cook knocks it down with the ladle

*"Don't you try to jump out.
You think I'm torturing you,
I'm giving you flavor,
so you can mix with spices and rice
and be the lovely vitality of a human being*

*Remember when you drank rain in the garden.
That was for this."*

*Grace first. Sexual pleasure,
then a boiling new life begins,
and the Friend has something good to eat.
- Rumi, translated by Coleman Barks*

Your Experience:

Is there a "boiling pot" in your recent experience? One you want to jump out of?

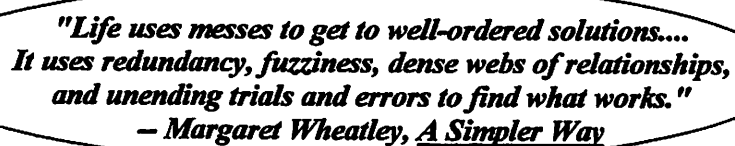
This is a body poem. You are the chickpea in the boiling pot and your body feels the discomfort.

In the space below draw a human figure, a small outline of a human body, your body.

Where is the pain in this body? Mark it with a dot.

What do you say to this person? What do you do for him or her?

Now, draw a second outline of a human body. Suppose this body is your organization or one you work with. Where on the body is the pain? Describe the pain. What would you say to the organization? What can be done?



*"Life uses messes to get to well-ordered solutions....
It uses redundancy, fuzziness, dense webs of relationships,
and unending trials and errors to find what works."
— Margaret Wheatley, A Simpler Way*

Exercise Three - Freedom of Inventiveness

**I create who I am
with my awareness**

The Caller

I don't know what sort of a God we have been talking about.

The caller calls in a loud voice to the Holy One at dusk.

Why? Surely the Holy One is not deaf.

He hears the delicate anklets that ring on the feet of an insect as it walks.

*Go over and over your beads, paint weird designs on your forehead,
wear your hair matted, long, and ostentatious,
but when deep inside you there is a loaded gun, how can you have
God?*

—Kabir

Your Experience:

What's the "loaded gun" within for you? What deep inner negativity, fear, anger, unresolved or unforgiven "things" might block your awareness of life's mystery, joy and fulfillment? Make a specific list (e.g., fear of losing my contract, anger over Jane's comment at our last business meeting, etc.)

Guided Visualization:

Imagine taking your beautiful, perfectly centered body of light for a walk. Slowly, easily, naturally you are walking into a setting in nature. It's your special place of peace -- by a lake or stream, on a beach -- perhaps it's a woods or a mountain retreat -- a park or a back yard.

Whatever the place is, let yourself experience it totally. Breathe and take in every sight, smell, sound. Experience yourself totally relaxed, yet energized. In this place you can commune with Pure Spirit. It is your Place of Peace. You begin to see issues in your life in a new perspective. Answers may come now, or perhaps they will come later. Relax.

Receive whatever message comes to you. If it helps, imagine the wisest person you know joins you here. He or she offers words of advice on how to let go of the negativity. Write these words and images down without judging or censoring them. Quietly ask your spirit to help you learn to trust and follow your energy more and more. Whenever you are ready, return to this time and space.

Jot down some notes to record your experience and any insights or messages. If you are in a group and you wish to share, take time for that.

"Contact with the sacred occurs in the stillness of the heart and mind. If there is any real destination to the spiritual quest, it is this point of silence, the middle of the spiral, the center of the self. . . . Silence is important because it gives direction. What waits for you in silence is the insight and direction you need to determine the next step in your quest. Silence is the source of knowing what to do or what not to do."

- Christina Baldwin. Life's Companion

Exercise Four - Original Invention

I know that who I am
is a remarkable,
original invention

*Sometimes a man stands up during supper
and walks outdoors, and keeps on walking,
because of a church that stands somewhere in the East.*

And his children say blessings on him as if he were dead.

*And another man, who remains inside his own house,
dies there, inside the dishes and in the glasses,
so that his children have to go far out into the world
toward that same church, which he forgot.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke

Your Experience:

Take a few minutes to consider these questions:

When have you stood up, left the familiar house and walked to "the East"?

What was "the church" that called you out on this adventure?

OR . . . are you the one who stayed in the dishes and glasses? Are you both people? Are you the child who pursued what your recent ancestors forgot to pursue?

Exercise:

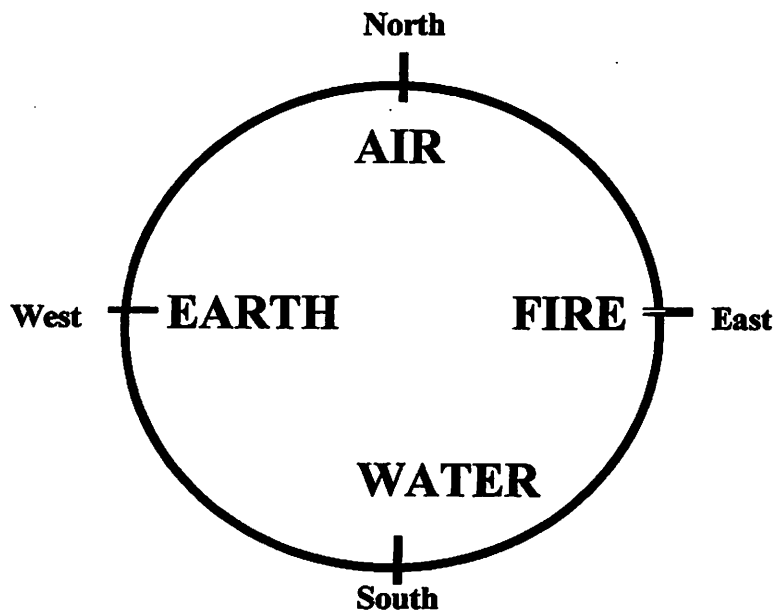
On the next page is a wheel from Native American tradition. On it, jot notes in answer to these questions:

Begin in the East: What calls you? Beckons you onward? Is the FIRE of your passion?

