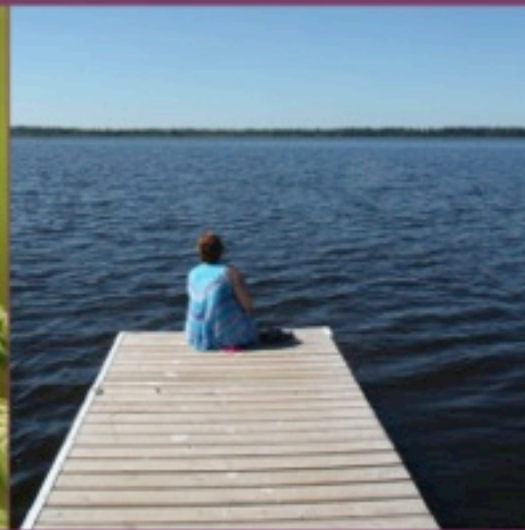


A PATH TO CONNECTION

How to make deeper connections with self, sacred, others, and the earth



*By Heather Plett
(with a lot of help from her friends)*

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INTRODUCTION

This morning, I sat down at my computer to work on this book, and... I just couldn't focus. I flitted through social media, got distracted by the links friends shared, got up to make tea, changed my mind, poured a glass of water, checked the mail, sat down to try to write again... and nothing came. All of those ideas that have been floating around in my head for the last month suddenly disappeared or seemed too trivial for what I wanted to say.

Suddenly the irony of the moment hit me. I was trying to write a book on making deeper connections, and I was feeling disconnected.

I felt like a boat that had come unmoored from the dock, drifting out in the waves without a captain to pilot it back to shore, disconnected from my purpose and my people.

So I did what I knew I had to do. I got up from the computer and walked outside into the sunshine. I headed down the street in the direction of my favourite bench overlooking the Red River. Just as I reached the bench, though, four people ahead of me with notebooks and lawnchairs set up shop on the bench for what looked like an outdoor staff meeting.



I walked past them and climbed down the banks to get closer to the water. One of my favourite spots along the river is only accessible if you leave the path and climb down a fairly steep bank through waist high thistles, a deterrent that means I usually have the spot all too myself. The bank and the thistles provide a shield that hides all evidence of the city and makes it feel like I've made my way into the wilderness. Across the river is a forest where deer and eagle can occasionally be spotted.

I sat on a large rock, turned my face to the sun, and closed my eyes.

I listened to the water gently lapping the rocks. I heard the faraway ducks quacking their greeting to each other. I felt the summer warmth on my skin.

Aaahhh... This was connection. This was exactly what I needed to help me feel like my boat had been brought back to shore, once again moored, anchored, and ready to carry my people and my cargo. I opened my hands and let the sun and the breeze and the lapping water refocus my disconnected mind.

This is the same spot I've gone to many times - when I was deep in grief over my mom's death, when I was feeling lost in my work and not sure I could survive self-employment, when I'd just had an argument with my husband and didn't know how to heal the wound we'd caused each other. This place - the water, the trees, the birds, the rocks, and the sun - heal me, ground me, and bring me back into connection. This spot serves as a lifeline, tossed across the water to bring my unmoored boat back to the safety of the shore.

On the way back, I took a detour through the woods. Once again, I left the beaten trail and dove into the quiet spaces where few other people wander. I plucked fresh chokecherries from the trees and let the sour dryness of them pucker my mouth. I smiled when I saw the fort some neighbourhood kids have built out of dead branches. I breathed deeply of the oxygen the trees offered up to my hungry lungs.

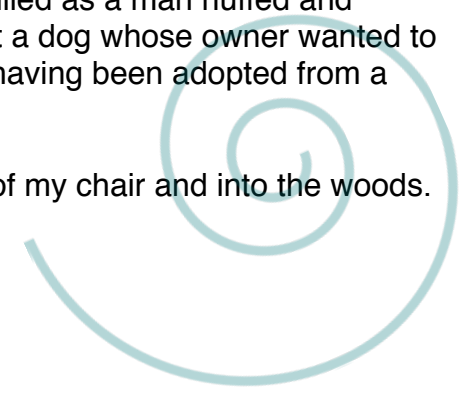


I was connected. I knew that I could return to my computer and once again tap into the stream of wisdom that had eluded me earlier.

On the way back to my house, I saw the foursome deep in conversation on the bench - a church leadership group talking about God and community. I passed a woman reverently turning the soil in her garden. I smiled as a man huffed and puffed past me on the street, his walking sticks click-clicking on the ground. I stopped to pet a dog whose owner wanted to share his story - that his name is Quincy and he'd just joined their family three weeks ago, having been adopted from a rescue centre.

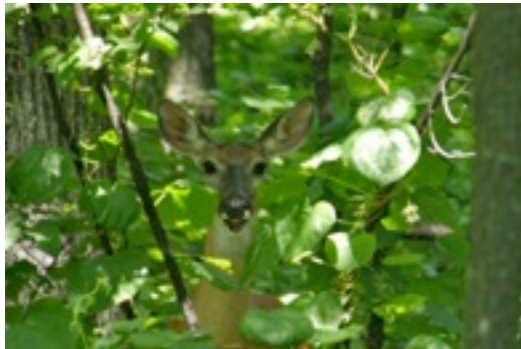
A common thread runs through all of these stories. It was the same thread that got me out of my chair and into the woods.

We are all on a quest for connection.



We dig in our gardens to connect with the soil. We buy walking sticks to help us connect with our bodies. We gather in circles to connect with each other. We sit by the riverside and whisper prayers to the god of our understanding. We bring rescue dogs home to connect with the animal kingdom.

When I got back to my computer, a friend had shared the following quote from Henry David Thoreau that summed up why I had left the house an hour earlier.



"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear; nor did I wish to practise resignation, unless it was quite necessary. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life, to live so sturdily and Spartan-like as to put to rout all that was not life, to cut a broad swath and shave close, to drive life into a corner, and reduce it to its lowest terms."

I want to "live deep and suck out all the marrow of life". And so I go to the woods to "learn what it has to teach" and to "live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life". I sit by the river to let the wisdom of the earth wash over me. I stop to pet rescued dogs to be a part of the healing of relationships. I listen to my heart when it needs the sunshine more than a computer screen. I sit in circles to connect with the deeper wisdom of my community.

This book is about making intentional connections. It's about opening our hearts to that quest that pulls us but that we so often ignore. It's about finding healing for what's become disconnected in our lives.

I have invited friends and colleagues to help me offer wisdom about deeper connections, and so you will find their collective wisdom throughout this book. They've submitted tips, poems, stories, and artwork. It seemed right that a book on making deeper connections didn't come from only one voice.

Originally, I attempted to categorize the writing into four categories - connection with self, connection with the sacred, connection with the earth, and connection with others - but it became clear fairly quickly that this was a false construct not worth pursuing. All four are intricately intertwined. **When I seek deeper connection with the earth, for example, I am also opening myself to deeper connection with myself and the sacred. When I connect with others in a deeper way, I can only do that if I am also open to a deeper connection with myself.**

It's all the same path, ultimately - a path to connection. We may seek one, because we have been awakened to that particular longing, but to truly live a life of connection we need all four. We can't be connected to the sacred but disconnected from the earth. We can't live in healthy connection with others while ignoring the disconnect in our own hearts.

If you are on this path (and we all are, whether we know it or not), start where you need to start. Walk into the woods, call a friend, take some quiet time for yourself, go to church or on a spiritual retreat - do whatever feels like the first right step.

Just be sure to do it. Because a disconnected life is an discontented life. It's a restless life, a lonely life, and a fearful life.

Choose connection. Connection matters. Connection heals.

It may feel, sometimes, like it's too hard, too risky, too vulnerable to open yourself up to what connection brings. It may feel like you're exposing yourself to too much pain, rejection, and uncertainty, but it's worth it. Trust me on this. Worth it times a thousand.

Because connection doesn't only heal you, it heals the world. It heals our communities. It heals our neighbourhoods. It heals the wounds our disconnection has caused the earth. When we're disconnected, we do damage to ourselves and everything around us. When we're connected, we bring healing and wholeness.

I say it again... choose connection. Reach out for the four threads - self, sacred, others, and earth - and hang on.

In the words of Margaret Wheatley, "Start anywhere. Follow it everywhere."

