

5 PRACTICES

for PEACE *and* CLARITY



BY
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introduction

How many times have you wished for the voice that would just tell you what to do?

You turn the debate around and upside down in your head, then verbally ping-pong with anyone who will listen. Like paint splatters on a canvas, there are some beautiful colors but no clear picture emerges. You throw up your hands and exhale an exaggerated, "I DON'T KNOW!"

But you *do* know.

Not the “you” that is swirling around inside your head, getting dizzy and exasperated because you’ve lost track of how many “on the other hands” there are to this decision. Rather, the You that is the still, small voice dwelling peacefully in a space deep within—untouched by chaos, noise, confusion, doubt and fear. Some call this the true self, the Self, one’s Essence or the Soul. Whatever the name, it is Wisdom, Truth and Love. It is accessible to all of us. It desires to be manifested in your body, personality and circumstances.

It is accessible, but not easy to hear; it is small because it is soft; it asks that we be still. To hear it, we must still the noise and distractions in and around us. When we quiet the mind, we notice what is happening in our mind, body and heart. By creating distance from swirling thoughts and emotions, we are able to hear what is wise, true and loving from the Spirit within.

The more we practice, the more clarity we gain about our habitual thoughts and responses, the decisions before us and our connection to others. With consistent practice, we discover the voice within, discern its nuance from other voices and trust that we can act from it—which leads to a more authentic and abundant life.

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We will explore these five contemplative practices to discover stillness:

- 1 BREATHING
- 2 VISUALIZATION
- 3 MOVEMENT
- 4 REPETITION
- 5 WRITING

To quiet the mind, sometimes we can modify an activity we already enjoy, like walking or writing. Other times we need something new or unfamiliar to open channels of awareness. I love what Richard Rohr says: “Find what contemplative practice works for you and practice like your life depends on it!”

May you discover clarity and peace.

Kim

What is “quieting the mind?”

Whether this is your first try at contemplation or you are trying again, you may have questions about “quieting the mind.” Contemplation (or meditation) is about creating some space between thoughts, but not about getting rid of them. Our wonderful, amazing minds do not have an off switch.

While contemplating, you may become sidetracked by planning, remembering, ruminating, judging, or imagining. Let go of the thought as if watching a boat float away down the river. Then return to the breath or other point of awareness. This process enables us to see that we are not our thoughts or emotions, but that we can notice, let go and return to the still space.

ONE VERY IMPORTANT FACT: beginners to contemplative practice sometimes feel like they are a boiling pot of body sensations, emotions and thoughts. This is all part of it! With consistent, regular practice, the disorientation lessens. We notice what is happening and offer ourselves kindness as we return to the exercise, just as we would if we were teaching a puppy how to “stay.”

The fruit of the practice is often first noticed outside of our times of contemplation. By learning to return within the meditation, we train our minds to return to the present during other times of busyness and stress in our lives.



practice one

Breathing

The most basic contemplative practice is paying attention to one's breath. When we pay attention to the breath, we slow down and pause. In the pause, we can create distance between ourselves and the distractions, noise or turmoil. The pause helps us remember what it is that we really want. While this practice can be done when you intentionally sit for a few minutes, it is also useful when suddenly faced with a tense situation, or when an immediate decision is required.



1

You may set a timer at the beginning of the practice so you can easily choose the duration, usually 5–20 minutes. Find a relatively distraction-free place to sit. Sit in a comfortable but upright position with feet flat on the ground, hands on the thighs.*



2

Close your eyes. Notice the sensation of your feet flat on the ground, your buttocks on the chair, your hands resting on your thighs. By allowing yourself to be in this space at this time, you are being present. You may desire to take a fuller breath or two and sigh it out, feeling yourself sink deeper into the chair as the shoulders soften.



3

Pay attention to your breath. Notice where you feel the sensation of your breath most acutely. Is it in the swirling around the nostrils, in the throat, in the sound of the breath or in the movement of the chest or abdomen? You may find it helpful to place your hand on the belly or the chest to feel the movement of the breath.