Move to the South: What nurtures you? What WATERS the seeds of your dreams?

Go to the West: What grounds you? What keeps you EARTHY and centered and on solid ground?

And to the North: What spiritizes or energizes you? What lifts you into the AIR and helps you fly free?



Use key words on your wheel to create a short poem.

*"It was my destiny to join in a great experience.
Having had the good fortune to belong to the League,
I was permitted to be a participant in a unique journey.
What wonder it had at the time!
How radiant and comet-like it seemed, and how quickly
it has been forgotten and allowed to fall into disrepute."
-Herman Hesse, Journey to the East*

Exercise Five - Freedom of Decision

**I know that my decisions
create the life I have**

All I Was Doing Was Breathing

*...All I was doing was being,
And the Dancing Energy came by my house...*

*But my eyes have their own life;
They laugh at rules,
And know whose they are.
I believe I can bear on my shoulders
Whatever you want to say of me.
Mira says: Without the energy that lifts mountains,
How am I to live?*

- Mirabai

Your Experience:

When have you "laughed at rules"?

What "Dancing Energy" have you felt? About what? Or who?

How was this moment, this experience like an "energy that lifts mountains"?
How essential is this energy for you?

Your Poem:

To capture this theme and savor it, try writing a haiku.

Haikus are short and they are striking in their simplicity, often capturing the essence of a moment. Write three lines of poetry, three simple sentences, about what you see. Use words that add up to five syllables in the first line; seven syllables in the second line; and five syllables in the third line. Take five minutes. If we take too long or work too hard, our poems tend to become stale and lifeless. Here's one:

*I laughed at limits
Turned to face the unknown road
Found it paved with hope.*

*"Often people attempt to live their lives backward:
they try to have more things, or more money,
in order to do more of what they want so they will
be happier. The way it actually works is the reverse.
You must first be who you really are, then, do what you need
to do, in order to have what you want."*

Margaret Young

Exercise Six - Self As A Delight

**I look at myself
and see what a delight I am**

Taking a Role

***"The essence of finding a role has to do with purpose....
Making a role requires the inner work of reflection and
creativity ... [beyond] technique
The final aspect of role is taking it"
-Alan Briskin***

Your Experience:

As you think about your gifts to life, answer questions like these:

What roles have others given me to do?

What roles have I chosen to play entirely on my own?

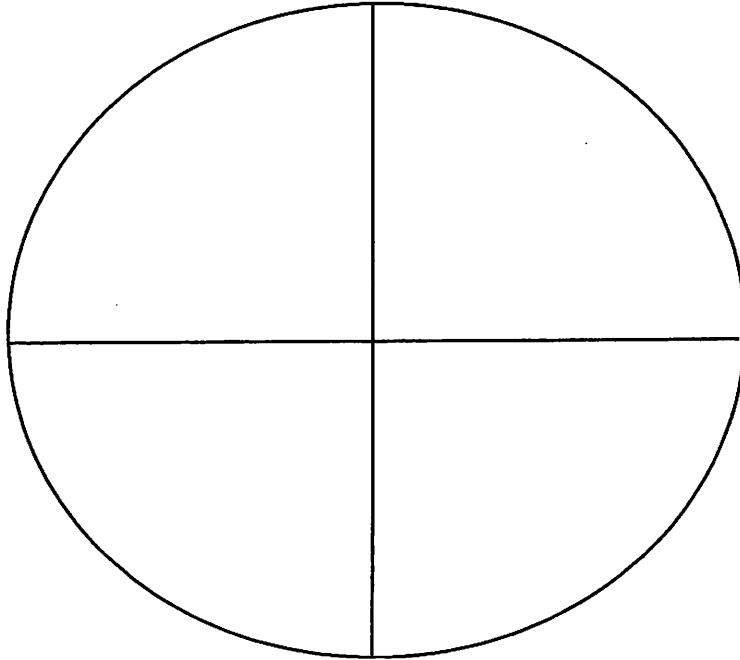
How did I arrive at choosing those roles? What "inner work" did I do?

What new role is calling for my gifts now?

What inner work might I need to do to take on a new role joyously?

Exercise:

Give a short title to the new role you feel you are being asked to play. On the spokes of the circle, write qualities you will need to play this new role. For each quality find a visual image that might serve as a reminder of that quality -- e.g., a bear for strength, a tree for flexibility or groundedness, a bird for perspective or freedom.



After completing the image, free write your concerns about taking your new role, AND the delightful possibilities of playing it.

*"In the silence I hear music.
And I see the blessing I am to the world."
Kellie Mitchell, Age 9*

Exercise Seven - Freedom of Obligation

Now I know that I am accountable
for what and who I am

*I understand the large hearts of heroes,
The courage of present times and all times,
How the skipper saw the crowded and rudderless wreck of the steam-ship,
and Death chasing it up and down the storm,
How he knuckled tight and gave not back an inch,
and was faithful of days and faithful of nights,
And chalk'd in large letters on a board, Be of good cheer,
we will not desert you;
How he follow'd with them and tack'd with them three days
and would not give it up,
How he saved the drifting company at last*

*All this I swallow, it tastes good, I like it well, it becomes mine,
I am the one, I suffer'd, I was there.
—Walt Whitman, from Song of Myself*

Your Experience:

Read this poem aloud to yourself or in a group. Notice the phrases or words that came alive for you during the reading.

What pictures came into your mind? What did you see?

How do you feel after reading it? What are your emotions?

What is this poem about? What themes run through it?

What does it have to do with your freedom? Your obligations?

What in life do you know you are accountable for? finally?

Your Poem:

Read back over your notes. Circle key words and phrases. From these words, phrases and images, write your own poem or a paragraph about being the courageous one in your life.

