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The Companion Playlist

We have compiled a playlist of practice instructions, stories and music. We would like to thank all the wonderful beings who have contributed to this compilation.

Access the playlist here:


Look for this symbol throughout the book:

CD

It appears next to topics that are supplemented by content on the playlist. (In earlier versions of this book, the playlist was a cd; that’s why it’s a CD symbol!)
Companion Playlist Track Listing

1. *Welcome to the Path*
   Eyerate and Dinoswords
   Companion Original, 2006

2. *Kaira Silo/The Hand of Love*
   Sule Greg Wilson
   The Drummers’ Path
   Destiny Recordings, 1994

3. *Basic Meditation/Counting the Way*
   Ian Koebner
   Companion Original, 2006

4. *Loving-Kindness Meditation*
   Mirabai Bush
   Companion Original, 2006

5. *Oriki Egún/Praising the Ancestors*
   Rose Sackey-Milligan
   Companion Original, 2006

6. *Ritual*
   Sobonfu Some
   Women’s Wisdom from the Heart of Africa
   Sounds True, 2005

7. *Introduction to Kirtan*
   Dan Edwards
   Companion Original, 2006
   *(Kirtan from *Sita Ram* by Jai Uttal)*

8. *Sita Ram*
   Jai Uttal
   Kirtan! The art and practice of ecstatic chant
   Sounds True, 2004

9. *Like This*
   Coleman Barks
   I Want Burning: The Ecstatic World of Rumi,
   Hafiz, and Lallah
   Sounds True, 2001

10. *The Way of the Drummer*
    Sule Greg Wilson
    Companion Original, 2006

11. *The Opening of the Way*
    Sule Greg Wilson
    The Drummers’ Path
    Destiny Recordings, 1994

12. *Soul Dancing*
    Chivonnie Meekins
    Companion Original, 2006
    Drums from The Drummers’ Path, 1994

13. *Del MeeravadZe Dastam (My Heart is Slipping from My Grasp)*
    Dashtan Ensemble
    Sounds True, 2000
Welcome

The Activist’s Ally is a resource manual for social justice activists seeking to bring contemplative practices into their lives, communities and workplaces. This manual is designed to assist you down the road of personal transformation with a dual focus on individual and group practice. As you read through each chapter, reflect on your own state to see how you personally connect with the material. Then, see how the information can affect your immediate community. The work begins with you.

We have to develop some form of sustaining practice if we intend to stay in the fight for justice over the long haul. At the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, we’ve seen how burnout affects the social justice community. It can be one of the most difficult challenges we confront. We believe that the best way to sustain ourselves while working for change is with the help of contemplative practices: activities that, when incorporated into our daily life, bring us strength, peace, and inspiration. We hope that this manual will serve as an introduction to contemplative social justice work, a companion to steady the ship during rough travels.

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s goal is to bring contemplative practice to people who are working to improve our world. This manual grew from ten years of the Center’s work with various organizations that have worked for social justice on issues including civil rights, equal rights, environmental justice, economic justice, welfare and poverty, education and the arts, health care including AIDS/HIV, labor, criminal justice, free speech and media reform, immigration, and housing and homelessness. Many of us have suffered burnout, and even when we are part of a contemplative workplace and individually nurture our paths of practice, we are still susceptible to being overworked and pushing too hard. However, our individual and organizational systems and practices help us to foster a greater awareness of when burnout is taking place and thus slow down, reflect, and pursue self-care. We understand and have fought this struggle, and it is our mission to pass on the tools that have been most beneficial during our campaigns. These are the gifts that we want to share with you.
What is the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society?

The Center began in 1993 when a group of people with experience in contemplative practice and an interest in social change came together to explore how contemplative practice could support work for social transformation. In 1997, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society was incorporated as a non-profit organization with a mission to integrate contemplative awareness into contemporary life in order to help create a more just, compassionate, and reflective society.

Because the Center wanted to make contemplative practices available in ways other than traditional monastic forms, we began by offering programs of practice and discussion to people who shared a common profession or interest. We originally created pilot projects in philanthropy, business, law, environment, journalism, higher education, and social justice activism to engage people in both the personal and professional concerns of their lives. In 2010, we focused our efforts on improving post-secondary education. We now hold conferences, retreats and workshops, create publications, identify useful resources, and connect like-minded individuals and organizations to help promote a stronger network of people working to improve education, and our society, with contemplative practices.
Part I:

An Introduction to Contemplative Practice
What Are Contemplative Practices?

What are contemplative practices? Most people don’t know what contemplative practices are, and there are language differences that keep us from understanding their essence and meaning. In other words, you may already have a contemplative practice in your life, but you may call it by a different name.

At the Center, we use the phrase “contemplative practice” to refer to any activity undertaken regularly with the intention of quieting the mind and cultivating deep concentration, calm, and awareness of the present moment. These practices can help develop compassion and an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life. Ideally, the insights that arise from the mind, body, and heart in the contemplative state reveal what has meaning in our lives.

Contemplative practices can include many forms of single-minded concentration, such as meditation; journal writing; mindful movement such as yoga, t’ai chi, and dance; prayer; ceremony; mindful reading; experiences in nature; artistic practices such as poetry, music, and spoken word; and forms of social activism in a context of mindfulness.

These practices may be done in silence and solitude, but they may also take a communal form. We consider various kinds of rituals and ceremonies, such as those designed to create sacred space, mark rites of passage, and celebrate cyclical nature of time, to be forms of contemplative practice. These include the practice of Shabbat, seasonal celebrations, fasting, and vision quests. We also view engaged interpersonal communication as a form of contemplative practice, including the Native American council circle process, storytelling, dialog, and deep listening.

Through the thoughtful application of the effects of contemplative practice to your daily life, a contemplative perspective gradually develops. The contemplative perspective connects the increased inner sensitivity that practice brings with your
activity in the outer world, through your work and relationships. By becoming more aware of yourself through practice, you can become more aware of others, eventually gaining an enhanced appreciation and understanding of the quality of your interactions in the world.

**Why Do Practices Matter?**

Contemplative practices can help you improve your relationships with yourself and other people. More specifically, the benefits of practice include:

**Transforming your relationship with yourself:**

- Generating an overall sense of calm and well-being
- Managing your stress and its impact on your body
- Deepening your self-understanding
- Sharpening your focus, concentration, and insight
- Upholding your core values in your personal and professional life

**Improving your relationships with others:**

- Enabling you to treat people with compassion and wisdom
- Helping you to see conflicts from different angles, opening up creative possibilities for problem-solving and resolving disagreement
- Improving your listening skills

**Enriching your relationship with the world around you:**

- Increasing your global awareness and appreciation for the interconnection of all life
- Developing the ability to question, explore, adapt to rapid change, and deal with complexity
‘Agape’ is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When you rise to love on this level, you love all people not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loves them. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Love your enemies.” And I’m happy he didn’t say, “Like your enemies,” because there are some people I find it pretty difficult to like…

I’ve seen too much hate to want to hate, myself…hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up to our most bitter opponents and say, “We will meet your physical force with soul force…do to us what you will and we will still love you…”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Compassionate Justice: Contemplative Skills and the Social Justice Movement

In the world of service today, it is normal to “do, do, do” and keep doing until the job is done, regardless of what it takes. This form of service, although courageous, can wipe us out as we focus all of our energy toward the well-being of others while being unaware of the implications for our own health and safety.

Transforming Activism

Although the connection between inner peace and a just world is known by many, the culture of social justice organizing and activism has severely undermined the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health of some of its finest warriors. This is a culture that encourages you to push yourself beyond reasonable limits because often there are no measures to determine when you have worked hard enough. Leaders may encourage an unhealthy and unrealistic work ethic. Burnout is often interpreted as a personal failure. Activists often work from a place of righteousness and excessive anger, losing perspective of the long view of change and possibly replicating one system of injustice with another.

Contemplative awareness can serve as a countermeasure to these challenges.

Compassionate justice is not only about self-care. It is also about helping you work to transform injustice into justice. With contemplative practices and self-care, it becomes easier to keep from adopting the language and methods of our adversaries. One of the beautiful things about integrating a contemplative perspective into your work is the joy of watching yourself shift from fighting fire with fire to fighting fire with water.
Contemplative Practice and Social Change

Through hundreds of years of practice and more recent medical and scientific studies, it is known that meditation and other contemplative practices can reduce stress and increase well-being. At the Center, we are also seeing that contemplative awareness can help contribute to wise, compassionate activism and leadership in every sector of American life. Contemplative practices can give you tools that address the causes of burnout: stress, exhaustion, anger, fear, frustration, and loss of motivation. Religious and spiritual institutions and some psychological programs have traditionally performed this role, but practices can also be learned and shared outside these institutions. We have heard repeatedly from participants in our retreats that meditation, walking the labyrinth, contemplative arts, and other contemplative practices learned outside a religious setting increased their empathy, compassion, and ability to work creatively with others.

We also recognize that the practices must be offered with skill and integrity to have a positive impact. They are seeds of change for a long-term, sustainable shift in our individual lives and society.

In 1997 we interviewed 40 well-respected teachers of contemplative practice from diverse religious, spiritual, and secular traditions. One of many questions we asked them was, “What is the connection between contemplation and social change?” Most of these teachers stated that not only does meditation not lead
to antisocial (“navel-gazing”) behavior, but that there is a causal connection between contemplative practice and social action. What happens for many people in the process of quieting down and cultivating awareness is a deepening sense of the interconnection of all life, and, flowing out of this, greater compassion.

As Rabbi Meir Sendor explains,

...There are certain ethical postures or stances that you come to appreciate, to be understood more deeply as you meditate. A sense of equanimity that meditation helps generate also gives you a deeper sense of equality that spreads to your relationship to others, as you can diminish your own ego obsession and open up to others and you get a greater sense of reciprocity and mutuality. These are all the great principles of every moral tradition. It seems that, in a certain sense, meditation or contemplation helps bring these principles alive. You get to understand them in a much deeper way. It’s not just on the surface. It’s not just weighing one thing against another. You really feel your sense of oneness with others, your connectedness with others, with all beings in the universe.

Some teachers were concerned that meditation could also be used as a way to avoid dealing with life. Rabbi Omer-Man cautioned, “My concern was that people - my students and other practitioners - were using meditation for a means to become too detached when there was a need to be attached.” But David Cooper reminded us that it is about balance:

In our day, you need both; you can’t do one without the other. If you become a person of incredible social action and you’re just out there, burning the candle at both ends, what happens is you burn out very quickly. You need a place where you can come back and regenerate yourself. On the other hand if you just go inside and become completely dedicated to practice and don’t have social consciousness and social action in mind - what happens is you shrivel up and lose your juices.
Father Thomas Keating also felt that “contemplation is the basis for social action, in the sense that without contemplation such action can be draining, while if one’s activity is rooted in a spiritual center nourished by contemplative prayer, there is much greater chance of perseverance and effectiveness in one’s service.”

**Benefits**

The Center has heard interesting and profound reports of the benefits of contemplative practices for social change. The following list leaves aside the physical benefits of contemplative practices, like stress reduction, pain management, reduced blood pressure, better sleep patterns, etc., all of which are related to the capacities listed below.

- **Ability to be present with suffering** (one’s own and that of others) without withdrawing, repressing, or ignoring it.

- **Renewing one’s commitment to a cause**: remembering original motivations. For example, at a contemplative retreat lead by the Center for leaders of national environmental organizations, participants realized that they had been wasting precious time and energy competing with each other for resources. This realization helps them re-commit to working more cooperatively towards their shared goals.

- **Improved relationships with others**: interpersonal intelligence and the ability to understand another point of view. Most work for social change is active and collaborative. Lawyers report greater understanding of their clients and also their opposing counsels and clients. Environmentalists reported that they were more effective in getting the Clean Air act passed by working together collaboratively after retreat. Members of prison meditation groups report getting along better with others. Contemplative practice increases many aspects of emotional intelligence.
• **Appreciation for the role of non-action** (not *inaction*), for listening before leaping. Gandhi’s retreat before the salt march is an example of this.

• **Questioning of the meaning of gain and loss.** Activists question what they are really “winning”—is it what they really want? Environmentalists struggle with whether any compromise is failure if it means that some part of life will be destroyed, even to save something “greater.” Contemplative practice creates quiet and space in the mind that allows these complex concerns to be questioned without habitual responses.

• **A deeper understanding of anger and the cultivation of more sustainable sources of energy**, like compassion and loving-kindness. Many activists worry that if they give up acting from anger they will be ineffective, even though they know it leads to burnout. Tapping into deeper, more positive sources of inspiration sustains energy for the long term.

• **Improved listening skills.**

• **Ability to move gracefully with change**, based on an understanding of the nature of impermanence.

• **Ability to live in the moment**, rather than *for* the moment: reducing greed and self-centered behavior.

• **Enhanced creativity and problem solving skills.**

• **Appreciation of the interconnection of all life**, which values all of nature as well as human life. The contemplative perspective is not centered in a particular, national world view.
Starting and Sustaining a Contemplative Practice

Now that we’ve examined the link between contemplative practice and social change, let’s take a look at the vast pool of available practices. So what kind of practice is right for you? Well, that’s for you to decide. This chapter includes descriptions of a number of practices. In case none of these are right for you, we’ve also provided additional resources for finding or creating a practice. The Companion Playlist also includes guided meditations and introductions to music, poetry, dance, and ritual practices.

If you look closely at your daily activities, you may find that you already have something like a practice. For example, upon arising each day, you may say a favorite affirmation or prayer, spend a few minutes in silence, record your dreams in a diary, or write a few lines in your journal. Or you may read from a sacred text or perform a short ritual as simple as lighting a candle or burning your favorite incense.

If you discover that you don’t have a fulfilling regular activity or you want another to complement what you are already doing, then the following exercise might be helpful: Sit in a quiet place and note the activities in your life that bring you joy. They might be listening to music, playing a musical instrument, walking in the woods or a garden, sitting quietly, or traveling on a pilgrimage to a sacred site. Any of these could be part of a regular contemplative practice.

Remember that your contemplative practice is, after all, a “practice”: in order to fully benefit from it, you have to integrate it into your daily life. Any ordinary activity can be transformed into a practice through focused intention, commitment, patience, and regularity, and the capacity of the experience to bring you fully into the moment and help you see things more clearly. Your practice may calm your mind, fill you with peace and joy, and challenge you, all at once. Practice is not about achieving perfection, but surrendering and experiencing the journey.
The Tree of Contemplative Practices

To help you discover some of the practices that have been developed over the past few thousand years, we’ve created an illustration of a Tree of Contemplative Practices. On the Tree, the roots symbolize the two intentions that are the foundation of all contemplative practices: cultivating awareness and developing a stronger connection to God, the Divine, or inner wisdom. The roots of the tree encompass and transcend differences in the religious traditions from which many of the practices originated, and allow room for the inclusion of new practices that are being created in secular settings.

The branches represent the different groupings of practices. For example, Stillness Practices focus on quieting the mind and body in order to develop calmness and focus. Generative Practices come in many different forms (i.e. prayers, visualizations, chanting) but share the common intent of generating thoughts and feelings of devotion and compassion, rather than calming and quieting the mind.

Many of the practices work well with one another. For example, groups may start a meeting with a few minutes of silence and then move into a council circle. Activities not included on the tree (gardening, practicing a musical instrument, taking a bath) could be considered a contemplative practice when done with the intent of cultivating awareness, or developing a stronger connection with one’s inner wisdom.
Creating Practices from Your Ancestral Spiritual Traditions
by Rose Sackey-Milligan
Former Social Justice Program Director, The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Every culture, the world over, has techniques for self-exploration that help us delve deep within ourselves to uncover authentic answers to questions and ideas. These are ways to gently open ourselves up to discover the mystery of life. Many of us come from mixed ancestry, and although it is sometimes difficult to determine one’s cultural background and ethnicity, you can look among your tapestry of ethnicities and identify the one(s) which resonate most strongly. Most indigenous cultures practice some form of earth-based spirituality, within which are a wealth of contemplative practices.

