

SPIRITUALITY

FROM THE
GROUND UP

~ ADVENTURE IN FAITH 2023 ~

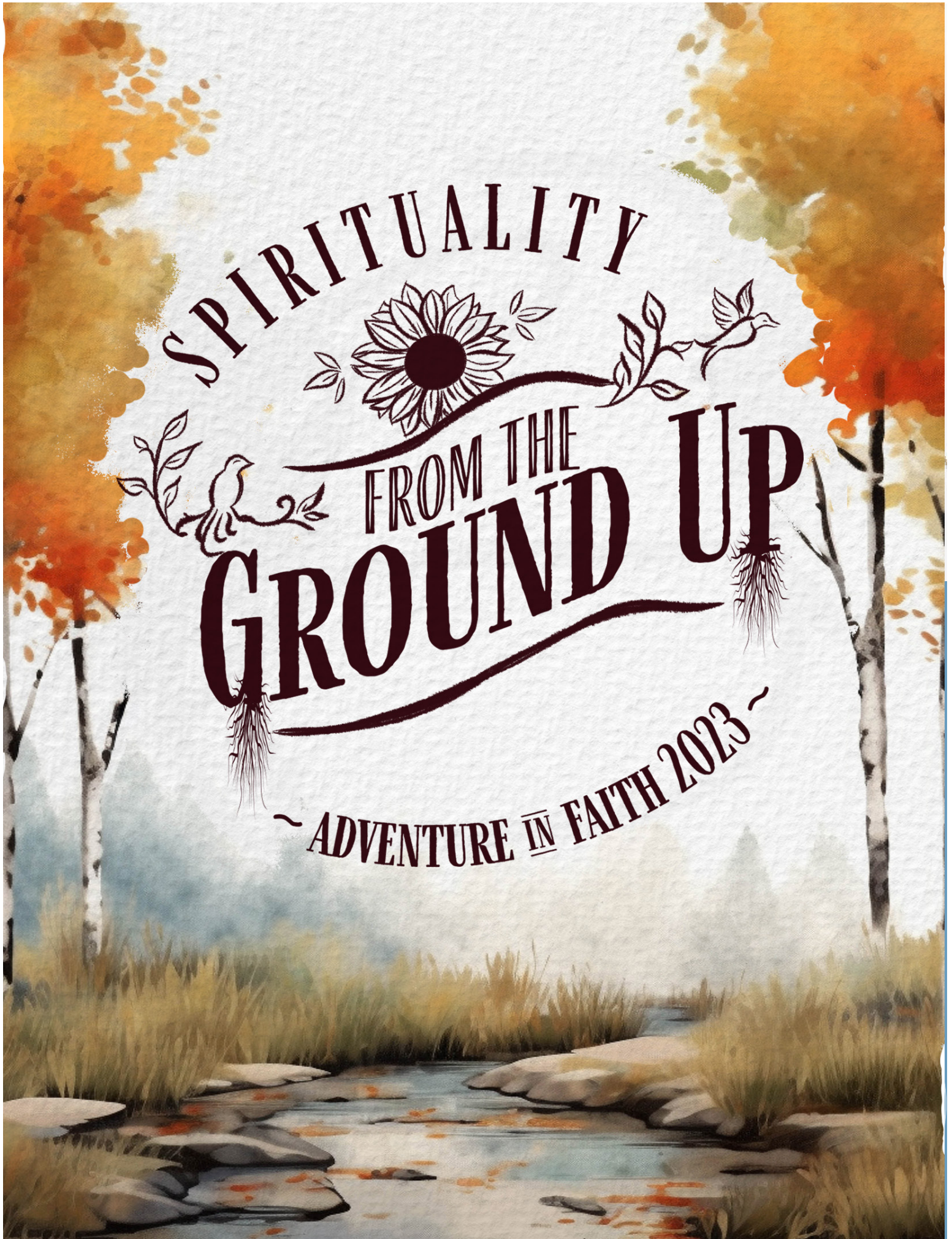


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FACILITATORS

This book was created as a group facilitators guide, however, if you wish, you may also encourage your group members to download it from the Mile Hi Church Adventure in Faith landing page.

GROUP TIMES AND MEMBERS

Groups should be at least one hour, but no more than an hour and a half. Ideally, each group should have no more than ten participants, including the facilitators.

OPENING AND CLOSING BLESSINGS

A brief blessing should start and end each group session. Ideally a facilitator will do an opening blessing, and as trust grows in the group, it might be beneficial to invite a participant to say a closing blessing.

KEY POINTS

These key points sum up what we intend the participant to understand in each week's session. You can choose to share these points with the group, or use them as your own guide for how to use the curriculum effectively.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are designed to create meaningful sharing in your group. You can choose which, if any to ask.

PROCESSES

These meditations, worksheets, and experientials are designed to assist the participants' inner exploration of the weekly topic. Choose the ones that you feel will be most resonant with your group.

INTERFAITH SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

These are practices that can be practiced in your group, or participants can be encouraged to practice during the week.

"How many paths are there to God? There are as many paths to God as there are souls on the earth." ~ Rumi

AFFIRMATIONS

You are invited to share these with your group each week.

WEEKLY PRAYERS

Each week concludes with an affirmative prayer.

SHARING GUIDELINES

It is recommended that you review these guidelines in your first session and refer back to them as needed.

SHARING GUIDELINES *(Handout to download)*

- ◆ **Sacred Listening** – When someone is sharing I do not just listen, but do so with the intention of not judging or trying to solve and with a loving heart.
- ◆ **Sharing from Personal Experience** – When I share, I do so from my own personal experience, recognizing that what may be true for me, may not be true for others. I do not speak to others' experiences outside of how they resonate in my own.
- ◆ **Confidentiality** – What someone shares in class I will not share about outside of class unless it is with the consent of the person who shared it.
- ◆ **Authenticity** – I will be sincere with my sharing by holding myself to the present and not the past, not to someone else's, but my own vision of myself, not the roles I play but who I really am.





INTRODUCTION

SPIRITUALITY FROM THE GROUND UP

Human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them over and over again to give birth to themselves.

~ Gabriel García Márquez



Our spirit is like a seed we place in the soil of a creative mind. This spirit is our life, but it is more than just that. It is our vision and our hopes, our longings and our aspirations—This spirit is our calling and our ancestry, our stories about what was, our affirmations of what is, and our prayers for what can be. For what is within our spirit to take root and grow in our life, we must first touch the ground.

Spirituality from the ground up means making sure you are creating the best environment, in mind, body, and spirit, to live a healthy, whole, and thriving life. This leads to an experience of giving birth to the best of yourself, letting go of what's holding you back, and remembering the heart of the sacred in all that you do, in all whom you love, and in your own reflection.

This adventure in faith we come together to ground, to root, to grow, and to fly.



ADVENTURE
IN FAITH 23
WEEK ONE

ROOTS AND WINGS

SPIRITUALITY
FROM THE
GROUND UP

“We teach our children two things, the first is roots, and the second is wings.” ~ Proverb

Spiritual living is about finding our roots and transcending perceived obstacles. As you root yourself in the sacred, as you clear the brush of your mind, and lay any hurts on the table with the faith that they can heal, you begin to grow the wings that carry you over what you might at one time thought was all there is, to greater and greater realities and ways of being.