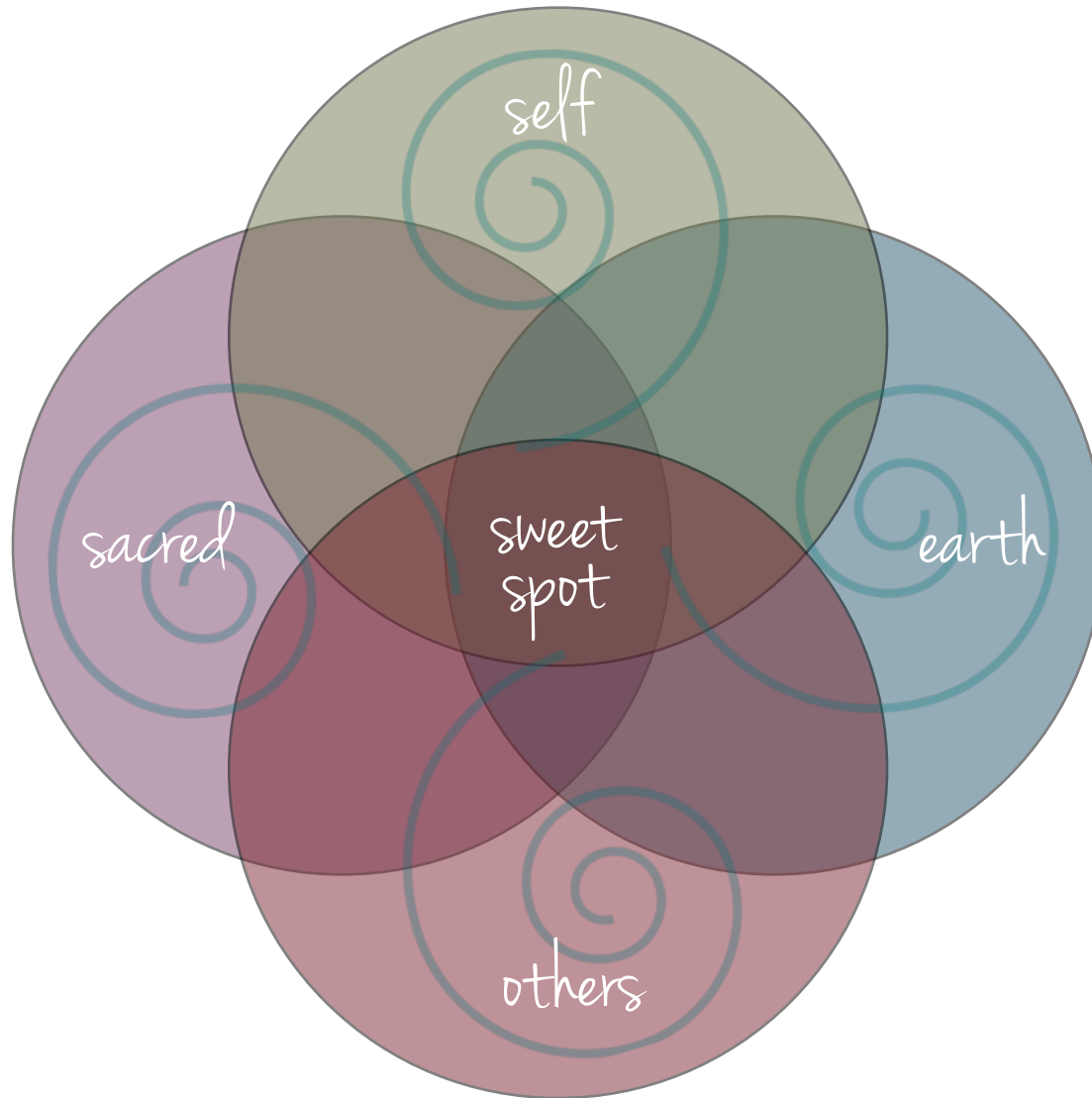


Heather Plett is a teacher, writer, coach, retreat host, and facilitator. She is also a wisdom-seeker, edge-walker, community-gatherer, and story-catcher. She delights in gathering circles of people together to share stories, ask questions, co-create, and build community.



FOUR PATHS, ONE JOURNEY

by Heather Plett



At the intersection between connection with self, sacred, others, and the earth, there is a sweet spot. This sweet spot is home - the place we've all been longing for, the place we spend our lives searching for.

You cannot take just one path to that sweet spot. You cannot choose to connect with the sacred and ignore the earth. You cannot connect with others without also connecting with yourself.

Only when we follow all four threads do we find our way to real connection, to that sweet spot.

Begin where you are. Open your heart to connection wherever it comes. That openness will lead you to other connections and other sweetness.

Follow the threads and you will find wholeness and healing.

HIS NEXT RESCUE

by Barbara Winter

Armed with a fistful of euros, my friend Georgia and I set out to explore Dublin on a cold and rainy morning. When we got to the bus stop, we asked a waiting passenger what the fare was and if exact change was needed. She told us the amount and said only the correct amount was accepted.

We began rummaging through our coins, but didn't have the fare for one person, much less two.

As we fretted over our dilemma, an elegantly dressed white-haired gentleman stepped out of the crowd and handed us the proper change without saying a word.

We were both pleasantly startled, but I managed to say, "Oh, thank you so much. That is so kind of you." He smiled, bowed slightly and said, "Damsels in distress are my specialty." With that, he hopped on the bus and was off to his next rescue.



Barbara J. Winter is a pioneering self-employment advocate, writer and teacher who has spent the last twenty-five years pondering the question, "Why aren't we all self-employed?"



SKIPPING STONES

by Ann Linnea

“Grandma, I skipped the stone!” exclaimed our 9-year-old grandson, Jaden. He and I had been practicing in the calmer backwaters of the Gooseberry River and he was ready to try his hand at skipping flat, wave-worn rocks into the wind and waves of the world’s largest lake. Three-year-old granddaughter, Sasha, was having her own fun throwing fistfuls of pebbles into the waves.

In the August sunshine, that Lake Superior combination of warm air and cold water, took my mind back sixty years to a similar moment when I was standing on this very shore of the lake trying to imitate my father’s skilled side throwing style. He made it look easy— that flick of wrist, and how the right-sized flat, smooth rock, could be fitted between thumb and forefinger and made to bounce on top of the water. Three. Four. Five times before sinking out of sight.

“Dad, Dad, I did it!” yelled my blond five-year-old self. The exuberance still echoes in my mind.

Thirty years later when my son, Brian, was five years old, I taught him the same, careful technique. His two-year-old sister, Sally, was doing what her daughter Sasha was doing as she watched her big brother and I. Brian, too, was a skilled skipper of stones. I imagine he might have been the first one to teach his nephew, Jaden, to skip stones along the shore of the big lake.

Generations of my family have loved and admired Lake Superior. My parents drove my three sisters and I up from the southern part of Minnesota for vacations. My husband and I lived overlooking it and raised our children here through their grade school years. I kayaked around it in the height of my mid-life adventuring, and it opened me to a different life. Standing with my grandchildren, this is the fourth generation of “us” to play along its shore. I love the lake so much. It is a powerful spiritual mentor for me.



The previous day on the lakeshore was also gorgeous . . . three-dozen family members and friends and nine children had gathered in sunshine and scattered clouds for an extraordinary ceremony of remembrance. Brian has been dead now for eight months. We are out of the shock and into the grief. For two hours we shared stories, tears, laughter, and song as we sought a new understanding of the life and death of this fine young man.

Then we each wandered the beach with a pouch of his ashes and said our individual farewells. The children were attentive, watching their adults cope with grief, learning more about life than we can know. Jaden followed me up the beach to my place of scattering ashes. He reached for my hand and I said, "I miss him so much, Jaden."

"Me, too," he said. We held onto each other and then without words, waded into the lake and scattered Brian's ashes.

Returning to the circle of friendship, food, more stories, and more music, we watched the day make the slow eternal switch to night. We loved this brave young man. We will miss him deeply.



Ann Linnea is a writer and educator with decades of experience serving the art of dialogue in a fascinating range of settings. Whether she's guiding people on a wilderness quest or presenting a workshop to business leaders, Ann embodies the stewardship of wild things, which has characterized her life and work.



ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS

by Amanda Fenton

I love this question from David Whyte's article ***Ten Questions That Have No Right To Go Away***:

"Do I know how to have real conversation? A real conversation always contains an invitation. You are inviting another person to reveal herself or himself to you, to tell you who they are or what they want. To do this requires vulnerability. Now we tend to think that vulnerability is associated with weakness, but there's a kind of robust vulnerability that can create a certain form of strength and presence too."

I challenged myself one night at a birthday gathering to look for moments to create connections with others through real conversation. I had three that night. I listened from a well of curiosity instead of the shallow pool of polite small talk. I invited them to reveal themselves with questions that encouraged them to unfold their story. Two of the people commented with surprise that they didn't expect to have this conversation tonight, and I could see from the spark in their eyes that they felt the magic of that robust vulnerability in revealing themselves to me. A gift for me to catch their story.



Amanda Fenton teaches, designs and hosts circle-based processes for groups who want to meet and work together in a more collaborative way.

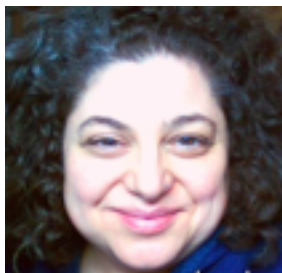


YOUR DREAMS

by Kara LC Jones



Don't ignore or give short shrift to your dreams. Invite them to tea. Sip with them under the stars and hear what they have to say. Let them be heard and nourished.



Kara LC Jones is founder of MotherHenna.com and co-founder of the CreativeGriefStudio.com.



DISCONNECT TO CONNECT

by Heather Plett

I'm writing this from a little cabin in a valley at the end of a narrow dirt road. As I sit here, I can hear crickets outside the open window, a fly buzzing around the room, an occasional bird chirping, my friend tapping at her keyboard in the other room, and not much else.

We are at least a mile from any other form of civilization. Other than the keyboard tapping, there are none of the sounds of human habitation.

There is no wi-fi and essentially no cell phone coverage here. Every once in awhile, out of habit, I still check my phone. A bar or two shows up, I open my email or Facebook (against my better judgement), but the bar disappears and I get nothing.

It's a little disconcerting when you first disconnect from all of the wired and wireless ways that we've become accustomed to.

When my friend and I arrived here last night, after a long leisurely meal at a nearby farmhouse where she cooked a meal entirely from the bounty of another friend's garden, it was pitch dark. The dark felt cavernous, unfamiliar, and unsafe. We rushed from the car into the cabin and turned on the lights.

It was too beautiful a night to waste under harsh fluorescent lights, though, so we turned off the lights, let our eyes adjust to the dark, and then ventured first onto the porch. Still close enough to a building and a light switch to feel safe, but out in a place where we could see the stars and the glowing moon. Soon we stepped off the porch so that we could better see the sky. We lay on the grass watching falling stars until the bugs finally coaxed us back inside.

This morning, instead of checking email and posting our latest adventures on Facebook, we sat on the front steps watching the morning mist roll through the valley. Birds danced in front of us and crickets sang their morning song. Once



our bodies felt awake enough, we walked down the path to the river and sat on a log listening to the water gurgling toward its destination. My friend - a biologist and grasslands expert - helped me identify the footprints in the mud by the river (raccoon and possibly wolf), and told me what kind of tree was providing the shade for us to sit comfortably on the fallen log.

It didn't happen right away when we arrived, but gradually I felt myself releasing and receiving. I was releasing the need to check emails every 15 minutes, releasing the need to scan my social media feed, and releasing the need to make productive use of my time. I was receiving the breeze on my face, receiving the delight of finding frogs by the water, receiving the beauty of the mist and the flowing water, and receiving the shade from the majestic tree.

I was feeling connected. Not connected in the way our internet providers define connection, but connected to the earth. Connected to the sky. Connected to the frogs. Connected to the river. Connected to my friend. Connected to the Creator. And connected to myself.