What follows is a framework for a conscious, deliberate discovery and identification of the folkways of your cultural and ethnic background, its traditional lore, patterns of thought, and contemplative practices. It requires patience and perseverance, both of which are useful qualities to develop. It will help you design a contemplative or spiritual practice based on your ancestral heritage that will complement your social justice activism.

1. Trace all the family lineages of both your parents, including all known deceased relatives. Check local libraries, bookstores, and the Internet for information on how to trace your immigrant ancestors, create a family tree or conduct a genealogical search.

2. Explore ancestral religious or spiritual belief systems. Identify the ancient contemplative practices, including rituals of your family lineage(s). If you identify yourself as multi-ethnic, you may have to explore a number of different cultures.

3. Use a variety of methods: interviews with family members on traditional folkways, books on ancestral lands and your lineage(s), and pilgrimages to ancestral lands and other countries.

4. Identify techniques in your ancestral lineage like ritual, dancing, sitting, standing, or moving meditation, mantra recitation, prayer, journaling, mindfulness exercises and work with those that feel right for you.
5. Research spiritual heroes and heroines in your ancestral lands, particularly those who were warriors of social justice.

6. Design a practice and rituals based on your research, belief system, personality and lifestyle.

7. Create sacred space dedicated to the ancestors. This is a special space, a beautiful and orderly atmosphere, outdoors, or in your room, apartment or home, designated exclusively for reflection, silence, and other contemplative practices such as prayer, journaling, meditation, dancing, and chanting. It will be a private place, which engenders feelings of peace, calm, contentment, joy, and pleasure. The kind of practice will determine which location is most appropriate. Here are a few questions you may want to consider in selecting the space:

- What will I do in my space?
- How much space do I need?
- How much privacy will I need?

8. Create a set of principles by which you choose to lead your life.

The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.

*Marcel Proust*
Choosing an Existing Practice

This section offers basic instructions for a small assortment of practices from a variety of traditions. You may find a practice here that resonates with you, but remember that any activity in which you regularly engage and which helps you increase your awareness and compassion can be a contemplative practice if done with intention.

As many practices are better experienced through listening to a teacher, rather than just reading text on a page, we’ve included seven tracks of practice instructions and guidance on the Companion Playlist. Some of the practices also have written instructions included in this chapter.

Mindfulness Meditation
by Ian Koebner
track 3 (and page 21)

Loving-Kindness Meditation
by Mirabai Bush
track 4 (and page 28)

Oriki Egún/Praising the Ancestors
by Rose Sackey-Milligan
track 5 (and page 17)

Ritual
by Sobonfu Some
track 6

Introduction to Kirtan
by Dan Edwards with music by Jai Uttal
track 7

The Way of the Drummer
by Sule Greg Wilson
track 10

Soul Dancing
by Chivonnie Meekins
track 12
Oriki Egún
(Praising the Ancestors)

Rose Sackey-Milligan reads this praise
song on track 5 of the Companion

Egún is a Yorùbá word which means ancestors. In the Yorùbá/Lùkùmí spiritual tradition the ancestors are believed to be in constant watch of their relatives on Earth. They bless and protect them, and in exchange, their relatives hold them in their daily reflections and prayer by using Oriki Egún. This praise song is commonly said during one’s daily meditations, in times of difficulty or at other special occasions. This praise song comes from Ifa/Orisa Yorùbá traditional religion of the Ode Remo lineage.

Iba a se Odu Merindinlogun Ọyeku, Mo juba.
I respect the holy scripture that honors the ancestors and I give it praise.

Iba a se Õgún, mo juba.
I respect the spirit of the ancestors and I give them praise.

Iba a se Arúku, mo juba.
I respect the spirits that transforms our ancestors and I give them praise.

Iba a se Eluku, mo juba.
I respect the spirits that elevate our ancestors and I give them praise.

A dupẹ gbogbo Õgún ebelesẹ Olodumare.
I thank the spirit of those ancestors who honor the Spirit of Creation.

Mo ni (name).
I am (name).

Õgún pèlẹ o.
Ancestors I greet you.

Õgún pèlẹ o.
Ancestors I greet you.

Õgún pèlẹ o.
Ancestors I greet you.

Õgún mo pẹ o.
Ancestors I call you.

Õgún mo pẹ o.
Ancestors I call you.

Õgún mo pẹ o.
Ancestors I call you.
Ni ọgba meta. I call you three times.

Égún iku ranran ẹ̀ awo ku opipi. Ancestors who have preserved the mystery of featherless flight.

O da so bo fun le wo. You mate the words of reverence and power.

Égún wo’lé wa. Ancestors you are welcome at this house.

Yana wa neni. Please call today.

Égún wo’lé wa. Ancestors you are welcome at this house.

Yana wa neni. Please call today.

Égún wo’lé wa. Ancestors you are welcome at this house.

Yana wa neni. Please call today.

Je wa adimu pa. Come that you may accept our offering.

Ti won ba njè lajulè Òrun ba won je. Whatever good things are eaten in heaven please partake.

Bi ekolo ba juba ilé ilé a lanu. If the earthworm pays homage to the earth, the earth shares her abundance.

Omodé ki Ìjuba ki iba pa a. If the child honors their parent they never suffer from neglect.

Ma ja kiki won Òrun, a dupe. All respect to the powers of heaven.

Igbo Baba. Praise to the fathers.

Igbo Yéyé. Praise to the mothers.

Igbo Yéyé. Praise to the mothers.

Igbo Baba. Praise to the fathers.
Igbo Yéyé.
Praise to the mothers.

Kawo o Kabiyesile Ēgún.
Hail to the Chief of the ancestors.

Kawo Okeluje Òba Obìnrin.
Hail to the mighty Queen Mother of the ancestors.

Iba Baba, iba Yéyé, Iba a se o.
We respect the fathers and the mothers.

Mo juba (name of ancestor).
I praise (name of ancestor).
* include all those ancestors you wish to remember preceded by the words Mo juba.

Ēgún fun me lo mo, a dupe.
Ancestors we ask for your help and give you thanks.

Ēgún fun me la l’afia, a dupe.
Ancestors we ask for good health and give you thanks.

Ēgún Oro ti ase fun Orun ni awon, a dupe.
Ancestors, we ask for the power of transformation from heaven and give you thanks.

Iba Olúwo (name of chief priest).
I respect (name of chief priest).

Iba Ìyagba (name of chief priestess).
I respect (name of chief priestess).

Iba Ojugboma a ko ni li-‘fa, a ko ni li Orisha.
I respect all those teachers who have taught me the ways of Ifa and Orisha.

Iba (name of elder).
I respect (name of elder)
* name each elder you want to acknowledge preceded by the word iba.

Ēgún e nle o o rami o o.
Ancestors, I am greeting you, my friends.

Emi o mona kan eyi ti nba gba Ori Ògún.
When I do not know which road to follow I will turn to the wisdom of the ancestors.

Ēgún a se dẹ.
The wisdom of the ancestors is here.
Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice from the Buddhist tradition. It is the ability to be fully present in each action, thought, and word. It is the moment-to-moment observation, without judgment, of exactly what is happening in the mind and in the body. As we examine ourselves with loving attention, in the present moment, we gain a better understanding of and appreciation for our actions, reactions, perceptions, and questions. And, a close look at our thoughts and emotions actually serves to give us more freedom to choose the actions that flow from them: how we react when a driver cuts in front of us, how we treat the stranger in our midst, how we handle conflict with a friend or family member.

Mindfulness helps distinguish between what is important and what is not. It also helps people to see the sacred in the ordinary events, tasks, and happenings of daily life. The practice ushers in a truly different way of seeing and knowing, one that draws us into a world beyond personality and experience into a place where we can better experience the essence of ourselves and of others.

In Buddhist mindfulness practice, individuals are taught to cultivate attention in a systemic and sustained way, either while sitting in one place or walking slowly. The practice begins with awareness of the breath. As meditation teacher and co-founder of the Insight Meditation Society Joseph Goldstein puts it, “The training is not easy because of the habits of our minds, but it’s elegantly simple; that’s what makes it effective. It’s not some complicated system or an abstruse set of systems – it’s extremely direct and pragmatic.”
Sitting Mindfulness Meditation

By Joseph Goldstein

Insight Meditation Society, Barre, Massachusetts


This meditation practice is from the Buddhist tradition.

Begin by sitting in a chair or on a cushion on the floor, with your back straight. Relax into your sitting posture with a few deep breaths. Allow the body and mind to become utterly relaxed while remaining very alert and attentive to the present moment. Feel the areas of your body that are tense, and the areas that are relaxing. Just let the body follow its own natural law. Do not try to force or fix anything. Let your mind be soft, and allow a spacious awareness to wash gently through your body.

Simply feel the sensations of sitting, side-stepping with your mind the tendency to image your body, to interpret, to define or think about it. Just let such thoughts and images come and go without being bothered by them, and attune to the bare sensations of sitting.

Feel your body with an awareness that arises from within your body, not from your head. Awareness of body anchors attention in the present moment and helps you to inhabit your body.

Gently sweep your awareness through your body, feeling the sensations with no agenda, no goal. Allow your body to anchor awareness in the present moment by just staying mindful of these sensations.

After some time, shift your awareness to the field of sound vibrations. Awareness of
sounds creates openness, spaciousness,
and receptivity in the mind. Be aware of the
pure sound vibration as well as the space or
silence between the sounds. As with body
sensations incline your awareness away from
the definition of the sound, or thoughts
about the sound, and simply attune to the
sound just as it is.

After some minutes of awareness of body
and sounds, bring your attention to your
natural breathing process. Locate the area where the breath is most clear and let
awareness lightly rest there. For some it is the sensation of the rising and falling of
the abdomen. For others it may be the sensations experienced at the nostrils with the
inhalation and exhalation.

You can use very soft mental labels to guide and sustain attention to the breath:
“rising/falling” for the abdomen and “in/out” for the nostrils. Let the breath breathe
itself without control, direction, or force. Feel each breath from within the breath, not
from the head. Feel the full breath cycle from the beginning through the middle to the
end.

The awareness is a combination of light, open spaciousness and receptivity, like
listening, and alert, attentive presence, touching the actual texture, shape, and form of
sensations.

Let go of everything else, or let it be in the background. Just let the breathing breathe
itself. Rest in a sense of utter relaxation, in that mindful feeling, with the sensations of
the breath.

As soon as you notice the mind wandering off, lost in thought, be aware of that with
non-judging awareness; gently connect it again to your anchor. Just feel from within
the stream of sensations.
Toward the end of your sitting, not striving or anticipating, not pouncing on sensations in the present, not bending back to what was just missed or reflecting on what just happened, keep inclining to the totality of the present moment. Keep anchoring easily, deeply, restfully. Just one breath at a time.

Mindfulness of breath begins to collect and concentrate the mind so that the initial distractions of thoughts, emotions, sensations, and sounds soon become objects of awareness themselves. Insight is gained into the true nature of the body and mind.

As concentration grows, mindfulness opens to the entire “flow” of body/mind experience through all the sense doors—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch and mental/emotive.

Seeing things as they are begins to untangle the tangles of attachment, fear, and confusion. One is able to live more from a place of joy, compassion, equanimity and wisdom.

We have to be transformed ourselves in order to invite the world into that transformation.

*Marcelle Martin, Religious Society of Friends*
Walking Meditation
Instructions by Steven Smith,
Hawaii Insight Meditation Center

This set of instructions is drawn from the Theravada Buddhist tradition, but other contemplative walking practices, such as Christian labyrinth walking, are associated with different religious traditions.

Find a place where you can walk back and forth for about ten to twenty steps. Keep your hands stationary, either behind your back, at your sides, or in front.

Feel the sensations of standing. Be aware of contact with the ground, of pressure and tension. Feel the entire energy field of the body, how it is all participating in this standing. Feel the hands hanging down...the shoulders weighted...the lower back, the pelvis...each having its own part in keeping the balance of the standing position.

Now bring your attention to the lower part of the body, from the hips downward, the primary foundation of standing. Staying aware, very slowly shift your weight from the left and back of your body to the right, noticing as you do how the sensations change as your balance shifts. Now hold your weight on the left for a moment, aware of the particular sensations in the leg - hips, thighs, legs, knees, calves, feet, toes. Feel hardness, tension, tightness, heat, vibration, toughness, stiffness - whatever is there.

Now, keeping your weight on the left side, bring your awareness to the right and feel the relative lightness, emptiness, and subtler sensations on the right leg. Now, with your awareness still on the right leg, slowly shift your weight to the right side. Let the awareness seep in right down to the bone, sensing the variations of hardness and softness, toughness, and fluidity, pressure, vibration, weight.

Now bring your awareness to the left side again, and move as if you are very slowly
pouring water from a full vessel into an empty one. Notice all the changes as you shift
your weight to the left side. With your eyes open just enough to hold your balance,
very slowly peel your right foot off the ground and move it forward and place it on the
ground. With your awareness on the right, shift your weight, bring awareness to the
left, and feel from the hips and buttocks down the sides, the whole range of sensations.
Continue stepping slowly, keeping your awareness on the sensations. When you get to
the end of the path, pause briefly and turn around. Center yourself, and be aware of the
first step as you begin again.

You can do the walking meditation at different paces: brisk, normal, and very slow and
meticulous. The idea is not to walk slowly; the idea is to move mindfully. As your mind
begins to quiet, you will see how we notice more when we move slowly.

If you like, you can say to yourself “walking/walking” or “step/step” or “right/left.” Not
using the labeling as a cadence that becomes rote, but using it to encourage the
awareness of the sensations of walking.

You are being really detailed, but you are not assessing, you are not evaluating. It is a
bare awareness, feeling the flow of sensations. Lifting, moving, placing.

Hold your visual field to a minimum-- 6, 8, 9 feet. Then, when you feel like you just can’t
take it anymore, open up your field of vision, look around, and be aware of seeing and
hearing for a while.

If you feel flooded with thoughts, just stop for a moment and be aware of thoughts. Let
the flood of thoughts come and go and then go back to the walking.

Think of it like this: you are starting off on a trek, and you just landed in Katmandu
in Nepal. You are going up to Mustang Valley; you are going to trek up one of these
mountains, and there is the goal of reaching the top, there’s the desire to get there, and
then there’s the realization that there is a whole process of getting there, and, along
the way, more and more, there is the realization that the process is the goal. At first,
you don’t have your walking body. You have been busy, muscles aren’t loose, bones are a bit stiff....it takes a while for there to be a rhythm between mind and body, to get into that rhythm, to be carried by that rhythm, so that the experience becomes being carried by the mountain, and then the body just feels in flow, it feels in sync with the mountain itself.

It is the same way in meditation--first it’s a stretch, and you feel a resistance, the push, the upward climb, but you can just take your time, keep learning how to settle back, lean back, and tune in to the process, until more and more, you feel carried by it, and it becomes restful.

To get clarity into any system that is creating inherent suffering and oppression, you have to be able to step out of that system to see it clearly. When you’re in the midst of the system, you cannot really see how the system supports oppression. To do that, you have to find some way to step out of it. That’s what the contemplative life is all about.

_Fleet Maul_

_Prison Dharma Network_
Mindful Eating

These instructions came to us from Buddhist teachers, but similar practices are found in traditions across the world.

Practicing mindfulness during a meal gives you an opportunity to experience food and the act of eating as you may have never experienced it before. Pause before your meal and examine your food with all your senses, noticing the color, shape, feel, smell, and taste of your food. As your meal unfolds in silence, tasting, chewing, swallowing, and digesting slow down and take on new dimensions. This is also a convenient practice, as eating is an activity you will hopefully do every day! It’s a great way to explore how daily activities can be changed by mindfulness.

Sit quietly, with a straight spine. Notice the sensations in your body. Note anticipation of eating.

Slowly begin to put food on your plate. Pay close attention to the color, the aroma, the size of the portion. Notice thoughts in your mind.

Set your plate in front of you. Look carefully at the food.

Slowly place the food in your mouth, notice the explosion of flavor and sensation of the food in your mouth, on your tongue. Notice all the flavors: the bitter, sour, sweet, salty, mild, hot.

