THE INNER LIFE:
A GUIDE FOR TEENS TO SELF-AWARENESS

A Service Project Report
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of
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by
Carolyn R. Grassel
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Approved by:

_____________________
Mark Thurston, Ph.D.
Committee Chairperson

_____________________
Robert Danner, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Herbert Stokely
Administrator, Atlantic University
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Abstract

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Carolyn R. Grassel

My project is the creation of a guidebook for teens that covers the subjective experiences of meditation, dreams, the imagination, and their application to self-awareness. The purpose of this project is to put into practical use some of the ideas that I have learned about Transpersonal Studies so as to acquaint teens with ways to explore and understand the nature of their inner lives. The disciplines of meditation, dream work and creative expression will encourage a path to self-knowledge. The insights revealed by these practices will be helpful in a young person’s discovery of how they fit in this world and how they choose to live as they approach adulthood.
Introduction

The Inner Life: A Guide for Teens to Self-awareness

Exploring Meditation, dreams and the imagination.

This project is a result of personal study and experience in the disciplines of meditation, dream work and the imagination. I taught an 8-week seminar for high school teens, ages 15-18 years, based on a simple guidebook for self-awareness I created for this age group. The classes were offered as part of a liberal religious education program at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland. The guide is in keeping with the living tradition of Unitarian Universalist congregations, which draws wisdom from many sources meant to inspire ethical and spiritual living.

The following is a description of the guidelines I proposed to follow for each of the classes:

1. The classes were divided into 8 workshops, meeting on Sunday mornings for 75 minutes from 10:45 am until noon. The classes were not consecutive due to other church related activities and inclement weather. The last class was cancelled due to a winter storm. Rescheduling this class was not possible, however, the workshop information was provided to each student as a packet of handouts.

2. There were 6 registered students, 5 female and 1 male, ranging in age from 15 to 18 years. Four of the students were seniors, preparing for college and 2 were sophomores. There were 2 additional student visitors who participated on occasion, 1 female high school senior and 1 male in his early twenties. All the registered students were active participants in the religious program at their church, including student teaching of the
younger members of the congregation, service work in the community and youth group membership. Our young adult male visitor was studying to be a Director of Religious Education in Unitarian Universalism and very active in the young adult UU group.

2. Each class began with the lighting of a candle and opening words. I chose a reading that was relevant to the day’s topic. The students also participated with their own words.

3. Announcements were made that were church related.

4. Check in with the students about any dreams or journaling activities during the week.

5. A short description of the topic covered that day. I made use of an easel for summarizing information and handouts.

6. Activity of the day.

7. Closing discussion.

8. Extinguishing the candle and closing words.
Procedures

Class #1

September 12, 2003

The Inner Life

1. Lighting of the candle and opening words.

2. Introductions – Leader and students.

3. Overview of the seminar – I explained that the seminar was mostly experiential with some background discussion. I posed the questions of what is an inner life and what is its spiritual significance? How can exploring our dreams, practicing meditation and prayer, and using our imaginations help us in discovering how we fit in this world? The activities include: (a) practicing several forms of meditation, (b) making simple prayer beads and personalizing them, (c) looking at dreams and applying basic interpretation techniques to better understand them, (d) exploring our imaginations through creative journaling, (e) designing a mandala, and (f) learning visualization techniques for relaxation and problem solving.

4. Journaling – I handed-out a journal to everyone. They decorated the journals with stickers and markers. The students found this activity meaningful and fun.

5. We discussed the how-to’s of journaling and why it is an important part of the self-exploration process. I invited the students to begin writing in their journals over the coming weeks and to include drawings, poetry, thoughts, current challenges, and dreams. I also encouraged them to think about their personal philosophies of life and jot down any thoughts about this in their journal.
6. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: This was a very successful first class. This interested group of 6 students revealed through our introductions a collective interest in dreams, poetry, and meditation. One student was particularly interested in paradoxes.
Class #2

September 19, 2003

Meditation

1. Lighting the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements

3. Check-in with students about their journaling experiences.

4. Discussion on meditation including definition, goals, types, challenges and embellishments.

5. Activities
   a. Breathing exercises: belly, counting and following the breath.
   b. Concentration exercise: an eating meditation using M&M’s and raisins.
   c. A short sitting meditation with music: chanting from *The Benedictine Monks of Santa Domingo DeSilos* CD.
   d. A brief discussion of the Labyrinth as a meditation tool. An invitation was extended to the group to walk a portable canvas labyrinth at our church the following week. A handout of a finger labyrinth based on the LeChartres pattern was presented to each student. This exercise provided a way to experience the labyrinth when a full scale one is not available.

I encouraged the students to practice some form of meditation until the next meeting and to write their experiences in their journals.