KEY POINTS FOR THE WEEK

- Having a strong groundedness in faith—roots, helps us to transcend difficulties and thrive in our everyday life—wings.
- We may be more rooted than we think, and identifying these roots can help us.
- We all have within us, the ability to overcome obstacles.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

*When you come to the edge of all the light you've known
And are about to step off into the darkness of the unknown
Faith is knowing one of two things will happen.
There will be something solid to stand on.
Or you will be taught how to fly.*

~ Richard Bach

*May all that is unforgiven in you be released. May your fears yield
their deepest tranquilities. May all that is unlived in you blossom
into a future graced with love.*

~ John O'Donahue

*I am a big bird winging over high mountains, down into serene
valleys. I am ripples of waves on silver seas. I'm a spring leaf
trembling in anticipation of full growth.*

~ Maya Angelou

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



Icebreaker:

1. Name a song that is a key part of the “*Soundtrack to Your Life.*”
2. What is something you’d like to expand your faith in during this adventure in faith?
3. When are you most grounded? When not grounded, what do you do best to get back to ground?





What warms my heart?

Example: *Hearing how something I said helped someone improve their life.*

OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One: Roots and Wings (Handout)

- **MY ROOTS:**
3 core beliefs about life that I can return to over and over.

Example: *Tomorrow is a new day.*

3 daily rituals that help me remember Spiritual Life.

Example: *Putting my daughter to bed at night.*

- **MY HEART:**
3 Core Relationships that keep me grounded with who I am.

Example: *My partner, my minister, my son.*

- **MY WINGS:**
Whose memory and presence am I guided by?

Example: *Practitioners who have passed on.*

What am I willing to “surrender” and let God take over?

Example: *Outcomes.*

Affirmation:

*I nurture my roots daily
I center my heart on that which I love
I remember my wings
Grounded in my roots centered with heart, I soar.*



Process Two: All God's Children Have Wings

During the time of slavery in the United States, a folktale emerged from African Americans that involved the stories of enslaved people, who grew wings and were able to escape their terrible conditions.

“And they all remembered what they had forgotten, and recalled the power that had once been theirs. Then they all stood up together, and they all leaped up into the air with a great shout; and in a moment were gone, flying, like a flock of crows, over the field, over the fence, and over the top of the wood...the men were clapping their hands, and the women went singing, and those who had children gave them their breasts, and the children laughed and sucked as their mothers flew and were not afraid.

The master, the overseer, and the driver looked after them as they flew, beyond the wood, beyond the river, miles on miles, until they passed beyond the last rim of the world and disappeared in the sky like a handful of leaves. They were never seen again.”

1. What is the meaning of this story?
2. In light of the terrible conditions of slavery, was this tale naïve or does it tell you something about the character of those who were enslaved?
3. Is there a time where you overcame a challenging circumstance, by remembering your own wings?
4. Do you find that ‘having wings’ is easier if you start from being grounded—like the example above where the slaves were grounded in their Faith? (a further telling of this tale can be found at *All God's Chillun Had Wings* - The Moonlit Road.com)





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Christian Tradition: Centering Prayer

A Centering Prayer is a simplified form of meditation in the Christian tradition that was developed in the 1970's by Father Thomas Keating and a group of Trappist Catholic monks. Their purpose in the development of this practice was to put the essence of Christian contemplative prayer into a meditation form that would be practical for today's lifestyle.

Three Steps for Practice:

1. Intention. Begin with a heart of devotion, to intend yourself to be completely available to the Presence of the Divine (God, Spirit, etc.).
2. Choose a sacred word that represents your willingness and connection to your intention. (It can be any word that is meaningful to you.)
3. When you catch yourself with a thought, simply let it go (not push it away) and release the thought and return to your contemplative word.

It is the repetitive process of letting go that carries you deeper and deeper into the field of your heart. Measured and neurologically verified, this practice entrains your brain waves and slows your brain down so you can experience more tranquility. This process leads us to compassion.

We recommend trying this together in your group, then practicing each day, bringing your experience to share next week.





AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

Going within I connect with my roots, and I feel my wings expanding; wings that are my spirit, my guides, my angels, my inner knowingness. I know the Spirit within guides me over all obstacles and helps me to ever become my highest self. How wonderful it is to know, that simply remembering the truth of who I am, helps me to embody and demonstrate that, and this being, brings about the right solutions, the right state of mind, and the absolutely most inspired way of being. And so it is. Amen.

AFFIRMATION

I am rooted in my Truth and it grows in my life.

ADVENTURE
IN FAITH 23
WEEK TWO

IN THE GARDEN

SUN., OCT. 8

WITH
JOSH REEVES



MUSIC: FEATURING THOM LICH
AND THE MILE HI BAND



8 & 10 A.M., IN-PERSON
10 A.M., LIVESTREAM WATCH PAGE,
FACEBOOK, & YOUTUBE

SPIRITUALITY
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Ernest Holmes said of the garden of our souls, “It may be necessary to cultivate your garden, to uproot the weeds and straighten out the rows, planting new seeds—new ideas, broader visions and deeper realizations of life.”

The garden of your soul needs tending so the best fruits of your life can blossom. In the tending, you may find much to prune, but you may be surprised, recalling seeds of intention planted in the past, of just what has grown.

KEY POINTS FOR THE WEEK

- Our mind is not a mess of disconnected thoughts and ideas, but a garden, with a rich creative soil.
- Tend to the garden of your mind, this is a creative act.
- Looking back, we may be surprised at just how much certain intentions have grown in our lives.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

“Might I,” quavered Mary, “might I have a bit of earth?”
“Earth!” he repeated. “What do you mean?” “To plant seeds in
— to make things grow—to see them come alive.”

~ Frances H. Burnett, *The Secret Garden*

*The heart of experiment is mystery. We cannot predict where
a seed will lead or if it will take root. Remain open to the new
and unknown. Begin with a question mark and embark
on a journey of discovery.*

~ Rick Rubin

*One acorn in ten thousand becomes a tree. On the one hand,
what a waste. On the other, it works. In the crapshoot of life,
you—I mean you—turned up. You rose from the ground of your
ancestors, their dust in your bones. Without accomplishing
another thing, you are the complete fulfillment of all those who
came before you. How can you doubt yourself?*

~ Karen Maezen Miller

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Report on how your interfaith spiritual practice went this week.

Read the following quote from Sufi teacher Sam Lewis:

“I feel like a gardener who planted a bunch of seeds and nothing came up; and again the next year he planted a bunch more seeds and nothing came up; and again the next year more seeds with the same result; and so on and on and on. And then this year, he planted a bunch of seeds: not only did they all come up, but all the seeds from the previous year came up and all the seeds from the year before, and so on. So I’ve just been frantically running around trying to harvest all the plants until Allah came to me and said, “Don’t worry. Harvest what you can and leave the rest to Me.”

2. How do you interpret this quote? Does it resonate with your life?



OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One: Meditation

Close your eyes and come fully present.

Allow your mind to become not an ongoing to-do list, but a garden. Hear these words from Thich Nhat Hanh.

“Your mind is like a piece of land planted with many different kinds of seeds: seeds of joy, peace, mindfulness, understanding, and love; seeds of craving, anger, fear, hate, and forgetfulness. These wholesome and unwholesome seeds are always there, sleeping in the soil of your mind. The quality of your life depends on the seeds you water. If you plant tomato seeds in your gardens, tomatoes will grow. Just so, if you water a seed of peace in your mind, peace will grow. When the seeds of happiness in you are watered, you will become happy. When the seed of anger in you is watered, you will become angry. The seeds that are watered frequently are those that will grow strong.”

Close your eyes and wander through the garden of your mind. Start at the center, what is there? Invoke your senses to experience your garden. Move around. Notice where love is, compassion, creativity, joy, prosperity, peace, and all you can think of. Take time to experience the beauty of your garden to the fullest.