4


Allow the natural rhythm of your breath, continuing to pay attention to the place you notice it most. Follow the breath like this as long as you desire. When you catch yourself thinking or becoming distracted, come back to the breath gently and with kindness. There is no judgment in returning.



5

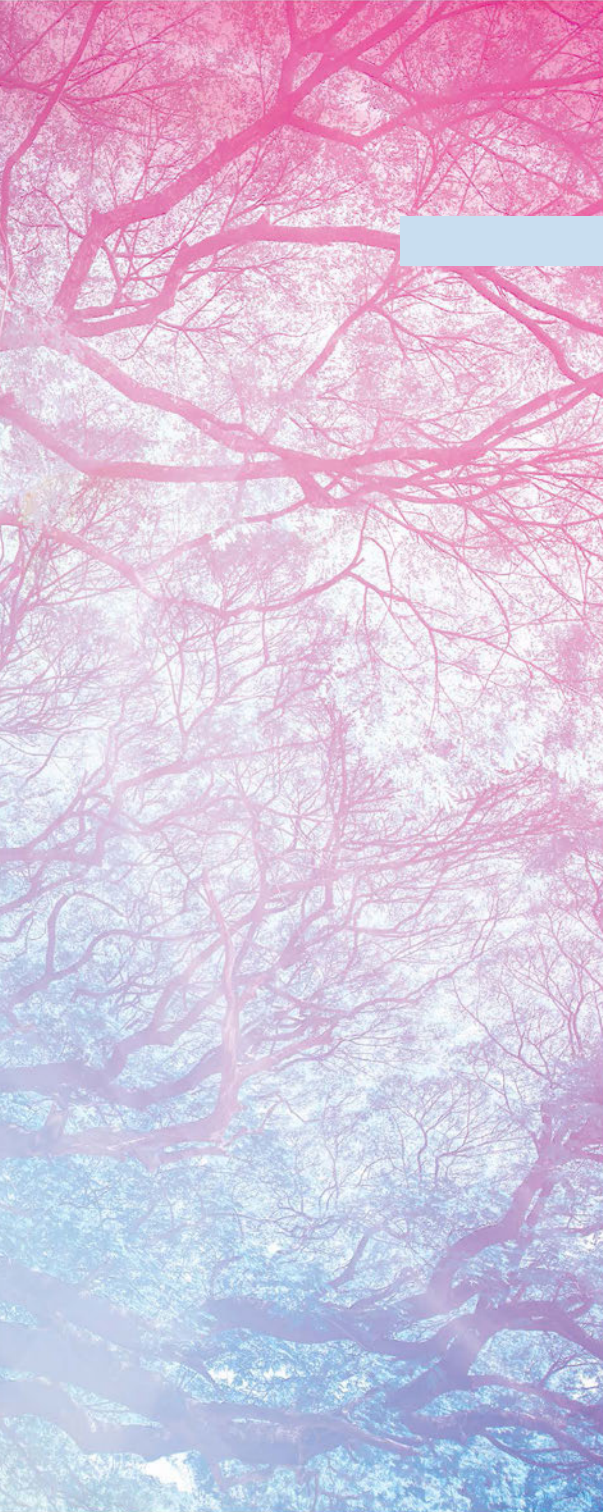
When finished, sit for a few moments with eyes closed or in a soft gaze. Notice how the body and mind feel. Grounded? Centered? Clear? Spacious? Relaxed?

*See following page.



Breath practice is foundational to many other contemplative practices as it grounds us in our bodies and the present moment before we begin the chosen exercise. Breath nourishes, calms, transforms nervous energy, grounds us in our bodies, creates space in the body, mind and heart, softens our defenses, and reminds us of our connection to the Divine and everything else.