Chew slowly, noticing the change in the texture, flavor, and sensations. Notice your thoughts. Notice the changes in your body as you swallow the food.

If you are impatient, simply notice that and continue chewing and swallowing slowly and mindfully.

Occasionally pause, put down your fork, and simply notice the sensations in your body and the thoughts in your mind.

At the end of the meal, take a few mindful moments before getting up. Enjoy.
Loving-Kindness Meditation
By Steven Smith, Hawaii Insight Meditation Center


This loving-kindness practice, or metta as it is called in the original Sanskrit, is from the Buddhist tradition.

Loving kindness is unconditional, inclusive love, a love with wisdom. It has no conditions; it does not depend on whether one “deserves” it or not; it is not restricted to friends and family; it extends to include all living beings. There are no expectations of anything in return. This is the ideal, pure love, which everyone has in potential. The innate, archetypal core of the human heart emerges as we do this practice. We begin with loving ourselves, for unless we have a measure of this unconditional love and acceptance for ourselves, it is difficult to extend it to others. Then we include others who are special to us, and ultimately all beings.

This is a meditation of care, concern, tenderness, loving kindness, friendship—a feeling of warmth for oneself and all others. It is an opening on deeper and deeper levels to feelings of kindness and pure love. It is not a sentimental feeling of goodwill, not an obligation. It does not depend on relationship, on how the other person feels about us. The process is one of softening, breaking down barriers that we feel inwardly toward ourselves and then those that we feel toward others.

Sit comfortably. One of the aims in this meditation is to feel good, so make your posture relaxed and comfortable. Begin to focus around your chest, your heart center (not necessarily your physical heart). Breathe in and out from that area, as if you are breathing from the heart and as if all experience is happening from there. Be mindful
only of the sensations at your heart center.

As you breathe in and out, begin by generating loving kindness toward yourself. Feel any areas of blockage—numbness, self-judgment, self-hatred. Then drop beneath that to the place where we care for ourselves like a newborn child or a beloved friend, where we want strength and health and safety for ourselves.

Continuing to breathe in and out, use either these traditional phrases or ones you choose yourself. Say them several times:

May I be free from inner and outer harm and danger.
May I be safe and protected.
May I be free of mental suffering or distress.
May I be happy.
May I be free of physical pain and suffering.
May I be healthy and strong.
May I be able to live in this world happily, peacefully, joyfully, with ease.

Next, visualize a person who most invites the feeling of pure unconditional loving kindness, the love that does not depend on getting anything back. The first person is usually (but not necessarily) someone we consider a mentor, a benefactor, an elder. It might be a parent, grandparent, or teacher, someone toward whom it takes no effort to feel respect and reverence, someone who immediately elicits the feeling of care. Repeat the phrases for this person: “May she be safe and protected....”

After feeling strong unconditional love for the benefactor, think of a person you regard as a dear friend and repeat the phrases again, breathing in and out of your heart center.

Now move to a “neutral” person, someone for whom you feel neither strong like nor dislike. As you repeat the phrases, allow yourself to feel tenderness, loving care for their
welfare.
Now move to someone you have difficulty with—hostile feelings, anger, resentments. Repeat the phrases for this person. If you have difficulty doing this, you can say before the phrases, “To the best of my ability I wish that you be....” If you begin to feel ill will toward this person, return to the benefactor and let the loving kindness arise again. Then return to this person. Let the phrases spread through your whole body, mind, and heart.

After the difficult person, radiate loving kindness out to all beings. Staying in touch with the warm, tender loving kindness at your center, begin to visualize or engender a felt sense of all living beings.

May all beings be safe, happy, healthy, live joyously...

Allow the phrases to be simply a conduit for the force of loving-kindness. Send this loving kindness to all beings until you feel the profound interconnectedness of all living beings, all life.

Love, compassion, and tolerance are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.

_Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama_
Centering Prayer

By Contemplative Outreach, www.contemplativeoutreach.org

Centering Prayer is drawn from ancient prayer practices of the Christian contemplative heritage, notably the Fathers and Mothers of the Desert, Lectio Divina (praying the scriptures), The Cloud of Unknowing, St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa of Avila. It was distilled into a simple method of prayer in the 1970’s by three Trappist monks, Fr. William Meninger, Fr. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating at the Trappist Abbey, St. Joseph’s Abbey in Spencer, Massachusetts.

Centering Prayer is a receptive prayer of resting in God, emphasizing prayer as a personal relationship with God. At the same time, it is a discipline to foster and serve this relationship by a regular, daily practice of prayer.

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God’s presence and action within.

2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God’s presence and action within.

3. When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

The sacred word expresses your intention to be in God’s presence and to yield to the divine action. The sacred word should be chosen during a brief period of prayer asking the Holy Spirit to inspire you with one that is especially suitable. Examples: Lord, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother. Other possibilities: Love, Peace, Shalom.

Having chosen a sacred word, do not change it during the prayer period, for that would be to start thinking again. A simple inward gaze upon God may be more suitable than
the sacred word. In this case, consent to God’s presence and action by turning inwardly toward God as if gazing upon him. The same guidelines apply to the sacred gaze as to the sacred word.

“Sitting comfortably” means relatively comfortably; not so comfortably that you get sleepy, but comfortably enough to avoid thinking about the discomfort of your body during this time of prayer. Whatever sitting position you choose, keep your back straight.

Close your eyes to let go of what is going on around and within you. Introduce the sacred word inwardly and as gently as a feather drifting to the ground.

When you become aware of thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word. “Thoughts” is an umbrella term for every perception including sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, reflections, and commentaries. Thoughts are a normal part of Centering Prayer. By “returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word,” a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity you initiate during the time of Centering Prayer. During the course of your prayer, the sacred word may become vague or even disappear.

At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with your eyes closed for a couple of minutes. If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite the Our Father during the additional 2 or 3 minutes, while the others listen. The additional 2 or 3 minutes give you time to readjust to your external senses and enable you to bring the atmosphere of silence into daily life.
Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a Christian practice originating in the Catholic tradition. It a way of praying with Scripture that calls one to study, ponder, listen and pray. Before lectio divina was developed into a regular practice in the Benedictine tradition, it was practiced by the Desert Mothers and Fathers (Christians who fled into Egypt to avoid persecution by the Roman Empire) and in various monastic settings.

The “scholastic method” of lectio divina may be divided into four stages: lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio. Before beginning, choose a verse or short passage from the Bible. This choice can be guided by the liturgical calendar, but you can also read a favorite verse or simply choose a passage at random.

**Lectio:** Read the passage slowly several times. Do not investigate the meaning of it or attempt to interpret it; simply read the words.

**Meditatio:** Begin to gently reflect on the text of the passage, thinking about how to apply it to your own life. Gravitate to any particular phrase or word that seems particularly meaningful.

**Oratio:** Respond to the passage by opening the heart. This is not primarily an intellectual exercise, but more of the beginning of a conversation with God.

**Contemplatio:** Listening. This is a freeing of yourself from your own thoughts, both mundane and holy. It is about hearing God. Relax and open your mind, heart and soul. Any conversation must allow for both sides to communicate, and this unfamiliar act allows you to be open to hearing God speak.

As Father Thomas Keating explains, “As we repeat the phrase or sentence slowly, over and over, a deeper insight may arise...Our awareness expands without our having done anything but allow the Spirit to act...We think [of] the text, but we do not think about the text. If we are thinking in the sense of reflecting, we are dominating the conversation. That can be done fruitfully some other time.”
Silence

Silence is not specific to any particular tradition or cultural context; it is practiced throughout the world.

Silence is the practice of intentionally not speaking in order to develop a sense of calm and a keener observation of the outside world.

Observing silence can feel awkward at first, especially when you are with a group of people, and during meals. In time, silence can become a comforting practice that helps cultivate calmness and tranquility. Here are some ways to incorporate an appreciation of silence into your daily life:

- Designate a certain hour or half-hour of the day as a silent time, perhaps in the early morning.

- Eat a meal in silence. Silent eating helps you pay closer attention to your food and the changes in your appetite; you may find yourself eating less than usual.

- Use silence to help you become more attuned to your environment. Turn off the TV, computer, radio, or other noise-producing devices and listening closely to the ambient sounds that remain. Try to find a sound you’ve never noticed before.

- When conversing with others, listen to what they are saying. Often, instead of listening, we are thinking of what next to say.

Silence is practiced at times during all Center retreats and workshops, as it helps to cultivate mindfulness. It is a particularly powerful practice for people with busy, fragmented lives. Some retreats include silence until 12:00 noon each day and again in the evenings. Others include a 24-hour period of silence that is practiced during sitting and walking meditation as well as meals and personal time.
Periods of extended silence are usually more fruitful when connections between participants are already established, and when people feel well-prepared for the silence. While there may be some expressions of anxiety at the beginning of a full day of silence, by the end most people usually feel very comfortable with it, and often express a desire for more and lengthier periods of quiet. The resistance is often about desiring more time to meet and talk with others, but during silence participants learn that there is another valuable way to connect. In the initial sessions after a silent period, it is important to take care to reintroduce speaking in a way that doesn’t feel too abrupt, jarring or intrusive.

**Speak to the earth, and it will teach you.**  
*Job 12:8*

**Nature**

Spend time in nature and discover how to relax, focus, and renew your connection to the earth. If you normally practice indoors, find a secluded spot outside for sitting, walking, or journaling. Pay attention to nature’s changing conditions - the fresh air, noise, and sunshine of the warmer months, or the crisp, peaceful cold of winter. Allow yourself to wander in nature, guided by your instincts. Use this solitary time to reflect on your life and your work.

Here is a practice that has been used at the Center’s retreats: find a private area outdoors where you can sit without being disturbed. Choose a small spot on the ground, about twelve inches in diameter. Sit silently, looking only at that spot, continually bringing your wandering mind back to what you are seeing there. After about 10 or 15 minutes, broaden your attention to more of your surroundings, trying to maintain the same intensity and attention to detail.
Contemplative Art
By Carrie Bergman
Webmaster, The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society

Creative expression provokes new ways of seeing, understanding ourselves, and relating to one another. As a contemplative practice, art-making can help you learn to calm and focus your mind and develop greater self-awareness, while making images that can serve as sources of inspiration and healing.

I suggest boosting your creative process by spending some time collecting images and ideas that appeal to you and stimulate your imagination. You might organize these in a scrapbook, snap photos with your phone, or carry a sketchbook to jot down your ideas. Your collection of images will serve as a “visual journal” and “inspiration guide,” and you can refer to it when you need a little creative push. Try looking through personal photographs, books, magazines or newspapers. Spend time outdoors, just watching and listening. You might sketch, write notes, or take photographs of sights that move you. Anything, no matter how silly or insignificant you think it may seem to others, is fair game. Your collection is for you alone, so be honest with yourself as you accumulate it.

When you’re ready to begin creating, gather your art-making materials and set aside a little space to work in. Sit silently for a few minutes to relax and focus your mind before you begin working with your materials. If you’re feeling stuck or feel the need for inspiration, you can refer to your notebook or scrapbook and/or ask yourself
a question to contemplate such as, “What am I interested in?” or “What moves me?” Try to allow your creative expression to flow in response to your question; your question may grow and change as you work. You may find yourself asking, “What topic do I want to make a picture about?” or “What would I love to look at?” You can also focus on making a work of art for a friend or loved one, and can ask yourself questions such as, “What kind of image would be nice for so-and-so to have?”

As you work with your materials, whether you are drawing, sculpting in clay, or building a paper collage, try to stay aware. Be aware of how you are feeling; if your emotions shift or intensify, what were you thinking about? How might you reflect this in your artwork? You may have started your project with an initial intention or inspiration, like making an image about your childhood or a subject you saw on the news. After some time has passed, you may notice that you thinking about someone you used to know, or a favorite song. The mind naturally jumps from topic to topic, so try to be aware of how your ideas change while you work. It’s OK to allow your mind to wander while making art, but see if you can also observe, with a gentle awareness, the thoughts, judgements, and emotions that arise during the creative process.

Youth group leaders working on a self-portrait project.
Yoga

Yoga is an ancient practice from the Hindu tradition. The physical postures, or *asanas*, that we commonly think of as comprising yoga really represent only a part of the yogic system, which also includes instructions and advice for behavior, meditation and mental development.

The practice of yoga postures is an opportunity to be mindful of the body’s movement. Just as the breath is the central focus in mindfulness meditation, it also carries us through each of the postures and brings us into greater awareness of energy blocks and other limitations in the body. This practice also frees the body up to be able to sit for meditation. As breath moves through tight muscles and relaxes the joints, there is more freedom to experience life at its fullest. Yoga has great value and relevance for daily life, because it can help us pay attention to the patterns of the mind. What surfaces “on the mat” is a mirror of what we face “off the mat.”

There are many schools of yoga, and many approaches to teaching. Differences among the schools are usually about emphasis: one may focus on strict alignment of the body, another on coordination of breath and movement; one may focus on holding each posture for a period of time, another on the flow from one posture to another. If you are new to yoga, you may want to try classes in different styles and with different teachers to find those that best match your needs.

Because there are so many asanas, we will only present one here: tadasana, or mountain pose. This is a great practice for when you are standing in line or waiting to cross the street. In this pose, stand firmly on the ground like a mountain. Bring your big toes together and your heels slightly apart. Gently rock back and forth until you are evenly balanced. Feel your feet on the earth; imagine that energy enters you from the ground and runs through your body. Rotate your thighs inward and tuck in your tailbone; bring your shoulders back; hold your head high. Feel your body integrated and aligned in that posture.
Sustaining Your Practice

Once you have begun your practice, learn it thoroughly and practice every day. Don’t abandon it after its initial “rush.” The benefits of any practice accrue over extended periods of time. Be prepared to endure doubt, confusion, disillusionment, sleepiness, restlessness, and boredom. These experiences are normal as you start on this new journey. Here are a few helpful guidelines.

• Set a regularly scheduled time daily for your practice. State your personal intentions and hold true to them. Stay focused on what you are trying to accomplish. Develop a rhythm that works for you and stick to it tenaciously, allowing nothing to distract you.

• Get support from like-minded friends and colleagues. Create circles of friends with similar orientation. Often they can provide guidance and serve as a source of inspiration.

• Keep a journal of your experiences. You may want to log your dreams or other significant events as well.

• Explore how different settings can change your awareness and your practice. If you are often inside or surrounded by people, spend time alone in nature. Slowing down to observe the natural world is an easy way to re-engage your senses. Alternatively, if you usually have easy access to quiet and solitude, try purposefully surrounding yourself with lots of people, noise, and activity.

• Practice every day! Incorporate it as a natural part of your daily life, like eating and sleeping.
Going Deeper

If you want to develop your practice, you might want to consider finding a teacher or mentor who can guide you as you learn. While learning from books can be helpful, you may have a question that books just can’t answer. If you know someone who can offer you wisdom from their own personal experience, they can be an invaluable resource. You can also look for a teacher at a contemplative center.

Another excellent way to enliven a practice is by doing a retreat. There are many different kinds of retreats—solitary or group, religious or secular, highly structured or self-directed—but any retreat essentially involves getting away from your usual distractions to focus on your contemplative practice.

This is what separates a retreat from other forms of rest or vacation: your intention. When you go on a retreat, you make a commitment to engage in and deepen your contemplative practice or religious discipline. Since retreats are often led by a teacher, they can also be valuable opportunities for you to ask questions and receive guidance on more personal spiritual matters.

At-Home Retreats

The typical retreat experience involves staying away from your home, at a retreat center or spiritual community of some kind, such as a monastery or meditation center. But for many of us it can be difficult, if not impossible, to get away from everyday life for an extended period. Fortunately, if you have good self-discipline and a little creativity, you can create a rejuvenating retreat for yourself at home by setting aside time to be used exclusively for your spiritual well-being.

