Practicing Peace

Finding personal balance in the midst of relationship chaos

by

William C. Martin

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To The Reader

Practicing Peace is written to help you find balance in your life at a time when your external relationships may be extremely off-balance. Writing it was a balancing experience for me. I have written quite a few books of spirituality and philosophy and several of them have become quite popular. But this is the first book I have written primarily for people who use the Internet to look for information.

If you have found your way to this book you are probably looking for immediate and practical help. You are not interested in philosophical rambling and are very interested in finding ways to deal with the pain and anxiety you are facing today. I want to give you some real help. I truly do.

The pain and loneliness we all face in life doesn't always get fixed by following a series of steps. It is not like a problem in geometry where applying the correct series of operations will lead to a solution. The solution we seek is far more mysterious. It is not really a thing we arrive at once and for all, but a series of balancing activities that help us to keep going when the going is difficult.

So I have written a small book that combines the inspirational with the practical. The first part of each section is a poetic verse designed to stimulate thought about a particular issue or theme. I deliberately use verse because it is the most effective way to speak of the mysteries of the heart and spirit. These mysteries cannot be described by an equation; they must be pointed to, like pointing at the moon. The moon is beautiful. But it cannot be adequately described. It must be pointed to so you can see it for yourself. The verse sections of this book are pointers.

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The second element of each section is titled, “Think About It,” and conveys my reflections on the theme set forth in the verse. These reflections are designed to help you move from the abstract theme to the practical exercise which follows in the third element.

This third element of each section is titled, “Peace Practice,” and contains simple and practical exercises. These exercises are the heart of the book. You must do these exercises with an open mind and with some sense of hope and discipline. They are not magic, but they are effective. Over the days, weeks and months they will gradually transform your life. Some will be very effective for you. Others will seem less so. Try them all, then settle on a few that seem to give you the greatest help. Over the weeks, some that didn’t initially seem helpful will suddenly be of great value. Others that seemed to help at first may lose their steam as time goes by. This is fine. Just keep reading and trying them out.

The practice of the exercises is, as I said, not magic. It just keeps your attention focused on the deeper things of your life. It helps you keep your relationship issues in perspective. It gives you balance.

This book is not about saving your relationship. Neither is it about breaking up your relationship. It is about your deeper and essential Self that will continue to exist regardless of what happens with your relationship. It is this deeper Self that must become your primary reference point. It is what will keep you from always looking to other people for self-definition. It is what allows you to have true relationship joy. It is your Essence, your Soul. Nothing else will give you true balance.

I cannot show you this Soul of yours. I cannot describe it. I cannot

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lead you to it. I can only give my poetry and my exercises as pointers. I have absolute confidence that you have within you all you need to find your own way.

I can also give you my continued encouragement. I have written several other books on spiritual and psychological themes whose titles are included in the bibliography at the end of this book. I have a web site at *www.thestillpoint.com* which can keep you informed of new books and of my workshop and retreat schedule. You can reach me through email at *Bill@thestillpoint.com*. I invite you to use this means to correspond with me. You are adequate for your own life, but you do not have to feel alone. We are all in this mystery together and it is my delight to share the journey with you.

Bill Martin
Chico, California, March, 2002

Dear Reader,
Those of us at the Fountain Hill Center for Counseling and Consultation (www.fountianhillcenter.com) are thrilled to bring William Martin's latest book to you via the Internet. If you would like to learn more about any of Bill's other books, please email him at Bill@thestillpoint.com, or go to his website, www.thestillpoint.com. His books for parents, couples, and for sages (those of us on the second half of life!) are wonderful!
Blessings to you.

Dr. Andrew D. Atwood
On behalf of the Staff and Board of Trustee of
The Fountain Hill Center for Counseling and
Consultation.

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1 - Begin Now

If I don't begin now,
when?
If I don't pay attention right now,
when?
Why hold my illusions so desperately
thinking there will be some future better moment
to wake up?

I can't wake up now,
I have relationships to fix,
(Why doesn't it work?)
people to see,
(Why do they all look the same?)
I'll start tomorrow.

Think About It

The only possible time to begin an honest and mindful spiritual journey is right now. You picked up this book for dozens of conscious and unconscious reasons. It will not be the wisdom of the author that keeps you reading. It will be the urgings of your own soul which has been whispering, "Now! Now is the time." You don't have to believe anything, attend any

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church or temple, submit yourself to any discipline other than paying complete attention to your life , all of it!

You need no other ritual than your breathing in and out, though you may add or subtract external rituals as you continue to breathe through your life.

You need no scriptures other than the world about you, though you may gain benefit from the words of those who have written of their own experiences along the way.

You need no guide but your own soul, though many will be happy to share the journey with you.

You need adopt no faith or belief system, nor need you abandon any. You only need to awaken to your life.

Peace Practice One

Throughout this book you will often be asked to return to the simple act of breathing. It is the basic guide along the way. All you need to do is start this moment. This very breath begins the journey.

(breathe in) "Breathing in . . .
(breathe out) . . . I now begin."
(Repeat silently in rhythm with your breath for one minute)

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2 - Balance

Nature never adds
without subtracting,
therefore always remains balanced.
But each day we add to our knowledge
and neglect to subtract from our illusions.
Each day we gain experience
but forget to lose our preconceptions.
Each day we grow in age
but still hang on to our worries.
How can we ever keep our balance?

Think About It

You will never find balance by constantly trying to gain control of events, circumstances, and people. You won't fix your relationship by arranging everything "just right." Adding more and more possessions to our life will not do it. Adding more and more activities will not do it. Balance is achieved by letting things come, and go, according to their own rhythms.

Peace Practice Two

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For this exercise it will be helpful to stand quietly in a comfortable room or in some peaceful outdoor setting.

Allow the force of gravity to firmly anchor your feet to the ground.

Let your weight be evenly distributed across the bottoms of your feet - front to back and side to side.

Imagine a silken thread attached to your tailbone gently pulling your bottom downward just a bit, causing your knees to unlock and bend slightly. At the same time imagine another silken thread attached to the crown of your head gently pulling up toward heaven, stretching your spine into a natural allignment of its four curves.

Let your arms drift a few inches from your sides and rest against the magnetic field of your body rather than remain pinned tight against your body.

(This standing posture is called the "Resting Posture" in the art of Tai Chi Chuan and is very meditative and refreshing just by itself.)

As you breathe in and out, repeat to yourself some of the natural opposites of life such as:

(breathe in) "come . . ."

(breathe out) ". . . go"

use a variety of the opposites - "have - lose, up - down, here - there, hold - release, loud - quiet" and so on until you find yourself at a Still Point, a place of balance amidst the ever changing nature of life.

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3 - Approval

Receiving approval from others
is like sitting by a camp fire on a dark Winter's night.
It is pleasant and comforting.
It warms the cold regions of the mind
and keeps the fires of confidence alive.
But if it is withdrawn the darkness descends,
the mind freezes in fear,
and confidence dies.