**When doing this exercise "in the heat of the moment," notice your feet on the ground and deepen your breath slightly. By bringing awareness to the breath and to the body firmly on the ground, you can continue a conversation more calmly, wait in line more patiently, or make an immediate decision more clearly. You may be able to do this unbeknown to anyone else.*



practice two

Visualization

This practice is an extension of the breathing practice. In this contemplation, you will take a little more time using visualization to create spaciousness in the three centers (body, heart and mind). This is a beautiful practice for opening up the three centers to the loving presence of the Spirit that is always available to us. Visualization builds a connection to ourselves and helps us discover our capacity to hold and handle more than we thought possible.



body

- 1 Follow steps 1 and 2 of the Breathing practice.**
- 2 Notice the breath and deepen it just a bit.
- 3 **Visualize the breath flowing into all parts of the body**, seeing it fill the feet and hands, the legs and arms, the front side of the body and the back side of the body. In the visualization, breath may have color, temperature or substance—like being a warm, golden light or a cool, blue air stream. You may feel tingling as you become aware of the parts of your body.
 - Can you sense the boundaries of your body soften, sensing less where your body ends and space begins?
 - If you notice a place of pain or tension, “send” the breath to that spot. See if you can create a loving space around that spot as if holding it in gentle hands. This may allow some ease or allow tightness to melt away.
- 4 Stay with the breath as it fills the body for a few moments longer or as long as you wish.

***You can also try this practice lying down on a mat or the floor which offers a different sensation of the body as it is supported by the ground on its entire backside.*



heart

- 5 **Visualize the breath filling your heart space**, the entire space of the chest. The warmth of the breath gently expands the rib cage on all sides. Left, right, front of the chest and the middle of the back.
- As it fills the chest, notice the spaciousness it creates in the heart center. Notice there is a vastness and depth to the heart that cannot be measured.
 - Notice also if there is some emotion being held in the heart center. Just as it is possible to create loving space around tension in the body, you can allow the breath to create a space around the emotion. See if you can let the heart space hold the emotion and allow it to be without attachment or judgment.
- 6 Stay with the breath as it fills the vast, loving space of the heart for a few moments longer or as long as you wish.



mind

- 7 **Direct the breath into the head center**, inhaling the breath into the width and breadth of the mind. Do this gently and slowly.
- Little by little, notice the mind expanding. Perhaps it feels as if it touches the space around you or even the sky.
- 8 Allow any thoughts in the mind to float away upon the inhale or exhale. Whatever thoughts are present are not bad, just not necessary right now. Enjoy the spaciousness and freedom that follows each inhale and exhale.
- 9 Stay with the breath as it enjoys the spacious sky of the mind for a few moments longer or as long as you wish.



body heart mind

- 10 To end the practice, bring your attention back to the natural rhythm of your breath, inhaling and exhaling. You can stay as long as you like or for your determined duration. When finished, gently open the eyes and adjust the senses to the room around you. Allowing a minute or two for transition allows the effects of the practice to be absorbed.

Notice the effects of the practice:

- Do you feel more spaciousness or softness?
- Is there a groundedness to this feeling, as well?
- Do you feel less stressed or anxious?
- Do you feel you have the ability to think more clearly or handle what's in front of you with more patience and openness?



practice three

Movement

Sometimes it is easier for us to find stillness when we are moving! Activities such as walking, running, swimming and cycling offer repetitive and controlled body movement. The repetition frees us to notice what is happening inside and connect to our surroundings.

When choosing a physical activity for contemplative practice, remember: the intention is not to achieve physical exercise. While physical movement will be a benefit, it will not be the point of the practice. Be curious about trying the activity as a “goal-less” experience. Don’t worry, you can still count your steps or choose a distance!

1. PREPARE

- Prepare by mindfully putting on your shoes or other gear. For example, notice how your shoes look, smell and feel as you slide your feet into them and tie the laces.
- Notice without judgment any emotions or thoughts you have about heading out. These just are.

2. BEGIN

- Allow some time and distance to feel yourself get into a comfortable rhythm.
- Be mindful of your intention to be present.

3. NOTICE

- Notice the sound and feel created by the motion.
- Notice what the breath is doing and how it sounds.
- Do you feel your heartbeat?
- What does the air feel like as your body cuts through it?
- Look around you. Can you allow the surroundings to enter your line of vision and exit without judging or naming? Notice how the surroundings come and go. These things just are.
- Notice if you are getting a sense that you "just are," too. You may feel a connectedness to your surroundings, to being with all that is just being.