6. Closing – a loving kindness meditation read by the leader and extinguishing the candle.
Leader observations on this class: This was a crash course in meditation. It was a small group this week (4 in attendance), but they were definitely interested. Two students sat on the floor for the exercises and 2 sat in chairs. One student in particular admitted she found it difficult to sit still, but showed an interest in participating in the upcoming labyrinth walk. Everyone was tired but relaxed.
Class #3

November 2, 2003

Prayer

1. Lighting the candle and opening words (The young man of the group carved a pumpkin for Halloween and we used it to hold the candle this week).

2. Church announcements.

3. Check-in with the students about any journaling or meditation experiences. (There were a few dreams and some journaling and meditation experiences during the past 2 weeks).

4. Prayer discussion: definition, types of prayer and a brief history of the use of prayer beads.

5. Activities
   b. Making prayer beads – Music played while creating. I brought a nice selection of beads that I collected over time. The students were very appreciative.
   c. Provided a handout of possible prayers to use with their beads.

6. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: This class of 7 was most attentive during the brief talk about prayer beads and their history. They also seemed to appreciate the sitting meditation. Some sat in chairs and the others relaxed on the floor with big pillows. The group consensus was that it was a peaceful experience. Our young man of the group did
not want to move from his spot because he was so relaxed.

The students were very creative in making their prayer beads. They really embraced this activity, talking amongst themselves and at other times quiet. The *Enchanted* CD played in the background. They were scattered across the room working on their beads. Some sat on the floor and others sat at the “bead” table. I provided paper plates to hold their beads while working. One student preferred to call the beads, ‘meditation beads’ instead of prayer beads. I referred to a special set of beads that I made as gratitude beads. This class could have been longer. The students were very engrossed.
Class #4

November 9, 2003

Dreams

1. Lighting the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements. The students were invited to participate in an upcoming labyrinth walk at the church.

3. Check-in with the students about their experiences with journaling, prayer beads and meditation during the week. One of the students re-strung the prayer beads and showed them to the class. Another student was wearing her beads as a bracelet.

4. Dream discussion: recalling dreams and the amplification of symbols.

5. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: One student shared her dream that was very detailed and interesting. Others participated using the symbol amplification technique and provided additional insight for the dreamer. Also, I displayed 3 of my dream catchers on the altar and we discussed their purpose. One of the students suggested making dream catchers. I would like to do this activity in a future class.
Class #5
November 16, 2003

Dreams, continued

1. Lighting the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements

3. Check-in with the students about their recent dreams. Also the introduction of a young adult visitor studying to be a Director of Religious Education.

4. Additional dream discussion and handouts utilizing the 5-step approach to dream interpretation and the 7-point framework of additional questions.

5. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: Three students shared their dreams. This was an exceptional class due to the depth of their discussions in which all participated. These young people were good at this! Their honesty and openness about sharing their dreams and insight was impressive. Our visitor connected comfortably with the group and thanked the class for allowing him to participate.
Class #6

November 30, 2003

The Imagination – The World of Mandalas

1. Lighting of the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements

3. Check-in with the group about their dreams, journaling and meditation experiences.

4. Discussion about mandalas focusing on a definition, occurrence, uses, and how to create one. I shared a number of visual examples of mandalas from several sources.

5. Activities:
   a. A three-minute sitting meditation to the music of “Be Now My Vision” from the *Evening Dance* by Kildare CD. This was a beautiful meditation. This particular song is in our church hymnal and is sung frequently.
   b. Creating a mandala: I provided markers, crayons, colored pencils and water based crayons. Also, multi-media art paper and a drafting compass.

6. Discussion about our creations.

7. Distribution of a selection of printed mandalas that they could color later. The students took these handouts eagerly.

8. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: There were only 3 students in class this day. Each created a unique mandala, mostly based on the elements (fire, wind). I colored a quilt motif mandala while the class created their own designs. The group liked the variety of media offerings, especially the water based crayons. This was a very focused class.
Class #7

December 7, 2003

Creative Visualization

1. Lighting of the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements

3. Check-in with the group about any recent dreams, mandala sightings (hubcaps!) and other experiences.

4. Discussion about creative visualization, including a definition and the importance of the imagination.

5. Activities: A handout with 3 short visualizations was presented to the group. Two of the visualizations we did in class. The students liked these. We also listened to and followed a 25-minute visualization tape by Sally Redfield, The Celestine Meditations.

6. Discussion about our experiences with the visualizations.

7. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

Leader observations on this class: I warned the group about the length of The Celestine Meditations tape, so they all found a spot lying down on the floor with big pillows. This was a very successful exercise. After the guided meditation tape, the students stayed in their spots, sat up and shared their experiences amongst themselves and me. One shared a short dream and one felt energized. The student who initially found it difficult to sit still is finding it easier to do with practice. The group also provided me with good feedback about the seminar in general. They planned a small party at the end of the last class next week.
Class #8
December 14, 2003

Wrap-up

1. Lighting of the candle and opening words.

2. Church announcements.

3. Discussion of our individual philosophy of life and thoughts on how to live in this world based on this philosophy. How can our experiences with journaling, dreams and the imagination during the 8-week seminar be applied to realizing what we value?