Carole Radziwill said: *“The very best relationship has a gardener and a flower. The gardener nurtures and the flower blooms.”*

And Ernest Holmes said: *“Guard well this garden of your mind. It is God’s garden of your soul. It is your Garden of Eden wherein you may grow your fondest desires and hopes, blossoming into fulfillment. Or, if you permit, the weeds of destruction, fear and doubt will choke out the beauty of hope until despair alone remains. Watch carefully, then this garden of your soul. Plant there only seeds of happiness, of joy, of peace, and of good will.”*

Now, move to an area where what is there struggles with weeds or lack of nutrients. Observe with curiosity and a gentle mind. Again, invoke all your senses to take in this experience. What do you see? Hear? Smell?

Continue to wander through your garden. What surprises you? Take a moment to think of some virtue or essence that you haven’t visited yet—maybe gratitude or forgiveness or something else? Seek out something you planted long ago—maybe as a child even, What does it look like? How has it grown?

Take a few minutes to journal about your garden.

Again, from Holmes: *“It may be necessary to cultivate your garden, to uproot the weeds and straighten out the rows, planting new seeds—new ideas, broader visions and deeper realizations of life. New aspirations must be a conviction of faith, the beauty of wholeness and the quietness of peace. Watch your garden carefully, guard it patiently, waiting for a new harvest—for you shall reap what you have sown.”*

And lastly from Curtis Tyrone Jones: “Keep planting new seeds until your mind becomes the earth that gives birth to new worlds.”

Either allow free journaling for 5-10 minutes or invite group members to answer the following questions.

Identify:

- What are weeds of belief that need to be removed from your garden?
- What are the strongest plants you’ve grown?
- What plants need more nurturing?
- What new seed is being called to be planted?

Process Two: Circle Of Excellence

(adapted from *NLP Comprehensive*)

This process is usually done standing, but it can be done with chairs if it supports your well-being. The process will use the words ‘step into’ so if one is sitting, move into another chair or imagine stepping. You can do this on your own or have a partner read this to you, then switch when the process is complete.

For this exercise, we will be working with a specific situation where you would like to be more resourceful—where you could do something with greater ease or competence, or you could Be more at peace with yourself. For this AIF, feel free to pick being more ‘rooted’ or ‘having wings’. We will use ‘rooted’ for this example.

Once you have chosen that situation, imagine there are 2 Circles in front of you. Standing in front of the circles, take a Deep Breath and relax. Let yourself remember, or bring to mind, a specific situation where you were being or feeling Rooted. Where you were safe and resourceful. Or you can choose to think of someone that you know of who is resourceful in this area. Imagine you, or that person, is in one of the circles. The circle can be as close or far as is comfortable. As you experience that even more deeply, step into that circle and ask yourself the noted questions/comments and write down (or have a partner write down) your response.

QUESTION: Now that you are really experiencing being rooted, pay attention to your body, like your posture or breathing. Are you aware of how your body feels? Is there an environment, like a place or somewhere in nature, in that situation. You could notice colors, sharpness of images; whether the things you see are moving or are a still picture.

RESPONSE:



QUESTION: Listen for sounds of voices, your own voice or the voices of others. What is being said, what tones or pitches do you notice? Are there fragrances or even tastes?

RESPONSE:

QUESTION: You may be able to pick up on an energy or level of activity Does the pleasure of the experience increase if you bring in a color or feel the presence of a mentor/guide?
Just notice and relax.

RESPONSE:

Say to yourself: *“I am thankful for recognizing the resources that I already have, or recognize and appreciate in another.”*

Please step out of the circle for just a few minutes.

Standing in front of the circles, take a Deep Breath and relax. Think of that specific situation where you want to be more rooted, to have more clarity, or to feel better about a situation or experience. As you experience that, step into the 2nd circle.

QUESTION: Now that you are experiencing that situation where you would like to be more rooted, **briefly** scan your body or your representation of the experience and notice what might be there. Notice your posture, body sensations and breathing. You could notice colors, sharpness of images around you; whether the things you see are moving or are a still picture.

RESPONSE:

QUESTION: Listen for sounds of your voice of the voices or others. What is being said, what tones or pitches do you notice? There may be fragrances or tastes. Do you notice an energy level? Just notice briefly and relax.

RESPONSE:

Step out of the 2nd Circle for just a minute and relax.

Now step into the 1st Circle again where you experience being rooted.

QUESTION: Pick just one or two of the resources you notice are most present in the 1st circle. It could be your body language, like posture, breathing, how your body feels, the environment in that situation. You could notice colors, sharpness of images; whether the things you see are moving or are a still picture. Now, take one of those resources and step out of the 1st circle and step quickly into the 2nd Circle. Add that resource (e.g., color, breathing, posture) to your experience in the 2nd Circle. Let it radiate through your experience in the 2nd Circle.

RESPONSE:

QUESTION: Step out of the 2nd Circle and back into the 1st Circle. Listen for sounds of voices, your own or the voices or others. What is being said, what tones or pitches do you notice? Are there fragrances or tastes or temperatures? You may even be able to pick up on an energy or level of activity.

RESPONSE:

QUESTION: Now, take that resource and step out of the 1st circle and step quickly into the 2nd Circle. Add that resource (energy level, sound, fragrance) to your experience in the 2nd Circle. Let it radiate through your experience in the 2nd Circle.

RESPONSE:



You can repeat this process one more time, if you would like to add another resource. Each time taking a single resource from the 1st Circle into the 2nd Circle.

QUESTION: What do you notice about your experience now, of the situation where you invited in more resources? If you would like, you can create a symbol that represents this integration and resourcefulness? What would that be? You can put that symbol somewhere safe in or on your body—or find an external representation that you can place somewhere that you can easily access it.

RESPONSE:

Say to yourself: *“I am thankful for recognizing the resources that I already have, or recognize and appreciate in another. I know I can call on them any time that I would find them useful. They are part of who I am and all I can Be.”*

Note: this can also be done by imagining someone who has the resources you want and using your imagination of their experience.

The process can also be done by building a bridge between the circles and letting them integrate. It is not uncommon for the circles to also move closer or even cross over a bit on their own.





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Sufi Tradition:

Tending the Garden of Your Heart

From *“The Sufi Book of Life”* Pathway #88

Al-Ghani (One of the 99 names of God)

“When you are guided to this pathway, take the opportunity to feel your heart as a garden in which everything you need is present for growing. See yourself living in this garden.”

Here are two meditations adapted from *The Sufi Book of Life*:

Meditation #1:

Find a place to meditate just after sunset. As you settle in, begin to breathe in and out through your heart, focusing on your heart as you breathe. Place your forehead on the earth, releasing all impressions of the day, both positive and negative, that you are ready to release. Allow your entire being to breathe and feel the support from earth underneath your forehead, deeply throughout your entire body, all the way to the level of your bones. Release any thoughts about what you have or have not accomplished and simply rest there, as if held in the arms of the Beloved.

Meditation #2:

Use your breath to center your attention in your heart. Breathing in and out, feel and sense the area around your heart and simply breathe in and out in a relaxed way. On your next inhale, breathe in and say Ya GhaN-ee and feel it resonating through you, reaching the very boundaries of the garden of your heart. Feel the sound of the long “ee” as if it is the sacred Life Force activating growth within your garden. Through the eyes of your heart begin to draw to mind the boundaries within your own life. What lies outside your heart? What grows within?

As you softly chant Ya GhaN-ee to yourself, imagine that it is supporting you in creating healthy boundaries within your life, within the garden of your heart. Any energy that is ready to be released is released, any energy that is ready to be embraced, is embraced.

After a few more breaths, release the meditation, feeling and knowing that you have tended to the garden of your heart with loving care.