The biggest problem you’ll face during an at-home retreat will probably be that you are surrounded by your usual distractions. For the period you are designating as your retreat time, unplug the TV, shut off your phone, and remind your family to leave you alone as much as possible. If you want to read, write, make art or listen to music
while on retreat, gather your supplies before your retreat period begins. You may wish to keep a journal of your thoughts and experiences. Or, you could try removing yourself from all distraction -- no reading, no listening to music, no writing -- and just experiment with being alone with your self for a time. Follow your instincts to spend your time the way you find most appropriate.

**Traditional/Residential Retreats**

It is more traditional to leave your home for a retreat. Retreat settings vary, and can include monasteries, campgrounds, spiritual or religious centers, or any rented space such as hotels and conference centers. The duration can vary from one day to several months, or even longer.

You may have to do some research to find a retreat that matches your interests. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of retreat centers across North America, offering a range of opportunities, from group retreats with guided teachings to solitary retreat time for individual practice. Some are held in exotic locations, serve gourmet meals, and house guests in private rooms, but others are simpler and offer dormitory accommodations and simple meals, or depend on participants to camp and provide their own food. Additionally, it is common for retreat centers to offer scholarships, work study programs, or “suggested donations” instead of fixed prices.

*The Resources chapter at the end of this manual contains lists of retreat centers, books, and websites.*
Shifting Perspectives

The contemplative perspective is the outlook that gradually develops through the thoughtful application of the effects of these practices to our daily living. The contemplative perspective connects the increased inner sensitivity that practice brings with our activity in the external world manifested through work and relationships. By becoming more aware of ourselves, we become more aware of others, eventually gaining an enhanced appreciation and understanding of our interconnection and the quality of our interactions in the world. We begin to see ourselves and our work in a broader context.

As we develop a contemplative perspective, certain values and skills begin to emerge that are important for our work as activists:

- **Patience and sustainability.** The contemplative perspective allows us to view problems as challenges to be solved and strengthens vigor and commitment. It helps us to approach situations with a fresh perspective.

- **Wisdom.** The contemplative perspective helps us to see things as they are, not as we wish they were or as we fear they are. Consequently, our decisions come from a more expansive place of understanding, and we can respond appropriately to any situation.

- **Passion.** The contemplative perspective can help us transform tendencies toward anger and self-righteousness into energy to serve one’s cause and justice more effectively.

- **Honest self-reflection.** The contemplative perspective fosters honesty in our experiences and relationships. It makes denial, distraction, and the demonization of others less of a default mode, and ultimately a choice we less often make.
• **Calmness.** The contemplative perspective promotes stability and calmness. We can better know and address our emotional responses rather then being victimized by them. We become better leaders of others.

• **A sensitive and realistic sense of ethics.** With the contemplative perspective we become more aware of the discomfort that comes with deviating from our innermost values. Confidence in our commitment to this ethical path/approach brings courage and strength.

• **Clarity of purpose; integrity in the midst of complex situations.** The contemplative perspective helps us to hold and maintain a clear vision of the values we are trying to promote in our work for social justice. We realign and ground ourselves in these values.

• **Compassion.** The contemplative perspective helps us to appreciate on a visceral level the interconnections among people and in life. It promotes empathy, heightens sensitivity to suffering, and opens the heart, allowing us to better apprehend difficult situations and handle them with a greater sense of ease.

• **Focus.** With the contemplative perspective there is more moment to moment focus on every situation, whether it is planning an action, talking on the phone, or meeting with allies or adversaries. Such clear and focused presence enhances effectiveness.

• **Awareness.** The contemplative perspective provides greater insight into: our own condition and that of others; our own needs and motivations and the needs and motivations of others; the total situation in which we find ourselves.

• **Skillful listening and communicating.** The contemplative perspective promotes empathetic and accurate listening. We listen better and more deeply to others and ourselves, and hear not just the words, but the essence of what is being said. With listening comes clearer and more effective communication.
Creativity. The contemplative perspective, in promoting flexibility of mind and heart and the ability to let go of habitual patterns, including self-doubt, when appropriate and needed, allows us to open to new approaches and novel strategies and to solve problems and accomplish objectives more effectively.

Dealing With Anger

*By Dan Edwards, Former Youth Program Director,*
*The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*

Emotions are a driving force behind why we do what we do. We are all emotional beings and how we deal with them tells a lot about our character. The gift that contemplative practice brings to our emotions is awareness, the mental space to confront our emotional state in a safe way.

There is an unspoken norm in the world of activism, and that is “go, go, go until the evil is defeated.” Plenty of self-destructive habits can form from this way of being, which in the long run can lead to burnout or withdrawal or both. Anger is the dominant emotion for many activists. It is a heavy load to carry, and many of us go through a good portion of our lives before we realize we are carrying it. Sometimes when leading a workshop I will ask the group to share what they are mad about in the world, and there is never a silent voice to this question. Most everybody is a little ticked off about something, but how we deal with anger varies greatly.

Anger is not a bad or negative thing; it is actually the fuel that feeds our quest for justice. It is when we let anger lead to hateful actions that we lose its beneficial potential. We must learn to notice these emotions as they arise and embrace them when they do. It’s like fighting fire with water—that is the magic of transforming the energy of anger into an action that leads to compassionate justice. We may feel that we have been wronged; we feel our immediate community and the world as a whole should not have to deal with an act that can anger us so. The act is usually tied to an occurrence in our lives that impacted us so profoundly that we will spend the
majority of our time trying to dismantle or contain it. We become triggered whenever it surfaces—that is, not if it surfaces but when it surfaces. Thus it is imperative that we realize that often the injustice or wrongdoing isn't personal but rather a societal ill and will always coexist with the peaceful lives we work hard to live.

Practice: Stop, Breathe, Reflect and Respond. Once I am aware that anger is arising, I stop. I breathe in and out, and I pay attention to my breath, so that I can come back into my body and ground myself. I breathe until the dominate voices of anger dissipate and my focus rests comfortably on my breath and the current moment. I can now begin to reflect on the situation from a grounded place.

I then reflect on my personal ties to this wrongdoing and examine the reasons why it is affecting me so. Why is this triggering me, and how? If I have worked to get over the past personal wrongdoing tied to this current wrongdoing and I still feel myself losing my center, then I haven’t really healed. Most of the real work is done here, and this is where contemplative practice will become an invaluable tool. It is your contemplative mind that puts up signs like highway markers that point right back to you and encourage you to heal yourself from anger before healing others.

Take as much time as you need to reflect. In the end, I respond after I have reflected for some time on the act or situation. If the situation requires an immediate response, I may not respond at all -- not because I am being passive or ignorant but because I am aware of how connected I am to the situation and how deeply personal my response may be. If I feel that I am not able to react from a grounded place, then I won’t. This method has helped keep me out of heated debates and actions that I would later feel the need to apologize for. So if your reactions are heated, give this method a shot. It may work for you.
Part II:

Contemplative Groups and Organizations
Creating Contemplative Groups and Organizations

What is a Contemplative Organization?

Contemplative organizations use contemplative practices in the services they offer, but also as an organizing principle for the workplace. Contemplative organizations strive to incorporate contemplative practices into all aspects of their work. The workday is specifically structured to offer opportunities for staff to practice, both alone and together.

These opportunities could include:

- Beginning meetings with silence
- Use of reflective dialogue in meetings
- Permission to take “contemplative breaks” during the day
- Creation of special space in the office for prayer, meditation, and/or quiet
- Use of contemplative group techniques like Appreciative Inquiry and Council Circle to conduct strategic planning for the organization
- Scheduling regular contemplative staff retreats as a source of unity and inspiration.
Contemplative organizations share the following characteristics:

- **Embodying Values**
  The organization models, as best it can, the changes it wishes to see in society. The mission, vision, and strategic plan emphasize the importance of the organization’s core values.

- **Moving Between Cycles of Action and Reflection**
  The organization recognizes that there is a time to work and a time to step back, rest, and learn from the past in order to plan for the future.

- **Balancing Process With Product**
  The way in which the organization works toward its goal is as important as the achievement of the goal.

- **Fostering a Workplace Culture of Caring and Respect**
  Leadership and personnel policies demonstrate compassion and respect towards employees and volunteers. Co-workers acknowledge and support each others’ strengths.
Challenges

Creating a contemplative organization can be a challenging proposition. At the core, helping the general public, funders, activists and organizers understand the nature of contemplative practice and the qualitative difference in the impact of the work done from this approach requires time and patience. They must experience it to appreciate it.

Some activists who value contemplative practice see it as extraneous to their “real work,” which is organizing in communities and dealing with suffering; anything other than that is not valued. We have heard social justice workers say, “We don’t have time for this,” and “We just need to get the work done.”

Similarly, community organizations are usually operating in organizational structures that undervalue the essential elements of contemplative awareness: slowing down, quieting the mind, introspection, and not always taking action.

Moreover, there is common belief in the social justice movement that religion and spirituality and one’s professional life should occupy different “compartments.” For others there is outright resistance and suspicion. Some think of contemplative practices as too spiritual, religious, strange, or as something reserved for only those leading a monastic life.

A further challenge is finding funding sources to support the development of contemplative organizations. Contemplative organizations are not yet widely understood in the foundation world, and funders may not consider the integration of these practices into social justice work as an activity eligible for funding.

It is our hope, despite these challenges, that you and your organization attempt the following suggestions with an open heart and mind.
Contemplative Meetings

Familiar forms of meeting can create familiar group dynamics—ways of collective communicating, sharing, and understanding. These ways can provide us with useful information and tools to help us get our work done. They also have their shadow sides. For example, in a traditional meeting it can be easy for a group to become distracted by cross-talk, for people to take rigid positions, and the voices of less-outspoken people to be drowned out by others. Investigating new forms of group process may help us to overcome some of these pitfalls and give us access to new kinds of information and ways of knowing.

Sometimes it is not the form that is the problem, but our lack of understanding of that form. We don’t need to scrap our old ways of gathering, but if we understand them better, we can tailor them to fit the needs of the group. In this manual we offer some basic ideas and guidelines for design and facilitation of traditional meetings as well as some alternative formats that you may find worth exploring.

First, there are a few basic elements of traditional group meetings that do support the contemplative process:

- **Clear expectations and goals** help orient the participants to the conversation. Distribute these before the meeting.

- **Agenda and relevant information** can help prepare people for the discussion before the conversation begins. Take time to review the agenda at the start of a meeting, and make room for additions or suggestions. If there are new members at the meeting, do a round of introductions.

- **Short inspiring readings**, such as poetry or the words of a teacher, at the meeting’s beginning can give people focus and motivation.
The following elements may be added to a traditional meeting to bring it toward a more contemplative form:

**Silence**
We recommend introducing short periods of silence at the beginning and end of each meeting. Silence is a great way to clear your mind and settle into your intentions before delving into conversation. At the end of a meeting, taking another few moments helps to absorb the conversation more fully and reflect upon the outcomes.

**Movement**
If the meeting is more than an hour and a half, a guided movement exercise will help the energy flow and remind participants that you value healthy bodies. Choose movement that is easy for everyone to do at their place in meeting clothes, vigorous enough to wake up the energy, but slow enough to encourage mindfulness of the body. Contemplative movements include standing yoga postures like the mountain pose, slow mindful stretching, and exercises from qi gong and tai chi.

The Companion Playlist contains several tracks of music and drumming to support your movement practice:

**Mindfulness Bell**
Sometimes, if the group is large and the discussion is expected to be long, the introduction of a “mindfulness bell” can be useful. Often, in intense discussions, people can lose their awareness of how much time and space they are taking up, and a gentle reminder can help them be more concise and clear. A soft ring of a bell helps bring this awareness to the person speaking. If you decide to use the bell, introduce it in the beginning of the conversation as a tool for awareness, rather than as a tool for control. Explain that inviting the bell to ring is not an attempt to silence someone, but instead to draw them into awareness of their role in the group. The bell ringer may say that each person will have one or two minutes to speak before he/she strikes the bell, in order to provide objectivity.
Dipping
In the midst of a dialog, “dipping” is another way for participants to stop and notice what is happening in their internal landscape. The facilitator will ask everyone to “dip” into their experience – to take a moment and notice what is going on inside. This could include thoughts, emotions, judgments, body sensations, and other reactions. Then people can be invited to share what they observed, perhaps with one or two other people.

Alternative Forms of Meeting
Introducing alternative meeting formats, such as Council Circle and Claremont Dialog, requires patience and commitment. To find the methods that work best for your group, invite discussion on which aspects feel the most helpful and which are the most challenging.

Council Circle
The process of Council comes from Native American traditions and has been used by many non-native people for generations to facilitate meaningful interaction. The structure of a council varies from place to place and has had a number of innovations and alterations over time, but the basic form remains constant. A group is gathered in a circle for a conversation about a specific topic. The opportunity to speak is given one at a time to all members of the council, often passing a “talking piece” clockwise around the circle to identify the speaker. Members only speak when it is their turn and are encouraged to listen intently, without comment, while others are speaking. All members have the right to keep silent or “pass” when their turn comes. A facilitator is charged with maintaining the boundaries of the circle to protect the process.

The Four Intentions
The following excerpts from the Ojai Foundation (www.ojaifoundation.org) may be helpful in developing your understanding of how to engage in the council process. Council uses four simple intentions that provide the basis for interaction in the council
circle. An intention is a direction that you want to move in, to the best of your ability, despite difficulties you may encounter.

The first intention is to “speak from the heart” when you have the talking piece. This means to speak not only with your head and your ideas, but with your feelings as well. It means to tell your own story as honestly as you can. You have countless important and meaningful experiences. When you speak about them truthfully, you are speaking from the heart.

The second intention is to “listen from the heart” when another person has the talking piece. This means to listen without judgment, to listen with an open mind, even if you disagree with what the person is saying. Listen not just with your mind, but with your heart as well.

The third intention is to “speak spontaneously.” This means that you try to wait before the talking piece comes to you before deciding what you want to say. There are good reasons for this. First, if you are thinking about what you are going to say, then you are not listening completely to the person who is speaking. Second, when you don’t preplan what you are going to say, you will often be surprised what comes to you when it is your turn.

The last intention is to “speak leanly.” Something that is “lean” doesn’t have anything extra on it. When you speak, keep in mind that many others would like a chance to speak, and that there is limited time. Use only those words necessary to get your point or story across. Please remember that no one is required to speak.

**Council Circle Facilitation**
There should be one person designated as the facilitator, who sets the initial intention of the circle and offers the basic structure and ground rules. This person also helps the group maintain circle boundaries either in terms of content or behavior, and should use gentle reminders to individuals and the group to adhere to the basic ground rules. This person should be empowered to call for brief pauses in the conversation or for a break if the group is too tired to continue in a productive way.
Once people have gathered, it is helpful for the facilitator to begin the circle with a gesture that shifts people’s attention from social space to council space. This gesture of welcome may be a moment of silence, reading a poem, singing a song, or listening to a musical interlude to invite a sense of calm presence.

Check-in helps people into a frame of mind for council and reminds everyone of their commitment to the expressed intention. It ensures that people are truly present in mind as well as in body.

To check-in with a new circle, participants may say their names and offer a brief self-introduction. To check-in with an ongoing circle, they may speak briefly about their hopes for the meeting, offer social comments, or share anecdotal stories about their lives.

**Using a Talking Piece**

The talking piece can be any object that passes easily from hand to hand. This may be an object from nature, such as a stone, stick or feather, or an object that has meaning for a particular circle. Only the person holding the talking piece speaks, and other circle members listen without interruption.
A talking piece is used whenever there is a desire to move the conversation more slowly so that everyone’s stories, input or wisdom can be gathered. One member picks up the talking piece, shares his/her thoughts or story, and then passes it on. The talking piece progresses around the circle, either in sequence or by volunteering, until everyone has had an opportunity to contribute.

Checkout and Farewell
When is a circle over? There are a number of ways to define the length of a council circle. A time frame can be set or a decision made to go around two or three times. Another option is to continue the council until there is a completely silent passing of the talking piece indicating that no one has anything left to add to the discussion. Make sure that you define the limit of the circle before beginning.

At the close of a circle meeting, it may be worthwhile to allow a few minutes for each person to “check-out” and comment on what they learned, or what is in their heart and mind as they leave. Closing the circle by checking out provides a formal end to the meeting and a chance for members to reflect on anything that has transpired.