But if a fire is built in the center of the heart
the warmth will permeate the whole body.
Nothing can extinguish it.
No one can take it away.
From it countless campfires can be lit,
bring warmth to everyone you meet.

Think About It

Childhood is bathed in experiences of insecurity. Most of what we need for survival lies outside of our control. Other, bigger, stronger people must provide it for us. As children we are completely dependent on the good will of these "bigger people." Outgrowing this deeply ingrained

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conditioning is difficult. We carry into adulthood the unconscious habit of seeing our well-being, even our survival, as dependent on the approval of seemingly stronger persons outside of ourselves.

Approval is nice. It is warming. But if it is withdrawn, then how will you keep warm? You must have a source of warmth, of fire, within you. Unless you have a furnace of self-approval as the bottom line of your life, you will never truly be warm nor will you be of warmth to others.

This does not mean that you have grandiose opinions of yourself or that you must never make mistakes. It does not mean that you do not cherish the company and help of other people. It simply means that you understand the truth that, you are adequate for your life! No matter what happens, you are adequate for your life!

Peace Practice Three

The following simple exercise is one of the most powerful in this whole book. Regular practice of it will transform your life. It is sometimes called the "Position of Compassion."

Sit quietly and breathe naturally and restfully. Place your right hand over your stomach and your left hand over your heart.. As you breathe, feel the warmth begin to grow beneath your hands at both these places. As any disturbing thoughts arise, let them sink either into the heart or the abdomen and be dissolved in the warmth. Let all of your attention keep returning to the warmth and comfort of these two areas of the body. You are building awareness of your own inner fire, your own inner power. As this awareness

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increases you will begin to notice that you are less and less dependent on the "fire" of others and therefore, paradoxically, more and more available for healthy and true relationships.

This exercise can be effective practiced for only a few brief moments, but is especially beneficial if a longer time - 10 minutes to 30 minutes can be allowed.

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4 - Belief

Don't be concerned about believing.
Be concerned instead with seeing.
See the light and shadow shapes that enter your eyes.
See the electrical dance of thought within your mind.
See the rise and fall of emotion following the thought.
See achievement, love and joy.
See failure, loss, and sorrow.
See everything arise and fall.
See it all without believing
and through your seeing,
will come your knowing.

Think About It

I'm not concerned with the debate between those who say we must first believe so that we can see, and those who say we must see in order to believe. Belief is, at best, a beginning step along the way. Belief gives us a start, a working hypothesis, by which we take the next experimental steps in life.

One of my teachers always says to me, "Believe nothing!" Of course I always have an exception to present to her. "But," I say, "certainly we must believe certain things. It's part of being human. Don't you believe some things?"

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She leans toward me from her cushion, “No,” she whispers, “But I experience everything.”

Experiencing is the key. We all long for the kind of life that comes only from an open hearted experience of the realities of both our inner and outer worlds. We don’t really need more web-sites to distract our attention. We don’t need more self-help books (including this one). We don’t need more voices to add to the confusion of conflicting beliefs. We need to know, by direct experience, the path that is truly ours.

Peace Practice Four

Begin to concentrate on the very simple things you know for sure.

I know my heart is beating.

I know the way my body feels at this moment.

I know I am breathing in and out.

Can you trust that these simplest of knowings will build into a deeper and wider knowing that will bring you the joy for which you long?

Thich Nhat Hanh, a wise and gentle Buddhist monk, taught a breath mantra that focuses on this simple knowing.

Let your breath lead you something like this:

“Breathing in, I know that I am breathing . . .

. . . breathing out, I smile.”

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5 - Belonging

The child belongs to the parents.
The adolescent belongs to no one.
The adult belongs to the community.
The seeker belongs to the self.
The elder returns to the family.
But the open hearted person
belongs to everyone.

Think About It

Oh how we long to belong somewhere, to someone. How wonderful to know that there is, underlying all the uncertainty of life, a place of certainty.

I deeply want to belong to my spouse, Nancy, and to my children, Lara and John. I want to be there in life and in death for them and I want them to be there in the same manner for each other and for me.

At the same time, I recognize that the place I truly belong is more mysterious, more awesome, more frightening, yet more secure than any of these relationships. I belong to the Divine Heart of the Universe; to the Tao; to God. But I resist acknowledging this deeper Belonging. I have convinced myself that my only safety is in the arms of loved ones.

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But the arms of loved ones are temporary. No matter how much I want it to be different, these arms are temporary. Each of us - me, Nancy, John, and Lara- will ultimately let go of human hands and walk, by ourselves, into the Mystery.

Our belonging to each other is deeply important. But it is only a mirror, a reflection of the deeper Belonging. I belong to Nancy. But through her eyes I find revealed to me something More. It is that something More that makes any real relationship possible.

Peace Practice Five

Perhaps the most important question you can consider regarding your relationship is this:

"Am I asking this person to be a window to God for me,
or to be a God to me?"

This question will lend itself to many hours of difficult but fruitful meditation. As you work with this question, you will discover many areas where you are asking the person to be a god rather than a window. Whenever we do this we sow the seeds of destruction for the relationship. Another person cannot be the God to whom we long to belong. Nor can we be the God to whom they long to belong.

Is this question at the heart of some of your pain and suffering? Think about it carefully.

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6 - Ebb and Flow

Coming and going,
having and losing,
laughing and crying,
living and dying,
pass through the open heart
without hindrance.
The mind neither grasps nor contracts.
The flow of life is unimpeded
and all things are experienced fully.
As the heart stays open,
the mind remains clear,
and the senses alert.
Universal compassion is experienced
and all is well.

Think About It

Much relationship pain comes from clinging to images of what we want, of what "should be." Being in relationship comforts many of our hidden and nameless fears. Another person is there beside us to keep the dark loneliness at bay. Because this is so comforting, any change in the relationship is perceived as an actual threat to our safety and well-being.

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This is natural.

But also natural is the fact that all things change. Life, by its very nature, is like your breath - in . . . out; full . . . empty. Always changing. Serenity comes not from arresting change, but from finding the peace beneath the change - the peace that passes understanding.

The following exercise can be an effective practice in being fully alive to all of life, rather than restricting our consciousness in an effort to secure pleasure and avoid pain.

Peace Practice Six

Let your mind remember and enjoy a time of great pleasure and peace. What were you doing? Who was there with you? Notice how you feel as you remember this. Do you notice any resistance to the memory. After a few minutes let the memory fade away. What takes its place? DId you feel any resistance to letting the memory go? How does your body feel?