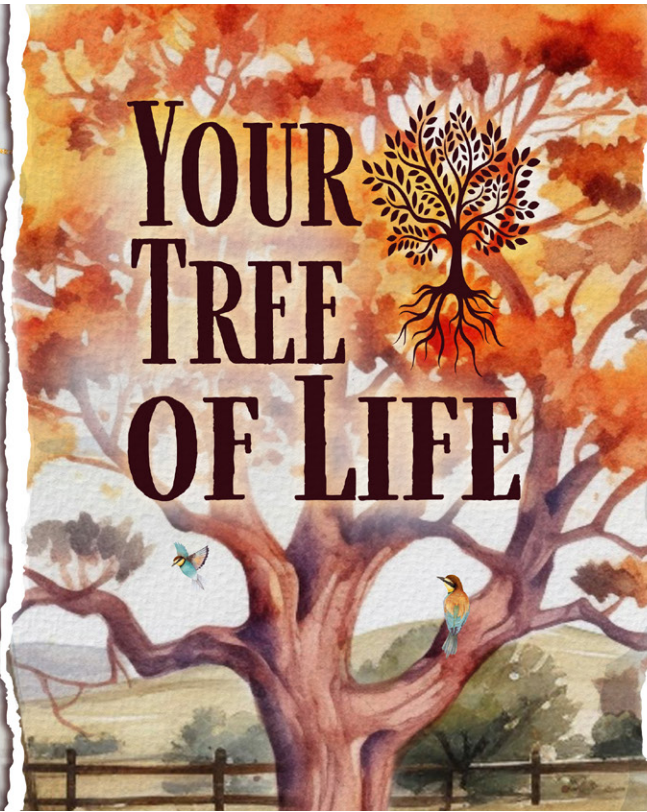
AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

As I meditate upon the garden of my life, I feel the answer to my prayers growing from the rich inspired soil of a Holy and creative Spirit. I accept the best of these fruits. I trust the process of their growing. I have faith in my own becoming. Anything that does not belong in my garden is pruned, and the Spirit reinvigorates and tends to my soul. And so it is. Amen.

AFFIRMATION

As I tend to the garden of my soul, Spirit takes care of my life.

YOUR TREE OF LIFE



When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees, especially the honey locust, equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines, they give off such hints of gladness. I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself, in which I have goodness and discernment, and never hurry through the world but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves and call out, "Stay awhile." The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, 'It's simple,' they say, 'and you too have come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.'"

~ Mary Oliver

The Tree of Life provides a strong metaphor for how to live a whole and growing life unified with all other living things and with Spirit. It has been spoken about across time and cultures. It is represented in song and story, in literature, music, film, and art. It has given inspiration to people all over the globe.

This week we take time to explore the depth it can bring into or perception of our own

personal life. We use our senses and our creative imagination to make our own meaning for what this symbol has to offer, dipping into the furthering of our own balance and harmony with all of creation. We explore the whole of the tree, from its roots embedded in Mother Earth to the green and growing tips of its branches. We discover the parallels of the tree within our own faith path, Science of Mind and Spirit.

Here Are Some Of The Ways The Tree Of Life Shows Up In Our World

The Tree of Life is a symbol which has appeared in many cultures and across time. It represents the interconnectedness of all and the balance and harmony manifest throughout the universe.

- In the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah, the ten emanations or attributes of God, the sefirot, are pictured on the Tree of Life. These sefirot show a pathway to enlightenment. They are a means of connecting one more deeply to the Divine. It is believed that contemplating the 10 ways that God shows up in the world, we draw ever closer and are eventually unified. In Kabbalistic thought, within every soul is a hidden part of God waiting to be revealed. God and Creation are held to be on a continuum which goes on eternally.

- In the Christian tradition the Tree of Life shows up in the Bible in several contexts. In Genesis, the Tree of Life is at the center of the Garden of Eden. A source of eternal life, it contained all knowledge. In the “*story*,” Adam and Eve were forbidden to eat the fruits of the tree. The Tree of Life has also been seen as a symbol of salvation through belief in Jesus the Christ. In some Christian tradition, the Tree of Life is seen as a symbol of the cross, the central symbol of Christianity. In the book of Revelation, the tree grows in the city of “*New Jerusalem*.” This is a place of eternal life and complete joy, a fulfillment of the promise of eternal life.
 - In Sacred Geometry, the Tree of Life is considered to be a diagram that encodes the blueprint of creation and the evolution of the universe. As a symbol of balance and harmony, it is often used in meditation and contemplation for the purpose of spiritual growth.
 - The Tree of Life has also been associated with the seven chakras, the energy centers in the body. The roots represent our connection to the Divine, while the branches hold the chakras. It is thought by some that by contemplating the tree of life symbol, one can work toward balancing and aligning the chakras for being centered in well-being.
 - In Buddhism, the Tree of Life is known as the Bodhi Tree. This is where Gautama Buddha sat and attained enlightenment. So it is believed that under the Bodhi Tree, one can attain peace and knowledge by divesting oneself of worldly desires. In Buddhism, the Tree of life is often associated with the concept of the three roots: the Buddha, the dharma, (Buddhist teachings,) and the Sangha, (the community of believers.) Also a symbol of spiritual growth, it represents our connection to the natural world and the interconnectedness of all living things.
 - In Hinduism, the Tree of Life represents the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The branches can represent the three states of being, the physical, the mental, and the spiritual. In Hindu mythology, it is connected with the king of gods, Indra, who is considered to be its guardian. The tree nourishes and protects all of life.
 - In Islam the Tree of Life is spoken of in the Qur’an as a tree that exists in Paradise and nourishes all believers. It is a connector between the physical and the spiritual. In one of the verses, the Surah Al-Rahman, it is written, “*And in Paradise are two gardens with the gates open to them. In both are two springs flowing, and in both are two kinds of fruit, and a tree of life, whose roots are in one garden and its branches in the other.*”
 - There are many other references to the Tree of Life from Egyptian mythology, in literature, in art, film, and music. All of these point to similar meanings of nurturance, connectivity of all living things and the cycle of birth and death.
- In our Science of Mind faith tradition, Ernest Holmes helps us understand the significance of “*pruning our tree*.” He tells us, “*It is important that we release all thoughts as well as things that clutter up our lives. We are reminded that there is something resembling the Divine in our intelligence and fearlessness of the organs of our body, in the way they take that which is necessary to their sustenance and well-being and release that which is not needed.*” (Ernest Holmes, *Science of Mind*, 232:4)

KEY POINTS FOR THE WEEK

- All of the major religions of the world have references to the Tree of Life. Many have images and practices which use this strong symbol. We all can make meaning from this metaphor. We can use it to enhance our spiritual practice. We can remind ourselves that our roots are the roots of faith. We can evaluate our own lives by looking at how we feed our tree, how we choose to expand our branches, how we create bloom and fruit with our attention and love, and how we trim what is no longer nurturing us.
- The Tree of Life is a strong symbol of the connectedness of everything. The branches are intertwined and they are all connected to the stalwart trunk outgrowing from the



roots. Within this symbol, we find our own connectedness, our own Oneness. And we can gather inspiration from this model of patience, beauty, and strength.

- The Tree of Life is a reminder of the balance and harmony of the universe. We can join with this dance of all life by spending time in nature.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

The greatest attribute of God is Love. The Tree of Life is located in the very depth of our soul. The most perfect and abundant fruit that grows and ripens is Life giving Love; it is the great healing force in the world. Love never fails to meet every demand of the human heart. The Divine principal of Love may be used to eliminate every sorrow, infirmity, in-harmony, ignorance and all mistakes of mankind. Love is God; eternal, limitless, changeless, infinite. It is the pulse of the world, the heartbeat of the Universe.