Often after check-out, the facilitator will offer a few inspirational words or farewell, or signal a few seconds of silence before the circle is released.

For further resources on Council Process, visit www.ojaifoundation.org and www.peerspirit.com.
Claremont Dialog

From the Quaker tradition, Claremont Dialog refers to a format in which the opportunity to speak passes systematically around the circle, in a similar manner to council circle. Friends may pass or speak as they choose. Silence for reflection often follows each contribution. This form encourages a focus on the issue at hand and, like council circle, minimizes the tendency for discussion to fall into a debate between individuals.

The group starts with a period of quiet worship or meditation. The leader briefly tells the nature of the dialog and explains the ground rules: this is a sharing of experience, not a discussion; we avoid analysis and theorizing; we respect what all share, and we refrain from making judgments; we do not probe or cross-question each other; we aim to answer with complete honesty and freedom, but if we do not feel free to answer a given question, we need not feel pressure to answer, but say “pass” (those that pass may be given another opportunity to speak after everyone else has spoken). The leader begins, and then the conversation continues around the circle so that all feel they have a proper space in which to participate.

Here are some key points for using this method:

- The speaking should be from feeling and experience, rather than from theory or opinion
- Answers be made in turn rather than through volunteering
- The choice not to answer be fully respected
- There be no discussion of what participants have shared and furthermore, what is said be held in confidence
- The leader takes part as one of the group.
Contemplative Conference Calls

**Intention**
Set the intention with pre-call materials. Include an inspirational quote or image so that the discussion begins in a reflective way, even before the call.

**Silence**
Once everyone is on the call, you can share a few minutes of silence or a guided meditation. End silence with a word, an inspirational quote, or a bell: it brings people into the space together.

**Sharing**
If there is time, ask everyone to share something about their life or their intention for the call or your work together. It becomes easier to imagine each other in the circle.

**Process**
When the discussion begins, here are some of the techniques we use to create a cooperative, loving, learning, awake space on the phone, using the technology at its best:

- Be modest and humble about what can be accomplished.
- Allow space for all voices, but stress that although the facilitator will try, each opinion may not be heard.
- Listen mindfully, without judgment. Listen to understand, not to agree with or believe.
- Be kind; assume the best. There are so many possibilities for misunderstanding.
- Exercise empathy and generosity, honoring and delighting in group mind.
• Expect nothing; be ready for anything. Have goals, but defer to greater wisdom.

• If you are stressed about the situation or the process, say that—don’t attack the information. If you are worried that those who have presented don’t understand the issue, or you want it presented in differently in the future, say that—it’s just information.

• Maintain a sense of proportion and a sense of humor because, as a great clown once said, “If you don’t have a sense of humor, it just isn’t funny.”

• Remember: There is always follow up; this will probably not be the last call of your life. You are part of a collaborative organization.

• Use these calls only when necessary.

• Follow up with minutes or notes, announced at the beginning, so people can be relaxed and focused during the call.

• End with thanks to all participants.

To experience the completeness of each moment is the ultimate healing.

Kazuaki Tanahashi
Contemplative Facilitation

The art of facilitation is one that takes many years of practice to master, but the basic elements can be learned in a short period of time. This includes management of information and maintaining a balance of spaciousness and decisiveness for the group process. Below are some suggested some ways to make good facilitation better by adding a contemplative dimension.

Leading Practices

Once you learn, experience, or recognize a contemplative practice, you may want to share it with others—your activist collective, your group at work, youth in a classroom. To teach contemplative practice you have to embody contemplative practice. It cannot be taught like math or science. It would feel pretty awkward for the meditation instructor to read from a textbook and stumble over the words. Most math and science teachers know their stuff, but the subjects require a cognitive approach to understanding. To know contemplative practice is to know it from the heart as well as the mind. Once you have gained a contemplative perspective it feels natural to incorporate some form of practice into anything you teach.

When you are a consistent practitioner, you will start to notice how “unrushed” you feel and how patience becomes more of a lifestyle than a given order. Impatience makes us crazy. Practice makes us patient and more reflective. A patient and reflective teacher/facilitator can usually hold the group and send out vibes that resonate with the group. A group can sense a shaky and ungrounded teacher before she even opens her mouth. It is the calming energy that emanates from someone who has gained a contemplative perspective that is required when teaching the practice to a group. This is important because without this it is hard to gain credibility and first timers in the group can be turned off by a shaky instructor. So whether you’re an instructor, teacher, facilitator or someone who’s just hosting a group, be your newfound contemplative self. There isn’t a one-way method. Every teacher is unique and every teacher isn’t perfect. Don’t let fear of doing it for the first time get in the way. It’s
perfectly natural to feel a little jittery. If this happens, remember what the practice has taught you: notice it, be with it, and let it go. Trust the process and good things will arise from your steady approach.

If you are able to, set up your room in a sacred, safe way. Try dimming the lights, set up the chairs or cushions so they’re in a circle. You basically want to recreate a feel reminiscent of the space where you first had your contemplative experience.

To create a contemplative space as a facilitator, ask yourself these questions:

- How can I maintain a sense of space that allows people to participate fully while still assuring that the group stays on task?
- When should I be permissive or directive in a conversation?
- How much information is needed for a group to begin a discussion or process?
- How much information is too much?
- What contemplative techniques will give the meeting the space for creative discussion?

Answers to these questions arrive through experience. However, we do have some suggestions and ideas that will be helpful in developing these qualities and knowledge for you and your group.
Guidelines for Contemplative Facilitation

• Make sure all participants know the context for discussions and have the information they need to engage in them fully.

• Let your own behavior be a model for how other participants should engage in the process.

• Have someone keep track of the conversation visually, on a flip chart or a whiteboard, which all participants can refer to. This provides for deeper and less repetitive conversation, allowing people to look back to earlier points in the discussion and extract themes.

• After an inspiring, difficult, or powerful comment, ask for a few minutes of silence so that it will be absorbed before responses are given.

• Notice who is speaking and who is not speaking. Encourage quiet participants to contribute.

• Use your intuition to determine what the group needs at any given moment.

• Help summarize the conversation for people who may not be looking at the whole picture. Pulling out themes and being aware of the direction of the conversation can be very helpful for the group to get its bearings.

• Gently keep participants on the subject. The group will benefit greatly if the conversation stays in close proximity to the stated goal.

• Try to stay aware of the difference between facilitating and participating. It is important to remain present and fully involved while still maintaining the responsibilities that come with holding the broader perspective of the discussion.
Introductory Circles

There are simple ways of making introductions more meaningful, encouraging us to bring more of who we are to the group, which can lead to greater group cohesion. Here are six exercises to enliven your introductory circles.

Naming
Name yourself as the child of your parents and the grandchild of your grandparents. For example, Sally might say, “My name is Sally Jennings, daughter of Alicia Francesco and Walker Jennings, granddaughter of Claudio and Melissa Francesco, and Robert and Rosario Jennings.” You can also add the places where they were born or lived. As the circle goes around and the names of our ancestors are brought into the room we begin to develop a sense of the many trajectories that have brought us to this room. This exercise may be difficult for some, and it may be helpful to openly recognize at the beginning of the circle that for a variety of reasons we may not all know even this much about our heritage.

Secrets
Have each participant speak their name and offer one piece of information about themself that they think no one else in the room knows. Again, this allows us to offer something personal to the group without feeling overexposed. Each individual has full discretion over what they offer. This exercise...
often helps us find out about our co-workers’ hobbies and talents and gives us new ways to connect with each other.

Here are a few other leading questions you can try:

- “When was the first time that you knew what you wanted to be in the world?”
- “What song inspires you when you are feeling overwhelmed?”

The following four exercises can be used like two ones described above, but they require at least one other person to start the process.

**The Paper Drop**

This exercise/icebreaker is designed to get the group focused, silent and calm. It is a useful tool that gets everyone centered and present. It can also be used to segue into some of the deeper exercises, and is also a good choice to use with kids.

1. Have the group take a couple of deep breaths and then close their eyes.

2. While their eyes are closed, explain to them that you are going to release a sheet of paper to the ground and if they hear it to raise their hand.

3. Give them a sign that you will start and ask them to nod if they’re ready.

4. Once they give the sign, release the paper. Notice how many hands are raised. Acknowledge their response.

5. While still keeping their eyes closed, explain to them that you are going to tear the sheet in half and try it again. Ask them to dig a little deeper and see if they can notice the half sheet when it lands.

6. Give them a sign that you will start and ask them to nod if they’re ready.
7. Once they give the sign, release the half sheet. Notice how many hands are raised. Acknowledge their response.

8. While still keeping their eyes closed, explain to them that you are now going to tear the half sheet in half and try it again. You can issue a challenge to the group. “Do you guys think you will be able to notice this little piece?” At this point, some of them may open their eyes to look at the piece, which is okay.

9. Give them a sign that you will start and ask them to nod if they’re ready.

10. Once they give the sign, release the piece. Notice how many hands are raised. Acknowledge their response. It is important to allow a little fun but not to turn the exercise into a game. Depending upon the response and energy of the group, you can continue the tearing process until there is only a very small piece left. You will be surprised as to how many people can hear the most miniscule piece of paper hit the ground. But most importantly you may be surprised at their focus.

**Deep Listening**

This exercise is designed to focus our listening so that we are able to listen from both our hearts and minds. Through deep listening we learn how to gather the essence of what the person is speaking to and not just the words. It is a useful tool that challenges us to abandon the norms of coaching, overtalking, and making the speaker feel unheard.

1. Have the group break into pairs (one on one)

2. Have the pair designate an A and B partner

3. Once they have designated, inform the group that A will go first.

4. Inform the group that A will tell you a story or an aspect of their life for a period
of time. (What subject matter or story you want the group to share is up to you and should be relative to the goal or theme the group is gathered for. The period of time is up to you as well, and usually should not exceed five minutes.)

5. Inform the group that while A is sharing, B should be silent and listening for key elements in A’s story. Acknowledge that our usual methods of communication will be tested and there may be an urge to coach, identify, chime in, and overtalk. Ask them to notice this when it occurs, resist the temptation and remain present with their partner.

6. Give them a sign that you are ready to start, and once they acknowledge you, begin the first session.

7. After the allotted time, give them a sign that you will end the first round and give them maybe 30 more seconds to wrap up.

8. Once they have settled down, inform them that B will have a turn to share. B will share on the same subject matter that A has and you will repeat the same instructions from numbers 5 through 7.

9. When they are both done allow them time to share a little more. Bring the whole group back together or join a few pairs and have them process the exercise. You may want to create these process questions and they should be open ended.

3rd Person Writing
This exercise is designed to allow the participant to examine their lives in a “ghost perspective”. The method removes us from the norm of using “I” when reflecting on our life stories and opens the way for us to notice not just ourselves, but all of the ingredients that make us who we are. This exercise can be very challenging to some, but when practiced, can become one of the most useful tools in your life.
1. (Optional) Start the group with a brief silent meditation.

2. Ask the group if they all have a journal or something to write in. Allow the group to gather what they need. If given the opportunity, alert the group beforehand that this session will require writing so that they are prepared.

3. Once the group has signaled that they are ready, inform them that they will be doing an individual writing exercise.

4. Inform the group that this will be a 3rd person writing exercise and to refrain from using “I” statements. They will be writing about themselves as “he” or “she,” as if from the outside.

5. Give the group a subject matter or topic to work with to guide the process. Examples: Write about a time when you had to forgive someone for emotionally hurting you. Write about a time when you felt most appreciated.

6. Let them know that if they get stuck then to write whatever is on their mind at the time, but by all means keep writing.

7. When the group seems ready, inform them of how much time they are given and tell them to find a place where they feel most comfortable that is in close proximity to a chime or your voice.

8. When they signal their readiness, start the exercise.

9. After the time is up, call the group back together or ring a chime to reconvene and ask a few processing questions. How was this for you? What came up? How is this writing style different from the usual way of writing your life?

10. After processing, ask them if they would like to share. Explain that sharing is optional, and ask the group to hold what they hear in confidentiality.
The Talisman
In this activity, each participant brings an object and shares its story with the group. The object should in some way communicate, symbolize, or express what matters to you and your passion for your work—your work with youth, in the arts, for social change, etc. It can be an ordinary object, an old favorite, a photo, or something you have made. Everyone will tell a story and build a “table of inspiration” with the objects.

At one retreat of environmental activists, everyone brought something that was symbolic of his or her relationship to the natural world. Each object served as an opening to a story. One by one, people walked to the center of the room, placed their “talisman” in the center of the room and told their story. Magical stories unfolded: of standing protected between a mother elephant’s legs, of how to teach foresters to feel the essence of trees marked for timber, of cleaning the oil from ducks after the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, of gifts given and received.

Sitting in a circle, around the table of inspiration, begin with a few minutes of silence. Invite participants to let go of ideas and simply notice their breath as it rises and falls in the body. Let the circle become calm and quiet, a good place for stories. Then, one by one, ask participants to tell the story of their object and how it symbolizes or had a part in their lives. The time of each story can be limited if necessary. At the end of the stories, there should be some form of appreciation of participants for each other—simple bowing into the circle; or two circles, standing, with the inner circle moving, so each person in the inner circle gets to thank each person in the outer circle.

For more information on building a table of inspiration, see page 89.
Conflict Resolution
*By Dan Edwards*

Conflict resolution skills are a necessity when working with the dynamic personalities of activists, including your own. Tension often arises within a group gathering. I want to make a clear distinction between tension and conflict. *Tension* is actually not always a bad thing when it comes to group dynamics. It can be the elephant in the room that, when it becomes visible, everyone takes a closer look at and learns from. At the Center, our workshops and retreats often focus on structures in our society that create and perpetuate oppression. Although everyone may come to the gathering ready to take on the issue, their viewpoints may differ greatly. This creates an inherent tension. It is when these differences aren’t contained in a focused and respectful discussion that the cool elephant transforms into the raging beast that is *conflict*.

In this section, we’ll explore some tools that can help resolve conflict if it arises and possibly prevent it from showing up at all. This section is in two parts, Personal Conflict Resolution and Group Conflict Resolution. It is important to deal with our own personal conflicts and issues before trying to help others, so that we model what we teach. Since this is a book on using contemplative practice, we will look at how to use contemplative practices in the process.

Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method that rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation.

The foundation of such a method is love.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*
**Personal Conflict Resolution**

The voice in our heads is our greatest ally and worst enemy. It can help us discern right from wrong, good from bad. But we can also get trapped in our own heads at one point or another. The trap comes from our attachment to things—material items or emotional, physical, or spiritual states. We don’t want anything to change, and we hold on when we ought to let go. Contemplative practice helps us detach and let go. An attachment to something good feels wonderful, but the dependence upon this attachment can have unforeseen consequences. Bad attachments can be all-around dangerous. Contemplative practice helps us become aware of these attachments and keeps us grounded when we realize that “Yes, I am hooked on this, and something must change.” For some people, detaching is easy and comes naturally, but for the most of us it’s a challenge because we would rather not face it and have become dependant it. Over time these attachments manifest into a belief system. When you stand firm behind your beliefs, sometimes conflict arises.

I will give you a personal example. I am an adopted child, and for most of my life I had issues with abandonment—people abandoning me or me abandoning them. The thought of it alone would trigger something in me that was very unsettling and much deeper than the actual situation in the moment. My political views reflected this attachment and so did my interpersonal life and my relationships with friends and family. I was attached to an idea of myself as someone who could not stand to be abandoned, so I would do anything to avoid that. I tried to control relationships, but the more I tried to gain control, the more I actually felt out of control. I then began to distrust myself and would feel unconfident and unassertive when dealing with almost any situation. I was unaware of how much this attachment shaped my belief system and my actions. I never asked myself, “What does my being adopted have to do with the situation that I am in now?” Contemplative practices, especially sitting meditation and writing, gave me the insightful awareness that awakened me to this connection. My conflict was generated by my clinging to the past while not really acknowledging it. My resolution came from becoming aware of the link, honoring its presence, forgiving myself and the parties involved, and ultimately releasing the tight grip I had on it. When I can’t let go of it fully, if it’s too difficult, I ritualize it. This means that once
a year, I create a time and space to honor its presence, and for the rest of the year I try to free my mind of it. If it appears, I notice it, embrace it and let it go. I literally verbalize it. “Hey. I see you. How are you? Cool. I must be going. I’ll see you again on that special day.”