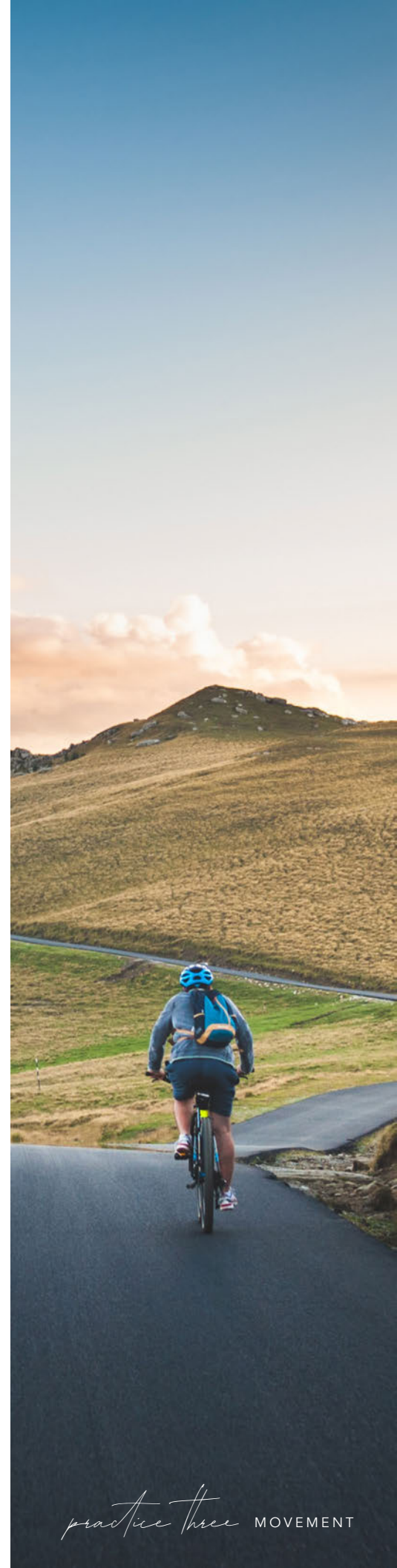
4. BE PRESENT

- Allow the mind to be present to whatever is around you and whatever you are feeling in body and heart. This is presence.
- The mind will often follow random thoughts or things you see; before you know it, you have gone down a mental trail that could rival any distance traveled on your own two feet! No problem. Your repetitive motion, breath, heartbeat and surroundings kindly invite you to return and be present.
- During this moving meditation, you may have creative insights or new ideas about a problem or question. This is the clarity that being present gifts us. It can occur during the movement; or you may feel freer or calmer to think, talk or journal about the issue after the activity.

5. WIND DOWN

- When finished, take a couple of minutes to notice the breath. If your heart rate is elevated, enjoy witnessing the breath come back to its natural rhythm.
- Notice everything you can about the state of your body, heart and mind. What is it like now? How is it different than before you began?
- Savor and reflect back on the sense of presence and freedom and connectedness you felt during the practice. And smile.

If running is already a part of your life or you wonder about starting to run, please listen to this podcast, *On Being: Running as a Spiritual Practice* (August 18, 2016): <https://onbeing.org/programs/billy-mills-christina-torres-ashley-hicks-et-al-running-as-spiritual-practice>
Here are 11 voices sharing how running has shaped them, connected them and sustained them. The storytellers are both casual and competitive runners. It's beautiful and practical!