Ironically, in all of our efforts to be more connected - our cell phones, tablets, computers, etc. - we have disconnected from what matters. We have disconnected from what lives and gives us life.



We have let ourselves become convinced that the natural world is a hostile place, intent on harming us, and that safety can only be found in human habitation. Most of us have become so accustomed to urban living, where food comes from grocery stores, bears are only in zoos, and the night is banished by bright streetlights, that we've turned the earth into a stranger rather than our friend.

I wasn't always afraid to step off the porch and into the yard where I could better see the stars. When I was a child on the farm, I did it often. I have fond memories of lying on my back at night on top of a hayrack full of hay bales, watching the northern lights dance in the sky. Sure there was some fluttering in my stomach over not knowing was just on the other edge of the darkness, but back then we interpreted it as excitement rather than fear.

Why have we broken our relationship with the earth?

Because it's easier to destroy that which we objectify.

It's easier to take what we want when the world is a hostile place.

It's easier to ignore the cries of the earth when we close our doors and pretend we don't see her.

How do we change that? How do we right a wrong and rebuild our relationship with the earth?

We start by paying attention.

We walk into the woods, sit by a tree, stare intently at a flower, and marvel. We marvel at how remarkable it is that a butterfly can follow the migratory path of its ancestors and end up hanging from the very same tree. We marvel at how amazing it is that a tree knows when to seal off its leaves so they fall off and don't require sap to flow up and down the tree in the freezing months of winter. We marvel at the way a deer cares for her young. We marvel at how many species of birds there are. We marvel at the size of elephants and the beauty of zebras.



When you look at something deeply and intentionally, it's hard to destroy it. When you sit with something and become friends with it, it's hard to take from it what you don't need.

We pay attention, and then we start changing our paradigms and our behaviour. We stop listening to the naysayers who tell us it's dangerous to walk in the woods. We challenge the people who tear down trees to build more parking lots. We question the governments who let big businesses destroy animal habitats.

There's nothing wrong with living indoors or using your cell phone every day. I'm not suggesting that you move off the grid and live in the woods. I'm simply suggesting that you look up from your screen at least once a day and connect with something living, something green, something wild.

Because when we reconnect with the earth, we'll find ourselves reconnecting with ourselves. And we'll all be better off for it.

MEDITATE & CONNECT

by Cigdem Kobu

Spend ten minutes everyday on your own and meditate. Sit down somewhere comfortable, close you eyes in silence and breathe. And remember that meditation does not mean you have to sit in the lotus pose on a zafu and chant om.

Meditation means inviting silence and tranquility into your life for a few minutes. It means enjoying time spent on your own, reconnecting with yourself. And rest assured that there is no right way to meditate. There is just the intention to sit and be. Feel yourself, listen to yourself. And breathe.

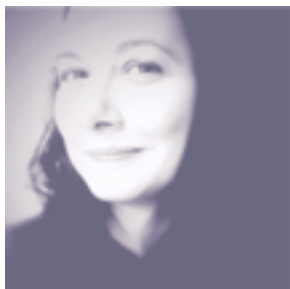
During meditation you can also ask yourself “seed questions.” A seed question is something you don’t have an immediate answer to. It can be a problem you want to solve or just a question such as, “What is my true nature?” or “What do I love?”

Other seed questions you can ask yourself are:

- What way of being will serve me today?
- What am I willing to let go of?
- How do I want to show up for myself?
- What would make my heart sing today?

Be creative and come up with your own questions. Plant a new seed question in your mind every day during your mini meditation and leave it to germinate. Observe what answers are waving at you. Sit with them without judging or jumping to conclusions.

If you start (and end) your day spending some time quietly on your own, you’ll see that you start reconnecting with yourself at a deeper level. And your spirit will thank you.



Cigdem Kobu is the founder of Peaceful Triumphs, an education and publishing company that crafts transformative community experiences and digital learning resources for ethical women entrepreneurs and creatives who want to thrive with more ease and less stress.



REIKI - A BEAUTIFUL WAY TO CONNECT!

by Diane Jung

Having Reiki in my life is like “coming home’ to Spirit within, a place to be without judgement. After practising Reiki and teaching for many years, I find it to be a place I can go and be myself, and allow the energy to flow through me. It is where I can connect with Spirit, with others and with Gaia, Mother Earth.

Reiki is Love. It is a state of Grace with the other person---no personality, not ours or theirs. It is Harmony and Balance. It is light. We are merely the vehicle to let the Light shine through us. In honoring the essence of who the other person is, we are also honoring and loving ourselves at a very high level.

After I took the first level of Reiki, I knew that this was something Big for me-- my life turned around 180 degrees for the better! I was a massage therapist at the time and after coming to Reiki, I became a healer.

I love and honor the practice of Namaste---

I honor the place in you that is the same in me.

I honor the place in you where the whole Universe resides .

I honor the place in you of Love, Light, of Peace and Truth.

When each of us is in that place, we are one with Creator,

One with each other, One with all that is.

Namaste.



Diane Jung partners with women of all ages to connect with their gifts and desires through mentoring, through the grace of healing that Reiki brings and through the wisdom of working with other wise women in circle.



LAKBAY (JOURNEY)

by Claire Madarang



This is how the word “God” (Bathala) is written in [baybayin](#), an ancient Filipino writing script. Another way to read this script is an expression of letting go and trusting (bahala), but which also literally means “God.”

My first long-term solo adventure was an act of letting go and trusting, amid mishaps and fears for my safety. In this opening up, I saw and felt in each person, each place, and each moment God. It was a pure joy I have not experienced since childhood.

To view the original artwork and zoom in on the photos, click [here](#).



Claire Madarang is a writer, traveler, and seeker who believes in traveling light both in the outer and inner journey.



THE SHAPE OF A MISTAKE

by Emily Gillies

When I was 16 I got a huge mistake of a tattoo. "All the other girls were doing it," so I went along with the crowd and decided to get a most boring and unimaginative rose permanently etched on my ankle. It was shoddy workmanship and due to circumstances beyond my control it never got finished. I was left with an indistinct dark blob that resembled more an abstract road map than a flower, and a feeling of disappointment in this failure I carried around on my body.

Gradually though, I started to embrace the quirkiness of my unique decoration. Certainly there was no other tattoo like it in the world. As I slowly lost my teenager's pressing need to fit in, I realized - with surprising pride - that there was also no other person like me in the world. I started to accept my tattoo as a symbol of this originality.

Nineteen years later I finally took steps to rectify my "mistake" and planned to enhance my tattoo with new images. In the soul-searching process of deciding what elements to include, I was delighted to discover that I finally knew what symbols and pictures were meaningful for me. The feeling of rightness was new and astonishing! I suddenly understood the quote from Rumi: "When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you - a joy." I had never known this soul-river was flowing in me, but once it was discovered I started noticing it in other joy-places of my life. How thankful I was to be in touch with this deep place of satisfaction!

Doing the hard personal work of getting to know myself was so rewarding that I decided to honour this feeling by including a river in my new tattoo design. It also incorporates the original "road map" picture I was graced with at age 16 because just as it was a part of my leg then, the girl I was at age 16 was a part of shaping me into the person I am now. I no longer think of my tattoo as a mistake - just a long work in progress. And now I have the compassion and wisdom to see how I am a beautiful work in progress too.



Emily Gillies lives happily in a tiny prairie town where she fills her days with friends, family and art



ENVIRONMENTAL ART

by Evelyn Ward de Roo



I make connections with the sacred through environmental art. Often I will create a piece of art from rocks and leave it for someone to find. I never know if anyone actually sees these earthart objects but my soul is nourished by the act of creating which in turn grounds me to the source of my creativity and pure love.



Evelyn Ward de Roo is contemplative musician, soundwork practitioner and artist who creates spaces and objects for women's healing.



THE POWER OF YOUR UNTOLD STORY

by Gail Larsen

"Wherever you are is called here, and you must treat it as a powerful stranger..."

The above line, from the poem *Lost* by David Waggoner, touches me each time I hear it. So often where we actually are in our lives represents the story we don't want others to know. It may reveal that we're not on top of our game where our culture would have us believe we are supposed to be. It may not show us in the best light when we want to impress those around us. It may expose a broken heart to even more vulnerability. So we stuff the truth and pretend it isn't real or important, forgetting we're all members of the Scar Clan. After all, this too shall pass. And all too often we suffer as a result – with shame, depression, a sense we should be able to move on to a story that is more acceptable and inspiring.

I've just returned from my annual Transformational Speaking weekend at Omega Institute. In this class for only 20 people, we discover that going beneath the surface of how we show up allows us to be seen and to connect with others in an authentic way. We recognize that our willingness to speak about where we are not only connects us to others but also connects us once again to ourselves.

The Omega class set up a private Facebook group, and as I've seen their postings, I recognize once again the power of our own story. Not the story used strategically so people will like us or hire us, but the story that takes us home to ourselves and allows us to connect with others around what's real and present and sometimes raw.

One of the significant stories we explore in the work of Transformational Speaking is the story that is most active in our lives right now, the story that takes our primary attention and energy. While it's the one we'd usually just as soon not tell to strangers, and one we won't likely use in a speech (at least until it has informed us in a meaningful way), it's the one that needs to be witnessed and heard by someone who will really listen. It is the story of "here" and "we must treat it as a powerful stranger, seek permission to know and be known."

Last year in Vancouver, two friends came to my class together and on Saturday night on their own, one said to the other, "I've only heard pieces of that story. How about telling me the whole thing?" Apparently it was a long night! But Lori

showed up the next morning cleansed and clear and eager to share what an important gift she had received because Bridgette was fully present to all that needed to be said and released, from start to finish.

My friend Kris gave me the same gift and it made all the difference. I have an unfortunate habit of falling in love and packing up my life to move to islands. (Well, I've only done it twice, but both moves were so devastating I've asked my friends if they hear me planning such an adventure again that they tie me down until I come to my senses.) The last time my love affair was with a community and a perceived way of life and sense of belonging. I'm still in the aftershock of the financial hit of that one despite the munificent growth opportunities it provided. The time before when I moved to an island my love was a man who lived in Hawaii, and when I chose to leave a year later I couldn't move through the grief of my lost dream. My self-talk and my story replayed like a broken record. Then one day Kris and I were driving from Denver to Vail and she said she wanted to hear the whole thing.. I got to go deep and not skim the surface. We stopped for dinner and I was crying so hard that Kris later said people thought we were lovers. She hung in there, my story was expressed and I was able to begin to heal.