Gently let a time of sorrow and loss come to your attention. Notice how your mind and your body will tend to tense against even the memory. Hold this image for just a bit and let it fade away as well. Let the joyous moments reenter. Is it difficult to return to the joy? Notice a possible tendency to hold on to the sorrow while resisting the joy. Spend some time letting the memories cycle back and forth between pleasure and pain, joy and sorrow, gain and loss. Notice how the mind and body will tend to hold on. Notice the tendency to resist the shifts of emotion and feelings. You might notice as you continue this meditation that the shifts come a bit more easily.

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(Once while doing this practice I entered a memory of deep sadness and found myself crying as I relived the pain and loss. I cried for quite a while before the memory began to fade. Then, unbidden, a memory of great peace and well-being came to my consciousness. My breathing slowed and my heart, already opened by the crying, was flooded with profound joy. I briefly glimpsed the mysterious interconnection between joy and sorrow. I understood, just for a moment, that both are necessary for the creation of an open and compassionate, heart. That understanding slipped away and I can't often recapture it. That also is part of the way things ebb and flow.*)*

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7 - First Thoughts

The day that is filled in the morning
contains few possibilities.
The day that begins in spaciousness
contains boundless opportunities.

Think About It

First thoughts, those images and ideas that fill our mind as we awaken, exert a powerful influence on the whole day. They enter our mind while it is still vulnerable and extremely succeptable to suggestion. Often they predetermine the way we interpret all the elements of our life that day: our relationships, our work, our hopes, and our moods.

As you become aware of being awake each morning you will have a natural tendency to begin a mental review; "Who am I? Where am I? What day is today? What's up today?" It is likely that your relationship issues will be among the first thoughts that appear clearly in your mind. Perhaps you begin to fill with an eagerness to get on into what promises to be a "good" day.

On the other hand you may begin to fill with dread at the difficult tasks and issues that seem to lie in wait. More probably you create a complex combination of the two. Whatever the case your mind is probably at full power before you ever get out of bed.

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Let me suggest an alternative.

Peace Practice Seven

When you realize that you are thus filling your mind, stop. Rise and sit for a moment on the edge of the bed. (So you won't go back to sleep.) Let your upper body assume a relaxed but erect posture. Let your hands sit in your lap in a meditative manner. Breathe naturally and from the abdomen. With each breath let your imagination take your attention into the region of your heart. Imagine this heart space as vast and empty, yet safe and welcoming. There is nothing waiting for you there but a safe spaciousness. Take ten relaxed breaths while imagining this. (You will gradually develop a clearer sense of this image for yourself as you practice.)

Now take ten more breaths while imagining the coming day arising out of this empty space. It is a day that has never happened before. It is a day that emerges from the creative vastness of the Divine. Anything is possible.

You have now taken approximately two or three minutes to interrupt your conditioned responses. Go ahead with your morning routine. You have made a tiny intervention that may seem insignificant but will, with practice, transform your approach to your day, and thus transform the day itself.

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8 - Experience

The mind chooses actions based on past experience
But experience is no substitute for direct perception.
The open heart perceives each moment directly,
without preconceptions.
Therefore correct action emerges from the heart,
which is young and supple
rather from the mind
which is old and rigid.

Think About It

I would be the first to admit that experience has a certain value. We have the ability to store memories of experiences and then retrieve them to compare with new experiences. Being able to conclude, "I've seen this before," can guide us to make more helpful decisions in the present moment. This ability to draw upon experience is what makes the opinions of experts worth considering.

But this very quality is a two-edged sword. And the second edge is very sharp. Saying, "I've seen this before," is always inaccurate because no moment is ever an exact repeat of a previous one. No situation is ever an exact repeat of one that has occurred before. The very expertise of the "expert" can become blindness. History is crowded with examples of expert

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opinions that refuse to acknowledge the breakthrough of individuals who see the same old things in new and different ways. It was not the expertise of Galileio and DeVinci that birthed new discoveries. It was their ability to see in new and fresh ways. It was their "open hearts" that made the difference.

Peace Practice Eight

Take a moment to go outside and select a stone from among any lying about.. Don't go too far. Just select an ordinary stone of any convenient size from the yard, the parking lot, anywhere - Just an ordinary stone.

Bring the stone back to a comfortable place where you can sit in meditation. Use your favorite meditation practice for a few moments to settle your mind and relax your breathing and your body.

Now turn your attention to the stone. Make one observation about the stone, only one- Some simple observation, such as, "it is brown."

Immediately after making the observation, return to a few moments of noticing your breath and clearing your mind.

Return your attention to the stone and make one different simple observation. This time it might be, "it is chipped."

Continue this process for twenty repetitions. Yes, I said twenty. You can do it. Just when you think there is nothing more you could possibly notice, something new will occur to you. (I once had a teacher who assigned me this exercise and told me not to come back to her until I had made a list of 100 observations. "You will then have only scratched the surface of what the stone has to tell you," she said.)

When you have finished the twenty repetitions, lay the stone down and

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bow to it. Express your gratitude to it for being such an able teacher. You have taken a wonderful step toward an open heart.

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9 - Experiencing You

I am God's only way of experiencing
"Me."
You are God's only way of experiencing
"You."
God doesn't need your goodness,
just your you-ness.
Don't settle for someone else's idea of you.

Think About It

I sat alone one early Spring day in the Arizona desert, looking around at the panorama of the Superstition Wilderness. The sun warmed my shoulders relieving the chill of the morning. I had been greeting the sun with drumming and chanting, attempting to let my conditioned reticence fall away in the safety of the desert solitude.

Suddenly I felt a shift within my consciousness that startled me. I watched a thought of gratitude arise within me that seemed to originate "outside" myself. As nearly as I can express it the thought communicated, "Thank you. Without you I could never have seen this particular sight." For a brief moment I was aware of being a "sensory organ of God."

This is a thought both frightening and awe-inspiring. Imagine! God is no stranger to any human thought or emotion. There is nothing that can be hidden from God - not because some huge heavenly Judge is hovering

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somewhere watching and evaluating. No, no, no, not at all. Nothing is hidden because God is experiencing it all, all of it - everything we label "sinful" and everything we label "good."

God notices the sparrow's fall, not because of a sophisticated celestial video monitoring scheme, but because God lives as the sparrow. God knows your innermost heart because God lives as you.

Peace Practice Nine

Don't be afraid. There is no "you" separate from God to be afraid. Your mind only thinks there is. You are always and eternally safe in the heart of God. Let your relationship issues be put in perspective. Sink into the deepest part of your identity, into the "you" that is not afraid, into the "you" that already and always has everything needed. Notice how your relationships gradually and naturally transform.

Take a breath.

It is God breathing.

Take another one. It is still God breathing.

Another . . . and another . . . and another . . . still God.

Think to yourself as you breathe in and out:

"I breathe . . .

. . . God breathes."