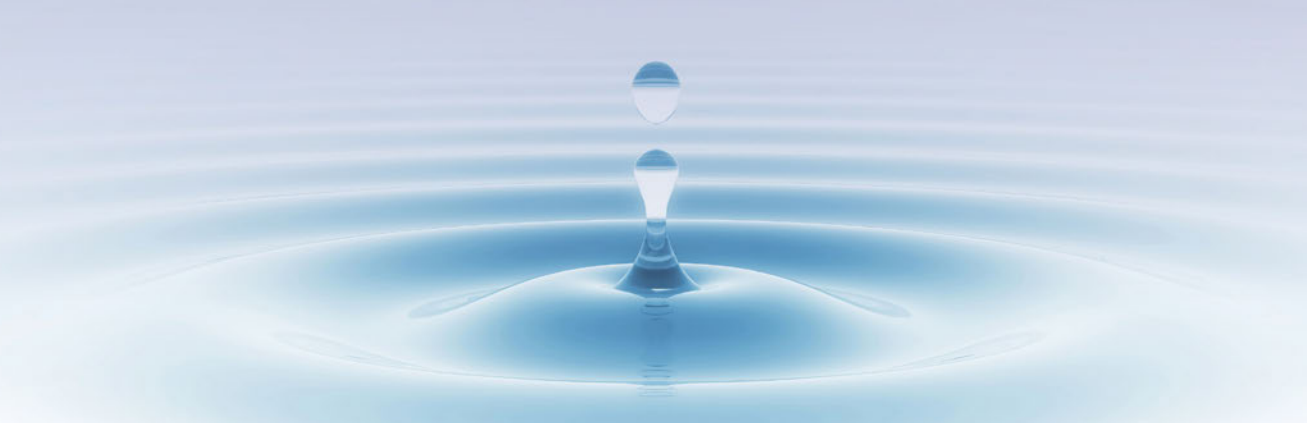


practice four

Repetition

A favorite practice of mine for uncovering internal wisdom and truth is a method called “the repeating question.” I was introduced to this way of contemplation by Russ Hudson, the Enneagram researcher, teacher and author.

By asking yourself the right question in the right space in the right frame of being, you are facilitating a conversation that will lead you to the heart of the matter. Recently, I used the question, “What am I hanging on to?” I followed up with a second repeating question, “What do I want to give myself to?” The answers gifted me with clarity about some things I suspected I already knew, and surprised me with new insights.



WHEN ONE
DESIRES
TO LIVE
AUTHENTICALLY,
IT IS THIS
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THAT IS THE
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This practice can expose the rawness of the truth. It is not unusual to feel a depth of emotion surrounding what is revealed. The physical sensation you may feel and the rising emotions are signs of the beautiful, wise, truthful and loving connection between mind, body and soul. When one desires to live authentically, it is this connectedness of being that is the catalyst for action.

You may already have some experience with this kind of practice. It is not altogether unlike standing in front of the open refrigerator asking yourself, "What am I in the mood to eat?" In that moment you let the thinking process step up to the role of active listener. You might "hear" that your taste buds are shouting for something savory or that your body is politely asking for a glass of water instead, or that your heart confesses that it is bored and looking for "action." You've been there, right?



1

Elicit the question

Let's begin with the question. An intentional question is a wonderful way to start a new year or a new season of life. Many times a question has come to me by way of a podcast, speaker or book. It's a question that piqued my interest or pinged my heart as a way of getting my attention. It keeps coming back up or doesn't want to let go. Sometimes we have a question about a thought or behavior pattern. "Why do I always think/do...?" After hearing "Happy New Year!" spoken to him so often, one person asked himself, "What makes me truly happy?" Other questions may be:

- "What keeps me from living the life I want?"
- "What do I really want?"
- "When do I feel free?"

2

Prepare

When you have chosen a question or a question has chosen you, gather a pen and paper. Become centered and present using the breath to settle the body, heart and mind. Steps 1 and 2 from Practice One (Breathing) may be helpful.



3

Engage

Write the question at the top of the page. Ask it out loud. Write your answer. Ask it out loud again. Write your next answer. Continue in this way for 10 to 15 rounds. Don't edit your writing. Write whatever answers arise. You may have as many valid answers as the amount of times you ask the question.



If you run out of answers after just a few rounds, continue to ask the question and leave space for an answer. Don't force anything; there is no such thing as failure. The answers will likely range from light and silly to deep and thought-provoking.

4

Be present

Notice any sensations in the body and any emotions that arise. Allow the emotion. Resistance to answering the question after a few asks is not unusual. You may want to continue journaling about what is happening or sit in the stillness with the emotions. Allow the breath to make a soft landing spot for the emotion, holding it with kindness and non-judgment.