Perennial wisdom teaches, "You may come to my door three times with your story. After that I will turn you away." It is good counsel. We don't want to tell a disempowering story so often that it creates neural pathways in our brains but we also need to tell the whole thing and be heard in order to really let it go. Only then are we free of the baggage we carry about how we're supposed to be able to move on.

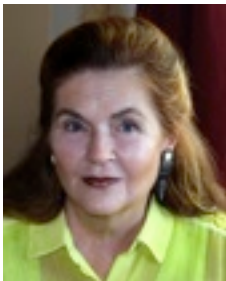
Cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien talks about the four healing salves. The teaching is that when we experience soul loss (that sense that something is missing and wherever it went it took our joy and full presence with it), we are to ask ourselves four questions.

- **When did I stop singing?**
- **When did I stop dancing?**
- **When did I stop telling my story?**
- **When did I stop being comfortable in the sweet territory of silence?**

Ah, the healing salve of telling our story – it could restore our joy so singing and dancing rise up within us again, and make it possible to be silent without the sound of our own wheels driving us crazy!

Do you have a story that needs to be witnessed and released so you can move into your full expression and your new story? Ask someone who loves you to set aside the time to listen. A therapist can be a good choice, too, but there is a special balm in someone being there who isn't being paid – especially when they're willing to just listen and not try to offer advice or fix anything.

Or, if there is someone you care about who needs the gift of your listening, show up and be fully present to the whole thing, without distraction or self-referencing. This is one of the greatest gifts we can give to someone we love.



Gail Larsen is the founder of Real Speaking® and the author of *Transformational Speaking: If You Want to Change the World, Tell a Better Story* (Random House and Brilliance Audio). Her work has been described by Fast Company as "transforming your relationship to your voice via the deepest stirrings of your soul."



TIME FOR THE HARVEST

by Mary Alice Arthur

It comes time for the harvest.
Everything I have collected
All the roads I have travelled
All the stories shared
And the wishes taken on
The blessings given
The energy spent
The novels in the making
The songs on the wind
Every footstep, every footnote
All the promises given and received
Every memory of my life
Gathers round me now

Asking for their moment
To be seen and shared and acknowledged.
What have you learned from me?
What will you make of me?
What have I served?
All those threads woven and unwoven
Making the pathway
Lining the road
My forming and unforming
The beginnings and the ends.
What was unknown becomes known
What has been gathered becomes seed
And I will blossom again.



Mary Alice Arthur is a Story Activist, a powerful synthesiser and meaningmaker, who makes the complex understandable, the simple profound and the pathway clear.



EARTH SKETCHES

by Hali Karla



In so many ways, I find that making connections is really about the posture and flexibility with which we choose to see and feel the connections that already exist. It is a relinquishing of any point of view we might cling to; a surrender to what is moving, now, in time and timeless, right here. Plugging in to the awareness of our own connectivity is the essence of holistic creativity and relationship. Whether a beginner or not, sketching in nature is a moving, therapeutic way to dissolve stress and notions of separateness, and experience the sacred energy of connection directly through our senses and body. Present to a place, seeing, breathing, sensing and sketching - the environment moves into us, like a map - from eye to mind to heart to hand. We trace earth's contour, texture, color, light with our very touch. Directing our thoughts and attention, the connectivity moves into our cells as we slow down, taking the time to revere and give thanks for the dynamic life Mother Earth makes possible. In slowing down, our bodies release, relax, rest and heal. Earth-sketching helps us remember our footprint and rhythms, and that we are here to learn, experience, express and grow.



Hali Karla is an artist and writer passionate about cultivating holistic creativity - she gathers artists, healers and visionaries for workshops and circles that inspire self-acceptance, celebrate wholeness and honor interconnection.



SELF-HEALING

by Donna Lynne Erickson

They came as droplets at first. The tears of regret. Oozing as I wrote in my journal. Memories of bad decisions. Giving myself permission to release them, one portal at a time, brought healing to my soul. Finally, I opened the floodgates and I cried and wailed and emptied myself until there was nothing left. One topic at a time. And soon, each morning I looked forward to my keening practice. Allowing the pain, fear and sorrow to walk up my throat and barge through once clenched teeth. I opened my mouth and released the sour gas of squelched emotions. I knew while I journaled and meditated and prayed—whether in music or silence—I would be just a little more connected. It was not an easy journey. I was disconnected before I connected. I unplugged from the busyness of my life—left a marriage that was killing me, a business that held my head under water, and a list obligations written by a desperate woman—me.

The nine months I lived “without” birthed in me a new life. My only task was to wake up, alone. Walk a block to a little house where I played on the floor with baby twin girls and their toddler sister. I had no income, or promise of one. I did not own a car, have a telephone, internet or television. There was no banker to please, no man to assuage, or deadline to meet. I did not know how long it would last or what the outcome would be—because I had no plan or goal or end date.

Love, presence, serenity and hope are the blossoms of my soul rest.



Donna Lynne Erickson lives in Viking, Alberta, rebuilding a place of living room hospitality—where friends and family meet to dialogue and explore this thing called life.



OF SNAILS AND TRAILS

By Paula Boyd Farrington

I read about Totem Animals
Whose essence shows The Way
The article said if you don't know yours,
Be aware, it will somehow speak to you; show up during your
day

And there you were
When I went out to the car
In plain view—a darling little snail
On the rear view mirror: driver's side

Oh no, I groan
I don't want my totem to be a SNAIL!
Sluggish. Slow. Escargot.
No, thank you. No. Just ... no.

But there you are again
In the evening dusk
climbing outside the kitchen window,
seemingly everywhere I look.

Oh my. Not what I wanted to see.
Why couldn't I have glimpsed a National Geographic Gazelle?
A Lion. A Jaguar. A Hawk. A Flamingo!
Something powerful or exotic. Hell.

But there you are.
Carrying your likeness of a gratitude symbol
upon your mandala of a spiral shell;
your home right with you, wherever you may dwell.

Let me look closer, your antennae sweeping out
Stretching forward, inquisitively sensing the air
I watch you quietly know where you're going,
on your own glossy path, climbing here and there.

Let me rethink this tiny powerhouse of Now
to warm to What Is
seeing anew the natural grace
In everything that lives

This little snail is more than cute,
It fulfills an important role
Recycles organic matter,
Strong and steady it goes and goes

And your giant ocean cousin?
All pink lipped with curvy shell,
known as an aphrodisiac,
her majesty feeds the islands well

Named the Queen Conch.
She sometimes sports a pearl.
A royal snail in aqua seas
Classic beauty, a crown of whorls

So can I embrace this totem tale?
As a celebration of gentler slower trails?
Of gliding along smoothly through time & tide?
The heart's humble wisdom says: oh, snail—be mine!



Paula Boyd Farrington celebrates the creative life, whether designing coffee table art books and marketing materials, custom collages and mixed media, writing silly poems, or helping people find the satisfaction that comes with dusting off or moving forward with creative projects and dreams.



HOW WE LIVE, MOVE, AND CO-EXIST

by Segun Dlude



Humanity finds expression not just in the fact that we live and breath, but in the things we make, the stories we tell and how we live, move and co-exist.

Our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual connections help us define who we are. As we relate to others, we find our identity. Relationships may not always be perfect, they may be transient, but they add depth to our stories and experiences.



Segun Dlude is a artist, photographer, and teacher who is on a quest for narrative in everything he witnesses.



CIRCLES OF CONNECTION

by Heather Plett

“Circles: The moon is most happy when it is full, the sun always looks like a perfectly minted gold coin polished and placed in flight by God’s playful kiss. And so many varieties of fruit hang plump and round. I see the beautiful curve of a pregnant belly shaped by a soul within, and the earth it self. I have gotten the hint: There is something about circles the beloved likes. Within the circle of a perfect one there is an infinite community of light.” – Hafiz

Circles keep showing up in my life, again and again, drawing me in, enticing me, inviting me to find the wisdom at the centre.

First there was *The Circle Way*

I fell in love with the idea of [The Circle Way](#) when I first encountered the work of [Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea](#) thirteen years ago. It took awhile before I had fully embraced it and could use it confidently in my work, but now it is central to everything I do. I use it in the classroom, in retreats, in group consultations, and even in online spaces.

The Circle Way is both simple and complex. In fact, I would say it is the “simplicity on the other side of complexity” that Oliver Wendell Holmes is talking about in this quote... *“For the simplicity on this side of complexity, I wouldn’t give you a fig. But for the simplicity on the other side of complexity, for that I would give you anything I have.”*

The Circle Way helps us cut through complexity to the simplicity on the other side.

By gathering people into a circle where we can all look into each other’s eyes, using some simple structure, principles and practices to help hold the conversation, and being intentional about the way we engage with each other, we can dramatically shift our conversations. I’ve seen it happen



again and again. People engage more intentionally than they normally do, conflict is resolved in constructive ways, and there is honesty and authenticity in the way we show up for each other.

If you'd like to learn more about how to host your own circle, you can download [PeerSpirit's Basic Guidelines here](#), or you can [buy the book](#).

Here are some of the things I love about The Circle Way:

1. It gives each person a voice. Circle council always begins with a check-in and ends with a check-out, where a talking piece is passed around and each person has an opportunity to speak. Whoever is holding the talking piece is the only person who can speak, giving respect and reverence to whatever each person chooses to speak of.

2. It cuts out distraction and holds focus. I've sat in many meetings and classrooms where only half of the people in the room are engaged and the other half are in side conversations or checking their smartphones. That rarely happens in a circle, and if it does, it will be called out by the others in the circle and rarely needs to be addressed by the host. People are much more attentive when they know they are being witnessed and when they are invited to witness each other.