~ Baird T. Spalding

Upon suffering and beyond suffering: the Red nation shall rise again and it shall be a blessing for a sick world. A world filled with broken promises, selfishness and separations. A world longing for light again. I see a time of Seven Generations when all the colors of mankind will gather under the Sacred Tree of Life and the whole Earth will become one circle again.

~ Crazy Horse

The Tree of Life shines where the Spirit never dies and the bright light of salvation shines in dark and empty skies.

~ Bob Dylan

As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications.

~ Charles Darwin



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. In your own tree of life, what is inviting expansion? Where would you like to grow some new leaves and eventually, fruits?
2. What is there in your current life that feels like it needs trimming or eliminating?
3. What is your particular way of discerning what to expand and what to prune?



OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One

(from Mark Nepo's book: *The Book of Awakenings*)

*Wrapped Within young Leaves:
the sound of water.*

~ Soseki

This delicate observation by this Japanese poet is filled with the quiet hope that embedded in our nature, even as we begin, is our gift already unfolded. Embedded in the seed is the blossom. Embedded in the womb is the child fully grown. Embedded in the impulse to care is the peace of God realized. Embedded in the edge of risk and fear is the authenticity that makes life worth living.

Wrapped within young leaves is the sound of water that will nourish them once they have opened. It's already there prompting them to unfold and grow. To believe that this is possible requires a faith in currents larger than any one mind can envision. But that is not such a difficult thing to accept, for as dust owes its path to the wind, we as human beings, are asked to acknowledge that something larger encircles us and prompts us to unfold.

There is a gravity of spirit that pulls the essence of who we are into being. Our job, like all sister creatures, is to find the abundance of air and water and light, and to unfold what is already within us.

- Sit quietly and imagine your heart is a young leaf, green and tender, wrapped unto itself.
- As you breathe, feel the water of life already in your veins.
- Now, as you breathe, stand and outstretch your arms, and feel who you are unfold.

Process #2: Be the Tree – A Guided Meditation

Stand or sit quietly, in a balanced position.

Take some deep belly breaths and release them fully until you feel quietened and centered.

Now begin feeling your roots. They are embedded in the rich loam of the earth. Perhaps they travel straight down directly into the very core of the earth. Or maybe your roots curl and reach out under the surface of the ground joining with the roots of other trees. Stay for a moment, breathing and feeling the sensation of your roots. These roots are your own network, your own foundation. They are your roots of faith. Through them, feel the presence of Spirit. Take as long as you desire sensing your rootedness.

When you feel the urge to move on, travel your consciousness upward and join it with your trunk, strong and solid. Notice the texture and color of its bark. Notice its girth. Your trunk is easily able to support the branches above. It knows its Divine purpose and its capabilities. Your trunk is the connecting force between your roots and your branchings. It stands its place calmly and is faithful to who and what it is, even in the storm.

Now start noticing the branchings your trunk is holding. Create them any way you want to. There may be many or few. They may first divide into two, or perhaps they have split into many, a small brigade of branches. Are they bare or are they sprouted out with leaves, flowers, or fruit. Sense the season, sense the colors and fragrances. Spent a moment seeing and feeling the fullness of your tree-ness. Just breathe and let it show you what it wants you to know.

Now see if there are any places where the branches are too thickly crowded together. Are there any places that have lost their vitality and need trimming? What can bring these areas back into health and balance? Something inside you knows what no longer needs to be there, what is no longer adding to the health and vitality of the rest of your tree-ness. Do what is necessary in your own way.... Cut out the dead wood. This may need to be done with a forceful motion, or perhaps you are gently separating the leaves and twigs that are no longer serving. Maybe you are just allowing yourself to stand in the wind and letting the parts that are no longer contributing to your wellness break off and fly away or fall to the ground around you. Find your own way of letting them go. As you release these parts, spend a moment thanking them for whatever they have given you. Now rest in your breath a moment before going on.

Allow yourself to feel the upward urgings somewhere in your tree. Is this happening down in the roots of faith? Do they need more nourishment and sustenance in order to grow? Or perhaps you feel the voice of your trunk wanting to put on more weight, grow in circumference, add rings of wisdom. Perhaps it wants to grow taller and gift you with the "looks-far" perspective. Thank your trunk for giving you the information you need, and move on to your branches.

Feel your branches begin to divide as cells in human organisms divide and multiply. Breathe in the clear, pure air and then exhale green-ness. See the tiny shiny leaves form and then increase in size. What blossoms want to form, and then what fruits? Allow your tree to expand and flourish. See the twig-tips reach upward

to the sky. These are your former dreams and imaginings coming into fruition. Welcome in the sweetness of new growth.

Stay there in the meadow in your treeness. Soak in the beautiful satisfaction that enters your entire being. When you feel full and complete, thank your tree for all the insight and sensation it has given you. You may want to take a little time returning to your human form.

When you are fully there in your human body, spend some time with your journal. Write down anything that feels important for you to know or remember. You may want to write about your feelings, your insights, details about what you want to release and want to bring in. Or, you may just want to sit in silence for these few moments.

Now we are going to break into dyads. Each person take a turn to share whatever you wish about this experience. You may want to share about the process and what you experienced. You may want to share any "aha" you may have gained. You may want to share a step you realized you need to take and how you will fit that into the mosaic of your life.





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Jewish Tradition: Practicing the Sabbath

The Sabbath, or Shabbat, the Jewish ancient practice of rest, gives us a rich template for connecting within ourselves and setting aside space with discipline and love in order to get in touch with the Infinite nature of God.

Qadosh, the Hebrew word for “*holy*” comes from a root that means, “*apart, separate, withdrawn.*” In Judaism, honoring the Sabbath is to devote time set apart for that which is holy. Sabbath rituals create a boundary from daily life in which we can truly non-negotiably grow our spiritual selves, community connection, and the depth that comes from spiritually practicing together.

Choose a couple of ways you can honor Shabbat this week: light candles at sunset on Friday; refrain from work/computer/driving or some other activities on Saturday; offer prayers of gratitude and intention at sundown on Saturday to re-enter the normal life rhythm.

Jewish prayers of reverence/devotion: Integrate one or two of these simple, cornerstone Jewish prayers in your daily practice; they can be spoken or sung.

Healing Prayer: *Ana elna r'fanala* – “Please God, please heal ‘her’”

Remembrance of the One: *Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu Adonai Echad* – “Hear O Israel, the lord your God, the lord is One”

Prayer Upon Waking: *Modeh ani lefanekha melekh chai vekayam shehechezarta bi nishmahti b'chemlah, rabah emunatekha.* – I give thanks to you, God, for You have returned my soul to me; abundant is Your faithfulness!

Ideas for Observing the Sabbath: Traditionally, Sabbath begins in the evening and ends at dinner time the following day. If you are limited by time, find an uninterrupted 4 hours that you can set aside and try not to make anything happen. Let go of internet surfing, email, housework, shopping and errands. Perhaps fill these hours with the following to bring about delight within you:

- Napping
- Praying
- Silence
- Walking in nature
- Reading
- Scripture
- Music
- Creativity
- Spending time with friends and family
- Anything that supports you in remembering God, the Divine within you
- Worship/Devotion/Spiritual Practices



AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

In this moment I stand absolutely still going deep inside and knowing that the Source of all life surrounds me and holds me in love. All around me the busyness of the world buzzes. But I am the Tree of Life. I stand rooted here on the earth, strong and quiet. The energy of the Divine courses through me.

I am blessed with the knowing of what within me needs to be fertilized and nurtured so that I may extend my unique way of loving out to all sentient beings around me. I see clearly what within me needs to be trimmed back so that I can breathe with ease and simply grow. I act on this knowledge with the simple faith that Life is showing me how to walk my path.

I accept all the changes the seasons bring. And I feel the sense of being carried through all challenges that come my way.