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10 - Focus

Focus is like a lens that directs the energy of the sun
and lights a fire in dry kindling without effort.
Anxiety is like rubbing two sticks together.
Much effort is necessary to generate enough heat to light a fire.
It can be done, but it is a waste of time.
The warmth of a fire is the natural result of the energy of the sun
and the focus of the lens.
Spiritual practice is polishing the lens,
not rubbing two sticks together.
The energy of the Divine will kindle your fire
and it will not be put out by any amount of rain.

Think About It

It is natural to lose focus during times of relationship crisis. You probably have been aware of much anxiety surrounding your mental images of how things could or should work out. This anxiety has a certain restless energy about it that often prompts you to exhaust yourself running about trying to make things "work."

Focus will feel entirely different. Focus is experienced only in the present moment. Right now, right here. It is like a laser beam of light undisturbed by the worries or fears that otherwise occupy your mind. It pays

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attention to only one thing at a time and directs all available energy at the point where effective action is possible.

Peace Practice Ten

Focus is an ability that can be learned and cultivated. It will be one of your most valuable skills for living a balanced life. Try this simple exercise:

Sit comfortably right where you are. Close your eyes and let your breath become relaxed and full. Gently count your breath to ten, counting each exhalation as one. Then open your eyes and let your gaze quickly pick out something in the room - literally anything in the room. Don't evaluate or try to do this "right." You are not looking for something "significant" - it could be an object, a color, a picture, or even a coffee stain on the carpet. It is important that you do not search for just the right object.

Focus your attention on this ordinary object. Let all thoughts drop away. Just watch this object . You will notice how difficult it is to focus completely even for a few seconds. Thoughts of all sorts will crowd around, demanding that your focus shift for a moment. Ignore them and keep returning your attention to the object. When you are tired and don't want to do this any more, do it for one more minute , then stop.

This little exercise is like practicing scales on a musical instrument . Practice it for a few moments as often during the day as you think of it. Once you see that focus is something that can be learned and practiced, you will be delighted at how often it can shift your day from the suffering of worry about the future to the joy of the present moment.

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11 - Forgiveness

As the mind's mental muscle develops,
its grip on memories tightens.
Every wound and every disappointment
is caught in this vise
and held firm.
To ease the pain, the mind covers them
with anger, resentment, and self-righteousness;
easier emotions to bear.
Forgiveness becomes an unrealistic dream,
Preached, but never experienced.

As the open heart develops,
the mind feels safe enough to relax its grip.
Protective shells dissolve and webs untangle,
and the pains are felt anew.
Then they are released to flow into the heart
where they are transformed into compassion.
Forgiveness becomes the natural response,
never preached but always present.

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Think About It

Holding onto memories is natural. Part of our sense of identity arises from the things that have happened in the past. Another aspect of our identity derives from the *meaning* we attach to the things that have happened. This is where we get in trouble. When we attach hurt and disappointed meanings to things that have occurred, the memories involved take on increased energy and become much more likely to be replayed and replayed, taking on a form that becomes difficult to release.

Peace Practice Eleven

This is one of the most difficult meditative practices. It pushes hard against the mind's conditioning that divides friend from enemy, good from bad, and acceptable from unacceptable. Always practice first with yourself as the object of your forgiveness, then shift the meditation to include other persons. Jesus said, "forgive us as we forgive others." indicating that forgiveness is not something one person gives to another but a field of compassion that enfolds both.

Sit comfortably and allow your breathing to become slow and natural. Place your hands gently against your chest and abdomen,

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as if you were holding a tiny newborn child tenderly to your body.
Take a moment to become aware of the warmth of your hands.
Imagine yourself as a newborn infant, only hours from your mother's womb, held protectively against your chest.
Let your heart melt in love and tenderness for this precious child,
and whisper softly the words it needs to hear
and carry with it all of life,
"I forgive you everything."
Rock gently back and forth
and soothe all the future pain away.
(repeat with other persons as you feel the need)

Continue this meditation for fifteen minutes if you can. Perhaps you will notice that the distinction between the child in your arms and the adult begins to blur and the forgiveness permeates more deeply. You may notice strong resistance at times. This is natural. Do not try to force feelings or responses but merely make this practice a regular part of your life. Over time it will cultivate a marvelous release of buried guilt and hardened resentment. Be patient. This is a process of opening to forgiveness for your self and others and it must overcome a lifetime of conditioning.

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12 - Don't Worry

Theologians prattle on about
"the nature of God."
Philosophers ramble on about
"the nature of life."
Both think that their endless words
are somehow solving a great and noble problem.
Problems, by their very nature
ask for a solution.
God is not a problem,
Life is not a problem.
Both merely "are."
Don't solve them.
Live them!

Think About It

There seem to be two possibilities.

One: There is no Divine Spiritual underpinning to existence.

Two: There is a Divine Spiritual underpinning to existence.

If One is true, then the best course of action is to pay attention to my brief candle of life and to do the best I can to enjoy it completely. I don't have to worry about pleasing or displeasing Divine Spirit because it does not

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exist.

If Two is true, then the best course of action is to pay attention to my brief candle of life and to do the best I can to enjoy it completely. I don't have to worry about pleasing or displeasing this Spirit, for it, by its very nature, is complete in itself. It will operate in my life according to its nature. Whatever capacity I have to recognize and relate to it will arise naturally.

The issues surrounding your life right now are not problems. They are merely life. If you continue to seek to "solve" them, you will be endlessly unhappy. Life cannot be solved. It can only be lived.

Live it!

Peace Practice Twelve

Allow your breathing to become relaxed and calm.

Let your attention center at a point an inch or two behind your eyes - in the middle of your mind. Imagine this center of attention as a small sphere of warm light. Once you have the beginnings of this image, begin to let this small sphere slowly sink down through your body, through your neck until it is resting in the region of your heart. Let it remain here. Your mind solves problems. This is good. Let it solve what problems arise.

But your mind does not live life.

Your heart lives life.

Live there.

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13 - Light

My body does not contain my spirit;
does not contain an inner light.
The light contains my body,
forms,
unforms,
and re-forms it
according to the intricate patterns
of the cosmic dance.
I am not my body.
I am the Light.

Think About It

Jesus once said, "You are the light of the world." Traditional explanations have moralized that statement and used it to encourage good deeds and acts of kindness. We are to show light through our actions.

Acts of kindness and mercy are lovely things, but that is not what I believe Jesus meant. I believe Jesus, like other "en-lightened" teachers, knew beyond doubt that we are literally made of light. If I could see the entire spectrum instead of the tiny bandwidth allowed by my eyes, I would see this truth. What I perceive as solid material would dissolve into a dance of energy vibrations, of quantum atomic energy, of light in its all of its infinite manifestations.

You and I are literally the "light of the world." Therefore, in our

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relationships we are not just “needy machines” trying to mesh our gears together in order to get our needs met. Our relationships, at their deepest and best, are dances, not battles. We can see our relationships as full of compromise and effort, or we can see them as full of shifts and changes of mood and melody, smoothly danced and fully enjoyed.