3. It calls out the best in each of us. In circle council, we talk about each person in the circle "holding the rim" for each other. That means that the circle is not complete without each person taking his/her seat and committing to being part of that circle. Together we hold the container, giving each other space for growth, grief, courage, and fear. If people in the circle take that seriously (and they usually do, because it feels like an honour to be invited into this sacred space), remarkable things can happen and people can step into their own greatness. In our gathering on Whidbey Island, for example, each person stepped forward, offered their gifts, and took on the work of making The Circle Way Initiative a reality. When you're invited into a space where there's *a leader in every chair*, you're much more inclined to contribute what you have to offer.



4. It allows us to be more intentional and listen more deeply to what is being said. By using things like a talking piece and a bell, the conversation is slowed down, there is less interruption, and there is intentionality in how we listen to each other. The talking piece is used to give each person our undivided attention. The bell is used to create pauses in the conversation

when something particularly profound is said, or there is conflict or a need for a shift in energy. In addition, the circle creates a space where we are all looking into each other's eyes instead of turning our backs to each other.

5. It invites people to step out of judgement and into grace.

When you are invited to listen to people's stories with openness and intention, not interrupting or giving advice, you learn to practice grace and non-judgement. Each person has value and nobody's contribution is worth more than another's. I have seen people enter the circle with resistance and judgement toward others in the circle, and before long things shifted and they were listening to each other in a more intentional way.



6. You can get lots of work done without feeling overly constricted by too much process. In some facilitation processes, there is so much complexity or restriction in the way the process unfolds that there is less room for creativity and spontaneity. The circle creates a more intuitive space, with just enough gently applied structure to keep things from going off the rails. At our gathering, we were all divided into work groups, and each group used the circle principles to guide their conversations. A great deal of work was accomplished and a lot of creativity showed up. There was just enough structure to hold it and not too much to limit it.

7. Conflict can be held in the container without destroying the circle. At the centre of the circle, there is always something in place which acts as the hub of the circle – a candle, flowers, a bowl, or something that represents the intention of the circle. When we gather in circle, we speak to the centre, rather than to individuals at the rim of the circle. This helps to hold the conflict in a safe way. Rather than directing our anger or frustration at a particular person, we offer it into the centre and the circle helps to hold and dissipate it. I have seen conflict almost miraculously evaporate when everyone in the circle feels heard and witnessed, and there is not the intensity of a one-on-one attack.

8. There is space for intimacy and community. I have been to a lot of conferences, retreats, and other gatherings, and without fail, the ones that are held in circle always result in the most intimate conversations and new friendships. Something special happens when you gather in circle, look into each other's eyes, listen with intention, and hold space for each other. It spills out into the coffee breaks and lunch hours, and you take it home with you after the gathering has ended.

Then there was the mandala . . .

I don't know exactly when the mandala began to intrigue me. It was a gradual thing, evolving over years and years of curiosity and exploration.

“Mandala” is the ancient sanskrit word for circle and it symbolizes wholeness. It's pretty simple, really – anything that shows up in circular form – whether it's art, dance, or a slice of kiwi fruit – can be considered a mandala. I love the fact that they are so universal and can be found everywhere. In every part of the world, mandalas show up in the art work, nature, and cultural and spiritual history of a place.

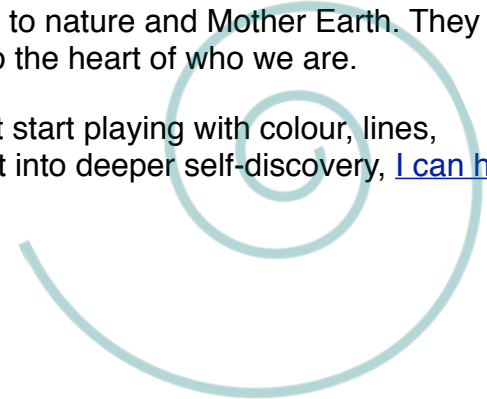


Mandalas have been used in various spiritual traditions (especially eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism) for spiritual teaching and meditative purposes. They have also been used for therapeutic purposes by psychoanalysts, most notably Carl Jung, who considered them the “[archetype of wholeness](#)“. In the Christian tradition, mandalas have been used by such notable mystics as [Hildegard von Bingen](#).

Mandalas combine spirituality, meditation, therapy, creative process, and play in one holistic circle. They help us slow our minds, process our complex thoughts, and shift out of our logical left-brains into our intuitive right brains.

They also have a **strong feminine aspect** to them, with connections to the womb and the birthing process, as well as to nature and Mother Earth. They ground and centre us and bring us back to the heart of who we are.

Anyone can learn to make mandalas – just start playing with colour, lines, words, and images inside a circle and see what emerges. But if you want to take that into deeper self-discovery, [I can help you](#).



Then there was the labyrinth...

It's been more than a dozen years since I walked my first labyrinth and fell in love. I visit labyrinths often and am very happy that the beautiful Carol Shields labyrinth is just across the river from where I live. It was at the centre of that labyrinth that I stood with my candle in a small circle of women, [welcoming 2012](#).

Labyrinths symbolize the search for the One, or God, salvation or enlightenment. The labyrinth also symbolizes the many dangers of the spiritual path; for example, one can get discouraged or lost in despair, or fall off the path altogether. But if these dangers are overcome, the centre awaits as a symbol of love and completion.

In our modern world we have lost touch with our origins, our roots, even our true identity. The labyrinth is the bridge that connects us to these things, to a long-forgotten part of ourselves. That's why it touches people very deeply, often in a way they can't verbalize, as the context itself is ancient.

As you walk the labyrinth, there will be times when you find yourself tantalizingly close to the goal, but then, suddenly, you find yourself moving away from the centre.

You can trust the path to take you to the center eventually, no matter where you happen to be at the moment.

Like all rites of passage and initiation ceremonies, walking the labyrinth is structured as a pilgrimage with three parts. First comes the journey inward (**releasing**), toward the sacred space where change happens. Next, time is spent at the centre (**receiving**), where the new life begins. Finally there is the journey outward, the return of the transformed person to the world (**returning**), often with a new identity.

It is the labyrinth's lack of complexity that allows so many people to use it as a meditative or devotional tool.



Once we are on the path, our minds are freed from the need to make decisions.

In addition to its value as a meditative tool, the labyrinth is also a great metaphor for life. Here's why...

1. The journey to God is a path that leads along many deceptive twists and turns to the centre.
2. Though it often feels like we're getting lost, if we keep following the path, we'll eventually end up where we're supposed to be.
3. When we're weary and feeling lost, all that is required of us is that we put one foot in front of the other and carry on.
4. Sometimes we get really close to the centre, and think our journey is done, but suddenly we round the corner and there's a whole new lesson we need to learn before we can rest.
5. Each time we pass a familiar place, we wonder "haven't I been here before?" Those moments offer us the opportunity to lean even more deeply into the lessons we're meant to learn and the beauty we're meant to see at those places.
6. God is both the centre we seek and the path that gets us there. What we need is to trust the centre and to trust the path that leads us to it.
7. The path to God requires that we commit our body to it, not simply our minds. Get up and walk – God is in the movement.
8. To hear Spirit whisper, we have to be willing to be quiet.
9. Like all rites of passage and initiation ceremonies, walking the labyrinth is structured as a pilgrimage with three parts. First comes the journey inward, toward the sacred space where change happens. Next, time is spent at the centre, where the new life begins. Finally there is the journey outward, the return of the transformed person to the world, often with a new identity.
10. We don't get straight paths in life – only winding roads that never show us the final destination and that keep taking us to places we don't expect to go.

And finally, the spiral...

You'll find spirals all over my website, and if you ever meet me in person, I'll probably be wearing at least a couple of pieces of jewellery with spirals on them.

Just like all of the other circular patterns I've just talked about, spirals teach me things. They teach me that life's journey is never a linear pathway. They remind me to go inward, to seek the truth within, whispered to me by the God of my understanding. They encourage me not to seek simple answers but to look for depth and meaning.

The spiral is a very feminine symbol, representing not only women but also a variety of things traditionally associated with women. Besides life cycles, fertility and childbirth, the spiral can reference intuition and other more internal concepts associated with women.



Spirals and circles are much more commonly found in nature than straight-edged shapes. The spiral, therefore, is often associated with the natural world as opposed to the constructed, mechanical and urban world. Spirals are primal, raw, and unrestrained by man.

Life cycles and cycles of the natural world create change. The old dies away so the new can come forth. Each of us progresses from child to adult to old age. As such, the spiral is not a symbol of stagnation but rather of change, progression, and development. It embraces these things as good and healthy and helps one to accept change even though we often are more comfortable retreating into tradition and old, standard ways.

The spiral, therefore, invites me to connect with nature, to embrace my primal, feminine wisdom, and to consider the natural cycles of life.

THE DARK

by Kristen Noelle



Where is this within you,
this "something new"
that is not quite ready
to be in the light?
Treasure this.
It is a magical thing
to stay in the dark,
taking in nourishment,
discovering the shape,
fragrance, and texture
of who you are yet to be.
Don't rush this.
Allow the dark to grow you.

-Julie Daley



Kristin Noelle is a teacher, a healer, and a visual poet whose work explores various angles of the question, "How can we consciously cultivate trust as a worldview?"



A SHY INTROVERT'S GUIDE TO CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

by Jodi Crane

As a sensitive introvert who is prone to shyness, I can have difficulty connecting with strangers or others I don't know well. This quirk of mine is despite the fact that I have no problem establishing relationships with clients in the counseling room, lecturing students in a college classroom, or giving a speech to ten or hundreds of my peers. You could say I'm just strange that way. Heck, for the longest time I'd only eat applesauce and rarely munch on a raw apple.

What's the difference in the cases above? In the latter ones I'm playing a role focused on others. Outside these situations it's two people meeting face-to-face on a one-lane street. For a sensitive, shy, introvert connecting with others well requires being in a place of energy and friendly mood while not preoccupied with my own thoughts and emotions.

This tendency doesn't mean I don't like people. Quite the contrary! I love people. Connection is one of my core values and core desired feelings. Along the way of two plus decades of adulthood, I've learned to eat the apple and even enjoy it too. Such is true of connecting with others.

Here's some tips.