I am the tree, standing tall, knowing I am connected to all living things. The sweet Grace of Gratitude fills my heart and I release this prayer with a full heart. And so it is. Amen.

AFFIRMATION

I am connected and unified with all of Life. I stand strong in my faith, knowing in each moment that I am opening to the guidance I need so that I may nurture what needs to grow and trim back what is no longer needed. I am refreshed and invigorated.

ADVENTURE
IN FAITH 23
WEEK FOUR

THE MUSTARD SEED

SPIRITUALITY
FROM THE
GROUND UP

Jesus used the mustard seed as a symbol of faith. The Buddha used it as a symbol of acceptance.

One of the great things about exploring other faiths isn't just in how they see things the same, but the same things, from different perspectives.

You can practice the faith of Christ, the discernment of the Buddha, the wisdom of your ancestors, and the wonder of your children.

Your faith isn't a combination of many, it is one faith, uplifted by the wisdom of so many.

KEY POINTS:

- Faith is about possibilities, but it can also be about acceptance.
- Even the smallest amount of faith, can demonstrate powerfully in our lives.
- Living from faith is a powerful creative action and sets in motion the creative process.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

*Don't wait for someone to bring you flowers.
Plant your own garden and decorate your own soul.*

~ Luther Burbank

To plant a garden is to believe in tomorrow.

~ Audrey Hepburn

*What was once a tiny seed of belief for me has grown into the
Tree of life, so if your faith is a little tested in this or any season,
I invite you to lean on mine... Hope on. Journey on.
Honestly acknowledge your questions and your concerns,
but first and forever fan the flame of your faith,
because all things are possible to them that believe.*

~ Jeffrey R. Holland

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. Have you ever practiced a Sabbath day or Sabbath hours? What was the experience like for you this past week?
2. The mustard seed, as well as being a cooking ingredient, has multiple spiritual meanings: Faith, growth, luck, support, healing, protection, purity, and prosperity. What does the mustard seed symbolize to you?

Read the parable of the sower:

“Then he told them many things in parables, saying: A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.”

3. Where does the hardpacked soil of the pathway show up in your thoughts and beliefs? What about the rocky places with little soil? What are the weeds that choke out and overwhelm what you sow? Where is the good soil in your life? What seeds have you planted that are flourishing?



OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One

Read the following parables about the mustard seed.

Buddhist:

A woman had a son, who became ill and died. The woman was so distraught she carried the baby around, refusing to accept what had happened. People in her village urged her to give the child a decent burial. But she refused.

Finally, someone suggested she go see the Buddha. He could perform miracles and could perhaps bring him back to life.

The woman traveled a long way to seek an audience with the great teacher. She told him her story.

“Can you bring my son back to me?” She asked.

The Buddha nodded. There was a process for this, he told her.

“You must take a mustard seed and give it to any family you find that hasn’t lost someone.”

The woman was elated.

She took the mustard seed to the first house she could find. She asked the man at the door if anyone there had died.

“Yes, my wife died, leaving me to care for our children,” he answered.

The woman moved on to another house, where a child had died. She went from one house to another, but each one had a loss—a mother, father, aunt, uncle.

The woman went back home and buried her son. After that, she became a follower of the Buddha.

Christianity:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.”

What if anything do these two parables have in common or in difference with one another? Which resonates more with you? What do they tell us about faith?

Process Two: Meditation

This is unusual in meditation, but I invite you to become mindful of any doubts you have about yourself.

Doubts about achieving what you want to accomplish.

Doubts about your abilities to achieve your goals or be the kind of person you want to be.

Doubts about your worthiness to be loved and prized.

Know that this is a safe place to listen to those doubts. To hear them.

What I want you to do, is to not just hear what they say, but listen to what they sound like.

What does the voice sound like that speaks these doubts?

Is it your own voice? If so, is it your voice present or past?

Perhaps it is someone else's voice?

Now, I invite you to listen to the voice of encouragement in yourself?

Encouragement to have faith that the seeds you have planted in your life will grow.

Encouragement that you are a good and capable person.

Encouragement that you are love-worthy and a significant person in other's lives.

What does this voice sound like?

Is it your own voice? Is it the voice of spirit guides, known or unknown to you?

Now, listen to the part of you, and it is there, that with absolute confidence, knows the truth of who you are, the truth of why you are here, and who you are in the Great Spirit.

This part of you knows you can accomplish anything while also knowing you don't have to accomplish a thing to be whole.

This part of you knows how love-worthy and giving you are and how precious you are.

This part of you knows the power of your presence, your word, and your truth.

How big is this part of you?

Is it a beach ball, or a baseball? An oak tree, or a mustard seed.

No matter what, imagine for a moment, that the rest of this day, you lived from this inner knowing. You spoke from it. You chose from it. You ate from it. You listened from it.

How would you live differently?

Even if the size of a mustard seed, if you lived from this faith, it would grow like wildfire in your life.

Just one day, and your entire life could change for the better, forever.

To close with a thought from Thomas Merton:
"Every moment and every event of every man's life on earth plants something in his soul. For just as the wind carries thousands of winged seeds, so each moment brings with it germs of spiritual vitality that come to rest imperceptibly in the minds and wills of men. Most of the unnumbered seeds perish and are lost, because men are not prepared to receive them: for such seeds as these cannot spring up anywhere except in the good soil of freedom, spontaneity, and love."





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Buddhist Tradition: Thich Nhat Hanh's Walking Meditation

Walking on the Earth

Walk slowly, in a relaxed way. When you practice this way, your steps are those of the most secure person on earth. Feel the gravity that makes every step attach to the earth. With each step, you are grounded on the earth.

One way to practice walking meditation is to breathe in and take one step, and focus all your attention on the sole of your foot. If you have not arrived fully, 100 percent in the here and the now, don't take the next step. I'm sure you can take a step like that because there is buddhanature in you. Buddhanature is the capacity of being aware of what is going on. It is what allows you to recognize what you are doing in the current moment and to say to yourself, I am alive, I am taking a step. Anyone can do this. There is a buddha in every one of us, and we should allow the buddha to walk.

While walking, practice conscious breathing by counting steps. Notice each breath and the number of steps you take as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Don't try to control your breathing. Allow your lungs as much time and air as they need, and simply notice how many steps you take as your lungs fill up and how many you take as they empty, mindful of both your breath and your steps. The link is the counting.

When you walk uphill or downhill, the number of steps per breath will change. Always follow

the needs of your lungs. You may notice that your exhalation is longer than your inhalation. You might find that you take three steps during your in-breath and four steps during your out-breath, or two steps, then three steps. If this is comfortable for you, please enjoy practicing this way. You can also try making the in-breath and the out-breath the same length, so that you take three steps with your in-breath and three with your out-breath. Keep walking and you will find the natural connection between your breath and your steps.

Don't forget to practice smiling. Your half-smile will bring calm and delight to your steps and your breath, and help sustain your attention. After practicing for half an hour or an hour, you will find that your breath, your steps, your counting, and your half-smile all blend together in a marvelous balance of mindfulness. Each step grounds us in the solidity of the earth. With each step we fully arrive in the present moment.