*"....I was alone without any expertise or experience whatsoever.
All I had was my dream and my inner resources.
Paradoxically, at this moment I had the feeling of certainty
that I would accomplish this dream. I felt nothing could deter me;
I would not let anything get in my way."
—Joseph Jaworski*

Exercise Eight - Living Life's Mystery

**I know I live before and
through the mystery of life itself**

*The soul, like the moon,
is new, and always new again.*

*And I have seen the ocean
continuously creating.*

*Since I scoured my mind
and my body, I too, Lalla,
am new, each moment new.*

*My teacher told me one thing,
Live in the soul.*

*When that was so,
I began to go naked,
and dance.*

Lalla

Your Experience:

Pondering this poem answer these questions:

In what way is your soul "new, and always new again"?

If you followed the teacher's advice to "live in the soul," what difference would that make in what you do or don't do?

Do

Not do

How would you "go naked, and dance"? What other images or words come to mind?

Your Poem:

Stand up. Go outside or in some free open space. Begin moving about. Hum or sing. Walk slowly and mindfully aware of your feet touching EARTH. Let yourself go for at least ten minutes. Come back and write whatever comes up for you without editing it.

"To live in the present moment is a miracle. The miracle is not to walk on water. The miracle is to walk on green Earth in the present moment, to appreciate the peace and beauty that are available now. Peace is all around us – in the world and in nature – and within us – in our bodies and our spirits. Once we learn to touch this peace, we will be healed and transformed. It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice. We need only to find ways to bring our body and mind back to the present moment so we can touch what is refreshing, healing, and wondrous."
–Thich Nhat Hanh. Touching Peace



*The
Mountain
of
Care*

The Mountain of Care

Rising out of the mist of our consciousness is a Mountain of Care. The Other World may come to our awareness at any point, in any state of being. While we are describing it here in sequential terms, it is holographic. The whole is present in each state of being, each experience of greater consciousness. Care is no exception. We do not make an effort to care. We care. Care is already present if we are alive.

Care is like a mountain in that it takes effort to act on it and maintain it for a particular purpose. One image that may help us with The Mountain of Care is to see ourselves as climbers. Four dimensions seen from this perspective are:

The Base Camp - Gratitude for life as it is, with all its cares

The Slow Climb - Service that we create out of our concerns

The Steep Climb - Mission that gives focus to our care

The Summit - Power to journey on and re-motivate ourselves

Of course, these are just a few images, but in this trek they might guide our reflection in the eight exercises which follow. Remember, although the images might sound sequential, they are not. In any one moment we might be any where on the mountain.

The base camp of the mountain is **gratitude**. We just show up. That in itself is a miracle. We could have just as easily not shown up. A million miracles have occurred so that we can breathe and exercise our love and care. The base camp is the place where I discover again and again that I love this world and I care about what goes on here. Here I realize that I'm continually astonished by ordinary people and their capacity to care. I also know they suffer. In strange gratitude I see how we are all climbing our Mountain of Care and that makes us human.

When you care and know that you care, **service** just happens. The mountainside is a slow gradual climb toward the summit. We may start in childhood --teaching a brother or sister to read. We might discover a talent or passion in youth that holds enough care to provide a vocational life. Later, the neighbor next door or the homeless couple under the bridge, or some political or social situation might call forth new care. We human beings inter-are. Our hearts go out to each other and may eventually require all that we have to give. It costs us our life energy. No wonder we need to return to base camp often to renew our supplies and energy.

However, we cannot take on the whole universe, all the needs of Planet Earth. We have to choose. Here the image is the **steeper climb of mission**. The climb becomes a challenge, a sheer cliff to climb with ropes and pitons. I know if I lose my concentration, I might slip off into an abyss or turn back in failure. What calling lays its claim upon me? I find myself stretched to use my time and talents even more fully. Perhaps even all

my ancestors have their hopes riding on me. Maybe the whole human experiment is at stake in my mission.

The summit of the Mountain of Care is a place where I find that I am not so much *having* a mission as *being* my mission. There is great power in the weary climber who discovers that mysterious "second wind", or who is able to find the courage and new vitality to live the mission from deep reservoirs of resolve and commitment. We find ourselves in dialogue with people of power from long ago and from today.

These exercises are intended to guide you into these and other states of being connected with the care you already have and express. May you find new ways to exercise your care as you continue to climb the Mountain of Care.

Exercise One - Original Gratitude

I'm lucky to have shown up
with my care

....battered and weak as I was, I felt I was standing in exactly the right place doing exactly the right thing, in exactly the right way

*Halfway through the talk, there was an absolute, living bond between myself and the audience, as if there were no speaker and no listener and the words were simply being created at the unknown frontier between listening and speaking. I looked out and knew this was the edge at which I wanted to live....
I went home after the talk and resigned my position at the center.*

There was nothing in my calendar, nothing in our family checkbook. There was no one, as yet, at the other end of the phone, but there would be. Before I left Monterey, I took one last walk on the misted beach....I walked the tide line a very, very happy man.

-David Whyte, Crossing the Unknown Sea

Your Experience:

Can you remember a time when you felt you were doing the exact right thing at the right time, in the right way? Jot a few notes about this event.

What are you grateful for when you are doing your true work in the world? Make a list.

Your Poem:

Try your hand at a short, repetitive word string poem. Each line can begin with the words "I'm lucky to" or another starter of your choice.

*"The gifts of grace and delight are present and abundant;
the time to live and love and give thanks and rest and delight is now,
this moment, this day. Feel what heaven is like; have a taste of eternity.
Rest in the arms of the divine. We do not have miles to go before we sleep.
The time to sleep, to rest, is now. We are already home."
— Wayne Muller, Sabbath*

Exercise Two - Appreciating Life

**I am in the family of
all creation**

*We give-away our thanks to the earth
which gives us our home.*

*We give-away our thanks to the rivers and lakes
which give-away their water.*

*We give-away our thanks to the trees
which give-away fruit and nuts.*

*We give-away our thanks to the wind
which brings rain to water the plants.*

*We give-away our thanks to the sun
who gives-away warmth and light.*

*All beings on earth: the trees, the animals, the wind
and the rivers give-away to one another
so all is in balance.*

*We give-away our promise to begin to learn
how to stay in balance with all the earth.*

-Dolores La Chapelle

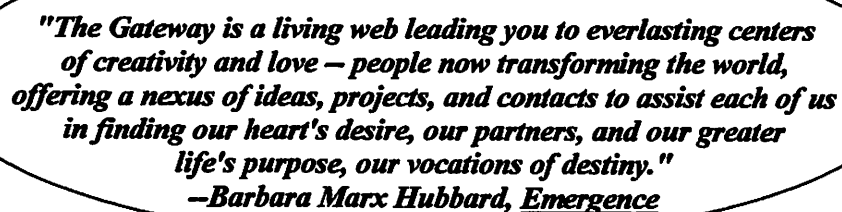
Your Experience:

What in life are you most grateful for? Name a few persons, aspects of nature, or inner qualities that come first into your mind. Now, double your list.