1. Do whatever you need to be well-rested before some event involving interacting with strangers or acquaintances.
2. Smile. Yes, 9 times out of 10 the other person will smile back. Your upward turned mouth will also send out a positive and welcoming vibe.
3. When being introduced to a stranger, say his or her name to yourself in your head and try to use it in conversation soon after. People love hearing their own name. Well, unless they are a kid who is in trouble.
4. I usually despise small talk, but you've got to start somewhere. As cliché as it sounds one can always talk about the weather. Or make a positive or neutral comment about their piece of clothing, book they are holding, or child standing next to them.
5. Be curious. Ask people questions about themselves. Most people like to talk about themselves to some degree. Even introverts.
6. I like to quickly move beyond the "what do you do for a living" or "how do you know the host" to something more unexpected like "what did you do on your last vacation."

-
7. During those times when I'm lacking energy and positivity or just don't feel like conversing, I will with humor and honesty say, "sorry, I don't mean to be antisocial. I'm tired and my small-talk reservoir is all tapped out for the moment." The usual response I get is some sort of acknowledgement, an "I understand," or they look at me a bit astonished yet grateful I had the nerve to say out loud what they'd been thinking.

Finally, I cannot leave this discussion without mentioning that all connection is not entirely verbal. As a play therapist I know that some of the best connecting occurs when we let down our guard, be freely ourselves, not take ourselves so seriously (as is my propensity), and enjoy playing with one another in some way. We may or may not be talking, but the focus is on the process of play itself and two or more people enjoying the company of one another.



Jodi Crane is a player, mom, professor, play therapist, creative, and blogger.



MONSTER

by Kyeli Smith

There's a monster lurking
dogging my steps
hanging about
wearing my dress and
when I look in the mirror
that's who I see;
the monster is here,
the monster is me.

No one else is as cruel,
no one's as mean,
no one as cold or
nasty or seems to
hate me as much as
I often do,
this monster is in me
(and also in you).

The cure is to love
to look in the face
that monster within
to breathe deep and brace
yourself as you look and
then further go,
the monster within you
must finally know

that you love yourself,
in all of your parts,
all of your light and
especially your dark,
and when that is true,
when full gaze is met,
the monster will leave and
be no more a threat.



Kyeli Smith is an intrepid indie iPhonographer + writer, mad adventurer addicted to transformation and love.



CONNECT WITH YOUR TRIBE

by Karen Caterson

It is VITAL to maintain connection with your Tribe! To connect with people who love what you love, share the values and passions you have.

Sure, it's also important to be open - to make friends with people who have lifestyles and beliefs totally different from yours. That's vital, too.

Many of us are curious and interested by nature - practically born to be open to possibilities, others' stories and might not need to be reminded to stay open, but we often need to be reminded of the Tribe factor!

I remember, when my girls were young, losing that part of myself that loves intellectual discussion. When I started going to classes again - and engaging in deep dialogues - it was like something clicked back into place. I felt strengthened, whole-er (yes, I do believe I made that word up, feel free to borrow it - grin).

We strengthen ourSELVES when we connect with Tribe - with people who share our loves, our passions, our values - the things that make our hearts beat faster (p.s. You can have more than one Tribe).



Karen Caterson (aka Square-Peg Karen) shares encouragement on her blog, Square-Peg People, through stories of connection, grace and self-love (plus the occasional swear word).



BEYOND THE CUSHION

by Mahala Mazerov

When I say "meditation," people think, "sitting, watching the breath."

But true meditation moves *beyond the cushion*, and into the world.

It's the expression of love. Of compassion. Of *bodhichitta*, the altruistic mind.

It's *choosing* to awaken those qualities within, regardless of what life presents.

Your *connection* to your heart, your wisdom, the people and planet around you *expands*. Boundaries dissolve.

Everything is sacred.

There is only *the essence of love*.

MahalaMazerov



Mahala Mazerov leads virtual meditation retreats and publishes Inspiring Magnificence, a quarterly micro-magazine. Subscribe for free at MahalaMazerov.com



A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE: “WEAVING THE WORLD TOGETHER – SIXTEEN YARNS”

By Katharine Weinmann

We gather in circle. Sixteen highly skilled facilitators, conversation hosts, community developers, educators and coaches.

Monthly we meet and have been for nearly four years. Each time, we are received into one of our homes, refreshed with food and wine, welcomed into an intentional space created for conversation, reflection, and support.

New faces and the not so new. We each arrive intent to shape a community of practice from which we can better offer our gifts to the world. Learning together the frames, skills and practices that help us work within growing complexities and uncertainties, find patterns of subtle shiftings, sense emergence of the new and necessary.

That evening as co-host, I invited each person to share a word, or phrase, that reflected their curiosity and attention as we moved into our work together. *Italicized* below are the “sixteen yarns” from which I wove this poem:

*Another learning experience, bold with anticipation and awe.
An engaged community inspired by the virtues of beauty, hope and simplicity.
Texture foretells of mystery and transformation.
Beauty, the loom for creativity.
Inspiration, the weft.
We, the warp.
Beginning.*



Katharine Weinmann, MSW, RSW, CPF is an Edmonton based process designer, conversation host and intuitive painting guide whose life work helps us “attend to the inner life, to live and lead with courage, clarity, compassion and creativity.”



THE OPENHEARTED CONNECTION OF LOVE

by Kathy Jourdain

Love is the conversation we need to have for connection to self, to others, to the Divine. Not romantic love. Not love with attachment or conditions. Love as a way to be in the world. Love as a way to hold space – with others, for others, for ourselves, for conversations and relationships that want and need to happen. Love as a healing energy. Love as a pathway in the world. Love as an illuminator.

Fear tries to obliterate love. The inner voice of our judge tries to shut it down. We have come to associate so much disappointment with love, we are afraid of love. Afraid to let it wash over us, our relationships, our way of being in the world. We are afraid we will be disappointed, exposed, hurt. Afraid we will be vulnerable in ways that allow others to take advantage of us, our good heart, our good intentions – in which case it is no longer love but something posing for love.

Love is the conversation we need to have. Now. Always. With each other. With ourselves. With the Divine.



Kathy Jourdain's first book, Embracing the Stranger in Me: A Journey to Openheartedness, has been hailed as a deeply authentic sharing of a personal journey that has shaped who she is today and is an invitation for others to enter or stay in their own unfolding journey.



CONNECTION TO YOUR EMOTIONAL SELF

by Dr. Jo Unger

Emotions are an integral part of our human experience. They provide us with important information about ourselves, the world around us and the interaction between ourselves and that world. They also provide a richness and sense of meaning to our daily lives and our relationships. We can fully sense the meaning behind a gift of love, the longing for a loved one living far away, the pain of hurtful words, and the joy of reconciliation.

Unfortunately, our North American culture sends us messages that only certain types of emotions are wanted or valued. We have been taught that we should only strive for happiness and that the experience of difficult emotions means something is wrong with us. This message is so strong that much of the work I do with clients is to help them remove the judgement they have laid on top of their normal emotional reactions to important life experiences. People come to therapy feeling that something is terribly wrong with them because they are grieving a significant loss or because they have anxiety over challenging situations. The first step is to recognize that these emotional reactions to difficult life situations are normal. Having and acknowledging a range of emotions does not mean we are flawed or weak. Once the judgment of the normal experience is reduced, many people find they can cope with the emotions themselves quite well. They also have a better knowledge and deeper connection to themselves and the ability to experience life more fully.

There are many practices and strategies to help us sit with, enjoy, ride, or cope with our emotions. The first step is to allow them to be and remove the judgement for having them.



Dr. Jo Ann Unger, C. Psych. is a clinical psychologist working as the coordinator of two family therapy programs at New Directions for Children, Youth, Adults and Families and in private practice with the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Institute in Winnipeg, Manitoba.



LESSONS FROM A WALK IN THE MARSH

by Kimberly Davis

I am love, in the way that sunlight is pure and clear.

I am strength, in the way that roots grow deep and branches soar to the sky.

A deep river flows through me and yet I am the river.



Kimberly Davis is an artist, writer, teacher and quilt shop owner on a mission to help women discover the beauty of their creative hearts.



CONNECTION IS NOW

by Miki DeVivo

Connection is Now. And Now. And Now.

Not yesterday, in “just a minute”, or after the laundry is folded.

Now.

Today, this minute, while folding laundry.

Now.

And all the itty bitty Nows add up over time to a connection that matters.

You can't really “mess up” because there is only now.

Know that there is Grace. Now is always unfolding. If you find that you have wandered, Now is always ready to take you back. To bring you back to the heart of the matter.

Now.

Let yourself stop for a moment. Reach out. Hold the hand. Pick up the phone.

Look. Really, really, really, look.

Let everything else melt away.

See.

See the way her eyelashes brush her cheeks. Notice the way the light shines on the curve of his neck.

Look your beloved (daughter, son, partner, mother) in the eyes.



Now. And Now. And Now.

And as you look, let your heart open. Let love rush in. Let love pour out.

Yes.

They are so imperfect.

Yes.

They leave dishes in the sink and laundry on the floor and you will never not be stepping on Legos.

Yes.

They matter so much.

Yes.

They are so lovely in their humanness.

Let yourself see. Let yourself feel.

This act of witnessing is your act of love.

In being seen, flawed and lovely, they come to know that they matter.

And in practicing this way of seeing, you come to know that loving them now is what matters most.



As the creator of The Lovely Now, Miki DeVivo is a photographer and creativity coach for thoughtful and down-to-earth families who are inspired to love their chaos and live what matters.



WHAT MY BODY HAS TAUGHT ME

by Marianne Elliott

My body has taught me
I am stronger than I realize
And more fragile than I like.
I can endure pain with courage
And be reduced to tears by a virus.
I am marvelous, miraculous, mysterious.
My body has its own deep intelligence.
I carry my memories in my cells.
I am constantly being born anew.
I hold tight to fear and resistance.
I breathe deeply, and let go.
My legs will carry me farther than I think I can walk.
My heart will keep beating even when it is broken.
My mouth will kiss, laugh, drink tea and eat chocolate.
My skin will shiver with pleasure.
My bones will tell the weather.
My feet will find the path.
My hands will soothe a crying child.
And write a story that will make you cry.
And pour you a glass of wine.
And brush your hair.
And stroke your cheek.