This process takes time. I know I am still a work in progress who bumps into my attachments every now and then. The more I practice the more often I notice when I am using my abandonment attachment as a springboard for my actions. I have become more consistent at responding from a genuine voice and not one filtered through an attached lens.

What about you? What are you attached to? Can you see the connections between past occurrences and your current life? What are the benefits of your attachments, if any? And what is the cost?

In the realm of social justice, I’ve met many people who have a personal connection with the injustice they are fighting. Most have been wronged by some structure in society. They will sweat, cry, shout, and bleed until the wrong is righted. This is the fuel from which most activists derive their energy. But this can be an angry fuel, an attached fuel, triggered by personal experience, and it can keep them from finding the best way to resolve the situation.

We need to honestly see our personal history, not deny it. We need to learn to forgive ourselves and the situations that spawned our attachments to loosen the firm grip they have on us. This doesn’t mean letting injustice slip through the cracks. It means taking care of yourself while fighting it. We have to resolve our conflicts and attachments if we truly want to heal social injustice. As Gandhi said, we have to be the change we want to see played out in the struggle.

**Group Conflict Resolution**
Having the ability to resolve tension in a group setting is a critical skill for a facilitator. As I mentioned earlier, there are many different personalities, viewpoints, belief
systems, and physical varieties represented by the participants in any gathering. When you include any form of injustice, people get personal. If they haven’t done some of the work I mentioned above, conflict may arise. As the facilitator, you are charged with resolving conflicting viewpoints. You serve as a neutral party between the two opposing sides, whether you agree or not, and you are the third party to the conversation.

Here are some steps you can take if conflict arises in your gathering:

**Lay down some ground rules or guidelines for agreeing to disagree safely.** If you are aware before the session that tension may arise from the subject matter, lay the guidelines down first. Guidelines should come from the group as an agreement or an informal contract with each other. This will transform rules into a collective responsibility.

A few standard guidelines are:

- **Confidentiality:** what is said in the room stays in the room.

- **Raising your hand when you want to speak:** this is an oldie but goodie and will help prevent people from talking over one another.

- **Agreeing to disagree:** put this one out there early to let people know that they can safely disagree with each other.

- **Speak to the room:** as the facilitator, have participants speak directly to you or the room in general, as opposed to directly addressing the person they are disagreeing with.

- **Stay in your body:** if someone feels they are getting heated or over-agitated, allow them the opportunity to breathe, remain silent, or in special cases, leave the room.
• **Recognize and voice the tension:** air it out. Don’t take it personally or as a fault of your planning.

There are plenty more guidelines that a group can come up with, but these are good starters.

**Facilitation Suggestions**

• As the group leader, you will be tasked with rephrasing statements made by individuals and restating them to the group if there is confusion.

• You will want to monitor vulgar language and make sure that you keep it to a minimum. Don’t allow any if tension arises: address it immediately, and have the person restate their opinion without it.

• Be sure to call upon other voices in the room if two or three people are dominating the conversation. This can help shift the energy away from the tension and back to the workshop theme.

• It is always helpful to have some form of opening and closing ritual. A ritual (something as simple as taking a few moments of silence or sitting, including having everyone introduce themselves) can help unify the group and form a collective bond. It also serves as a collective sigh from any discomfort from the session.

• Remember to be active in any tension but not over-reactive. Tension thrives off of a shaky and apprehensive facilitator and can turn your workshop into a circus.

• Practice noticing the energy of the group. If there is low energy, try something uplifting or physical. If there is high energy, than balance it with calming warm
ups. At any time, ask people to take a few slow deep breaths and come back to their center.

- And by all means avoid tangents and any conversation that doesn’t pertain to the theme of your workshop. If someone is on a tangent, gently recognize it and bring the group back to the theme.

- Sometimes the tangent can be a very important issue on its own and has relevance to the group but can deviate from the primary topic of the workshop. In this case, recognize how important it is and make a suggestion to the group to discuss this at an alternate time and/or place. This is called the “parking lot.” Suggest that whomever began the tangent be responsible for reconvening a group or committee later and they can do so at the completion of your session.
Staff Retreats

A staff retreat day scheduled into the regular work life of an organization can be a source of great unity and inspiration. As we learn to be with each other in different ways we develop deeper understandings of who we are as individuals and as a group. Spending time with coworkers in a way that is fun, relaxed, and reflective can be nourishing as well as productive. Rarely in this culture do we take the time to simply pause from the frantic pace of our actions. A commitment to pausing on an organizational level can lead to an entirely different and powerful orientation toward work, vision, community, and self.

Even creating pause for a short time within a regular workday can help to create a healthy pace for our work lives. And the commitment to taking an entire day for contemplation and rejuvenation can make those changes more profound, especially if repeated at regular intervals throughout the year. It may require a leap of faith to take a precious eight hours out of the month (or even the year), but that commitment signifies an understanding of the importance of the dynamic relationship between process and product and a willingness to invest in the long-term sustainability of your workplace.

At the Center we have a staff retreat every month. You may want to start with four retreat days per year, one for each season, in order to develop a pace that is comfortable and regular and does not interfere too greatly with your schedule. The seasons also provide thematic variation, helping to ensure that the staff retreat does not become stale. Holidays from various traditions often coincide with seasonal changes and can be used for inspiration and content.

We encourage you to try some of the activities we suggest here, as well as to experiment with new ideas. Come up with a design that incorporates contributions from all members of staff, in order to best recognize and support the gifts that everyone brings to the group.
There are three general elements at the heart of our retreat days at the Center:

- sharing time in practices and in silence
- engaging in meaningful conversation
- having fun.

Typically, all of these elements are taken up with the spirit of “practice” — with the deliberate intention of maintaining a deep engagement and a sacred presence in the activities. We encourage respect for the activity and those who designed it, care and consideration for our fellow coworkers, an interest in deepening our own wisdom and compassion, and a desire to manifest the full potential of the larger group.

Since we are in a different environment from our regular work, we take special care that everyone feels secure. These kinds of contemplative spaces are uncommon in our hectic world, so sharing silence with a group of people, for example, can be challenging and uncomfortable for some at first. The challenge is to negotiate a balance between creating a space that feels comfortable and pushing the edges of what is possible. Incorporating everyone’s ideas and interests into the staff retreat days is one way to assure that everyone feels ownership of the space.

**Design of the Day**

When designing a staff retreat day, it is important to pay attention to balance and flow throughout the day. No agenda is ever perfect, but we can try to create a structure that supports people in their natural tendencies and needs. If we say that there will be time for silence and time for speech, time for stillness and time for movement, time for reflection and time for production, we begin to see balance in the day. We like to begin our days with some kind of movement exercise, like Yoga or Qi Gong, which is a good way to enliven people, get the group energy moving, and settle people into the day.
Sleepiness tends to make the early afternoon a difficult period. Sometimes it is helpful to give people a little extra time to rest after lunch, followed by movement or an activity that is energetic and inspiring. After periods of intense discussion, it can be nice to have a break or at least time to spend in personal unstructured reflection. Just be careful to not let people wander too far off in their bodies or minds because it can be hard to bring them back into the fold of the group.

In general, it is good to end the day with a circle of sharing or another ritual or cohesive activity that allows everyone to hear everyone else and gives them the opportunity to express their gratitude and appreciation for the day and each other.

We have found that it has been very beneficial to use an off-site space for our retreat days. Getting out of our office where work can beckon moves us into a more contemplative mode. On the other hand, when we have not been able to go off-site, a few decorative elements and shifts in the space have helped us turn our work space into a new environment, lending itself to deeper reflection.

**Example of a Center retreat day**

- 10 am arrival
- 10:15 yoga with video or instructor
- 11:00 sitting meditation
- 11:30 walking meditation
- 12:00 group discussion or council
- 12:30 lunch
- 2:00 gardening, art, or other group activity
- 3:30 sitting meditation
- 4:00 closing circle
Staff Retreat Day Activities

Silence
At the Center, we tend to incorporate frequent silence on our staff retreats. You may choose to do the same, or silence may play a smaller role while your staff adjusts to new ways of being together. When we speak about silence at the Center, we don’t mean the outside environment. It is rarely possible to find a place with “perfect” silence. There are usually cars driving by, sirens, birds chirping in the trees, or old pipes clanking away in the office building. Rather, we think of silence as something that we are engaged in. Silence is a quality of mind, a way of being, and a powerful type of presence in the world. It represents the vast, calm unknown from which all things emerge.

When we are silent we are reflected back to our selves. There is a consciousness of self that we often ignore in daily life, during which we are usually compelled to express every thought, emotion, or idea that floats into our heads. Embracing silence allows us to be with ourselves in a way that is simply observant – not judgmental or mindless. This quality of observation can make our appreciation for life more subtle and profound and can make group experience richer and more nuanced.

As we are silent with each other, it is important to be careful that we are not “silencing” others or ourselves. For some people, this may seem like an unnecessary distinction. But for people who have been silenced in their lives due to racial, sexual, political, or other forms of oppression, this distinction can be deeply important. The silent dynamic we are trying to embody here is not one of “power over,” where we are not permitted to speak, but rather of “power with” coworkers and friends, with whom we have made a commitment to understanding the value of sharing space and time in a way that is supportive, meaningful, and infused with respect.

Artistic Practices
Many members of our staff are inclined toward artistic expression. But even for those of us who do not think we are artistically gifted, artistic expression has proven to be
fun and fulfilling. Sometimes, one staff member with a particular skill will teach the others a technique, like brush calligraphy or block printing. Other times people will simply bring in supplies to share so everyone can spend time making some little piece of art. Often we will put on some music or have a staff musician practice their instrument while we work silently on our individual projects.

**Collage**
One particularly powerful project was a collage based on visioning the future of the Center. A staff member brought a variety of old magazines that we were invited to search through and cut up as we looked for images that answered a question she posed. This time the question was, “What would the world look like if the mission of the Center were fulfilled?”

We spent an hour looking through magazines and composing our visions in silence. After, we each spoke about our pieces, sharing the ideas and images. In the end, we came to an understanding of each other and the ways in which we hold our work that was different from what emerges from discussion alone.

**Drumming**
Drumming is one of the most ancient forms of evoking spirit. Its pulse speaks directly to the heart and a good rhythm weaves the spirit of a group together. The drum calls and releases the spirit simultaneously and can create a group experience that can linger for life. When at a retreat or gathering there is nothing like waking to the energy the drum provides. No need for sugar in the coffee, the drum will be all you need. When the energy of the group is low, break out the drum. When the end of a long day is done, break out the drum. We suggest bringing some form of hand drum to your gathering. You will be amazed at the wonders it can provide.

**Drawing Without Looking**
This requires few materials—just paper and pencils or colored pens or markers. Each person sits in silence across from another and draws what she or he sees, without looking at the paper, for a few minutes. Then people share their drawings and talk about their experience. This breaks through usual patterns of ideas about talent, and requires a careful focus on the other person. The exercise can be repeated, which shows how each experience is quite different.

**Prayer (or Inspiration) Flags**
In Tibet, prayer flags are often created by printing sacred symbols, mantras, and prayers on pieces of yellow, green, blue, white, and red fabric. The flags are placed outdoors so that the wind can carry prayers and blessings out into the world.

Inspired by this practice, we spent an afternoon at a staff retreat day creating our own flags. The symbols we chose were sacred or significant to each of us. Our finished flags, hung together from a cord, represent our different backgrounds and spiritual experiences.

In order to make these flags you will need:
1. Linoleum blocks
2. Carving tools
3. A roller for applying ink
4. Block printing ink - preferably water-soluble
5. Wax paper or other surface for rolling ink
6. Thin, smooth material for printing such as tissue paper, muslin, etc.
7. Brayer or smooth, even object for pressing the inked block onto the flag
8. String or other material for hanging finished flags
1. Begin by deciding what picture you’d like to make. You can draw the outline of your picture on your linoleum block, or just carve freehand.

2. Carefully carve out the parts of the linoleum block that you do not want to appear in the final print. The flat, uncarved surfaces on your block are what will be inked and printed on your flag. You may want to carve with the top of the block pushed up against a wall or other barrier, so that it doesn’t slide around as you work.

3. When you are done carving, prepare to ink your block by rolling your ink roller through a small puddle of ink. It may take some practice to learn how much ink is enough for solid coverage. Don’t apply too much ink to the roller, or your print will look messy.

4. Roll the inked roller on your block. You will have a “preview” of your finished print, except in reverse!

5. Position your inked block over your flag. Use the brayer or whatever smooth object you have to rub the back of your block and transfer the ink to the flag. Make sure that you have newspaper under the flag in case ink seeps through the fabric!

6. Carefully remove the block and wash it off for future use. Let your flag dry; voila!
A few tips for creating your flags:

- When carving, make sure the cuts are deep and distinct enough to avoid getting filled with ink.
- For more intricate designs, try coloring in areas to make a clearer distinction between what you want carved out and what you want left.
- Remember that letters, numbers, and symbols will all be reversed when printed!
- Try making a tiled pattern of different carvings, or different color prints of the same design.

We spent the day in silence and the carving became a meditative practice. When it came time to print our blocks, there was much more energy and liveliness and we appreciated each other’s flags. We hung the flags in our office meditation room. They not only brighten our space but also remind us of our diversity, our connection, and the prayers, thoughts, and energy we put into the work.

**Storycircles**

When staff members share stories from their personal experience they draw out the collective wisdom of the group. A theme related to your work or to a particular challenge facing your organization can make these circles more clearly relevant to staff. Keep it simple: it may help if the facilitator starts with a story from his or her own experience and then each person shares. Suggest a time for each one. It’s OK to pass. Investigating the interrelating themes, content, and meaning of these stories can help an organization use its collective knowledge and wisdom in very practical ways for common goals.
Meditation
There are many forms of meditation that can be incorporated into a staff retreat day. In fact, we try to apply a mindful, meditative quality of mind to all our activities while on retreat. In many ways, meditation can be seen as a core practice for individuals and groups alike.

There are some basic meditation instructions in Chapter 4, and the Resources chapter at the end of the book lists more ideas.

See track 3 of the Companion Playlist, where Ian Koebner leads a mindfulness meditation practice, and track 4, where Mirabai Bush leads a loving-kindness meditation practice: http://bit.ly/cmindally

Gardening
We typically hold our retreats at the house of our Executive Director. During the summer her garden is full of flowers, vegetables, and weeds. There have been several retreat days where our desire to be outside has led us to offer help with the weeding. Of course, she doesn’t mind our offering to help out in the garden, so we give ourselves the opportunity to do some low-key gardening together while we silently commune with the plants and animals. Doing it collectively and in silence allows us to center ourselves individually, become more aware of the natural world, and come to group cohesion as we mindfully and playfully hang out in the garden.

If you work in an urban area, you may be able to help out at a community garden. If you are in an environment in which gardening isn’t possible, any number of other group outdoor activities can substitute – try cleaning up the street! It may be valuable to find a location for your retreat days which provides opportunities that do not exist in your office.
Writing
Journaling in silence can help people concentrate their thoughts on a particular idea and aid in quieting the mind. It can be a powerful way to connect with our inner lives and our world. Before or after one of the retreat practices, ask the group to write in the journals for 10 or 20 minutes and then, if they want to, share their entries with others.

Free writing is a simple process that brings you into the moment and is the basis for other discoveries. We often use it at retreats, either giving a topic to write about or just asking people to begin writing with “Here and now….”

Basic free writing follows these guidelines:
• Write nonstop for a set period of time (10–20 minutes).
• Do not make corrections as you write.
• Keep writing, even if you have to write something like, “I don’t know what to write.”
• Write whatever comes into your mind.
• Do not judge or censor what you are writing.