4. Closing words and extinguishing the candle.

5. Party.

Leader comments: Unfortunately, this class was cancelled due to a snowstorm. The logistics of student and church availability did not permit a rescheduling of this final class. I did provide a packet of 4 handouts to the students the following week covering some of the material we would have discussed in class. Regrettably, there was no party. I thanked each of them for participating in the workshops as they prepared for a new 8-week seminar.
Results

Each of the students described their individual experiences in the Inner Life Seminar as positive and informative as they were introduced to a variety of ways to explore their spirituality. In this small faith-based community of teens, there were some wonderful revelations expressed by the group:

1. Meditating could be either an energizing or relaxing experience.

2. Many religious traditions throughout the world use some form of prayer and meditation to help the individual or collective group stay connected to something greater than themselves.

3. Placing beads on a string was just as meditative as the finished bracelet being used prayerfully for the good of others.

4. Our dreams contain information manifested in the form of symbols and action that can be journaled and interpreted to become a part of our personal history.

5. The imagination can take us to a favorite place in our memory, or be expressed in a creative way on a piece of paper through words or images.

6. Our personal thoughts and actions do matter in this uncertain world.

Three months after the completion of the workshops, I posed 4 follow-up questions to each of the 6 students about their experiences with the Inner Life Seminar. Their answers are summarized in the chart below.

1. How would you describe your experiences as a participant in the Inner Life classes?

2. Did you have a favorite of the methods explored that you found personally
useful?

3. Have you learned more about yourself as a result of participating in the classes that you can comfortably share?

4. Have you been able to apply any of this insight in your life?

<table>
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<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Question 4</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Positive experience. Appreciated the historical background on prayer beads.</td>
<td>The prayer beads.</td>
<td>Opened eyes to prayer and meditation.</td>
<td>Uses beads for a counting meditation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enlightening. Taught new approaches to spirituality and religion.</td>
<td>Dream analysis. Recounting a dream is relaxing in a meditative way.</td>
<td>More confident in abilities to do things. The discovery of being an interesting person.</td>
<td>Helps others to interpret their dreams and gets positive feedback. It is sharing the wealth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>It was fun. Learned a lot of information.</td>
<td>Prayer beads and meditation techniques.</td>
<td>Learned to relax better.</td>
<td>Walked a labyrinth and enjoyed it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fun, interesting and lots of variety.</td>
<td>Meditation.</td>
<td>Felt energized after the 25-minute visualization tape.</td>
<td>Uses the beads.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very rewarding and fun. Explored new areas.</td>
<td>Meditation beads.</td>
<td>Meditation is helpful in getting through these times.</td>
<td>Currently uses beads and meditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fun.</td>
<td>Liked the beads. Also creating a mandala.</td>
<td>No Comment.</td>
<td>Paying more attention to dreams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is encouraging to note that each student took something from the seminar that related to his or her own experience and is still using it.
Conclusions

Adolescence is a time when growing cognitive skills provide a teen with the ability to be curious and exploratory in many areas of life, such as the physical, emotional, social and spiritual. The teen years are short and fast, and require a certain awareness to move successfully through them. A personal quest for self-knowledge at this time of life reveals important information that helps to establish one’s identity, value system, and potentials for accomplishment. The Inner Life Seminar fostered ways for the teens to learn about themselves from the inside out. Presented with a variety of spiritual disciplines, our teens may find interesting and meaningful answers to the emerging question of “Who am I?” Confidently responding to this insight by making self-respecting choices, a personal foundation for ethical and spiritual living is possible.

On a personal note, I enjoyed working with this group very much. Collectively, they were appreciative, interested in the subjects covered, participatory and insightful. They interacted comfortably with one another and were respectful of personal opinions and feelings. The only disappointment was foregoing the last class because of snow. Even the students were disappointed. They were looking forward to meeting and having a party with food.

It was also great to have a cooperative class. There were no discipline problems – everyone wanted to be there. In past workshops with this age group, there was usually someone who was not interested and this was disruptive.

I appreciated their impromptu feedback to the seminar in general. The prayer/meditation beads were a hit with this group. There is something comforting about
the process of creating a personal set of beads and using them. They enjoyed the visual
arts approach to self-knowledge as was demonstrated in their journal decorating, mandala
and bead creations. I looked forward to preparing for each class and sharing information
with them in an experiential way. I felt encouraged that these exercises provided
additional resources to help them discover and develop their own inherent wisdom.