Peace Practice Thirteen

Find a space large enough to allow for free movement, a clear floor space large enough to take a few steps in any direction. Stand quietly with your hands resting loosely at your sides. Loosen your shoulder muscles a bit by rotating your neck gently three or four times, first to the left then to the right.

Imagine your arms as a series of interconnected levers, cables, and pullys. This is indeed how anatomy textbooks would describe our muscular-skeletal structure.. Move first your right arm, then your left, in a large circle - up above your head and circling down toward the floor. Do these circles for a few moments and notice how each muscle and joint moves according to mechanical principles.

Now stop and stand still for a few more minutes. Close your eyes and imagine that you can see the actual structure of your body - a light-filled dance of atomic energy, nothing substantial, just energy in motion appearing as light.

Keeping this picture in mind, again move your arms in circles. Relax your muscles. You are not pulling levers, you are effortlessly directing energy to move through space. Your arms are a dance of light - no effort.

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14 - Loneliness

Sometimes I feel lonely on this journey.
My spouse is my dear companion,
but she too will fade as do the almond blossoms
and first one, then the other of us
will fall
alone.
I must find my lonely way, though accompanied by my friends.
I must know my lonely heart, though loved by many others.
I must die my lonely death, though surrounded by my dear ones.
Only as I know my aloneness
can I know my belonging.

Think About It

The ninth century Chinese poet, Han-Shan, lived alone and wrote compellingly of the spiritual journey.

"In the wilderness, mountains and seas are all right,
But I wish I had a companion in my search for the way."

Han-Shan, Cold Mountain, trans. Burton Watson
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 68

It is terribly easy to spend one's whole life avoiding loneliness. Our culture supports this avoidance with its myriad noises and distractions. Yet

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even such a driven culture as ours cannot completely protect us from our essential aloneness. Our drive toward relationship with others is a natural wonderful part of living, but if we think it can protect us from loneliness we are mistaken.

You will discover that the recognition of loneliness does not lead to despair, though a meditation like this one may seem difficult. If we allow our hearts to fully feel this loneliness we will find we have a place of compassion that lies beyond and below our fear and anxiety. Gently letting ourselves approach this darkness will begin to rescue us from our countless escapes and distractions that serve only to keep us fearful and lead us into the very isolation we fear. Going into our loneliness brings us eventually a deep sense of belonging to the very Heart of the Universe. This belonging is renewed every moment. It is part of our very nature.

I am going to ask you to sit and meditate on loneliness. This will be difficult to do. Much of your relationship pain is due to a conscious or unconscious fear of being alone. If the meditation becomes too difficult, stop and return to it later. Perhaps you might ask a friend to be with you as you meditate.

Peace Practice Fourteen

Remember a time in your life when you were terribly lonely. Or maybe you have fears of losing those you love and finding yourself all alone. Perhaps you feel very alone in your life at the present time.

Allow these feelings of loneliness to flow into and out of your body with each breath. Breathing in, feel the loneliness. Breathing out, let the

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loneliness flow away. Notice, for just a moment, a more comfortable sensation in the chest and. Sometimes the feelings may be so intense that you are on the verge of panicking or breaking out in sobs. Just notice these feelings as well.

If you have dear friends and family members, take a moment to bring them to your mind in gratitude. They are truly blessings in your life and worthy of being celebrated.

But now let the sense of their presence fade away. Imagine time and circumstances gently removing them from your life, leaving you alone.

(As I am doing this meditation at the present moment, I feel a tingling sense of panic, almost desperation rising in my chest. Without loved ones or friends the world seems a terrible, hostile place and I feel doubts about my ability to cope with it in those circumstances. I breathe into my panic for ten breaths and it subsides just a bit. I allow it to remain at the edge of my consciousness and then cautiously let it back in.

As the panic rises once more I recognize that I feel very young, a child afraid of being abandoned to a situation I don't understand and don't feel I can handle. Again I breathe into the panic and let it move aside just a bit. Then I take two or three deep breaths and let my meditation end, noticing that I still hold on to nebulous anxious feelings.)

To end this meditation, place your right palm open over your heart and your left palm open over your abdomen. Let the warmth from your hands bring you comfort. Breathe this way until you feel a sense of connectedness and universal compassion that encompasses your loneliness.

Greatest blessings upon you, courageous pilgrim. You are greatly loved. Do not be afraid.

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15 - Love or Awakening?

One teacher says the task of life
is to awaken.
Another says it is to love.
Both are right.
To love without awakening
is attachment to a need for another person,
not really love at all.
To awaken without loving
is attachment to an idea in the mind,
while remaining fast asleep.
Love and awakening are two sides
of one coin.

Think About It

To try to use spiritual practice as a tool to fix a love relationship will not work. The spiritual path is a path of awakening and will not be used as a means to any other end.

But the fact that you are struggling with loving another person is a wonderful sign. For just as trying to love without awakening will never work, awakening without love is empty and useless.

All of the pain, struggle, and wonder of trying to thus love another person and be loved in return is like a loud alarm clock ringing right beside the bed where we are trying to sleep.

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"Wake up!" it cries. Over and over it screams, "Wake up!"

So, welcome to the morning. The day seems filled with fearful images and I know you would rather pull up the covers and try to return to a dream where love is easy and all your fantasies are fulfilled.

Sorry. Time to wake up. But I promise you that the day will be ever so much more wonderful than your comfortable dreams. It will have pain and loss mixed with the joy and pleasure, but it will be REAL. You will be ALIVE.

It may be helpful to begin to distinguish between your desires for a "dream life" and the longing of your Soul for a "real life." Often our images of a romantic relationship have many elements of a dream .

Of course we all want a "dreamy" relationship, don't we?

Who wants a "real" relationship?

How do you know what is "real" and what is "dream?"

Peace Practice Fifteen

Sit quietly and think about these two words, dream and real.

Real is that which is before you right now, in the present moment. It may not be everything you want it to be. But it is far more than you are allowing it to be. Love cannot exist in a dream. Love is REAL. And it can only be experienced by one who is wide awake.

Ask yourself, "What am I missing in the present moment by hanging on to my sleep-time dream?"

(breathe in) "Real . . .

(breathe out) . . . Dream."

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16 - Clear Thinking

Conditioned thinking creates problem after problem
needing them to keep itself alive.
Clear thinking arises,
does its work,
and disappears.
No trace,
no problem.

Think About It

While sitting in my morning meditation today, I found my mind generating an entire drama involving my losing all I have due to mindless mistakes, ending up sick, on the street, alone and disgraced. Silly? Of course. But I'll wager it is familiar. This whole drama arose because I was balancing the checkbook last night and feeling the stress of tight finances as my spouse and I seek to grow a Center for Contemplative Practice.