5

Be still

Finish with some breathing and sitting for a few minutes in the presence and the connectedness you may feel, as with a good friend when words have run out and being together is all that is necessary.





practice five

Writing

This practice of clearing mental chatter through writing is called Morning Pages. It comes straight from *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron, who prescribes Morning Pages for those who desire to write or create other art.

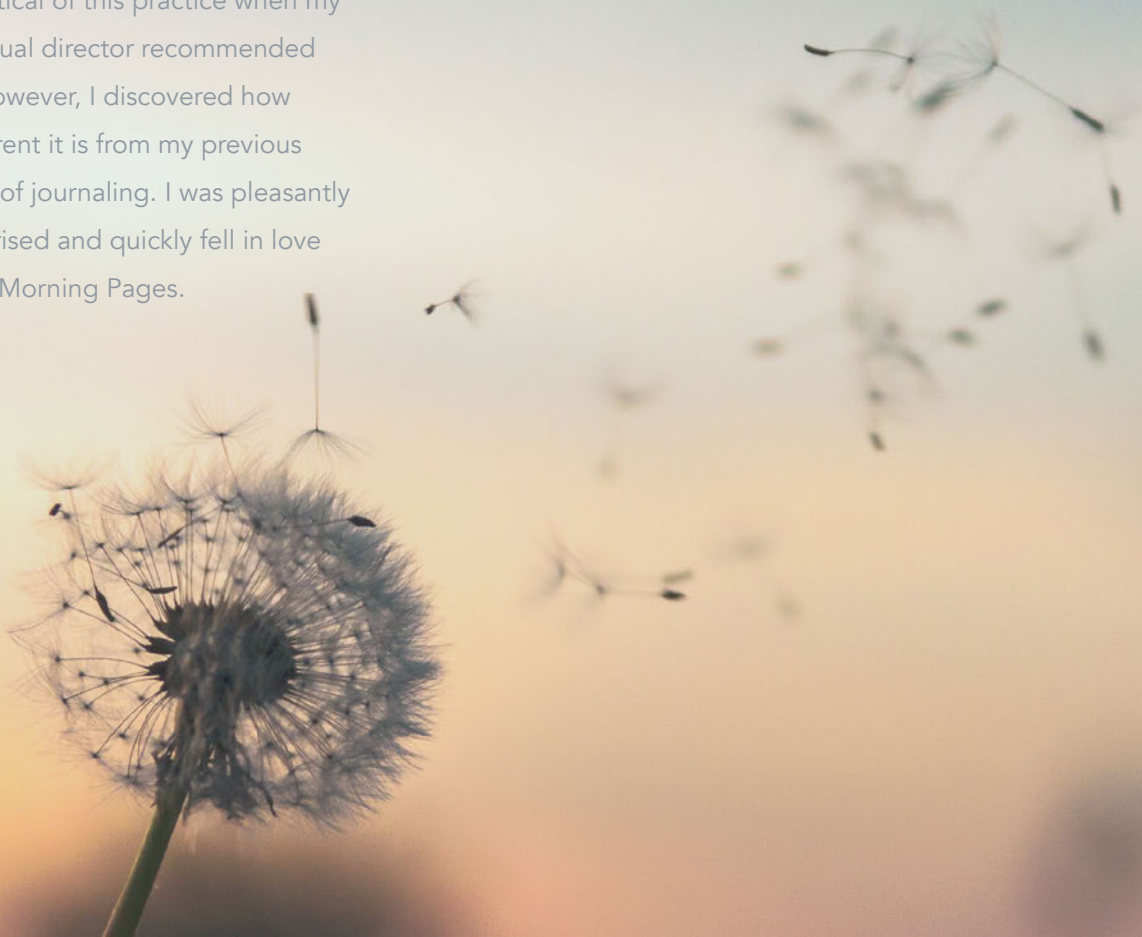
I love learning about how artists begin the process of creating their art. The making of an authentic life is very much like the making of art. One must engage whatever is present, touch the old wounds, feel every emotion, surrender the ego, persevere through fear and doubt, begin again and again, listen, connect, love, and show up every day.