There was more than enough information and activities planned for this seminar.
Unfortunately, there was not enough time to do everything as planned. However, it was
helpful to have a selection of activities from which to choose. I can take a topic from any
of the individual class sessions and expand it into a future workshop. I plan to teach this
youth seminar in the fall of 2004. Several of my students suggested that I offer the
seminar to adults through the Adult Education Program at the church and the county.
That idea is currently under consideration.
Bibliography


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The Inner Life: A Guide for Teens to Self-awareness

Exploring Meditation, Dreams and the Imagination

Carolyn R. Grassel

Atlantic University, Virginia Beach
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Introduction

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

Ralph Waldo Emerson

There are many ways to describe ourselves. Each of us has outer qualities, such as physical appearance and behaviors, that affect our lives and that the world sees. There are also inner qualities that guide our spirits and determine how we will experience life as it is presented to us. We each have a purpose in life and hopefully a desire to discover the gifts we have to share with others. We each have a personal truth that is expressed in our words and actions. This truth is at the foundation of what we value in life. Our own inner knowledge provides answers of how to live in this world and ways to change. To know yourself is an important step to building a personal philosophy of living.

This simple guide is to acquaint the reader with ways to explore and understand the nature of the inner life. The disciplines of meditation, dream work, and creative expression are but some of the many paths to gaining self-knowledge. It is my intent to offer a sampling of these disciplines and to encourage the reader to continue learning and expanding their own “inner” knowledge.
Chapter 1

Journaling

*The journal is a fantastic place to develop creativity and talent in art, writing, and other areas of life.*


Keeping a journal is part of the self-exploration process. Within its pages are a record of your life, including your thoughts, feelings, dreams and beliefs. It becomes a personal history book. For starters, the following are basic guidelines for journal keeping:

1. Select a bound journal, either lined or unlined, and choose a favorite writing implement.
2. Find a time and a comfortable place to write.
3. Relax – Do simple breathing exercises before starting to write.
4. Date the entry.
5. Start writing – Do not be too concerned about spelling or grammar.
6. Write as much as you need to.
7. Be honest and write for yourself.
8. Write down any thoughts, ideas or challenges that come to mind. Also pay attention to any dreams and write them down. Include any symbols or artwork.
9. This is your journal and privacy is important. You decide how much you will want to share in your journal and with others.
10. Enjoy the journaling experience (Capacchione, 2002; Klug, 2002).

Here is a simple journaling exercise to try. It is basically a review of a day in your life. Start with getting up in the morning. Describe in detail the places you visited through out the day. Make a list of any objects, colors, odors and sounds that you recall. Describe them. Tell about the people you were with and any highlights of what you did. What were your reactions to these experiences? (Capacchione, 2002). Any final thoughts before retiring at days’ end? Write those down, too. Sleep well for you had a busy day.
Chapter 2

Meditation

We all seek calm, peace and wisdom. We seek states of mind and body that gives us a clearer picture of ourselves. Hopefully, we choose direct and less harmful ways to touch that place of calm and ease.

Soren Gordhamer, Author, *Just Say Om! : A Teenager’s Guide*

Meditation is a time spent to go within ourselves and be still. It is a practical way to explore your inner world, resulting in a heightened awareness of thoughts, feelings, personal truths, and the senses. Meditation is also an active practice of training our attention by focusing it on something, such as an object, a sound, our breathing, or a word. This discipline is a relevant aspect of human nature making it a universal tradition that transcends era, culture and religion.

There are many types of meditation with each using a different area of focus. The following is a sampling of various practices. Find a method that works for you and realize that it can change over time depending on your needs.

1. Sitting meditation – the focus may be a mantra or affirmation (a word or phrase that has power), music, breathing, sounds and sights of nature. Sit still with your chosen focus for 3 minutes. Increase the time gradually to 20 minutes. Use a timer to keep track of time.

2. Walking meditation – this requires motion to help build concentration and relaxation. Taking a walk in nature is a good place to start. The purpose is to enjoy the walking for
its own sake, appreciating the moment with each step and breath (Nhat Hanh, 1990).

Walking a labyrinth, an ancient spiritual symbol, is another meditation tool that provides a circuitous simple path leading to and from a center space. Walking this circular path, with only one way in and out and no dead ends, represents a metaphor for life’s journey. Each labyrinth experience may be different for the same individual. The labyrinth pattern, and there are a variety from which to choose, may also be transferred onto a piece of paper. Using a finger or stylus, follow the pathway from the entrance in to the center and back out. See the LeChartres Labyrinth pattern for finger walking at the end of this chapter. This classic pattern is named for the labyrinth in the stone floor of the Chartres Cathedral in France (Artress, 1996; Geoffrion, 2000).

3. Christian Meditation – has its foundation based upon faith in Christ. This is an active form of reflection on specific content, usually The Bible. Before reading the scriptures, take a moment to relax and concentrate on your breathing. Read your selection slowly and be aware of any words or phrases that have meaning to you. Reflect upon these words and remain open to any insight from these messages. The Book of Psalms is a good place to start (Crafton, 1996; Klug, 2002).