Being a problem solving machine, the mind has been trained to attach some sort of problem to almost every internal thought or external situation. "What does this mean?" it asks. "Will this last?" it worries. "This is awful, how can we get rid of it," it complains. "This is great, how can we hang on to it," it pleads.

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And so, in all the marvelous moments when we are faced with ordinary work and pleasures, the mind jumps into gear and creates countless problems - this is what it has been trained to do.

In the midst of your relationship issues, you still have countless moments of ordinary happiness staring you right in the face. But I'll wager your mind is keeping you convinced that there are problems to be solved and that you must worry about them, right now, right here. Anything but relax and enjoy the moment.

Peace Practice Sixteen

Teaching the mind to arise and do its work, then return to rest, is a lifelong task. Begin with following the breath into the present moment and imagining a cool mist swirling gently within the mind. Softly, without violence, this mist washes the neural pathways. Like cleaning up a computer disk, you allow the mist to free the pathways of the mind, leaving them clean and ready for solving real problems at the proper time. In rhythm with your breathing say:

"Breathing in, I wash my mind . . .
. . . breathing out, I rest in peace."

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17 - No Worries

No need to beg God
to give you this, or spare you that.
No need to curry favor, or avoid displeasure.
No need to bargain or whine.
Prayer is like irrigating thirsty crops.
Open the water gates, step aside,
and let water do what water does.
No need to beg.
No need to push.
No need to worry.
Water flows.

Think About It

Many times in our prayers we fall into the trap of worrying and begging, as if God is just one more way we have to get all of our "ducks in a row."

Conversation with God is important. Nothing you say or don't say will affect God's unconditional acceptance of you and love for you. But there is no need to worry, no need to have our relationship with God be just one more relationship in our life that we have to "do right." This is the one relationship we can't do wrong. Relax.

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Peace Practice Seventeen

Whatever your spiritual practice of prayer or meditation, relax your facial muscles, soften your eyes, let the tension drain from your shoulders, open your hands, pay attention to your breath, and let your mind quiet naturally. Don't judge your thoughts or words. Don't condemn yourself or others. Nothing more is necessary.

Try these words in rhythm with your breathing:

(breathe in) "no . . .

(breathe out) . . . worries."

(breathe in) "water . . .

(breathe out) " . . . flows."

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18 - Holy Scripture

Scriptures and bibles live in the mind,
but the Word of God lives only in the heart.
Collect the words your soul knows to be true and helpful,
beautiful and encouraging,
comforting and challenging,
from wherever you may find them.
Do not limit yourself to one,
or even to a thousand books.
Cherish the words of loved ones
and honor the thoughts of strangers.
Do not neglect the words
that arise in your own heart.
Write this living bible with your own hand.
Keep it with you always
and add to it and subtract from it
as your journey unfolds.
It will be the very voice of God for you.

Think About It

Jesus said, “the letter brings death, but the Spirit brings life.” You must have the courage to write out your own truths. Your current pains and

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struggles are inviting you to explore deeper and deeper into the uncharted territory of your own heart. This is your heart and no one else can map it for you. Others can only give hints. You must write it yourself and now, in the time of your confusion and pain, is the time to begin.

Peace Practice Eighteen

This may be the most important exercise you will ever undertake. It involves a profound shifting of your center of attention from outside voices to the Inner Voice of your own Soul.

Start today. Pick out a diary, blank book, or journal and write at the top of the first page - "My Guidebook". Keep it with you at all times and don't hesitate to modify, cross out, and add to its entries. You are building the Scripture of your Heart. It is a sacred act. You may use entries from the scriptures of your own tradition, but only those that ring deeply true for you. You are not rejecting the other parts. You are merely constructing your own, personal, unique logbook and guide.

This will not be a journal of thoughts and ramblings. It will be a place to write down only those things that appear to be true and helpful. Be aware that these entries will change over the days, weeks and months.

These pages will become the mirror of your heart, a Living Scripture.

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19 - Teachers and Saviors

They call Buddha, Teacher
and Jesus, Savior
The only thing a teacher does
is awaken your own wisdom.
The only thing a savior does
is introduce you to your own wholeness.
Wisdom and salvation do not reside outside of you
they are already as close as your breath.

Think About It

Shifting from an external orientation to an internal one is a hero's journey, requiring the deepest sort of trust and courage. We must let our teachers and saviors do their work without projecting on to them our own light and then abandoning it to them. Constructing religions around guides and saviors can immobilize them and blunt their words.

I invite you to consider your favorite teacher or savior as one who stands beside you on a soft Summer night and points out the constellations with the authority of one who has spent countless nights considering the stars. Does this wise one really want you to see him or her more clearly? Or is it the stars you are to see?

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Those of us who have grown up in a particular religious heritage sometimes have great difficulty taking back the projections we have naturally placed on the heroes of our faith. But the path of awakening demands that we see for ourselves, experience for ourselves, and know for ourselves.

Peace Practice Nineteen

Take some time for comfortable meditation. Let your breathing be relaxed and peaceful and allow this breathing to lead you to a sense of gentle awareness of the center of your body, just below your navel and a few inches inside your skin. This place will symbolize for the moment the very Center of who you are.

Imagine a tiny pinprick of light shining at this spot. It is very tiny, but each time you breathe it grows just a bit. Gradually it grows enough so that you can feel a soothing warmth coming from it. Each breath increases this comfortable warm feeling and the light is becoming brighter and larger.

Soon it fills your whole abdomen and becomes large enough to escape the confines of your skin. Keep breathing until this light literally shines everywhere around you and within you. Bask in its illumination and warmth for a few breaths. Then allow it to become smaller and smaller until it returns to the tiny light at your very Center. This is where it always has been and always will be.

This is the Light of God at the very center of your life

Make a brief bow to the wonder and glory of this Light to which you belong and which belongs to you.

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20 - The Soul's Consultant

Your mind is your soul's consultant,
your heart's advisor.
Let it analyze problems,
then suggest solutions.
Then gently remove from it
the burden of worry, fuss and fret.
Give it spacious silence
in which to calm and rest itself.
Then follow the wisdom of your soul
and the compassion of your heart.

Think About It

Imagine you are the CEO of a large corporation who has hired an expensive consultant to advise you. The consultant has presented you with a detailed analysis and a set of recommended action steps. Now this consultant begins to barrage you with phone calls, emails, and faxes at all times of the day and night checking to see whether or not you have followed his recommendations; issuing you dire warnings of the consequences of not doing what he suggests, and reminding you that his other clients did what he said and they greatly benefited.

How many ways can you say, "You're fired?" Yet how often do we submit to this intrusive barrage from our mind and call it normal living?

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In the midst of your current problems, thank your mind for its work, , and tell it you'll get back to it if you need any more information. Then let your compassionate and open heart do its work.