Each of these have given something to you. Take the list above and select 3 items and see if you can identify their give-away and what it means to you and to the world.

What is your unique give-away? Think of your qualities and your particular kind of caring. Pretend you are someone else, a close friend perhaps. Using that person's voice, describe your give-away.

Read over what you have written above. Alone or in a small group, create a short and simple ritual of thanksgiving.



*"The Gateway is a living web leading you to everlasting centers
of creativity and love – people now transforming the world,
offering a nexus of ideas, projects, and contacts to assist each of us
in finding our heart's desire, our partners, and our greater
life's purpose, our vocations of destiny."
–Barbara Marx Hubbard, Emergence*

Exercise Three - Universal Concern

I care for the whole of creation
around me

At first, as a student, I wanted freedom only for myself, the transitory freedoms of being able to stay out at night, read what I pleased, and go where I chose. Later, as a young man in Johannesburg, I yearned for the basic and honorable freedoms of achieving my potential, of earning my keep, of marrying and having a family – the freedom not to be obstructed in a lawful life. But I then slowly saw that not only was I not free, but my brothers and sisters were not free . . . that is when the hunger for my own freedom became the greater hunger for the freedom of my people.

It was this desire for the freedom of my people to live their lives with dignity and self-respect that animated my life, that transformed a frightened young man into a bold one, that drove a law-abiding attorney to become a criminal, that turned a family-loving husband into a man without a home . . . I am no more virtuous or self-sacrificing than the next man, but I found that I could not even enjoy the poor and limited freedoms I was allowed when I knew my people were not free.

-Nelson Mandela

Your Experience:

Recall a time in your life when concern for yourself gradually or suddenly became concern for others in the larger human family. How did this awareness change your life?

Your Poem:

Read over your notes in answer to the above question. Create some word pictures with images and feelings. Put them into a brief poem. If it helps, you might use Mandela's start phrase: *"At first I wanted only"* or another starter of your choice.

"One of the shining qualities that heroes possess is the willingness to be educated by all things Heroic people also understand that calls are not just inner experiences – passions, dreams, symptoms – but also outer. These come to us from the world and from the events in our lives, and whether they fling themselves at us like fastballs or follow us around and rub up against us like stray cats, they, too, require a response."

– Greg Levoy, Callings

Exercise Four - Deep Compassion

Caring requires virtually
all that I am

*We've stood over our ashes;
now what do we take on our long journey?
The secret fear that wherever we go we are superfluous?*

....
*. . . We are doomed to be left behind by the flock
in the harshest of winters . . .*

*You, fly away!
But when you fly off
don't forget us, grounded in the field!
And no matter to what joyful faraway lands
your happy wings bear you,
may our charred wings
protect you from carelessness.*

Lyubov Sirota, Chernoble Poems

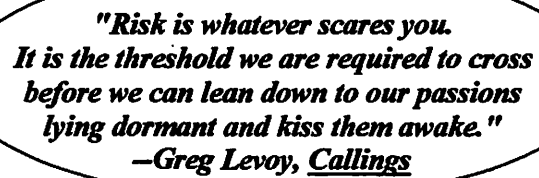
Your Experience:

If deep compassion is a kind of remembering, or bringing to mind those who suffer, what individuals or groups do you bring to mind often? Make a list.

Your Writing:

Select one from the list above and write a letter, expressing your care:

How do you (or will you) express this care in actions as well as words?



*"Risk is whatever scares you.
It is the threshold we are required to cross
before we can lean down to our passions
lying dormant and kiss them awake."
—Greg Levoy, Callings*

Exercise Five - Singular Mission

**I invent history itself
in the place where I am**

*I am the blossom pressed in a book,
found again after two hundred years. . . .*

*I am the maker, the lover, and the keeper
I am food on the prisoner's plate*

*I am the patient gardener
of the dry and weedy garden*

*I am there in the basket of fruit
presented to the widow*

*I am the one whose love
overcomes you, already with you
when you think to call my name . . .
- Jane Kenyon*

Your Reflection:

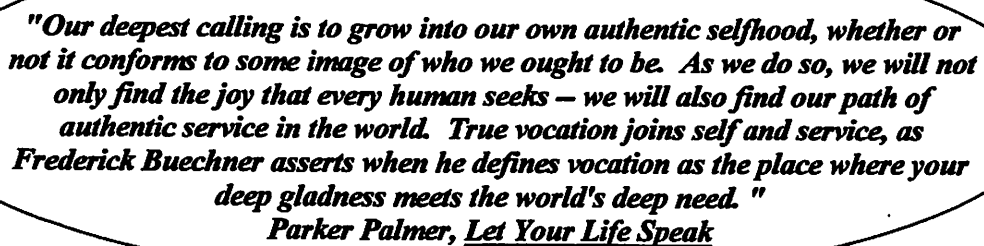
Who is the "I" in this poem?

Select one image that speaks to you and flesh out some detail. For example, if you select the "patient gardener", what is the garden you tend? Is it dry and weedy? Is it blooming? Is it just being planted? If you are giving a basket, who are you giving it to and what is in it?

Look at the quote from Parker Palmer below. Where would you say that your own deep gladness meets the world's deep need? You can begin with a personal passion, talent, or care that drives you.