*Come before his presence with a song.*

Psalm 100:1

4. Mindfulness meditation – A Buddhist approach for the appreciation of the present moment. Anything can become the focus of the meditation. For example: eating dinner, sipping a beverage, observing an interesting object, taking a bath, washing dishes, painting and even playing solitaire. Mindfulness is a state of awareness (Nhat Hanh,
5. Lovingkindness (metta) Meditation – A flowing form of Buddhist meditation used to develop compassion. The initial focus is upon the suffering of others. Starting with yourself, cultivate and direct goodwill and compassion to all beings, without exception (Salzberg, 1995). The following is a written metta meditation that may be repeated to yourself as you sit:

May I be filled with loving kindness
May I be happy, peaceful and well
May I meet with success on my life’s journey

May my family and friends be filled with loving kindness
May my family and friends be happy, peaceful and well
May my family and friends meet with success on their life’s journey

May all beings be filled with loving kindness
May all beings be happy, peaceful and well
May all beings meet with success on their life’s journey

Meditation is simple, however there are challenges. In sitting meditation, the idea is to remain relaxed, but alert and aware. There will be distractions such as extraneous noises, or bodily sensations such as itching or twitching. Just bring the focus back and resume your concentration. Staying awake may be a challenge, especially if you are...
really tired and need the sleep. Any form of meditation requires practice and patience on the part of the meditator (Fontana, 2002).

Some individuals prefer to add embellishments to their practice. This may include (a) candles and incense (used with care), (b) music – generally something light, calming and relaxing, (c) light – sunlight or candlelight, and (d) color - marbles, crystals, or flowers.

Regardless of the meditation method used, effective breathing will be at its foundation. It is our breathing that directs us. What is required is deep and calm breathing that allows oxygen deep into the body. Here are three basic breathing exercises to try and practice. By practicing your breathing, you will develop the skill to stay in the moment. Before starting, find a comfortable sitting position, loosen any restrictive clothing, straighten the spine, place feet flat on the floor (no crossed legs), place your hands in your lap and gently close your eyes.

1. Belly breathing – Take a big breath and let it go slowly, like a sigh of relief. Inhale the next breath in slowly and feel how your belly expands. When you exhale, notice how your belly relaxes. As you breathe from your belly, notice how both mind and body come to rest. Repeat several times (Monaghan & Dierrek, 1999).

2. Counting your breath – The goal is to keep a mental tally of your breaths without becoming distracted. Count from 1 to 10 by counting a complete inhalation and exhalation as 1. If you loose count for any reason, start at 1 again. See if you can concentrate to 10. Repeat.

3. Following your breath – Breathe normally. Concentrate on your breath, watching it
flow in and out. Do not count your breath or chant anything. If your mind wanders, bring it back to observing your breath (Nhat Hanh, 1987).

Be sure to write down any thoughts about your meditation experiences in your journal as your practice progresses. Remember that meditation is about focusing the mind (concentration), allowing it to be still (tranquility), and seeing what is there (insight) (Fontana, 2002).

“Walking the Labyrinth by Hand”

Geoffrion (2000), p.72
Chapter 3
Prayer

_We all need time for silence, to reflect and pray._

Mother Teresa

Prayer is a way to approach the sacred in life. Like meditation, the foundation of all prayer is an interior silence. However, prayer may be directed to something outside the self for inner guidance. This ‘something’ or energy has many names depending on one’s beliefs and convictions. Some familiar names: God, Goddess, Holy Spirit, Jesus, Mary, Buddha, Allah, Mother Earth, Creator or Higher Power.

There are basically four types of prayer:

1. *Adoration*, which acknowledges the greatness of divinity.
2. *Thanksgiving*, which expresses gratitude for the created world and the specific benefits we receive from it.
3. *Contrition* or an apology for transgressions for which one feels remorse.
4. *Petition* or a request that asks for the needs of the individual or others to be met.

Prayer may be a collective or solitary experience occurring in places of worship or other settings. Prayer may be silent or expressed vocally in song (chant) or speech (Monaghan & Diereck, 1999). A way to symbolize one’s commitment to this ‘thoughtful’ spiritual practice is through the use of prayer beads. A personal collection of beads strung together forming a circle or an open strand is helpful in keeping one’s place in structured prayer or thought.
Prayer beads date to about 185 BC. Hindus and eventually Buddhists adopted the practice of using mala (or garland) beads for repeating mantras or counting one’s breath. This circle of beads, made originally from seeds, then bones or sandalwood, contains 108 beads or divisions of that number, 54 or 27 beads.

The Catholic rosary originally contained 150 beads, each representing the 150 psalms of The Bible. The modern rosary is 59 beads divided into groups of 10 beads and includes meditating on the life of Jesus and Mary.

There is an Earth rosary, a non-denominational variation containing 4 sets of 13 beads. These 52 beads represent each week of the year.

In Islamic tradition, there are 33 or 99 beads with one “leader” bead representing the 99 names of Allah found in The Koran and one essential name.

In Judaism, there is a prayer shawl (tallit) with a specified number of knots indicating obedience to The Commandments.

A secular counterpart of prayer beads, called worry beads, is used in the Middle East, Turkey and Greece for calming and rebalancing (Wiley & Shannon, 2002, pp. 6-11).