And hold your hand.
My body will chop wood.
And carry water.
My body understands the wisdom of rest.
The beauty of stillness.
The power of touch.
The importance of dance.
And that there is only this. Here. Now.
My body understands joy, delight and play.
My body knows what I am hungry for.
My body has taught me to pay attention to my desires.
To listen to my gut.
To trust my appetites.
My body has taught me I am human.
I am here.
I am beautiful.
I am powerful.
I am brave.
I am scared.
I am alive.
And I am grateful.



Marianne Elliott is a writer, human rights advocate, storyteller and yoga teacher committed to creating a kinder way.



WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

by Heather Plett

“We are all connected.” The young girl in the red sari popped up at my elbow for the third time that day.

“Yes,” I grinned at her. “We are all connected. Indeed.” I put my arm around her shoulders and squeezed.

It was our only shared language, but that didn’t stop us from building a friendship around grins and hugs. She took my hand and lead me through her village.



I was in Bangladesh with a film crew, gathering stories of people like this young girl and her family, who were suffering the injustice of hunger and had received support from the non-profit organization I was working for. In this particular village on the shores of the Indian Ocean, a cyclone had wiped out the entire village, taking everyone’s homes, cattle, gardens, and (in some cases) family members.

As we traveled from village to village, we were connecting with the local people (through interpreters) by teaching them to say “we are all connected” and then inviting them to teach us how to say it in their language. The local camera-person I’d hired was gathering footage of our conversations so that we could build a video montage for viewers back home.

In my role as Director of Communication, Fundraising, and Education, I was constantly challenged with how to tell effective stories that would inspire donors and volunteers to get involved in the work of ending hunger. I didn’t want to do it the traditional way, though. I didn’t want to paint pictures of poverty and helplessness to invoke sympathy and tug on people’s heart strings. I didn’t want to reduce these beautiful, hard-working people to “recipients” or “the poor”.

I wanted to paint a picture of a connected world, where there is reciprocity and interdependence and where the actions, purchases and lifestyles of those of us in more wealthy countries have clear consequences on those in less wealthy countries, and vice versa. I wanted people to understand that their choices to buy cheap clothes made in Bangladesh had a direct impact on the livelihood of people living in that country, and that their choices to rely too heavily on fossil fuels had

an impact on the world's climate. I wanted them to feel compelled to give out of a sense of connection rather than a sense of pity.

Because we ARE all connected. We are connected to the young girl in the red sari who wanted to be my friend. We are connected to the school teacher on a tiny island in the Bay of Bengal, whose whole village had been forced to live on boats for weeks while the island was under water and whose eyes filled with tears when I stepped onto the boat and waved good-bye at the end of our lovely day together. We are connected to the young Ethiopian woman who has dedicated her life to engineering projects that give more people access to water, and who slept in a truck so that I could have her bed.



We are also connected to the young black man who died unnecessarily at the hands of a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri recently.

And we are connected to the next door neighbour who annoys us by repeatedly revving his car in the driveway.

And we are connected to the farmer who grew the food we'll eat for supper.

There is an intricate web of connection that runs through all the world, connecting us to one another, reminding us that we can not live separate lives. We all play have parts to play in this interconnected world, because we all rely on each other for our survival and well-being. Our choices matter. Our lifestyles matter. Our relationships matter.

We cannot live as though the purchase of a \$5 t-shirt has no impact on the young woman on the other side of the world who stitched it together for only a few pennies.

We cannot live as though the garbage we throw out every day has no impact on the earth that provides the food we eat.

We cannot live as though the privileges we take for granted don't marginalize the people who have no access to those privileges.

Connections matter and the choices we make demonstrate whether or not we take that to heart. When we choose to make ethical purchases (fair trade, organic, etc.) we use our dollars to foster connection. When we choose to elect people

who have the best interests of people living in poverty and marginalization at heart, we use our political power to foster connection. When we choose to reduce our fossil fuel use, we foster greater connection with the earth.

Every time we turn on the news, we see evidence of disconnection in the world. There's the story in the local newspaper about the body of a young Indigenous woman, who'd been marginalized, exploited, and murdered, found wrapped in plastic and floating in the river that runs past my house. There are the stories of conflict in Iraq and Syria, where young children are being killed and young women are being raped. There are stories of school shootings and gang warfare. There are countless stories of natural disasters that point to climate change.

All of these stories point to a disconnection of one kind or another.

We are all hungry for that sweet spot of deeper connection. To get there, we can start with small things right in our own back yards. We can choose to have a conversation with the annoying neighbour rather than yelling at them from across the fence. We can walk to the farmer's market and meet the people who grow our food rather than letting the supermarket separate us. We can get involved with local causes that help people work their way out of poverty.

You don't have to fly to Bangladesh to meet the young girl in the red sari to understand connection. You don't even need to leave your neighbourhood. You just have to start where you are. Start with the next interaction you have, the next thing you buy, or the next choice you make.

Start with just one of the **"100 Ways to Connect"** at the end of this book.



YING AND YANG

by Leah Godin



Bad Boyfriend



Good Boyfriend

The first painting represents an abusive relationship from two years ago, and the second represents the very happy and healthy relationship that I'm in now. While doing them, I realized that those relationships are like ying and yang to one another, and I feel strongly now that I needed to experience them both in my lifetime. It was a very positive realization and has allowed me to consider the abusive and unhealthy relationship with more acceptance, and peace. This has in turn allowed me to commit more fully and have less fear in my current relationship with a wonderful, loving, respectful and passionate man.



Leah Godin is a 30 year old woman currently living and working in Toronto, who was born and raised on a farm in Kawartha Lakes.



CAN WE CONNECT WITH THE DIVINE

by Neda Gaspar

in this earthly realm
can we connect with the Divine
can we touch the Unseen
will our hearts know
is recognition a possibility

she sat beside me
while we drummed the eagle song
looking down my eyes rested
on her bare worn feet at ease on the floor

suddenly from no where
a gentle love overflowed in my heart
in a flash I knew I recognized the feet of my Beloved
He brings me these gifted moments at the most unexpected times
making all my sadness disappear



Neda Gaspar surprised herself when she became a poet and published a book of poetry, called "Neda".



OPT OUT

by Pace Smith

When you grow up as part of a society (like we all do, unless we're raised by wolves), it can be hard to tell the difference between who you really are and who you're expected to be.

It can help to **opt out** of some of society's unspoken rules. Rebel a little. Try freedom on for size. Then, if you want to, you can follow the rules again - but because you *want* to instead of following them out of habit.

For example, there's an unspoken rule in society that you're supposed to keep up to date with the news. What if you opted out and disconnected yourself from all (or most) news? How would you feel? Would anything bad happen? You won't know until you try... and you can always start watching/reading news again later after you experiment.

What else could you try? Opt out of fast food? Opt out of the "always refreshing, always available" social media and email expectation? Opt out of TV? Opt out of wearing the style of clothes that's expected of you?

You can't find the true you underneath all the layers until you try peeling the layers off. Play with it! How about a 30-day experiment?



Pace Smith helps sensitive spiritual misfits follow their heart's compass to a wild crazy meaningful life.



CONNECTING WITH THE SACRED

by Rose Regier

I connect to the sacred with my body. Beyond thoughts and ego identity, my body taps into the visceral experience of being alive. Rather than making a divine connection happen, I have only to be present enough to let it happen. I ask my body, "How would you like to move?" I dance, gyrate, and act like an animal or a force of nature. I play music and just let my body go. I raise my face up to the sky and feel reverent and wild at the same time. To me, this is the essence of divine connection.



Rose Regier is a recovering pharmacist who is creating a new career filled with creativity, soul, and meaning.



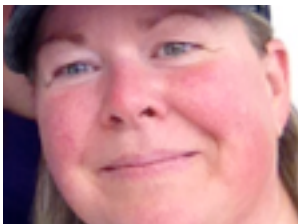
ART AS CONNECTION

by Sheila Farstad

The physical act of creating is my "making connections" vehicle.....and for me it encompasses the four areas of self, others, spiritual and nature. Art expression is my language and acts as interpreter in all areas of my life. It's where I go to be!

I believe that all 'beings' are artistic in our pure form.....but sometimes forget because of stuff from others. Now when I say artistic I do not mean that you have to go out and create a painting or sculpture (although you can if that calls you....lol) but your unique artistic voice may be in your canning ability, or how you bake buns, or your care of critters, or fixing things..... the possibilities are endless when we take the definition of creative outside its traditional box!

The act of creation teaches independent thought processes and innovative problem solving not to mention feels really good.....so be open to the possibilities and get creative!



Sheila Farstad is owner of Above The Hill Artworks and Heart Song Wellness Studio in the refurbished Minto School in North Portal, Saskatchewan.



CONNECTION, COMMUNITY, AND FOOD

by Shahrzad Arasteh

Food connects us, nourishes us, and carries our memories like a beautiful wrap softly holding a precious gift. It's also a lovely way to build and deepen relationships. The food we make and share with others is an expression of our care for them, is infused with our own story, and is an invitation to be a part of our community. So, create opportunities to share yourself and celebrate, honor, comfort, or welcome others through the gift of a nourishing meal made by your heart and hands.



Shahrzad Arasteh is a holistic career counselor and trainer whose love of community and food come together in her book, *Nourish Your Career*.



WHERE IS GOD?

by Suzan Nolan

Sometimes I wonder if I believe in a God at all. Sometimes all I've learned about God seems like myth, story, or superstition. It seems like we've concocted the notion of god as a baby sitter who looks over us in times of difficulty and we've made up stories about virgin births and rising from the dead, and good and evil, and who is good and evil, and all that stuff that seems so unbelievable.

Sometimes I just wonder out loud if there is a god. And then I feel that tugging at my heart, that inexpressible yearning to be whole, that leads me to my mat, to silence, to a deeper awareness of what's coming up inside of me. It is from that place that the questions of who is god is or where disappear and there is just this moment and this breath.