Walking Meditation Poem

*I take refuge in Mother Earth.
Every breath, every step manifests our love.
Every breath brings happiness.
Every step brings happiness.
I see the whole cosmos in the earth.*

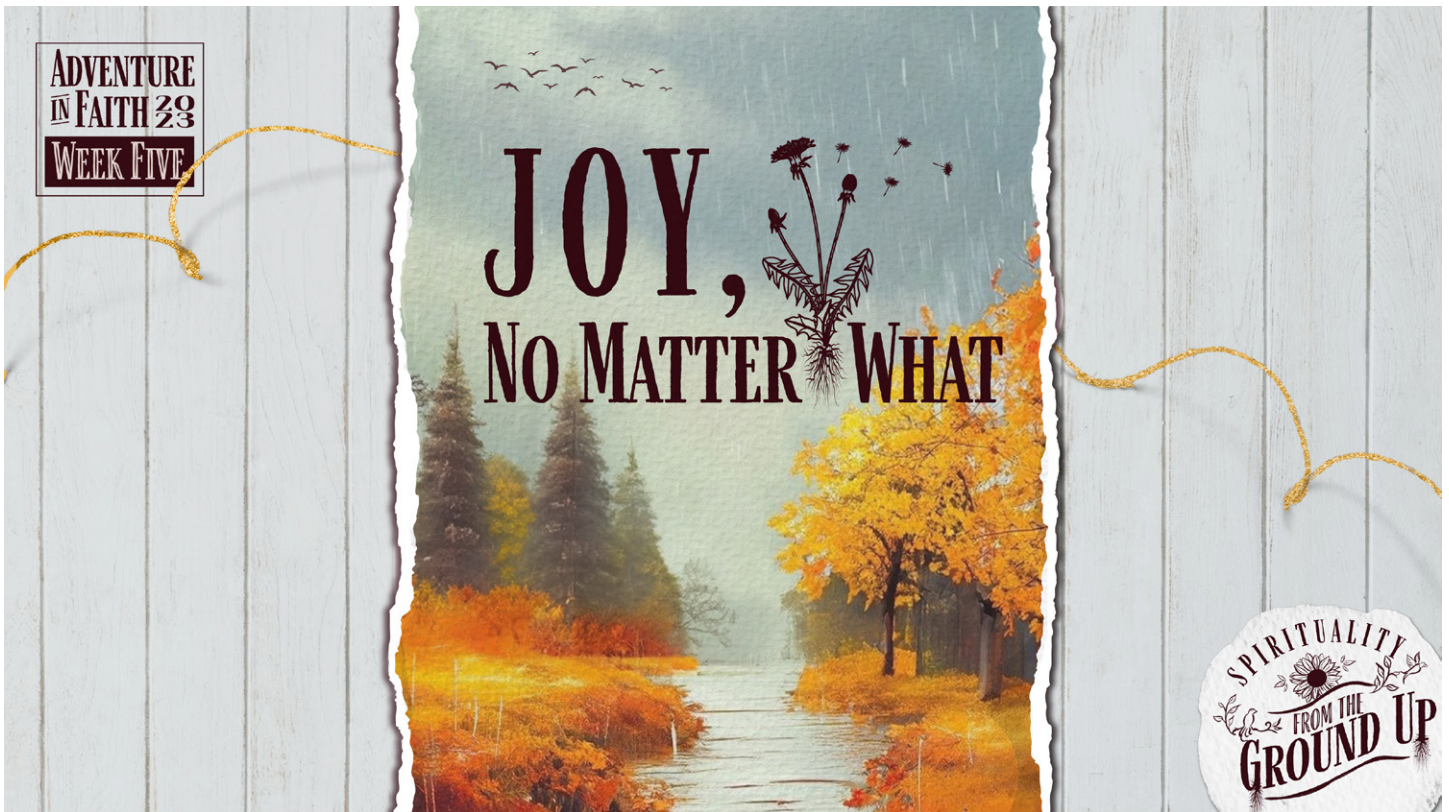


AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

All I need is the tiniest amount of faith, to live from, to believe from, to choose from, to think from, to listen from. As I live from this faith; faith in myself, faith in my purpose, faith in what I am called to become, I know living from this faith creates such wellbeing and thriving. Not just for me, but for all whom I love around me. I am so very grateful. And so it is. Amen.

AFFIRMATION

*I take refuge in Mother Earth.
Every breath, every step manifests our love.
Every breath brings happiness.
Every step brings happiness.
I see the whole cosmos in the earth.*



Joseph Campbell encourages us to participate joyfully in the sorrows of the world. Living a spirit-centered life when we hear of other's suffering, we are called to practice compassion. When suffering is inflicted upon us, we are called to practice forgiveness. When the mental world of humankind seems flipped up-side down and shaken sideways so that we seem to not even recognize our own reflection, we are called not to go down in the muck with the sensationalists, pundits, and cynics but to rise to the level of those who are most spiritually "awake" and refuse to live from anything but joy.

KEY POINTS:

- Even when challenged physical, emotionally, or spiritually, we can still choose to live in joy.
- Joy, born of the Spirit, cannot be destroyed by that of the "world."
- There are particular ways in which we experience meaning. Suffering can be one of those.

The Shift to Experiencing Portals To Joy

By Dodi Jackson

There is a well-spring of joy in each of us. It rests as an undercurrent, a river of Love and inspiration flowing without end from Spirit. On the in-taking of our first breath in this human body, Joy was at the ready and eager to be present and brought into this new beingness. We never have to “create” this Joy; it is our Birthright. It simply resides within, our whole life through, waiting to be seen and known. This does not mean we are always feeling it. As we walk our human road, so many sensations flood us. We experience times of uncomfortableness in our bodies, situations that arise and pull us off center. We ride the roller coaster of thoughts and emotions. Certainly, this is the nature of us as Spiritual Beings having a human experience. Conditions come in waves, and we learn little by little how to navigate those waves. And yet the wise ones in every faith path speak of this Joy. They remind us of the power and the sweetness of it. They offer inspiration to lift us. They show us the stardust paths they have walked. So rather than needing to “create” joy in our lives, we need to punch holes in whatever barriers may exist that keep us from seeing and feeling it. The “portals of joy” are like windows and doors through which we can glimpse it, touch it, and allow it to touch us. We can walk through the invisible membranes that keep us from what we really want and need. It is for each of us as human beings to discover which ways work best for us to do this. This week, in our Adventures in Faith explorations, we seek to articulate for ourselves how to know that current of joy that lies beneath the surface of our lives. We do not seek to deny or turn away from the very real challenges in our lives. But we make the shift to trust the undercurrent and expand our repertoire in accessing it.

QUOTES FOR THE JOURNEY

I went to a bookstore and asked the saleswoman, ‘Where’s the self-help section?’ She said if she told me, it would defeat the purpose.

~ Steven Wright

You are an eternal being now on the pathway of endless unfoldment, never less but always more yourself. Life is not static. It is forever dynamic, forever creating—not something done and finished, but something alive, awake and aware. There is something inside you that sings the song of eternity. Listen to it. There is an eternal springtime of your soul. Always rising but never setting is the sun of your destiny.

~ Ernest Holmes

Thou wilt shew me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

~ Psalm 16:11



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



1. What has been a key insight you have gathered in our time together?
2. Who is someone in our group who has inspired you?
3. What interfaith practice are you most likely to continue to practice and explore?



OPTIONAL PROCESSES

Process One: Frankl's Three Ways To Experience Meaning

Viktor Frankl talked about three ways to find meaning in life.

- By performing a deed or creating something-taking action.
- By coming into contact with someone or experiencing something.
- By experiencing unavoidable suffering, and the attitude we take toward it.

The first may be defined as living for a cause greater than one's self. This can be answering a calling to serve a community, or towards a career, or in service to others.

The second way may be defined as loving others, as putting others needs above your own.

The third is the transcendence we find when we cannot change a situation, but in turn change ourselves.

Frankl shares the following: *"Does this not bring to mind the story of Death in Teheran? A rich and mighty Persian once walked in his garden with one of his servants. The servant cried that he had just encountered Death, who had threatened him. He begged his master to give him his fastest horse so that he could make haste and flee to Teheran, which he could reach that same evening. The master consented and the servant galloped off on the horse. On returning to his house, the master*

himself met death, questioned him, "Why did you terrify and threaten my servant?" "I did not threaten him; I only showed surprise in still finding him here when I planned to meet him tonight in Teheran," said Death."