Contemplative writing is a way of gently, cleverly, shedding our ego selves. Our ego self is the result of habitual patterns such as thinking, feeling, projecting, behaving, and storytelling. We use these patterns to fulfill our needs and move through life. The trouble is—and it is trouble—these habits formed in our youth do not serve us well as adults.

Habits create a habitat. Habitats are great for the many wonderful, remarkable species on our planet that depend on a comfort zone to enable existence. However, we have a spirit within that begs to live beyond existence. We want to thrive, create, imagine and pursue. Morning pages provides space for the still, small voice to speak its truth and give us insight into what holds us back or what will propel us forward into living the life that is truly ours to forge.

GIVE IT A CHANCE

I usually dislike journaling, so I was skeptical of this practice when my spiritual director recommended it. However, I discovered how different it is from my previous idea of journaling. I was pleasantly surprised and quickly fell in love with Morning Pages.



WE HAVE A

spirit WITHIN

THAT BEGS TO LIVE

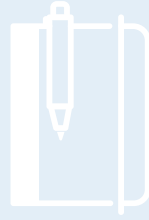
beyond existence





STEP 1 CHOOSE A TIME OF DAY

This practice is called Morning Pages because Cameron proposes it is good to write this way before the day fully begins. For one, our minds are not completely geared up for the day; secondly, once we engage in daily tasks, it is more difficult to surrender 20–30 minutes for writing. It will become apparent whether morning or another time of day will be your optimal practice time. Evening may be a good time for you, or perhaps the Pages will provide a beautiful break in the afternoon. As with all of these practices, you will find clarity in the doing, and doing it consistently.



STEP 2 SETTLE IN

Gather your writing materials: a notebook and pen. Settle yourself into your seat with a few breaths.

STEP 3 BEGIN WRITING



Write whatever comes to mind. Allow what arises in the mind as thought or observation to flow out of the pen. Don't stop writing. Don't edit, erase or read. Don't worry about the legibility or grammar. The purpose is to write three full pages or for about 20–30 minutes.

This practice provides clarity because it clears the mind. You are free to write ANYTHING, such as how you are feeling or...you need to pick up tea or you should really vacuum under the couch cushions or what you wish you said to the neighbor yesterday or this writing is stupid. By writing anything and everything that comes to mind, the mind becomes clear. Aaahhhh.