And sometimes if I'm really still, the thoughts leave for a few moments and there is just this, this one life, this one moment, this one connection. And sometimes when I can just let it all be in the silence of my breath, I can feel my connection to a lot of other things. I can feel my heart open to the stocker at Safeway who asks me if I need help and I say, yes, I can't find the filo dough, and she says, I'll take you there. And I'm overwhelmed with gratitude for this kind of service.

Sometimes when I'm walking my dog early in the morning, I see an elderly woman who has walked miles already stop to visit and tell me how much she loves the sun rise and I see myself in her. I see the stockbroker who gets up early to go to the local school, a school his two adopted Haitian children no longer attend, to put in a garden so children can learn about vegetables.

Is there a god? I don't know, but there are so many people in my life who embody a spirit of love and goodness that if there is a god, it is expressed in the beauty of all that is around me.



Suzan Nolan is a retired school counselor who is passionate about women's circles and is currently the Convener of Gather the Women Global Matrix.



100 WAYS TO CONNECT

with yourself, others, the earth, and the sacred

Suggestion: Print these out, cut them up, and fill a basket with them. Each day for 100 days, pick out one piece of paper and find a way to do what's on it (or your own variation of it).

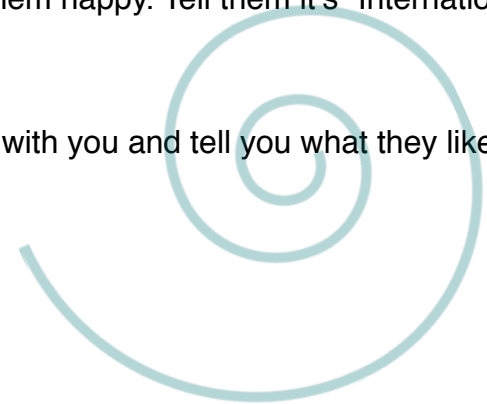
1. Dance like no-one's watching.
2. Take an internet sabbatical for a day, a week, or a month.
3. Eat chocolate without chewing.
4. Write the names of 21 people on pieces of paper and place them in a basket. Each day for the next three weeks, pick one name from the basket and pray for that person.
5. Try a hundred mile diet for a day or a week, eating only what's been grown, gathered, or caught from within one hundred miles of your house.
6. Start a gratitude journal and write 10 things you're grateful for every day.
7. Keep your mouth shut and listen all day.
8. Go to the woods with a sketchpad and draw a tree.
9. Buy a bag of tootsie rolls or lollipops and go for a walk or a bus ride. Don't go home until you've given away every one.
10. Ask the next person you meet what their favourite childhood memory is.
11. Look for something in your house that you really like and give it away.
12. Try a new art form and [grow your creativity](#).
13. Tie a lollipop and a thank you note for your mail carrier on your mailbox.
14. Say "no" the next time someone asks you to do something you don't want to do.



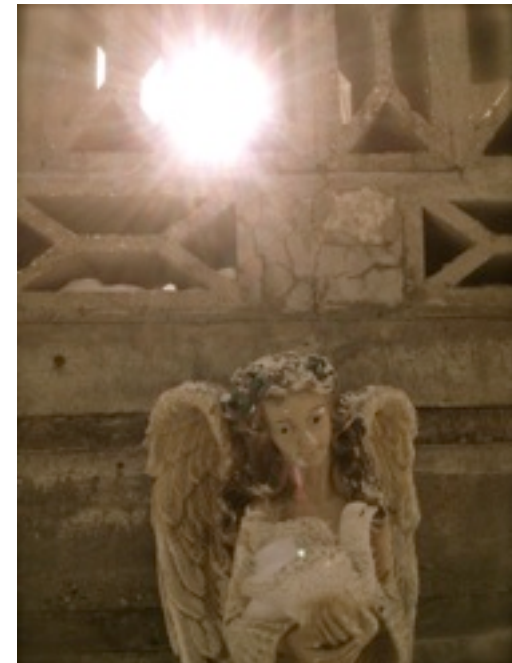
15. Walk a labyrinth. If you can't find a physical one, [try an online version](#).
16. Join a choir. Or just sing in the shower.
17. Go barefoot in the grass.
18. Visit the oldest cathedral in your city. Or the sacred site of local indigenous people.
19. Draw a circle on a map around your neighbourhood and set an intention to walk on every one of the streets in the circle. Start today with one you've never walked on.
20. Contact a priest, imam, pastor, yogi, or any other leader or teacher from a religion or spiritual tradition that is not your own and invite them out for coffee. Ask them to tell you what they love about their faith or spiritual practice.
21. One day a week, turn off the alarm and let yourself sleep in.
22. Invite your friends over for wine and conversation. Give each person half an hour to share their life story. Use a talking piece so that only the person holding it can speak and everyone else listens with intention.
23. Write your favourite inspirational quotes on sticky notes and stick them on bathroom mirrors in public places.
24. Ask the cashier at the grocery store what their favourite chocolate bar is and then buy it for them.
25. Take a yoga class. Or try one you find on Youtube.
26. Set aside an afternoon for random acts of service and wander around your neighbourhood looking for people to help, for garbage to pick up, for lonely people to talk to, and for other kind things to do.
27. Write a letter to a politician that you admire, thanking them for serving their constituents.
28. Cook twice what you'd normally make for supper and bring the leftovers to a friend.
29. Visit a museum and write a letter of gratitude to one of the historical people who forged your country, city, etc.
30. Buy crayons and make messy art.



31. Visit a grocery store and buy a fruit or vegetable you've never tried before. Research it to find out where it came from and how people eat it. If you can, ask someone from the country where it came from to tell you how to eat it.
32. Go outside at night and look at the stars.
33. Have an openhearted conversation with someone whose worldview is different from yours.
34. Light a candle for a friend who's going through a hard time. Say his/her name out loud as you light it.
35. Paint a picture of what you think God looks like.
36. Set aside playtime on the weekend and go to the playground, do finger-painting, or play with your favourite toys.
37. Go for a Reiki treatment.
38. Visit the beach and make a mandala out of stones, twigs, flowers, or all three.
39. Take an afternoon nap. Just because.
40. Ask yourself "what am I willing to let go of today?" And then do it.
41. Skip stones in a lake.
42. Plan a random surprise party or night out on the town for a friend, just to make them happy. Tell them it's "International Celebrate-a-Friend" day.
43. Eat more slowly.
44. Visit the poorest neighbourhood in your area and invite a stranger to have lunch with you and tell you what they like about living there.
45. Dress up and take yourself out to dinner.
46. Visit a park in your community you've never been to before.
47. Cuddle.



48. Sign up for a buy nothing challenge and don't buy anything but essentials for a week, month, or year.
49. Write a letter. Mail it.
50. Turn your face toward the sun and close your eyes.
51. Meditate.
52. Ask this question on social media or in an email to your friends: "What would you ask me if you knew I wouldn't say no?"
53. Get a massage.
54. Ask yourself "what am I good at?" and then go do that thing for at least one person.
55. Buy flowers. For yourself or someone else.
56. Invite friends over to play your favourite board game.
57. Ask 10 (or more) friends from different parts of the world to each send you a stone from where they live. Build an inukshuk, altar, or sculpture and send them all photos.
58. Leave a box of chocolates in a stranger's mailbox.
59. Make a [lack-of-vision board](#).
60. Write a list of 10 kind things you've witnessed (or done) this week.
61. Forgive someone.
62. Ask a friend what "sacred" means to them.
63. Ask yourself "what am I curious about?" and then find out more about that thing that makes you curious.
64. Tell someone that you love them.
65. Spend extra time in self-care for one day. Soak in the bathtub, use good lotion all over your body, read a book, get a haircut - do whatever you need to feel loved and cared for.



66. Visit a locally-owned business and ask the business owner to tell them about what they love about their business.
67. Write a list of 5 beautiful things you can see from where you're sitting or standing.
68. Slow down.
69. Pick weeds in a graveyard.
70. Write a thank you letter to a teacher who changed your life. Send it if you can.
71. Be kind to yourself.
72. Buy a coffee for the person behind you in line.
73. Laugh.
74. Clear off a shelf in your favourite room and create an altar with a collection of things that connect you to the sacred.
75. Get out of town.
76. Go for a photo walk in your neighbourhood. Take pictures of at least ten things you never noticed before.
77. Find a pet to cuddle with.
78. Initiate a conversation that goes beyond small-talk.
79. Make art on your sidewalk or front steps with chalk. Invite the neighbourhood children to join you.
80. Make a prayer painting. Write down the names of all of the people you're praying for, cut them up and collage the names onto a canvas or paper. Add paint and other elements. Cover the names if you wish.
81. Make a [mandala that explores your roots](#).
82. The next time you eat, pause, look at your food, consider where it came from, express your gratitude, and be mindful.
83. Set an intention to look each person in the eye today and witness them.
84. Visit someone in the hospital.



-
85. Spend time by or in water.
 86. Create a new ritual for your morning. Light a candle, write a gratitude note, read an inspirational quote or passage from a spiritual text, meditate for five minutes, take a bath, etc. Do it at least 10 days in a row.
 87. Play with your food. Make art on your plate.
 88. [Start a journal practice.](#)
 89. Celebrate the ordinary. Make a list of ten ordinary things that you celebrate right now.
 90. Sit still for 15 minutes.
 91. Give to a charitable cause you care about.
 92. Do something that scares you.
 93. Complete this sentence: "If I had my wish, I would..."
 94. Be kind to someone who frustrates you.
 95. As you're lying in bed at the end of the day, take a few moments to feel your whole being, focusing on each part of your body for a few seconds at a time.
 96. Satisfy a craving.
 97. Spend half an hour reading from a sacred text, either from your own spiritual tradition or one you want to learn about.
 98. Buy a treat for your bus driver, gas station attendant, librarian, or someone else who serves you today.
 99. Make a phone call to someone from your family of origin or family of choice.
 100. When you see something beautiful, stand in reverence.



Thank you for spending some time in connection with me and my wise friends in the pages of this book!

I trust that something in these pages will have helped you find a deeper connection to yourself, others, the sacred, and the earth.

If you want to learn more, if you'd like to work with me, or if you wish to seek permission to use any of the content of this book, please visit me at www.heatherplett.com

My email address is heather@heatherplett.com

Yours, with love,

Heather Plett