A simple set of prayer beads can be made by stringing beads, amulets, shells or other similar material on a short piece of beading string or stretch cord. Each bead or charm chosen may symbolize something personal and meaningful to the individual. The beads can be used for personal reflection or the well being of others while sitting quietly. They may also be used in conjunction with a structured prayer, such as one of the following:
I thank You God for most this
amazing
day: for the leaping greenly spirits
of trees
and a blue true dream of sky; and
for everything
which is natural which is infinite
which is yes

*e.e. cummings* (UUA, 1993, #504)

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury; pardon;
Where there is doubt, faith;
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
And where there is sadness, joy:
O, Divine Master, grant that I may not so much
Seek to be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,
To be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

*St. Francis of Assisi*  (Wiley & Shannon, 2002, p.111)

Spirit of Life, come unto me.
Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion.
Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;
move in the hand, giving life the shape of justice.
Roots hold me close; wings set me free;
Spirit of Life, come to me, come to me.

*Caolyn McDade*  (UUA, 1993, #123)

Sisters, brothers
Take your time, go slowly
Listen deep inside yourself
Simple things are holy.

*Maria Harris*
Chapter 4

Dreams

*Dreams are the touchstones of our characters.*

Henry David Thoreau

Dreams are the language of the subconscious. They are real experiences that occur in the non-material word and they are important because they are a tool for self-discovery. Dreams guide us to a more whole and balanced physical, mental and spiritual way of living since all of these aspects of human nature are revealed in our dreams. Dreams provide encouragement and inspiration, which contribute to personal growth and transformation. They stimulate our creativity on different levels. Dreams reveal useful information that can change the way we look at life (Thurston, 1988).

Humans have attached great importance to dreams since ancient times, when dreams were considered to be prophecies from the gods. This widespread belief in the divine source of dreams lessened and during the 19th century, modern theorists emphasized that dreams are actually extensions of the waking state. More consideration was also given to the creative potential of dreams since they have greatly influenced our history and culture. Many dreamers have been provided with details that would impact our world in the arts, sciences, politics and religion (Van de Castle, 1994).

Carl Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology, was also a pioneer in dream study. He approached dreams as a process of unfoldment unique to each individual dreamer. This wisdom, generated from the unconscious self
through dreaming, appears clearer to the conscious mind by the presence of symbols in the dreams. Modern psychoanalysis uses dream interpretation in order to understand the workings of the patient’s unconscious mind (Van de Castle, 1994).

Edgar Cayce (1877-1945), well known for his psychic abilities and considered the Father of Holistic Health, was also very interested in dreams. He believed that the dreamer should take personal responsibility for what is learned in the dream, followed by applying this knowledge in waking life in a meaningful way. Therefore, dream interpretation is dream application and it is the individual who is best qualified to interpret his own dreams. The wisdom extracted from these inner journeys provides an opportunity to be an active participant in our personal growth (Thurston, 1978).

The first step in working with dreams is remembering them. There are various methods by which you can train yourself to better recall your dreams or parts of them. Since we dream about 2 hours a night, and we all dream whether we remember or not, it is important to go to bed early and get enough sleep. Dreaming occurs during light sleep when there is rapid eye movement, or REM. Deep sleep, which occurs in the early part of the sleep cycle, alternates with light sleep throughout the night. Here are additional ways for recalling your dreams that can be applied:

1. Prior to falling asleep, use a pre-sleep suggestion telling yourself to remember your dreams. Be mindful of your purpose in wanting to work with dreams and that personal values and ideals are important in shaping a dream.

2. Place a journal, pen and flashlight by the bedside. Use this journal to record any dreams, parts of dreams, symbols or feelings when you awake. Try not to move
much upon awakening so as not to disengage this state of awareness.

3. Practice prayer and meditation on a regular basis in your waking life. These powerful paths to attunement help in channeling our better qualities.

4. Share your dreams with interested family or friends for additional insight (Thurston, 1978).

Once you have “captured” a dream, there are methods by which you can interpret them. One practical approach to interpreting dreams consists of five steps:

1. Identify the feelings in the dream, not just how the dreamer feels about the dream. Include all of the feelings that give any of the dream imagery life.

2. Create a statement of the theme of the dream. This simple statement, or story outline, will release the message of the dream. By eliminating details and drawing no conclusions, only the dream’s essence remains. The theme is mostly concerned with the activity occurring in the dream, so the identification of key action words is important. This is helpful in recognizing any meaningful patterns that may be present in waking life. Remember that it is possible to have more than one theme for any dream since there is usually more than one way to interpret an experience. Also, if the dream is long, write a theme for each changing scene.

3. Explore the symbols present in the dream and attempt to achieve a basic understanding by their association with the dreamer. Even though the dream image resembles something familiar from daily life, it may represent something deeper than its literal meaning. Symbols often represent parts of ourselves that would otherwise go unnoticed. Amplification of a symbol, a form of free association, will expand its
meaning and provide additional information by the use of spontaneously connecting ideas and feelings to the image.