Peace Practice Twenty

Take a few moments to breathe quietly and allow the thoughts to settle down for just a moment. Focus your attention at a spot inside your skull, just behind your forehead - the area of your mind/brain. Take a deep breath and shift your focus to a spot inside the middle of your chest - your heart. Take another breath and shift back to the brain/mind.

Gently, in rhythm with your breathing, shift your attention back and forth from brain to heart. Do this very gently. You are teaching yourself to shift your attention, your sense of identity, away from your head.

When you sense your thoughts going in circles and trying to punish or guilt you, practice this shifting exercise. Your mind is your servant, not your master. Your heart is in charge.

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21 - Waiting

Standing in line
or snarled in traffic,
the balanced heart is never waiting
for something else to happen.
Therefore it is relaxed and supple,
free of complaint,
and open to wondrous possibilities.

Think About It

It is very difficult to wait patiently when your life is in chaos, but this art is essential to a balanced heart. Each opportunity to wait must be welcomed as one would welcome an honored teacher into one's home. Don't try to force issues.

Wait

Peace Practice Twenty-One

Sit in a peaceful posture.

Let your breathing be relaxed and full. Sit until you become restless, perhaps it will take only a few moments, perhaps longer. Once you become restless, begin to let the word, "wait . . . ," begin to appear in rhythm with your breathing. Let your restlessness grow, but keep breathing, "wait."

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Finally when you feel you can't possibly wait even one more minute, do just that - wait one more minute, no more no less. Then get up and go about your business.

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22 - Who Am I?

I ask God, "Who am I?"
He replies, "Yes."
Feeling like Abbot or Costello I push on,
"But who am I?"
"You are indeed," replies the Comedian.
"No, no, no. Who am I?"
"Now you've got it," glows the Divine Smile.
"I give up."
"Yes! Wonderful!" laughs God.

Think About It

Suffering in relationships often involves clinging to myths about yourself, about who you are and what you need. Becoming aware often requires leaving behind conditioned beliefs regarding self-identity. Much of your self image consists of who you have learned yourself to be in your interaction with other people. This can be an extremely elusive identity, shifting and dancing according to moods, circumstances, and needs.

Your identity is especially vulnerable to the moods and actions of others. If a significant other person loves you, you can consider yourself loveable. If this person does not love you, you easily switch to a "not loveable" self identity. Well, which is it? Loveable, or not loveable? No

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way to pin it down.

God is not interested in propping up all of our masks and images of ourself. God knows that our true identity is part of the Mystery of Divine Life and that we can't pin it down with our words and roles. Asking God to help us to be better actors and to be better at keeping our roles and masks in place will only keep us forever frustrated.

Our frustrations with God and with our relationships can help us break through to new life. It is a painful path, but it is a path that leads to wonderful awakenings.

Peace Practice Twenty-Two

I suggest that you spend a week meditating only on the question, "Who am I?"

Let the question rise and fall with your breath in times of formal meditation and in countless other times during the day.

Do not accept any answer that arises. You will think of pat answers, roles, identities that are tied to other people - be satisfied with nothing that comes to mind. Keep saying, "Yes, but who am I?" Change the word that receives the emphasis. Keep asking. Keep asking.

With luck, you may reach a point where the whole thing seems absurd. Good. Keep asking.

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23 - Who Cares?

Sometimes caring for another person hurts so much
we question the nature of caring,
saying, "Who cares anyway!"
This leads to cynicism and despair.

Sometimes caring for another person hurts so much
we question the nature of the "who" that hurts,
saying, "Who is it that hurts so much?"
This leads to peace and joy.

The cynic has questioned the caring.
The sage has questioned the "who."

Think About It

There is a fine line between despair and contentment. Both arise from deep and painful questioning. One line of questioning attempts to figure out how to arrange the externals of life in a manner that will comfort and please the parts of us who are needy and afraid. This line of questioning does not lead to lasting peace. It is like trying to please a very young child. No sooner do we arrange things one way than the child decides something else is needed. Or the child may be so afraid of imaginary things that nothing we do can ease the fear.

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The other line of questioning trys to understand the nature of the parts of us who are so needy and afraid. This is a long and difficult way of searching. It does not lead to quick and easy answers. It is not satisfied with temporary diversions or manipulation of other people. But it is the way to true peace and contentment.

Peace Practice Twenty-Three

The next time you are in a difficult and painful state of mind, ask the key question:

Who is it that feels this way?

Sit in quiet meditation. and let your breathing become relaxed and full. Let the question repeat itself in the rhythm of your breath.

"Who is it . . .

. . . that feels this way?"

A very important related question may be,

"How old is the one who feels this way?"

The "who" that feels afraid, mad, or sad is never the deepest part of us. It is always a part of us that has learned to feel this way for a reason. This learning usually began at an early age.

"How old is the one who feels this way?"

Don't try to analyze this rationally as if you were Sigmund Freud. Just get a sense of this painful part of you. and realize that it is only a small and quite young part of you. There is a deeper you that remains unafraid

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and calm beneath all the storm. This part of you can comfort and reassure the younger, frightened part. Don't fall victim to mistaken identity.

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24 - Worship

The Divine does not need worship
nor does it seek adoration.
It is enough that we see every shape and shade,
listen to every nuance of sound,
feel every breeze that touches our skin,
inhale every fragrance
and taste all things bitter and sweet.
You are the temple.
You are the priest.
Each breath you take is a sacrament.
This is the acceptable worship of God.

Think About It

Worship can be a help in balancing our life amidst relationship issues, but only if it is a natural activity. You don't need another thing in your life that you "have to do." Worship will not make things work our the way you want. It may help you to see more deeply and to appreciate the ordinary moments you are graciously given.

Make no mistake. God has no need whatsoever of worship. The notion that the Grace and Love behind the cosmos needs to be flattered and praised is absurd. Worship rituals have become part of the world's great

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spiritual traditions because they help us pay attention. They help us feel connected and grateful. They sometimes open our eyes and unblock our ears. They slow us down.

At its best, formal worship serves as a training session for cultivating attention. The goal is to learn to worship by paying complete attention to each and every breath of life.

Peace Practice Twenty-Four

Suggestion: Each day spend a few minutes in a place of serenity and beauty, even if it is just in a corner of your room watching a small flower arrangement in a tiny vase. Take these moments to worship and praise the unfolding mystery of your life.

You might also practice throughout the day using words such as these:

"Breathing in, I praise . . .
. . . breathing out, I worship."

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25 - Yin and Yang

Seeking only Yang
causes Yin to hide
until it is strong enough to burst loose,
causing great damage.
When good behavior is demanded,
evil hides beneath the surface
where no one will see.
When a compassionate heart is sought,
evil finds no place of concealment
and ceases to cause harm.
Find a heart of compassion
and your darkness will once again
dance with your light.