Do you agree with Frankl? Have you found meaning in these three areas?

How, if at all, can suffering teach us to live in joy?

Process Two: May I, May You

This beautiful practice comes to us from Alana Shaw, Founder and Artistic Director of "Turning the Wheel," an intergenerational dance theater company based in Boulder, Colorado.

For this exercise, we will work in pairs. So turn to a person sitting next to you. Find a place where the two of you can sit facing each other either on chairs or on the floor. Start by joining hands if this is comfortable for you. You may also just sit near each other. Spend a moment or two just breathing, allowing your breath to take you to a calm and centered place. Now you will take turns: Partner #1 begins by saying "May I" and follows that sentence stem with a statement of something she/he desires. (Example: "May I experience peace in my life.") The second person repeats the desire that has just been expressed, saying, "May you experience peace in your life." It is important to repeat the sentence exactly, if you can. Then partner #2 speaks a desire. (Example: "May I give and receive Love freely in my life.") Partner #1 repeats this wish. Take a breath or two

in between each new thought, giving it time to have weight and sink in. Now it is person #1's turn to voice a wish or desire. ("May I ...") And Person #2 will echo that, "May you..." Continue in this same way. You may be as global or as specific as you are led to be. (*May my hip heal rapidly and perfectly from the surgery, or, May I break the pattern of... or take action on...*) I have done this exercise many times with diverse groups of people. It has never failed to be a satisfying and moving experience. The whole atmosphere of the room often lifts as we offer our heartfelt affirmations to each other. People tend to allow themselves another layer of vulnerability—whatever that looks and feels like to them. This activity can easily serve as a culminating exercise which can bring a sense of closure to the group. When people slow down and eventually become silent, just breathing together, the facilitator will know it is complete. Sometimes people like to share how the process felt, or what it meant to them, or what they learned. Each group facilitator will "*read the group*" and choose a way to gently bring it to a close.

Process Three: Honoring Circle

This can be as simple as asking each participant to say something they honor about the person to their left, or as focused as highlighting one person at a time (possibly having them sit in the middle of the circle) and having each group member say something they honor about them.

This can be a meaningful closing process.





INTERFAITH PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK

(Handout)

From the Hindu Tradition:

Create a Family Altar with Chanting Practice

“God is not in the mountain, nor even in the temple, holy as It may be. God is within me, now, today, this very moment, in this breath I draw, in the eternal now and the everlasting here.”

~ Ernest Holmes

Create a Hinduism-Inspired Altar

Having an altar in your home is one way in which you can connect to the sacred and your spirituality on a daily basis. Here are some ideas on how you can create a Hinduism-inspired altar at home:

- 1. Sacred Space:** Find a place in your home where the altar will not interrupt daily life, a corner with a space where you can sit or lie down peacefully without interruption. Place a small table or a blanket in order to differentiate the sacred space for your altar.
- 2. Sacred Items:** Gather some sacred items that have meaning and that bring you feelings of peace, love, inspiration, honoring, or celebration.
- 3. Murtis (Statues):** Place murtis or statues on your altar. In Hinduism, murtis or statues of deities are placed upon the altar in order to represent the qualities that you would like to draw forth in your life or within your own heart. These statues can come from any faith tradition or culture as long as they are meaningful to you and placed with reverence and intention.

Some popular suggestions from Hinduism are the elephant-headed *Ganesha* (the remover of obstacles), *Saraswati* (the Hindu Goddess of the arts and knowledge), and *Hanuman* for his devotion and love. In the Hindu philosophy, the deities aren't considered anything outside of you but represent aspects of your own human nature.

Quan Yin is the Buddhist Goddess of compassion, for example, and can help you manifest empathy and love within your own heart. Whatever calls to you is appropriate and meaningful.

- 4. Meaningful Photos:** Photographs of ascended masters, children, or relatives help to bring you into a state of oneness with those who inspire you and have helped you come to the current moment. By adding these photos to your altar, you are celebrating those who have supported your growth, perhaps even challenged you to support you in becoming who you are today.
- 5. Mala Beads:** The altar is an excellent space to place your mala or prayer beads when you are not using them and to hold them in sacred energy for when you are ready to use them next.
- 6. Sacred Texts:** An important part of the Hindu tradition is *svadhyaya*, or study of the Self through sacred texts, or *shastras*. Any text (like the *Bible*, *The Torah*, *The Qu'ran*, *Tao Te Ching*, *The Bhagavad Gita* or any other sacred text) could have a special home on or near your altar. Make them accessible so they can be a regular part of your spiritual rituals.

7. Journal: You may feel like placing your journal or special pens near your altar. If writing is a part of your practice, keep a special journal that holds within it your blessed energy.

Your altar can be used as an integral part of your spiritual practice. With intention, it becomes a sacred space that holds the energy of devotion and reverence for your sacred practices and personal growth rituals. Prayer, ceremony, meditation, chanting, and contemplation will infuse the items in your altar space with wonderful and powerful energy that supports your returning to that state of being each time you practice there.

And, as it is now part of your home, each time you are near it, you can feel the energy and can connect with all that you are cultivating as part of your own spiritual practice.

May the space around you reflect the sacred within you!

Mantra Spiritual Practice

The word mantra comes from two Sanskrit words/syllables:

Manas or “mind” and *Trai*, the syllable that means “to protect” or “to free from.”

Therefore, a mantra is a spiritual tool used by your mind in order to free yourself from the repetitive nature of the mind or unwanted thoughts.

This week, you have the opportunity to explore and to establish a daily chanting practice. Spend five minutes per day chanting with a Hindu mantra.

There are many ways to chant mantras. You can chant by simply speaking the words aloud over and over, or you can sing the mantra out loud to yourself by making up your own melody, or you can find a chant on YouTube or the Internet to chant along while you listen to someone else singing.

Begin by setting your intention, centering yourself by taking a few deep breaths and then begin to chant.

Sometimes it is supportive to hold a mala while you are chanting, hold a bead in your hand and chant the entire mantra upon finishing move to the next bead until you have completed 108 recitations.

If you are able to do this at an altar with an image of Hindu deities, a candle burning, and/or the “Om” symbol that is included here, that would support your practice by providing a sacred focal point for your attention.

Here are some Hindu Mantras you might try:

Om Namah Shivaya

“I bow to Shiva, removing all negative energy and attracting positive energy.”

Aham Prema

“I am Divine Love”

Ohm Shanti

“Peace be with you”





AFFIRMATIVE PRAYER

“I believe that the joy of the Lord is within me, and I saturate my thinking with it this day. I have happiness in my heart and joy in my soul. I laugh and live in peace. I give joy to all whom I meet. I speak only of those things which bring joy to my friends and happiness to myself. I see my present world as heaven. I see my present family, friends, and coworkers as spiritual beings. I see God everywhere, and my joy is full. I give thanks to the unfailing presence of God for this joy in my life.”

From Ernest Holmes and Raymond Charles Barker’s *“Richer Living”*

AFFIRMATION

From Boulder, Colorado poet Elizabeth Reninger, *“And Now the Story Lives Inside You”*

*Stars Branching to infinity
Your light is a boundless celebration holds within its rapture
A thousand galaxies naked beneath every heaven you compose
A melody so fine only children and angels can hear it
As when a rising receding tide whispers its secret to miles of white sand
Each grain a phrase or syllable awakened and you who’ve walked this beach forever
Where your footprints used to be now a reflected moon
Now your own voice singing.*