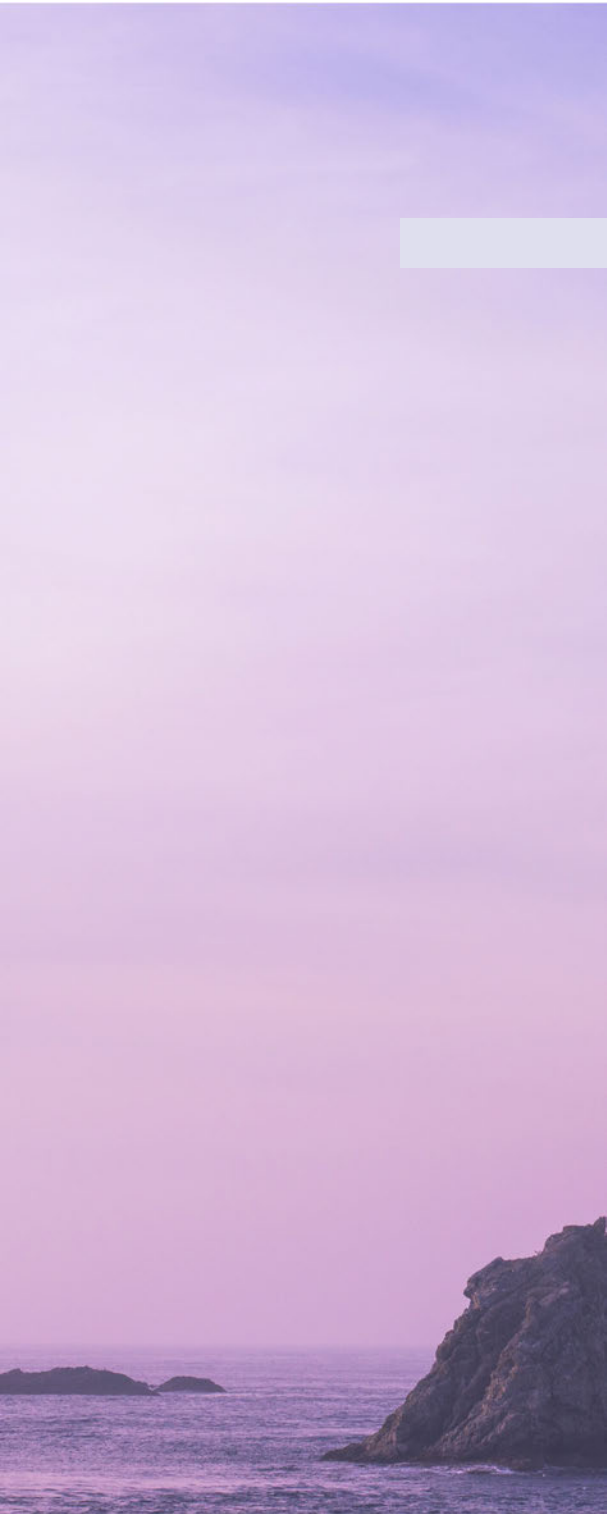
STEP 4 REPEAT

I suggest giving this practice a daily commitment for a month. You may find it becomes a daily practice for a lifetime, or you may do it intermittently. If you find Morning Pages beneficial, you will know when is the right day or season for writing Pages again.

At first, my pages were pretty legible, but it took so long to fill three pages, I sped it up. Now, my Morning Pages notebooks mostly look like wavy scribbles. I couldn't go back and read them if I tried. Much of it is not worth reading because it is so mundane. Yet the Pages have provided me more clarity and insight into who I am, what I am really feeling, where I want to go, what I truly desire, what I want to change and how I'm going to do it. There are times when ideas come that I write legibly so I can reflect on them later, but mostly what happens during the Pages stays with me. It is a conversation that begins in the head and ends in the heart. The impact is real and it sticks in a way that I do not have to go back and read it. You can have this conversation and you know you can have another tomorrow and another the day after that.

Please listen to what Julia Cameron has to say about the Morning Pages here: <https://juliacameronlive.com/basic-tools/morning-pages>. If you are curious about the artist's tools and process, get the book—you won't be disappointed.





conclusion

These practices and various others have become the foundation for prayer and spirituality in my life. May one or more of these practices provide the stillness you seek in order to experience more clarity and peace. You have everything you need to begin. Your Soul has already whispered to you because you were drawn to read this e-book. Don't be surprised by the push/pull you may feel about beginning contemplative practice. Our ego selves know this is a transformative practice that will change the way we think about and respond to our lives. This change is unpredictable and seems scary, yet the Spirit within is eagerly longing "out loud" to let you know you are ready to pursue a life that is wise, true and loving.

Continue your journey

This e-book is a basic summary of five contemplative practices. Should you wish to explore them further, or if questions arise as you practice, please email me via my website, www.withheartforward.com. Let these practices be a beginning point as you seek others that align with your preferences. I offer ideas through my [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#) and [Pinterest](#) pages as well. Practicing with a group is another beautiful way of supporting and connecting to yourself and others.

As you begin to discover, listen to, trust and live from the true voice within, you may find it helpful to discuss what is arising. A spiritual director is a companion for the journey toward authentic connection with yourself, the Divine and others. A spiritual director can help you hold, frame, talk about and discern what you are experiencing.

You can learn more about Spiritual Direction on my [website](#). If you would like help in deciding if spiritual direction is the next step for you, please [email me](#). The Spiritual Directors International website, www.sdiworld.org, is also helpful for finding information and contacting a spiritual director.



May clarity and peace be yours in abundance.

Kim

Kim Mulder
Certified Spiritual Director
Founder, With Heart Forward