Writing Exercise:

Using any method that you like, create a Mission Statement for yourself. Some choices might be a paragraph, a word string poem or even a two column list using My Deep Gladness and The World's Deep Need as headings.



"Our deepest calling is to grow into our own authentic selfhood, whether or not it conforms to some image of who we ought to be. As we do so, we will not only find the joy that every human seeks – we will also find our path of authentic service in the world. True vocation joins self and service, as Frederick Buechner asserts when he defines vocation as the place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need. "
Parker Palmer, Let Your Life Speak

Exercise Six - Inclusive Responsibility

**I am responsible for whatever
is present in my domain**

*People are often unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered,
forgive them anyway.
If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives,
be kind anyway.
If you are successful, you will win some false friends
and some true friends;
succeed anyway.
If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
be honest and frank anyway.
What you spend years building,
someone could destroy overnight;
build anyway.
If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
be happy anyway.
Give the world your best anyway.
You see, in the final analysis, it is between you and God;
it was never between you and them anyway.
-Mother Theresa*

Your Experience:

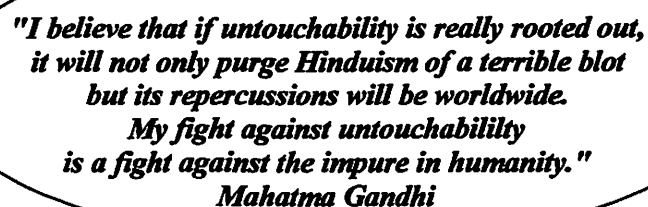
Can you recall a time when your own choice or your own responsibility was challenged by others? How did you handle it?

What, for you, is the message in this poem by Mother Theresa?

Your Writing:

Using your answers to the foregoing questions, create an affirmation of the life style you intend to manifest.

There is an old saying that we must learn to "keep our own counsel". When your caring is challenged, how do you counsel yourself? What advice means most to you?



*"I believe that if untouchability is really rooted out,
it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot
but its repercussions will be worldwide.
My fight against untouchability
is a fight against the impure in humanity."
Mahatma Gandhi*

Exercise Seven - Transparent Power

**My life makes a profound
impact. I move mountains.**

*As we live, we are transmitters of life.
And when we fail to transmit life, life fails to flow through us.
That is part of the mystery of love, it is a flow onwards.
Loveless people transmit nothing.*

*And if, as we work, we can transmit life into our work,
Life, still more life, rushes into us to compensate, to be ready
And we ripple with life through the days.*

*Even if it is a woman making an apple dumpling, or a man a stool,
If life goes into the pudding, good is the pudding, good is the stool,
Content is the woman with fresh life rippling into her, content is the man.*

*Give, and it shall be given unto you is still the truth about life.
But giving life is not so easy.
It doesn't mean handing it out to some mean fool,
Or letting the living dead eat you up.
It means kindling the life-quality where it was not,
Even if it's only in the whiteness of a washed pocket-handkerchief.*

-D.H. Lawrence, Complete Poems

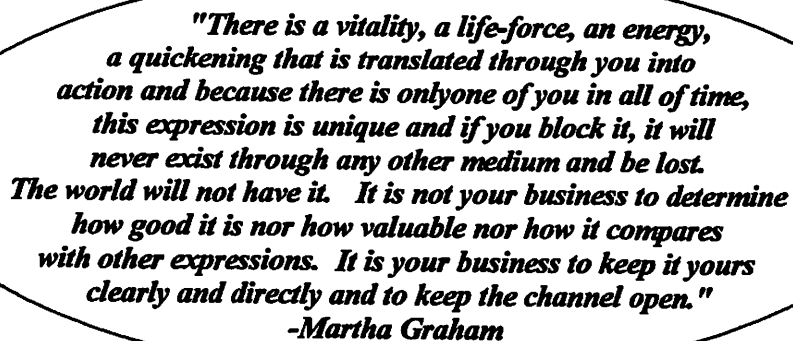
Your Experience:

How can you tell when you or someone else is transmitting life into their work?

How can you tell when you or someone else is letting the living dead eat them up?

Your Poem:

You are in charge of kindling the life quality in your own life. Create a word string poem of those things you will think, say and do to accomplish that task. You might look at the quote by Martha Graham below and think particularly of ways you will care for your own life-force or keep your channel open.



*"There is a vitality, a life-force, an energy,
a quickening that is translated through you into
action and because there is only one of you in all of time,
this expression is unique and if you block it, it will
never exist through any other medium and be lost.
The world will not have it. It is not your business to determine
how good it is nor how valuable nor how it compares
with other expressions. It is your business to keep it yours
clearly and directly and to keep the channel open."
-Martha Graham*

Exercise Eight - Mysterious Motivation

Here I stand,
developing strange power

*To remember to love when you are hungry and hot
When your clothes are dirty and you speak just a few words.
To smile when you're alone and need help and care
When the magic has stopped and you are left with crawling...*

*Remember,
Until the end
We are never without breath
Nor helpless to turn love into bread
We are never so alone that we dare to forget
Others are ours and we always belong.
This is a fierce practice.
This belonging
This is real power.
To move through the world and make it your own,
This is the magic.
And it never stops.*

— Vicki Robbins

Your Experience:

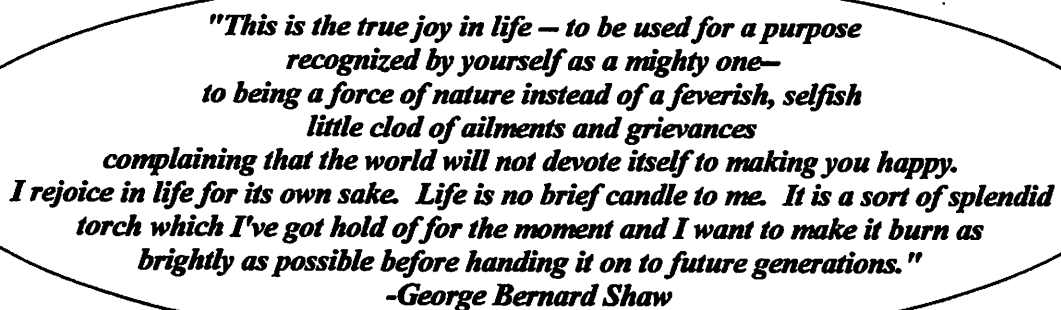
As you read the above poem, underline the words or phrases that stand out for you. What, in your own life, is a fierce practice that has magic or real power?