Free writing has these benefits:
• It makes you more comfortable with the act of writing.
• It helps you bypass the “inner critic” who tells you you can’t write.
• It can be a valve to release stress.
• It can help you discover things to write about.
• It can indirectly improve your formal writing.
• It can be fun.

Some final suggestions for free writing:
• Use the writing tool that is most comfortable for you— pencil, computer, etc.
• Don’t cross anything out. Write the new idea down; leave the old one.
• Drop all punctuation. That can make your free writing faster and more fluent.
Mindful Movement
We always include mindful movement exercises. They help get people out of their heads and into their bodies and can help prevent fatigue during the day. This can include anything from yoga and tai chi to dancing or playing twister.

Nothing is better than having an actual teacher in the room, so if you can get a local yoga or contemplative dance teacher to come in for a workshop, all the better! Maybe someone in your organization can lead this kind of exercise.

See track 12 of the Companion Playlist, where Chivonnie Meekins discusses the spiritual aspects of dance: http://bit.ly/cmindally

Guest Teachers
It can be helpful to occasionally invite guests to staff retreats to share your work, as well as to learn from them. Ask guests to lead workshops, facilitate a discussion, or train your staff in a contemplative practice. Remember to invite a diverse group of people over time—people of different backgrounds and traditions so as not to support or recognize only one tradition.
Sharing a Meal
Sharing a meal is an ancient way of celebrating community. We sometimes cook together during staff retreat; other times we bring lunch with us. We always sit down together to enjoy the food. People often share special food from their family traditions. Occasionally we have our lunch in silence. This practice gives us the opportunity to be more mindful of our eating and to enjoy the process of eating in a way that we are not accustomed to. Though it can be initially awkward, silence at a meal can add to the intimacy and connectedness of the group, invoking a quality of sacredness as we physically sustain ourselves. Sometimes we practice mindful eating. Coordinating the meal without speaking can also be a fun and challenging way of experimenting in non-verbal communication. Setting the table, preparing the food, washing the dishes can feel completely different when done in silence. Of course, having a conversation over food can also be a great way to enjoy your time together as a staff. You will find a balance that works for your organization.

Sharing Practices
If you or your co-workers claim particular religions, spiritual, or ethnic heritages, providing a space for sharing their practices can be a wonderful opportunity for the whole group. This can also be a place of great sensitivity: it has to be voluntary and optional, and, even then, some may not feel comfortable sharing their own practices or engaging in the practices of others. If there is a general level of interest and openness in the group, try an exploration. If there is resistance, the resistance itself can be a good thing to explore. You may want to ask an individual or a couple of people to lead the group in an activity or create an interfaith ceremony or celebration, in which a number of traditions are shared. Allow plenty of space for feedback and reflection from the group.
Deeper Group Sharing
Group sharing can become deeper according to the level of comfort and openness that your group develops.

Joe Lambert from the Center for Digital Storytelling (www.storycenter.org) offered us one such practice. Give everyone a 3x5 note card and a pen, and ask them to write a short letter to someone who they can no longer communicate with. The person may have passed away or simply have lost contact. It does not even have been someone known personally. Give participants ten minutes to write the note. Then, ask the participants to read their notes out loud, and, if they feel comfortable, to share more about the person. After the readings, invite participants to leave the letters on a group altar, keeping the memories, stories, and people in the room during the time together.

If you know that you are with a close-knit group, you can hand out paper and an assortment of crayons and markers and break everyone up into pairs. Ask them to think deeply about the other person in the pair – who they are, what they bring to the group, what is their essential being. Then, use simple images and shapes to design an emblem – a seal, a crest, a design – that captures the essence of that person. Allow ten minutes for the design and share it with the larger group.

This practice encourages thinking about the positive attributes of our partners and the ways in which their energy and talents add to the group dynamic. It also allows coworkers to acknowledge the aspects of each other that are valued, thereby giving a unique opportunity to voice respect for each other.
Staff Retreat Day Focus: The Table of Inspiration

A Table of Inspiration is a wonderful addition to life in organizations. The Table of Inspiration creates and develops what might be called a “center of gravity” for your workplace: a place where the community finds its center and communal grounding.

These kinds of places are an important factor in any kind of community, whether formal or informal. People always find a place and a way to congregate: to share from a deeper place and find community support. Barbershops, parks, and cafés are good examples of community places that serve as centers of gravity. While these places may rise and fall away spontaneously, the intention of creating such a center can have long-lasting benefits.

Where are the in-between spaces in your workplace? Is there a kitchen, hallway, water fountain, or copy machine where people naturally converge? A place where the unofficial conversations happen around work or non-work related themes? These spaces are too often thought of as places where productivity slips and concentration is lost. Often, organizations discourage the use of these spaces. However, it may be more helpful to try and use those spaces productively.

A Table of Inspiration can be used to collect and concentrate energy in ways that promote work, rather than detract from it. Maybe it makes sense to situate the Table in or around one of these natural centers of gravity, or maybe not. Maybe you have a space in your office that seems like it could be a central location, if some intention were put behind it. Maybe the Table is not a permanent fixture in your office, and is used only at regular intervals or celebrations throughout the year. Regardless of how you choose to incorporate the model into your organization, it can be a powerful method of staff development and community building.

The Table of Inspiration can be used to learn about each other in new and profound
ways through sharing stories, symbols, and people that are meaningful to us. It encourages modes of communication that are not typical in the workplace.

If you decide to set up a Table, regular attention will keep it alive. During staff meetings, you may want to set aside time for making additions to it and to comment on anything previously added.

Your office may choose to come up with themes for the Table related to the time of year, holidays, current events, or periods of historical relevance. This can help to keep it fresh. On the other hand, it can also create disruption if people feel attached to the continuity of certain elements in the Table: this can be a place of exploration for you and your co-workers. Either way it can be helpful to have elements of ritual or ceremony in the changing and maintenance of the Table of Inspiration, so that everyone feels involved in the ongoing process. It doesn’t have to be a big to-do, but changes should be made with some level of public recognition.

What should be placed there? Nothing is objectively prohibited, but it should be used as a “sacred space.” However, the definition of “sacred” can vary from day to day and from person to person. Whatever is considered meaningful should be valid. For many people, humor is sacred. For others, religion. The commitment to having a space that is open to all forms of sacredness, even its most mundane or playful forms, can be a challenging, but fascinating, experiment. Items that are funny, poignant, powerful, inspiring, silly, sad, or controversial can all be helpful, as long as people learn to relate to it in an open and spacious way.

If something is placed on the Table of Inspiration that people find offensive or troubling, this should be seen as an opportunity for dialog and discussion in your office. Maybe your coworkers would be interested in setting up some ground rules or protocol around use and development of the Table. Having intentional forms for dealing with conflict helps prevent organizational trauma and guides the organization on a path toward learning.
Here are some ideas for building your workplace Table of Inspiration:

- Many altars include the four elements of fire, earth, water, and air in material or symbolic form. Also, something alluding to the six directions of north, east, west, south, above, and below is common. These elements help create an understanding of the broader, universal context in which these offerings exist: reminding us of where we come from, what we ultimately depend on, and in what direction we are headed.

- Photos of inspiring people related to your work can be a powerful way of reconnecting with deeper intentions and motivations. Constituents, leaders in the field, and historical personalities can help us ground ourselves in the rationale and inspiration for our work.

- Cloth, ribbons, candles, and other decorations can help make the Table more compelling and beautiful.


- Things representing the past, present, and future.

A Seasonal Offering Ceremony
One way of integrating the Table of Inspiration into your office is for the staff to formally revisit it at the beginning of each season to set the tone and provide a base of reflection for the period ahead.

Spend some time collectively dismantling the last season’s altar. If it feels appropriate, it may be powerful to do this in silence, with individuals reflecting on the objects they are removing from the altar. Some potential questions to keep in mind may be: How
have these offerings guided you through the past four months? Have they provided you with hope or inspiration during difficult times? Have they provided challenges to you? What will you be happy to let go of? What will you miss? It may also be interesting for your group to talk over these questions out loud while pulling off the materials from the old altar. Experiment with one or the other to see what works for your group.

It is important to commit to some basic form when constructing the new season’s Table. For instance, all staff should be present and should be invited to bring materials well in advance so that the Table can achieve its richest expression. It will be more powerful if people engage it with a good deal of preparation. Once gathered, staff should be invited to place their materials on the Table one at a time. They should be invited to say a few words about their object, but should also feel free to place them without comment. After the new Table of Inspiration is complete, the group may choose to spend five or ten minutes in silence reflecting on the stories and objects.

**Questions**
Here are some questions that may help guide the construction of each new season’s Table.

- What have you learned from this season in the past?
- What experiences have shaped your understanding of the season?
- What stories, ideas, and sensibilities are you carrying with you that may effect how you experience the season?
- What do you most hope for the season, yourself, and your work?

**Important Occasions**
There are myriad days during the year that mark significant events in the religious, cultural, or historical calendars of this and other societies. These days can create spaces
for sharing and learning the wisdom that underlies their significance. They can also be useful tools for encouraging staff leadership around the altar’s development.

**Religious or Spiritual Holidays**
Delegate responsibility of celebrating the event to an individual or small group who is interested in a particular holiday, allowing people to share from their own traditions and teachings. Staff members who claim particular religious traditions may want to share those thoughts, beliefs, and teachings with the group. If two or more religious holidays coincide on the calendar, people from different traditions can share their perspective and lead a discussion on what traditions can learn from each other and how it may be relevant to the work of the group.

**Weekly Staff Meetings**
If your staff is energetically engaged in the construction and development of the Table of Inspiration, you may want to keep the momentum going by engaging it at more frequent intervals, instead of waiting for the next big holiday. Even if you choose to focus the construction into seasonal sessions, additions to the altar should be acceptable any time a staff member feels moved to do so. In order to maintain consistency, you may want to provide a space at staff meetings for people to share what they have added during the past week. Explore the ways in which the Table might become an integral and dynamic aspect of organizational life.

**Conclusion**
We hope that this concept of a workplace Table of Inspiration can be helpful to you and your organization. We think that it is an invaluable tool for creating deep understanding between the collective, as well as a more profound connection to the work that you are engaged in. Your group’s Table will be unique and develop in ways that no one can predict. We hope that your organization can embrace this mystery and develop a shared relationship with a sacred space.
Outcomes for Contemplative Organizations

According to the Center’s research on the value of contemplative practices in the workplace, there are three consequences that are likely to emerge in your organization from incorporating the techniques featured in this chapter.

1. **Improved communication.** Staff members develop the capacity to listen without blame or judgment. More importantly, these and similar techniques allowed for new and effective ways to deal with conflict resolution between individuals and groups.

   One of the most challenging issues that community organizations have to deal with are issues of race and class, yet making significant, broad-based changes requires the participation of everyone. Building a movement, given the diverse views and perspectives and inequities of power and privilege of a group, often creates tremendous conflict. The judicious use of contemplative practices can bring more “breathing room” and create a space for more productive conversations.

2. **A greater sense of team and community.** One of the things you are likely to notice as you continue your practice is that petty squabbles and issues with others in your workplace tend to become less important. The possibility of bonding and increasing a sense of mutual trust can be greatly enhanced.

3. **Realizing the interconnections of people and the unity of life.** With new awareness developed through practice, people tend to care for each other more. Both Gandhi and King said that we must learn unconditional love even for those we don’t like. For social justice workers, this means that we arrive at a place of deeper caring, which is critical in maintaining a vision of hope when the going gets rough.
If we attempt to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening our own self-understanding, our own freedom, integrity, and capacity to love, we will not have anything to give to others. We will communicate nothing but the contagion of our own obsessions, our aggressiveness, our own ego-centered ambitions.

*Thomas Merton*
In interviews with the Center, activists who had a contemplative practice reported that these practices have

- supported deep, significant social change,
- sustained them personally,
- helped them process emotions in a constructive way, bring the shadows to light, and shift power dynamics and structures.

To introduce you to ideas from leaders in the field, the following pages contain short segments of interviews with some of the mentors from our Social Justice Mentoring Retreats and some of the activist leaders who participated in our Contemplative Net Project from 2002-2004.

If I could transmit a message to the whole world, I would say, “Be sure to secure your own oxygen mask before helping others.” Find contemplative and spiritual practices so you can sustain yourself in the work that you do.

*Marian David*
*Sustaining the Soul that Serves*
I chair a K-5 charter school. We’re the largest second-language learning school in New York State. One day one of the best teachers appeared to be almost hyperventilating. I asked her, “What’s going on?” She said she had had a very difficult day from the very beginning, before she even got to school. I said to her,

“May I share something that I do as a practice and that I’ve done with my children?”
“What is it?”
“I can teach you to slow down your heart, and I can teach you how to get into the moment, into your breath.”
“Go ahead.”
“Well I don’t want to put my hand on your chest. Put your hand on your chest, and I’ll put my hand on top of yours.”

So we did. We were out in an open area because I am very careful about how I deal with teachers or anyone that works for me these days.

“Just close your eyes. Be very conscience of your breath and what’s happening to you right now. Just tell your heart to slow down….slow down. My kids, when do that with them they can do it. You can do it. You work with kids.”

It took about a minute, and she was just absolutely elated that she was able to calm down. As a result she showed other teachers. Whenever I see her, she says, “I’m slowing down my heart.”

I’m not sure how much that has to do with social action, social justice, and spirituality, but here was a particular moment in which I was able to share my practice without having to sit on a cushion, without having to explain about Zen, or Buddhism. It was just a need to be taken care of, and the skills that I have learned over the years served me well and served that teacher well. Apparently she then spread it to other people.
Nghia Tran

In 1963 when I was born, my father was in the middle of the war, and as I grew up I saw a lot of death and destruction and very little healing among humanity. That deeply affected my outlook on life. In 1975 we left Vietnam because of the war. Ever since then, I’ve been carrying this question inside my heart: Why does humanity behave that way toward one another? I have to go through a transformation to heal that pain, not just for myself but for my family and the ancestors who came before me. That’s the beginning of my own healing journey…

As a community organizer working in non-profit organizations over the last 15-20 years, I reflected on why there is so much pain among us who seek social and economic justice in the world. I realized that the fuels we use to drive ourselves are anger and pain. That is our currency, that’s our way of motivating our work until the fuel burns out. It burned me out. That fire destroyed my sense of wellness within. I realized I had to find a different way of looking at life, a different way of reflecting on how I can help to shift the paradigm of the world from one of hatred and pain to one of love and healing. In that journey I realized that I have to find the silence of my heart and listen to its pain before I can begin to address the healing. Those were the opportunities that led me to different contemplative practices. I come from a Buddhist tradition blessed with richness in meditation and prayerful modes, which helped me find that contemplative mind, that quietness of mind. Hearing the cries of the heart, hearing the wounds of the people, and a prayer for healing, for myself, my family and the community that I serve. That’s my journey.
Social justice work is inherently about liberation from oppression and from our participation in the dynamics of oppression that exist in our society, whether we come from the position of a dominant group and the privilege that we have learned to bring into the world with us, or the internalized oppression that we learned as people of color, or people that are oppressed by one of their other identities, like sexuality or gender. So we come with an understanding that social justice is about working toward undoing oppression in its different ways of manifesting. That is the basis of what social justice is and that coincides with not only our personal liberation from oppression but the work we need to do together. Contemplative practice gives us the ability to break the pattern of oppression. It allows us to see how to face situations that are apparently racist or coming from some form of privilege. With practice, we can notice that we are reacting and breaking away, or separating ourselves from other people in the movement. We become able to see it, acknowledge it, and do something different about it. Not just step away, but re-engage and respond differently. Contemplative practice is about re-engaging, opening the heart, and remaining connected in spite of whatever else might be going on. As mentors we come out of that understanding and engage with the emerging leaders that come to our retreats and with whom we work back in our communities. It helps them acknowledge and validates for them that oppression is alive and well and there is something different we can do about it. It is incumbent upon us as leaders to model a different way of confronting injustice in the world and creating peace.
Sule Greg Wilson
The Drummer’s Path

The place that I’ve been coming from with contemplative practice is not Buddhist, even though I’ve had training in that, too. I’ve been working more with people with African practice. As well as sitting in meditation, you’re dancing and pulling in and chanting and pulling in. Getting in touch with forces that way opens your spirit up and opens your eyes so you can start to see how people are working through their archetypes and not necessarily dealing with the situation they’re in. Contemplative practice gives you vision, and space in between actions, and space in between breaths to really see what a situation is and how it’s working so you don’t fall into the trap of the situation and can work through the moment more appropriately.