Think About It

Yin and Yang are symbols of the universal nature of polarity. All existence is predicated on the presence of both positive and negative. The very structure of the atom depends on the dance of the electron and the proton - each in perfect balance and harmony with each other. So it is in the spiritual life. Spiritual practice is not a seeking of only the qualities, thoughts, and actions we have learned to label, "good." Spiritual practice is a compassionate, yet difficult and courageous, look at everything in the inner

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and outer worlds.

Give up trying to be a good person in order to make your relationship work. If a potential lover wants to see only your acceptable side, this person will never truly love you. Give up trying to make your partner into a good person in order to make your relationship work. If you want to see only the acceptable side of your lover, you will never truly love them.

Of course I am not recommending that you act out every destructive impulse that comes to mind. I am suggesting that you become instead a whole person, seeing all the dark and light that makes up your life. Acknowledging your light allows it to shine without diminishment. Acknowledging your darkness lessens its power to act out destructively.

Peace Practice Twenty-Five

The parts of you that act in destructive ways are very young parts of you, even though the results of their actions may be powerful. Treat them with the compassion you would show a fearful child who doesn't understand how destructive his fear really is.

In your meditation, visualize a part of your personality that you find unacceptable, that you always criticize and try to control. Let this part of you take the form of a small child. (No matter how "adult" these parts of you seem or how adult their destructiveness might be, they are still children. It is important to concentrate until they can be pictured as such.)

When you have an image in mind, picture letting this child sit on your lap and cry or yell or whatever it seems to need to do until it finally settles down in your arms. Hold it close until you sense a glimmer of compassion

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arise within you for this child's pain.

This is a difficult exercise. You will tend to shy away from it, preferring to push these parts of you away, to deny them, or try to fix them - make them behave. I tell you truly, only compassion will heal and integrate them into the wholeness of your marvelous life.

And remember , until you can embrace these parts of you, how can you ever truly embrace another person with all of their own shadows and lights?

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26 - You Are You

"You are the salt of the earth,"
said Jesus.
That about you
which you judge as unacceptable
is part of what gives you
your uniqueness.
Be careful of self improvement efforts.
In attempting to please another person
you may try to become something you are not.
You will fail.
Everyone will be miserable.
If you don't live the life
that lies deep within you,
who will?

Think About It

You don't have to be Jesus.
You don't have to be Gandhi.
You don't have to be Mother Teresa.
You have to be you.
Sounds self evident, doesn't it? Yet most people spend their entire

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lives contorting and twisting themselves and other people in a tragic attempt to make everything fit into some sort of an ideal mold.

Peace Practice Twenty-Six

Sit quietly. Take a few moments to follow your breath into a relaxed state.

Question: "Who am I trying to be?"

Spend a few minutes letting this question become part of your breathing.

(inhale) "Who am I . . .

(exhale) . . . trying to be?"

Don't try to figure it out. Just let the question become part of you for a while.

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Conclusion (But not the end)

The organic digital computer we call our brain processes the events of life in a linear fashion and from them creates a sense of individual identity. This conditioned sense of identity is changed and modified by each new bit of data the brain adds to its memory. This brain cannot adequately process images of a time before it existed or a time after it dies so it cannot imagine an identity before or after this life.

Listen carefully. This is very important. It is the summation of everything this book is communicating.

You are <u>not</u> your brain!

It is obvious that your eye is a sense organ that processes light and breaks some of it into bits of electrical impulses that your brain can process and turn into experiences and memories. Your brain is also a sense organ. It is a wonderfully complex sense organ, but still a sense organ.

Here is a question that may be one of the most important questions of your life.

If your eye "belongs" to your brain and provides it with data then to whom, or what, does your brain belong?

It is my contention that this deeper "you" is your true identity. It may be called soul, spirit, or essence. The name doesn't matter. This is <u>you.</u> This you is eternally safe as an expression of God and knows perfect peace always.

This book has been about practices that help you shift your sense of who you are from the various conditioned and confusing identities to your

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unconditioned and eternal identity. This is the practice of peace. You cannot find peace by any arrangement of the conditioned identities within you or any arrangement of the other people outside of you. You cannot make yourself be at peace. You, the real you, is at peace. With practice, you can learn to take all the smaller, conditioned "yous" to the place where the real You lives.

In the following appendix I have included a list of books and other resources I have found helpful in my own practice. Look it over and see if any of them appeal to your intuition. Explore them. Explore everything that seems to call to you.

This is practicing peace.

I will resist closing by wishing you peace. You are peace.

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Appendix of Resources

Books

1. *Save Your Marriage,* Dr. Andrew Atwood,

Andy is my dearest friend and valued colleague. His book is available on-line at www.marrigeanddivorcehelp.com. It offers practical and thoughtful steps for evaluating your marriage and helps you make decisions based on the best within you.

2. *How To Know God, The Soul's Journey into the Mystery of Mysteries,* Deepak Chopra, Harmony Books

If you want to explore the spiritual path along with one of today's true spiritual masters, read this book. It requires your focused attention but is well worth the effort.

3. *There is Nothing Wrong With You*, Cheri Huber, Keep It Simple Books

My wife, Nancy, and I regularly attend meditation retreats at the Zen Center in Northern California where Cheri teaches. She has clear insight into the ways we punish ourselves and offers straight-forward advice on breaking the habits of self-hate.

4. *The Power of Now*, Eckhart Tolle, New World Library

Tolle does a remarkable job of distilling the basic truth found in all spiritual paths: that life is NOW. He presents his teachings in non-technical and helpful words.

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4. *The Couple's Tao Te Ching,* William Martin, Marlowe and Co.

5. *The Parent's Tao Te Ching,* William Martin, Marlowe and Co.

6. *The Sage's Tao Te Ching,* William Martin, Marlowe and Co.

7. *The Way of the Word,* William Martin, CTS Press

I can't avoid recommending my own books. They express my own journey through a combination of Christian and ancient Chinese Taoist insights.

Internet Resources

www.thestillpoint.com

This site will keep you informed of my retreat and seminar schedule. You can also buy my books through this site if you wish. My email address is *Bill@thestillpoint.com* Please write me if you would like some help along the way.

www.keepitsimplebooks.com

This site has links to Cheri Huber's books and also to the work of the Zen Monastery Practice Center where I take my personal retreats.

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Dear Reader,

Once again we want to thank you for taking peace seriously. If you would like to learn more about Bill Martin, remember to go to his website at www.thestillpoint.com.

If you would like to learn more about Dominican Center at Marywood go to www.dominicancenter.com.

And, if you would like to learn more about the Fountain Hill Center go to www.fountainhillcenter.com.

And remember, always, "You are peace."

Thanks again,

Dr. Andrew D. Atwood

On Behalf of the Folks at Staff and Board of Trustee Of the Fountain Hill Center for Counseling and Consultation

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