Read the Shaw quote at the end of this exercise. If your own life is a "splendid torch", what do you hope you will pass on to future generations? You might include things you stand for or especially care about.

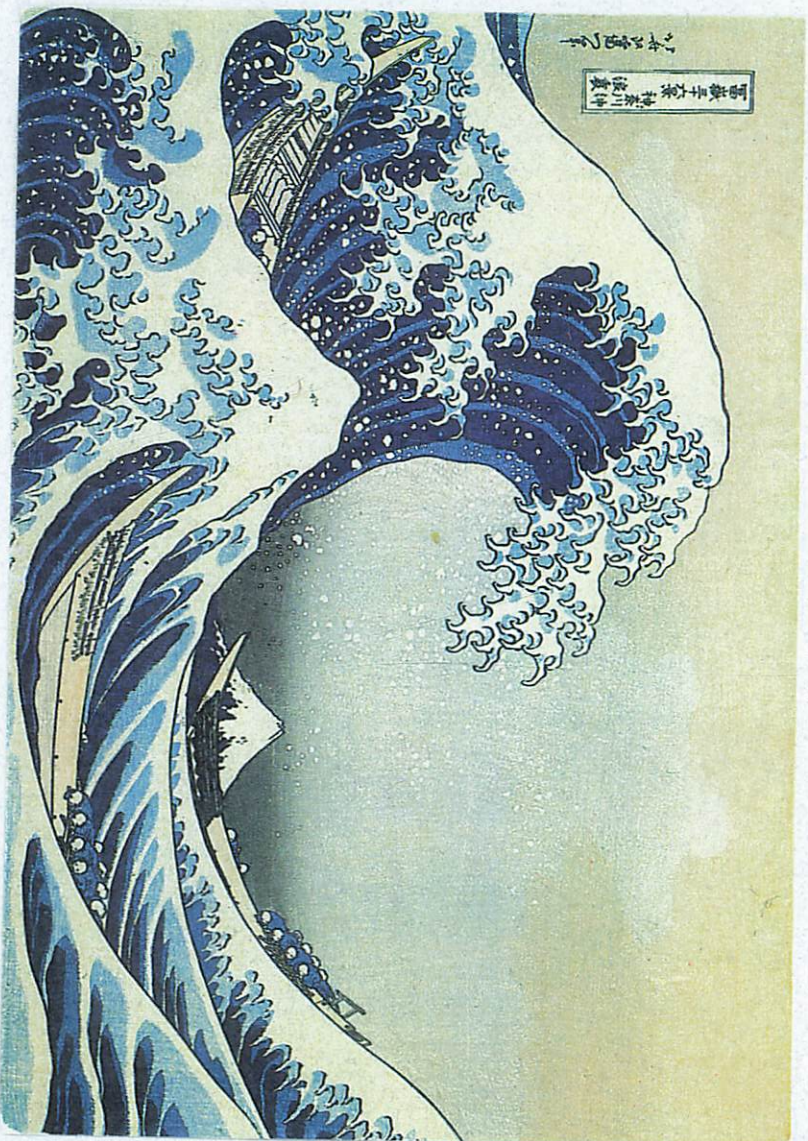
Your Writing:

From the words and phrases used in answer to the foregoing questions, create your original poem.

If you are working in a group, share your words and invite others to share theirs. Reflect on common themes and new insights.



*"This is the true joy in life – to be used for a purpose
recognized by yourself as a mighty one—
to being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish
little clod of ailments and grievances
complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.
I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid
torch which I've got hold of for the moment and I want to make it burn as
brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."
-George Bernard Shaw*



The Sea of Tranquility

The Sea of Tranquility

Our energies flow through and beyond us into the whole universe. What we know, do and be are received in a state of being that is like a vast ocean or sea. In the spirit dimension of life it is like a Sea of Tranquility. This fourth area of The Other World is discontinuous from the other three. It expresses the relationship we take to living in a Land of Mystery, swimming in a River of Consciousness, or climbing a Mountain of Care. It is our human experience of being received, honored and accepted by All That Is.

Because The Other World journey is not sequential, The Sea of Tranquility can happen any time we feel that inexplicable inner calm that might come upon us even in difficult circumstances. Because it exists in the spirit dimension, it can occur alongside any life situation or event. What we are looking for is a new language for this important state of being.

In the Sea of Tranquility we know that we are a discreet entity in the enormous vastness that includes our galaxy and the galaxies at the farthest edges of the universe. It's like waking up to a strange certitude about who and what we are. It's as though we've found our place in life and meaning is all around us. Every blade of grass and bothersome insect is illumined as essential to life itself. In this state of being you know yourself to be fulfilled and hope-filled. You have all you need.

The four categories within The Sea of Tranquility are:

Enlightened Living - Empowering Nurture
Unbelievable Peace - Problemless Living
Unspeakable Joy - Unusual Contentment
Everlasting Life - Living with Saints

This experience has been expressed in many spiritual traditions such as The Kingdom of God in Christianity and The Pure Land in Buddhism. Yet the words point to an experience we have each had, not after death, but in day-to-day life -- the experience of inner peace in the midst of the storm of life. Living in the present moment, all past worries and guilt are forgotten. Future anxieties and uncertainties become ingredients out of which we can fashion our vocations, our families, our communities and our world. This is the peace that passes understanding.

Sailing in such a sea fills one full of joy and happiness that is difficult to describe. Everything you think and do begins to tingle with expectation and possibility. You realize that all the resources you need are at your fingertips. You can't go wrong because you are One with all that is. You can now die a happy death.