Social action is about reaction to problems and forces being imposed upon you. Therefore you are already at a loss. You are already reacting. You are already at the second stage of manifestation. You’re not initiating it yourself. So when you’re coming from that defensive position, you’d better be careful. Contemplative practice allows you to examine your own thought processes and emotional conditioning so you don’t fall into the traps that have been set for you by those who have initiated the situations that many people in social action are trying to amend. Contemplative practice gives you a chance to see where peoples’ needs are and not just what their voices say. You can look at someone and see that their heart is crying even though their mouth is screaming at you. Their heart is crying. If you address the need that you are able to see after doing contemplative practice, then you can actually help them and get the world on a better footing.
Marian David  
*Sustaining the Soul That Serves*

I’m one that really celebrates quarter inch turns. I don’t need to see a whole 360 hundred degrees to call it success. But I feel you know when a heart connection was made. I was in a group the other week and I was doing a session and you could tell that the people were really tired. Just burned out in the work. A lot was being put upon them and I just said, just breathe. I invited them to breathe, breathe in love and more love and just relax. And you just felt the tension melt in the room. One woman came up and said, “Thank you for doing that. I don’t know when anybody has invited me just to breathe and love myself.” And so it doesn’t take much to please me.

In this group there was a director of a youth center in the Puerto Rican community. And he was like, “I don’t know what I’m doing here in a retreat. My boys are getting killed on the street.” He had just had two deaths of friends in street violence. And he was really having a hard time being on the retreat. He was getting ready to quit his work because he said he couldn’t do it. It was a three-day retreat, and we just invited him to do some of the practices, take a walk, commune in nature. And we had journals and invited people to write whatever they wanted to in them. He started writing and then he went for a walk. When he came back in, we asked if anybody wanted to share any of their experiences or anything they wrote. He wrote about the time when he had dropped out of school, had gone to Puerto Rico and met up with some guys on the beach who asked him, “Do you want to go out on the boat?” And he said he did. He didn’t know the guys, they were older men. He swam for about two hours with dolphins off that boat and spent the evening. And he said it was a peaceful time. When he came back to the city, he finished school and started really changing... just taking on responsibility. He told us that he had never thought again about that experience of swimming with the dolphins, ever since he had done it. He hadn’t ever remembered it until he got centered and started journaling.
Diana Winston
Buddhist Peace Fellowship

Some time ago there was a retreat that we held at the Los Alamos Nuclear Laboratory where we basically were given a parking lot to be activists in; we were given it by the laboratory itself. Los Alamos, in New Mexico, is where nuclear weapons and nuclear energy research is being developed, and we were going there on a protest vigil, and so we sat. They gave us a parking lot, and we set up a giant blue tarp and plopped down our meditation cushions on it and meditated for peace.

I have to say it was very, very strange. You definitely wondered if this is doing anything at all. Here we are sitting in the boiling hot sun in a protest vigil against this gigantic military industrial complex. Most of the workers weren’t seeing us because we were out in the parking lot, kind of out in the distance.

One of the interesting things that happened was we invited everyone to go and have lunch with the workers at the lab. We are trying to bring forth these principles of nonduality, of not demonizing, of being as mindful as we possibly can. That’s another principle in Buddhist activism. It means if you are standing in a protest march, are you aware of your body, are you aware of your mind and your emotions? This is not typical activism! So we go into the cafeteria and we sit down with these lab workers and hear their stories. It was incredible, because what happened for me, certainly, was I got the other side, and all of my ideas, like, “you are evil because you are making nuclear weapons” began to dissolve. I started hearing how concerned people were, and their fear: their fear for their family, and what if they didn’t have a job.

So it is breaking down these barriers. To me, that is true Buddhist social change work. How can we understand and love other people? It is not easy.
Resources

Organizations Committed to Contemplative Social Change

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
www.avodah.net
AVODAH integrates work for social change, Jewish learning and community building.

Beloved Community Center
www.belovedcommunitycenter.org
The Center fosters and models a spirit of community based on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of a “Beloved Community.”

Buddhist Peace Fellowship
www.bpf.org
BPF’s programs, publications, and practice groups link Buddhist teachings of wisdom and compassion with progressive social change.

The Center for Nonviolent Communication
www.cnvc.org
A global organization helping people connect compassionately with themselves and one another through Nonviolent Communication.

Jobs with Justice
www.jwj.org
Jobs with Justice engages workers and allies in campaigns to win justice in workplaces and in communities where working families live. Their leadership program seeks to bring new forms and practices that bridge external organizational and political development with internal personal mastery and spiritual grounding.
Mosaic
www.mosaicvoices.org
Mosaic seeks to create cross-cultural alliances, mentoring relationships and social connections built upon personal trust and commitment to bridging unhealthy divisions in contemporary communities.

Movement Strategy Center
http://movementstrategy.org/publications-tools/
MSC works with grassroots organizations, alliances, and networks, as well as funders, to build powerful and transformative social justice movements.

Network of Spiritual Progressives
www.spiritualprogressives.org
The NSP, project of Tikkun, works to articulate a politics of meaning—emphasizing that human beings have not only material needs but spiritual and “meaning needs.”

Prison Mindfulness Institute
www.prisonmindfulness.org
The PDMI’s mission is to transform lives by providing prisoners with contemplative tools for self-transformation and rehabilitation.

The SpiritHouse Project
www.spirithouseproject.org
The SpiritHouse Project is a national organization that uses research, action, the arts, education, spiritual reflection, and analysis to bring diverse peoples together to build a just and non-violent movement that propels us toward a beloved community.

Spirit in Action
www.spiritinaction.net
Spirit in Action is a non-profit organization dedicated to building a successful movement for social change in the US.
Sustaining the Soul that Serves
www.sustainingthesoulthatserpves.org
Offers programs for youth and young adult leaders, teachers, ministers, counselors, healthcare providers, social workers and others who service to explore contemplative/spiritual practices to renew and sustain themselves, avoid burnout, and maintain peace and balance in their professional and personal lives.

Tools for Change
www.toolsforchange.org
Tools for Change is a multi-cultural organization that promotes healing, leadership development, and sustainable democracy.

Veterans of Hope Project
www.veteransofhope.org
The Veterans of Hope Project is a multifaceted educational initiative on religion, culture and participatory democracy.
Recommended Reading:
Books on Spiritual Activism and Service

Brave Hearts, Rebel Spirits: A Spiritual Activists Handbook
by Brooke Shelby Biggs
Anita Roddick Books, 2003
You know the names Martin Luther King, Jr., Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela. But have you heard of Roy Bourgeois, Neta Golan, or Sulak Sivaraksa? How about Vandana Shiva, Daniel and Philip Berrigan, or Janusz Korczak? They, and the dozens more spiritual activists in this book, are the heirs to that great tradition of faith-based activism. They are Buddhists and Catholics, Hindus and Muslims, Baha’is, Jews and Quakers. The stories of these modern-day prophets of positive change will inspire you, and the resources provided in each chapter will help you put your own beliefs to work in the world.

Compassion in Action: Setting Out on the Path of Service
by Ram Dass and Mirabai Bush
Three Rivers Press, 1995

Deliberate Acts of Kindness: Service as a Spiritual Practice
by Meredith Gould
Image Books, 2002

How Can I Help? Stories and Reflection on Service
by Ram Dass and Paul Gorman
Knopf, 1985

The Path of Compassion: Writings on Socially Engaged Buddhism
Fred Eppsteiner, ed.
Parallax, 1988
The Spiritual Activist: Practices to Transform Your Life, Your Work, and Your World
by Claudia Horwitz
Penguin, 2002

Spiritual Politics: Changing the World from the Inside Out
by Corinne McLaughlin
Ballantine Books, 1994

Sustaining the Soul that Serves: A Guide to Sustain Emerging and Seasoned Leaders
by Marian David, Anthony T. Browder, and Pamela H. Toole
Sustaining the Soul that Serves, 2000

Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Return Hope to the Future
by Margaret J. Wheatley
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002

Work as a Spiritual Practice
by Lewis Richmond
Broadway, 1999

Working Inside Out: Tools for Change
by Margo Adair
Sourcebooks, 2003
Books on Contemplative Practices

**Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace**
by Angel Kyodo Williams
Penguin Books, 2002

**Breath Sweeps Mind: A First Guide to Meditation Practice**
Jean Smith, Editor
Riverhead Books, 1998

**Breathing Space: A Spiritual Journey in the South Bronx**
by Heidi B. Neumark
Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003

**Dharma, Color and Culture: New Voices in Western Buddhism**
Rev. Ryûmon Hilda Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Editor
Parallax Press, 2004

**Dreaming Me: An African American Woman’s Spiritual Journey**
by Jan Willis
Riverhead, 2001

**Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church**
by Barbara A. Holmes
Fortress Press, 2005

**The Measure of Our Success: Letter to My Children and Yours**
by Marian Wright Edelman
Beacon Press, 1992
Meeting Faith: The Forest Journals of a Black Buddhist Nun
by Faith Adiele

Queer Dharma: Voices of Gay Buddhists
Edited by Winston Leyland
Gay Sunshine Press, 2000

Romancing the Shadow: A Guide to Soul Work for a Vital, Authentic Life
by Connie Zweig and Steve Wolf
Ballantine Wellspring, 1999

Soulcards
by Deborah Koff-Chapin
The Center for Touch Drawing, www.touchdrawing.com
A set of illustrated cards that can be used for introspection and contemplation. Images from the Soulcards are used throughout this book.

Start Where You Are: A Guide to Compassionate Living
by Pema Chodren
Shambala, 1994

Voices of Wisdom: Hawaiian Elders Speak
by MJ Harden
Photography by Steve Brinkman
Aka Press, 1999

Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life
by Jon Kabat-Zinn
Hyperion, 1994
Books on Contemplative Retreats

Come and Sit: A Week inside Meditation Centers
by Marcia Z. Nelson and Wayne Teasdale
Skylight Paths Publishing
This book devotes a chapter to each of seven traditions: Christianity, Zen, Theravada Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Sufism, Judaism, and Hinduism.

Lighting the Lamp of Wisdom: A Week inside a Yoga Ashram
by John Ittner and David Frawley
Skylight Paths Publishing

Making a Heart for God: A Week inside a Catholic Monastery
by Dianne Aprile and Patrick Hart
Skylight Paths Publishing

Waking Up: A Week inside a Zen Monastery
by Jack Maguire, Foreword by John Daido Loori
Skylight Paths Publishing

The Women’s Retreat Book
by Jennifer Louden
Harper San Francisco, 1997
Books on Engaged Buddhism

**Engaged Buddhism in the West**  
Edited by Christopher Queen  
Wisdom Publications, 2000

**Not Turning Away: The Practice of Engaged Buddhism**  
Edited by Susan Moon  
Shambhala Publications, 2004

Books on Prison Work

**Dharma in Hell: the Prison Writings of Fleet Maull**  
by Fleet Maull  
Prison Dharma Network, 2006

**Finding Freedom: Writings from Death Row**  
by Jarvis J. Masters  

Books on Nonviolent Communication

**Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living**  
by Laura Slattery, Ken Butigan, Veronica Pelicaric and Ken Preston-Pile  
Pace e Bene Foundation, 2005

**Nonviolent Communication: a Language of Life**  
by Marshall B. Rosenberg  
Puddledancer Press, 2003
Websites

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s Practice Pages
www.contemplativemind.org/practices

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society’s Social Justice Program
www.contemplativemind.org/archive/socialjustice

The Contemplative Net Project
www.contemplativemind.org/archive/cnet
A research project conducted at the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society from 2001 to 2004, examining how contemplative practices are being used by organizations in secular settings, with a special emphasis on social justice organizations.

Contemplative Outreach
www.centeringprayer.com
Contemplative Outreach is an international spiritual network of individuals and small faith communities committed to Christian contemplation and the method of Centering Prayer.

Everyday Zen
www.everydayzen.org
Committed to sharing the Zen attitude, spirit, and practice with the world in a variety of settings, including social justice activism. It is dedicated to listening to the world, to changing it and being changed by it. Sittings and retreats in various locations.

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service
www.paceebene.org
Pace e Bene’s mission is to develop the spirituality and practice of active nonviolence as a way of living and being and as a process for cultural transformation.
**Spirituality and Practice**
www.spiritualityandpractice.com
Contains a number of secular and non-religious based practices that are easy to follow and adapt to your personal interests.
Retreat Centers for Practice & Social Justice

**Agape Community**
Ware, MA  
www.agapecommunity.org  
A lay Catholic residential community with a vision of ministry in peace education and non-violence and an ecumenical and interfaith embrace.

**Center for Transformative Change**
Berkeley, CA  
center.transformativechange.org  
Founded by teacher Angel Kyodo Williams, Transformative Change (XC) is the first national center entirely dedicated to bridging the inner and outer lives of social change agents, activists and allies to support a more effective, more sustainable movement of social justice for all.

**Center for Whole Communities**
Fayston, VT  
www.wholecommunities.org  
The Center nurtures reflective and creative practices that open the door for more authentic collaborations, deeper dialogue, and new ways of being leaders.

**Elat Chayyim Center for Jewish Spirituality**
Falls Village, CT  
hazon.org/elat-chayyim  
An extensive and varied retreat schedule, it promotes practices which draw deeply on the wisdom of our ancestors and at the same time are at the cutting edge of spiritual experience.
Garrison Institute  
Garrison, NY  
www.garrisoninstitute.org  
Founded in 2002 to apply the transformative wisdom of the world’s contemplative traditions to systemic challenges facing the human and natural environment.

Zen Peacemakers/House of One People  
www.zenpeacemakers.org  
Offering contemplative training paths, study programs, and hands-on internships. Zen Peacemakers are dedicated to actualizing the interconnectedness of life.

Pendle Hill  
Wallingford, PA  
www.pendlehill.org  
Pendle Hill is a Quaker center for spiritual growth, study, practice and service. They offer many programs open to people of all faiths including retreats, evening lectures, weekend workshops, short courses, and a longer term Resident Program.

Vallecitos Mountain Refuge  
Taos, NM  
www.vallecitos.org  
A wilderness ranch and contemplative retreat center for the nonprofit and public interest community. They have a schedule of retreats for activists.
Films and Documentaries

**Amandla! A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony**  
Directed by Lee Hirsch  
This film documentary tells the story of black South African freedom music and the role it played in the long battle against apartheid. Amandla!'s focus is on the struggle's spiritual dimension, as articulated and embodied in song.

**Baraka**  
Directed by Ron Fricke  
Baraka is a Sufi word meaning “blessing” or “essence of life.” In non-narrative form it engenders a sense of compassionate action by expanding our awareness of the natural world and our place and connection to it.

**Doing Time, Doing Vipassana**  
Directed by Ayelet Menahemi and Eilona Ariel  
This extraordinary documentary takes viewers into India’s largest prison - known as one of the toughest in the world – and shows the dramatic change brought about by the introduction of Vipassana meditation.

**Howard Zinn: You Can’t Be a Neutral on a Moving Train**  
Directed by Deb Ellis and Denis Mueller  
This rousing and enlightening documentary presents a 40 year portrait of Zinn’s radical political life for peace and justice.

**I Know I’m Not Alone**  
Directed by Michael Franti  
A documentary of musician and activist Michael Franti’s mission of peace in the Middle East.
Wiping the Tears of Seven Generations
Directed by Fidel Moreno and Gary Rhine
This film tells the story of the Si Tanka Wokiksuye, The Bigfoot Memorial Ride. 300 Lakota Sioux horseback riders rode for two weeks through bitter, sub-zero winter weather, reverently praying and mourning over the lives lost exactly 100 years earlier at The Wounded Knee Massacre.