

Women's Circle Workbook



Practices to Increase Self-awareness
&
Self-acceptance



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Organizational Leadership—Servant Leader master's capstone

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Part One of Three

Purpose

This workbook is to serve the women at DTNA by creating an opportunity to come together and find support, shared understandings, and to increase relationship skills that may transform their lives and the lives of those, they serve.



Believe

Art by Dawnette Hale



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Requirements of this section

- ❖ Meditate in silence for 10 minutes each day.
- ❖ Follow the path of Lectio Divina once a week for a minimum of 30 minutes
- ❖ Journal daily using the prompts or write from what is in your heart

Silence—an exploration into mindfulness



St. Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, California

Defining silence

Different people can understand silence in different ways. There are two different types of silence – external silence and internal silence. External silence might be experienced if electronic devices are not playing, when in nature, when alone, and when people are not talking. Internal silence is a spiritual space and is not dependent upon people, spaces, and the absence or presence of sounds. Internal silence is the space of mindfulness. The focus of this section is on meditation and the Lectio Divina practices.

Purpose of silent mindfulness

Mindfulness practices are an effort to be present in each moment. The only time we may make choices to change our lives is in the

present. We cannot change the past, and the future has not happened. If we are not present in the moment, we may lack the awareness that a choice is offered.

Each day, we may choose to allow our past decisions and autoprocessing mental models to continue to play an old script, or we may choose a new direction. A direction that reflects who we are today on our journey and lays the path for who we will become in the future.



Benefits

It is not hard to understand the benefits of internal silence. Silence is a space of mindfulness, meditation, and sensing. When we practice developing ourselves in silence, we support the ability to pause before communicating. We also increase our ability to being open to new ideas, and to be focused, calm, and able to respond when emotions are triggered. It is through the practice of mindfulness that we develop these benefits.

Pause before communicating – the first thought may not be the best

There are times when our word choices and actions have not served us well. When we look back on our experiences, we might wish that at times, we had used different words or tone, and perhaps we might wish we had remained silent. Changing our ingrained and automatic behaviors requires awareness of our default words and actions – awareness of our mental models and biases.



Throughout a lifetime, our experiences and the social norms of our

communities created mental models or biases to help us connect, fit in, and to solve problems. In addition to the mental models we create, our body naturally seeks to make the most efficient use of our energy. One process that consumes a lot of energy is thinking and thinking about every process sequence within our complex systems is not efficient — instead, our body auto processes activities such as breathing, temperature control, digestion, and walking. Our brain also auto-processes for efficiency and survival. Examples of this include facial recognition (belonging to the same tribe), speed-reading (skipping words and letters), and responding to perceived threats. There are two concerns with our perception of threats – ancient brain choices, and the area of toxic patterns with social norms and behaviors.



First, the ancient brain choices, we are automatically programmed to fight, flight, faint, or freeze when we have triggering experiences. These reactions helped us survive the dangers from that time and in challenging situations today. One example of this type of reaction is the ability to slam on the breaks when we notice something swiftly change while driving. We do not want to have to think through every process to stop the vehicle. Our ancient brain processes the information and makes choices for our survival. If our brain chooses flight, then we might steer the car away, slam on the breaks, or speed up to put distance between the developing situation and us. We rely upon these processes to help us through the many complex tasks and help us survive.

The second threat is when a mental model has been created because of toxic behaviors or non-inclusive social norms and behaviors. An example of a mental model created from toxic behaviors might be reactions developed because of the presence

of an addict in the home. When someone in the household is behaving in unpredictable ways, we develop coping methods. Toxic behavior might include if someone yells, we leave the room or remain silent. If the toxic behavior is present in our lives for long enough, or an event creates a great enough trauma, we will develop a reaction or response pattern to this threat or activity and similar behaviors. Examples of social specific behavior can be found in the behaviors and customs of people from different cultures, religions, as well as, in the group's ability to access resources.

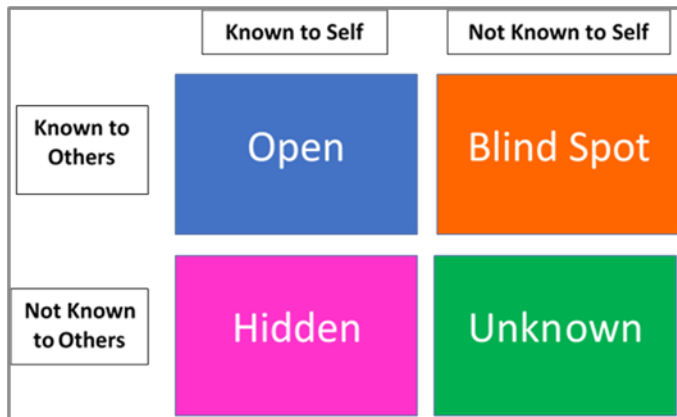
These programmed responses within our subconscious may be useful for many years when situations persist. However, when the behavior changes and our patterns do not change, or when we have a strong reaction to something our brain thinks are similar, but it is not the same, our responses can cause harm. The automatic reactions and responses from our limited views may prevent us from understanding, valuing, and engaging in appropriate, inclusive, and compassionate relationships. Also, these old responses that were helpful to us in the past may cause us to feel shame and embarrassment.

The challenge in dealing with mental models and biases is that they are unconscious. We often lack an awareness of the inappropriate or exclusionary nature of our automatic responses and reactions, and of being out of sync with new or different circumstances. Engaging in mindfulness practice can assist in giving us time to consider our initial responses and pause before auto replying. By pausing before responding, we are a step closer to bringing our best self to the present moment.