These exercises are designed to enable us focus on such experiences and expand on them throughout our daily life. The poetry is drawn from cultures around the world to help us identify with such metaphors. The exercises take us from classical culture into the poetic images familiar to each of us. Again, play with them. Have fun. Enjoy your own imagination and creativity.

Exercise One - Enlightened Living

**I gratefully show up
with a chance to live a life**

Our imagination is the womb out of which a new world will be born. Think of every situation in your life as being ripe for new birth. See luminous energy emerging from your heart, extending outward to touch all things. Cast the light over your childhood home. Cast it over your physical body. Cast it over warring nations. Cast it over the entire planet. Cast it over people you love. Cast it over the people you judge. Feel now a bolt of energy coming over you as you extend this light. Avoid the temptation to invalidate the image. It's not an idle fantasy, for the light is real.

Now allow the light to flood your body, your blood, your bones. Allow it to illuminate your mind, your emotions, your relationships, your career. Congratulations. You have picked up your wand and begun to use it.

— Marianne Williamson

Your Experience:

The above reading is a guided visualization. Take a quiet moment with no distractions and read the section at least three times, aloud if that is possible.

What is one area of your life where you especially want or need to cast a light?

What situation in your life seems to you to be particularly ripe for a new birth?

Is there a dream emerging from your own heart that represents a new direction or growth possibility for you?

Your Poem:

Using your answers from the previous questions and other thoughts and feelings that are up for you now, write a free verse poem that contains images of your most enlightened and fulfilled life. You might use such starters as: *"A day in my fulfilled life..."* or *"Living my life ..."*

*"Creating authentic power is a pro-active,
lifetime endeavor that requires your intention and effort.
If you become distracted or get tired, realize
that these experiences, also, are part of the creation
of authentic power. Authentic power is the experience
of fulfillment, no matter what you are doing. It is knowing
that the person you are with is the person you are
supposed to be with All that you say and all that you do
is appropriate. You have no thoughts of fear.*

*— Gary Zukav & Linda Francis,
The Heart of the Soul*

Exercise Two - Empowering Nurture

I see how empowered
I really am

Many of our ancestors pined for good work as they would for a lover, and remained unrequited and stricken by want. Many of our ancestors died while working in dangerous or desperate conditions. Some left good work and found none to replace it. A few, a very few, left little, crossed oceans, and found abundance beyond hope. Others worked hard or traveled to new shores and dutifully sacrificed for their sons and daughters, while their hearts and minds were elsewhere, their own dreams unfulfilled, their innermost selves left high and dry, disappointed by time's fleeting tide.

Whatever our inheritance of work in this life, we are only the apex of innumerable lives of endeavor and sacrifice.
— David Whyte

Your Experience:

What words or images stand out for you in the above reading?

Name one or two of your ancestors whose story nurtures you, empowers you, or encourages you to strength or faithfulness in your own work. These can be blood relatives or spiritual ancestors.

How do you imagine that your real or symbolic descendants will be nurtured by your vision, strength or courage?

Your Writing:

This is your chance to create a shape poem on the theme of being an **apex** of lives lived. A secret to this poem is adding words to each successive line to obtain a pyramid shape. Example:

*Alive,
Living freedom
Old ones imagined.
I firmly hold their legacy
In vibrant colors splashed on paper
And wilder words that express my passion
The dead are not dead, but alive in me today.*

"1. The cry is not yours. It is not you talking, but innumerable ancestors talking with your mouth. It is not you who desire, but innumerable generations of descendants longing with your heart. 2. Your dead do not lie in the ground. They have become birds, trees, air. You sit under their shade, you are nourished by their flesh, you inhale their breathing. They have become ideas and passions, they determine your will and your actions. 3. Future generations do not move far from you in a uncertain time. They live, desire, and act in your loins and your heart."

- Nikos Kazantzakis, Saviors of God

Exercise Three - Unbelievable Peace

**I find peace in a strange
victory over all my fears**

*LOVE is a little white bird –
and the flight of it is so fast
you can't see it
and you know it's there
only by the faint whirr of its wings
and the hush song coming so low to your ears
you fear it might be silence
and you listen keen and you listen long . . .
and the little white bird's hush song
is telling you nothing can harm you,
the days to come can weave in and weave out
and spin their fabrics and designs for you
and nothing can harm you –
unless you change yourself into a thing of harm
nothing can harm you.*

*I give you the little white bird –
and my thanks for your hearing me –
and my prayers for you,
my deep silent prayers.
– Carl Sandburg*

Your Experience:

Name a time when you felt free of having any harm come to you.

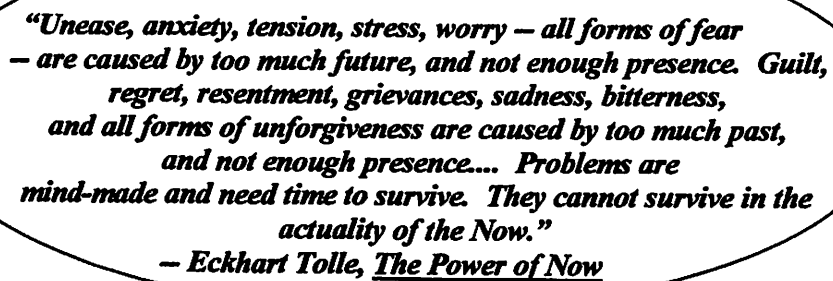
What messenger told you that you were safe?

Did you believe the messenger at first?

How do you know within yourself that it is true: no harm can come to you?

Your Writing:

Imagine you are asked to speak on the topic "Victory over Fears". You are well qualified to give this talk because of your own life experience. Use the space below to create an outline or tell a short story on this theme. If the quote below from Eckhart Tolle helps you, feel free to use that.