As an example, choose a symbol from one of your dreams and ask these questions about it:

1. What is a ________________?
2. What does a ______________ do?
3. What benefits come from a ____________?
4. What problems come from a ____________?
5. What do you like about a ________________?
6. What do you dislike about a ________________?

4. Arrive at a provisional understanding of the dream and determine how this initial interpretation relates to something that is occurring in the current conscious life. This may be accomplished by the revision and refinement of the initial interpretation. Also, additional questions taken from a 7-Point Framework Model can be asked to help expand the framework of the dream’s meaning:

1. Can I apply the theme rather literally to a current life concern?
2. Does this dream compensate for some extreme in my waking attitudes, situations or relationships?
3. Does this dream involve a psychic perception? For instance, is this a dream foretelling likely future events or a warning?
4. Can this dream be the result of some current fear?
5. Can this dream be the result of some current desire?
6. Does this dream contain a physical diagnosis?

7. If I would experience this dream in waking life, what would I have learned?

At this time, a plan can be devised for the application of the dream in preparation for the next step.

5. Apply this knowledge and wisdom that has been revealed in the dream in a practical way. Using these insights will open the way for more guidance and clarification, not just in our dreams, but our waking lives as well (Thurston, 1988).

The Haiku - An Expressive Way to Interpret A Dream

Dream images can guide us by means of written words in the form of poetry and storytelling. Sometimes the communicating of ideas found in our dreams becomes clearer through poetry. One type of poem, the Haiku, is a simple form of lyric verse with a minimal number of words that describe an entire experience. It is also a creative way of generating a theme to a dream. Although thought provoking and taking some time to invent, its format consists of 3 lines and 17 syllables (Monaghan & Diereck, 1999). An example of a Haiku taken from a personal dream about teenagers invading my kitchen is as follows:

Cooking in my space,
Teens filing through the kitchen
What is for dinner?

This creative use of the Haiku has been described as “the heart of the dream in 17 syllables.”
Chapter 5

The Imagination

*Your imagination is your preview of life’s coming attractions.*

Albert Einstein, Physicist

Another creative approach to personal reality is in the use of the imagination. “The imagination is a way of thinking that uses sensory information for processing those thoughts that can be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or sensed in some way in the mind” (Rossman, 2003, P.34). In using this thought process, we can imagine our life to be one of lack, limitation and problems or one of fulfillment, health and inner peace (Gawain, 2002). One way to express the imagination is in the realm of the visual arts. Drawing is an excellent way to record the images our imagination presents to us so as to remember them and keep them alive. Sometimes these images are difficult to express in the written word, but take on special meaning when collected inside a drawn circle. These circles, or mandalas tell a story.

The World of Mandalas

*A mandala is art, thoughts, words, and emotions expressed in a circle.*

Julia T. Johnson, Author, *The Thundering Years.*

*Mandala* is Sanskrit for “sacred circle.” In the West, this form of sacred art may be found in the Rose windows of cathedrals or the circular designs of labyrinths. In the East, a mandala is a meditative tool used by Tibetan and Indian monks to facilitate entry
into deeper states of inner awareness. The circle is also found in American Indian rituals in the form of a Medicine Wheel. Mandalas are universal images which can be found all over the world and beyond, from the infinitely small as an atom to the infinitely large as a galaxy.

Creating a personal mandala begins with drawing a circle on paper or canvas. Making a circle creates a sense of order. The design of the mandala incorporates physical forms as well as geometrical shapes. As for color, use whatever art media you prefer such as crayons, markers, paint, pencils or pen and ink (Fincher, 2000).

Ideas for creating your mandala may come from dream symbols, a life situation, nature, favorite imagery, a theme or a question.

Working with mandalas (a) invites the presence of Self, (b) brings a sense of calm, (c) helps to develop the potential for wholeness, (d) leads one into a deeper exploration of spirituality, (e) helps to focus on thoughts that are difficult to put into words, and (f) presents new solutions to difficult questions (Fincher, 2000, p.21). The mandala may be used to increase concentration during meditation so that the meditator can become completely absorbed in it.

The following are mandalas of familiar images and of different traditions. It is meditative just to color them, if you wish. As your awareness grows, you will find that mandalas are everywhere.
Heart Light Mandala

Carolyn Grassel, January 2001
Butterfly Pattern With Quilt Stitching

Eitel (1985), p.89
Shell

Dahlke (1999), p.60
Celtic Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.168
Italian – Christian Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.170
Jewish Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.171
African Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.176
Islamic Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.184
Tibetan Mandala

Dahlke (1999), p.186
The Medicine Wheel

Bopp, Bopp Brown, Lane (1985), p.9
Creating Your Own Mandala
Creative Visualization

*The world is but canvas to our imaginations.*

Henry David Thoreau

Creative visualization is a way of using the imagination to create what you want to manifest in your life. It is different from petitionary prayer since it does not invoke the help of a spiritual power. However, the power of the imagination is itself a basic creative energy of the universe that we all use.