*"Unease, anxiety, tension, stress, worry – all forms of fear
– are caused by too much future, and not enough presence. Guilt,
regret, resentment, grievances, sadness, bitterness,
and all forms of unforgiveness are caused by too much past,
and not enough presence.... Problems are
mind-made and need time to survive. They cannot survive in the
actuality of the Now."
– Eckhart Tolle, The Power of Now*

Exercise Four - Problemless Living

**I find myself no longer at war
with anyone**

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.*

*A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.*

*Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.*

*The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.*

-Rumi

Your Experience:

Create your own short list of the "unexpected visitors" (or problems) that have arrived at your door.

In any of these situations, was something cleared out that, in hindsight, you needed to let go of?

Do these "guests", disguised as problems, help in our growth? If so, how does that work in your experience?

If you are in a group and it seems appropriate, share your reflections.

If you are working alone, create a short poem that begins with the words "Problemless living is"

*"You must have a room or a certain hour of the day
or so when you do not know what was in the morning paper,
where you do not know who your friends are, you don't know
what you owe anybody or what they owe you, but a
place where you can simply experience and
bring forth what you are and
what you might be*

*If you have a sacred place and use it, take advantage
of it, Something will happen."*

—Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth

Exercise Five - Unspeakable Joy

**I have plunged into
spontaneous gratitude and joy**

The Sabbath rocks us and holds us until we can remember who we are. If we are to deeply and fully integrate rest into the rhythm of our lives, we need a sense of memory, a visceral bodily experience of what it is like to be delightfully inactive. Students who study in the presence of a fragrance do better on tests when the same fragrance is later present in the testing room. On the Sabbath we smell spices, we bring flowers, we smell the bread in the oven, and we are transported, we recall feelings and insights we have known before, and we remember. When Sabbath is done and we return to our labor, we carry the fragrance of rest in our bodies.

— Wayne Muller

Your Experience:

Smell is one of the strongest human senses. What fragrances were you aware of as you read this passage?

When was the last time you felt completely rested or "delightfully inactive"?

Name some ways you could help yourself to have rest in the future.

Your Writing:

Create a word string poem about the causes of true joy in your life. Let the poem be as long and creative as you wish. Keep in mind that each line may have just one word or a complete phrase. Let your five senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling) help if you wish.

*"What I've discovered is that joy isn't waiting
on the other side of that process; joy IS that process.
And if you just put your faith in it, you'll save yourself
a lot of anxiety – and you'll always land
exactly where you should be."
– Oprah Winfrey, "O" Magazine*

**I find I am harmoniously
surrounded by good**

*Like a cat asleep on a chair
at peace, in peace
and at one with the master of the house, with the mistress,
at home, at home in the house of the living,
sleeping on the hearth, and yawning before the fire.*

***Sleeping on the hearth of the living world
yawning at home before the fire of life
feeling the presence of the living God
like a great reassurance
a deep calm in the heart
a presence
as of the master sitting at the board
in his own and greater being,
in the house of life.***

Your Experience:

Using your own life experience, record on the chart below the primary feelings and images you associate with each category:

Being Discontent	Being Content

In your own opinion, what is the key to finding true contentment in life?

Your Poem:

Read the quote below. Use your answers to the foregoing questions and any thoughts from the quote below to create a poem about "Unusual Contentment". Remember, this contentment may or may not have anything to do with outer circumstances going your way.

"One of the goals of having inner peace is healing fear. It may be a fear that someone will hurt you, abandon or run away from you. It may be a fear of putting yourself out there and failing. Inner peace is a connection to the heart and a willingness to let go of fear. It is achieved by letting go of having anything to defend, and being willing to be vulnerable. It is not putting on an act for other people; it is being willing to shine through as who you are, and knowing you are all right."

– Sanaya Roman Living with Joy

Exercise Seven - Everlasting Life

**I am agelessly wise and
forever risen**

I am not I.

I am this one

*Walking beside me whom I do not see,
Whom at times I manage to visit,
And whom at other times I forget;
The one who remains silent when I talk,
The one who forgives, sweet, when I hate,
The one who takes a walk where I am not,
The one who will remain standing when I die.*

-Juan Ramon Jimenez

Your Experience:

After reading the above poem, reflect on your own experience of this "one" who remains standing when you die. What words and phrases might you use to describe this one?

What is the deep truth this poem is pointing to as you understand it? Jot a few notes on your responses.

Your Writing:

Using your notes on the previous page, take a moment and briefly tell your life story from the perspective of one who has "everlasting life".

Remember, a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Use as many poetic images as you need to tell your story. You don't necessarily need to worry about chronological time or specific events: this is a cosmic or symbolic story.

*"Nirvana means extinction, above all the extinction
of ideas – the ideas of birth and death, existence and nonexistence,
coming and going, self and other, one and many.*

All these cause us to suffer."

Thich Nhat Hanh, The Heart of Buddha's Teaching

Exercise Eight - Living with Saints

I am always on the Way
with all who have gone before

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And to know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, remembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning;
At the source of the longest river
The voice of the hidden waterfall
And the children in the apple-tree
Not known, because not looked for
But heard, half-heard, in the stillness
Between two waves of the sea.
Quick now, here, now, always –
A condition of complete simplicity
(Costing not less than everything)....
– TS Eliot, Four Quartets*

Your Experience:

What best describes your own life timeline? Is the line straight, curved, going up or going down, or in a circle?

What has "paved the way" for certain victories? Name one or two significant road blocks.

In your own experience, what does it mean to arrive where you started and know that place for the first time?

Your Poem:

In a relaxed state, without thinking too much, fill in the blanks below:

I'm always on the Way to _____

I'm always on the Way to _____

I'm always on the Way to _____

I'm always on the Way with my companion _____

I'm always on the Way with my companion _____

I'm always on the Way and arriving at _____

I'm always on the Way and arriving at _____

Reading these phrases back, what is the poem you have created?
Write it below.

*"Abandon the affairs of the world,
and your form will be unbound. Let life
be enough, and its essence will be undiminished.
When your form is whole and your essence eternally
beginning again at the beginning, you are one with heaven."
– Chuang Tzu, The Essential Chuang Tzu*