Just for a moment, allow your imagination to create a clear image of something you wish to manifest. Continue to focus on this goal regularly, giving it positive energy until it has been achieved or there is no longer an interest. Sometimes our goals change before they are realized. This is not unusual because it is part of the process of growth and change (Gawain, 2002).

The following visualizations may be practiced by repeating them to yourself slowly and visualizing the images that the words suggest:

*Body Scan*

This is a good way to release tender points in your body. Take three deep breaths to relax you. Scan your body with your inner awareness, from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. When you feel a point of pain or feel tension, breathe into that place until it releases, holding the intention of its relaxing. Take your time. Don’t rush. This is especially good when you come home and want
transition time (Lysne, 1997, p. 151).

**The Pebble Meditation**

While sitting and breathing slowly, think of yourself as a pebble, which is falling through a clear stream. While sinking, there is no intention to guide your movement. Sink toward the spot of total rest on the gentle sand of the riverbed. Continue meditating on the pebble until your mind and body are at complete rest: a pebble resting on the sand. You are at peace. No desire can pull you away from this present state (Nhat Hanh, 1987, pp. 132-133).

**Pink Bubble Technique**

Sit or lie down comfortably, close your eyes and breathe deeply, slowly and naturally. Gradually relax deeper and deeper. Imagine something that you would like to manifest. Imagine that it has already happened. Picture it as clearly as possible in your mind. Now in your mind’s eye surround your fantasy with a pink bubble; put your goal inside the bubble. Pink is the color associated with the heart, and if this color vibration surrounds whatever you visualize, it will bring to you only that which is in perfect affinity with your being. The third step is to let go of the bubble and imagine it floating off in the Universe, still containing your vision. This symbolizes that you are emotionally “letting go” of it. Now it is free to float around the Universe, attracting and gathering energy for its manifestation. There is nothing more you need to do (Gawain, 2002, pp. 98-99).
Chapter 6

My Philosophy of Life

At this time, I would like to suggest another journaling idea to try. Hopefully, by experiencing this sampler of spiritual practices, you have discovered more about yourself and realize that your creativity has the power to shape the world in which you live.

What is your philosophy of life? Here are some guidelines for writing your creed of life in your journal:

1. Reflect on what is important to you in your life. What do you value?
2. How do you stay connected with yourself and the world around you?
3. What are your dreams? How will you fulfill them?
4. As you practice meditating, prayer, dream watching or other creative means for self-awareness, observe any new insights on your personal philosophy along the way. Jot down any thoughts on this matter in your journal.
5. If your written philosophy survives over time (hopefully it will), reread it and see if your core beliefs are still relevant to you. Have there been any changes or new revelations? Does your living behavior match your ideals?

The following is an excerpt from my own personal philosophy written in 1965 at the age of 15:

_ I haven’t lived enough of my life yet to be philosophical about it, but for as much of it that I have lived, these are my reactions._

_ I am an advocate of education and believe that this is the basis of a rich and rewarding life. Times are changing and rapidly. In order to achieve intellectual and_
economical fulfillment, a high school education is no longer adequate. There are those who take everyday living for granted not noticing what amazing changes each new day brings.

Socially, teenagers need to mingle with other people they enjoy and with whom they share common interests...Joining some worthwhile organization such as a church youth fellowship helps the average teenager to adjust socially and gives an opportunity to meet new people.

To lead a happy and healthful life, one should indulge in plenty of exercise and a regular nutritious diet.

I believe in the Golden Rule and doing good for good’s sake.

One should choose an avocation. This is something that can be enjoyed and sometimes may lead to a vocation. One pastime which is extremely worthwhile and improves one’s thinking power is reading good books. I treasure reading and can honestly say that my vocabulary has increased.

To sum things up on my philosophy of life, I rather foster the expression, “Life is what you make it.”
Chapter 7

Ideal Suggestions

As you continue to live your life day to day, here are some suggestions that will help you remain true to your highest ideals:

1. Seek the company of those who share your values.
2. Take time everyday to be with yourself in a peaceful and restful way (write in your journal, meditate or take a slow nature walk).
3. Pay attention since ideas and answers come in interesting ways.
4. Develop your talents.
5. Be interested in your life.
6. Allow yourself to make mistakes. Think of challenges as opportunities to grow and change.
7. Have respect for your body and emotions.
8. Know that it is okay to ask for help when needed.
9. Help others when they need it.
10. Be grateful for each new day (Johnson, 2001).

"Each morning upon rising, and each evening before sleeping, give thanks for the life within you and for all life, for the good things the Creator has given you and others for the opportunity to grow a little more each day. Consider your thoughts and actions of the past days and seek for the courage and strength to be a better person. Seek for the things that will benefit everyone (Bopp et al. 1985, pg. 75)."
References