Johari Window

What do I know about myself? What do others see when they look at me? What is hidden and unknown to me and others that control my interactions and choices? These questions are represented in the Johari Window.



Johari Window

While a meditative practice may not always provide insights to blinds spots and the unknown, it does give us time to claim our inner experience and increase our ability to decide how we choose to respond.

Openness to new ideas

With the intentional effort to still the mind, there is an opportunity to be open to new insights. Being open to new ideas and experiences usually happens in one of two ways, when we experience emotional pain and suffering and wish to avoid the feelings in the future, or when we are in a mental space where we do not have to defend ourselves. Personal experiences of emotional pain may draw us towards meditation, and the subsequent development of a mindfulness practice helps to create greater

levels of self-acceptance. With an increase in self-acceptance, we decrease our need to defend ourselves. We are aware of our choices and are more open to understanding other people's choices. The hope from this open space is that we will not require other people to defend themselves, but rather engage in learning, mutual respect, and community building together. With the increase in our ability to shift perspectives, we can develop more awareness of other choices and hold the ideas with reverence.

Being present in the moment - focused and calm

Mindfulness practices are based on intentional effort and focus. Time is dedicated to the learning of and exploring of silence. There is no other purpose other than to engage in reaching deep within ourselves and connecting to the universal oneness.

The effort is the reward. The results are an understanding and acceptance of yourself. Through the sensations of self-awareness and self-acceptance, we become focused and calm and able to understand and accept others.

This workbook we will explore two types of silent mindfulness practices – meditation and the Lectio Divina.



Meditation



Beginning a journey

There are many different approaches and resources to developing a meditation practice, including online videos and tutorials, subscription radio, podcasts, yoga and religious spaces, and books to help develop a meditation practice. Meditation began in Taoist China and Buddhist India around the 6th and 5th centuries BCE (Puff, 2013). A few of the many resources available on meditation can be found in the Tools section of this workbook.

When I began meditating, I struggled with sitting in silence. I found it boring and uncomfortable. What finally moved me into a daily practice and being comfortable with silence was Oprah and Deepak's 21-Day Meditation Experience. I appreciated the focused topics, the progression in thoughts and ideas, which helped me, develop deeper understandings, and supportive music. Also, a bell sounds at the end of each of their daily meditations, letting me know my time was complete. It was very satisfying to be consistent in my mindfulness practice and rewarding to hear the bell.

Not everyone is going to resonate with the same practice. It will be important to explore to find someone that suits your preferences.



St. Andrew's Abbey,
Valyermo, California

A simple practice



Find a quiet, calm space where you can be alone and undisturbed.

Find a comfortable place to sit. Begin to relax, loosening your body from the stresses of the day. Release as much tension from your body as you are able. Let your shoulders drop down and roll them back to open your chest. Do not sit in discomfort; seek a comfortable posture and position.

Let your thoughts of the day and any worries or concerns go. You are preparing to enter the silence and connect with your inner world and cosmic consciousness - the space of creation.

Slowly take deep breaths: inhale through your nose, and gently exhale through your mouth.

Close your eyes and focus on slowing breathing in and out.

Maintain the focus on your breathing for your meditation.

Once the timer goes off, gently open your eyes.



Tip: I usually set a timer (with a pleasant sound) for 10 or 15 minutes. If I am feeling a bit scattered, I add an extra 5 minutes.

Distractions

During a meditative practice, it is common to have a few thoughts popping into the space and creating a distraction. Distraction is normal. Sometimes we need to yawn, or we suddenly become aware of something we forgot or needed to manage. Simply return your attention to your breathing. Some days the distractions are kept to a minimum, and other days finding the quiet space can be challenging. Both experiences are okay.

Distraction while meditating mirrors the challenges of life – we want an experience to flow a certain way, and it often does not, so we need to adjust. Developing the ability to adjust our thoughts and refocus takes practice, and this is an excellent space for those efforts.

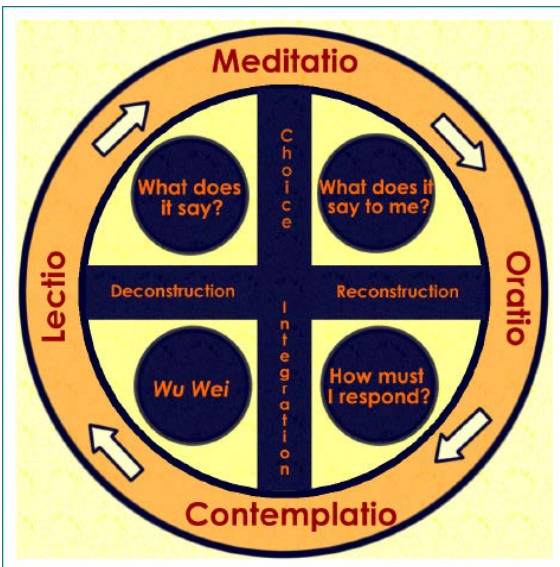
Somedays offer more distractions. On those days, I will say to myself, "Thank you for the thought. I understand this is important. I will make time and consider what this means after my meditation." It may also be helpful to spend a few extra minutes when journaling to focus on the distracting thought. You may be open to new inspiration following your centering time.



"There is simply the rose; it is perfect in every moment of its existence."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Lectio Divina – sacred readings



The Lectio Divina is a process for the silent contemplation of something written. Benedict of Nursia introduced the process in the 6th century, and it's still part of the daily lives of Benedictine monks today (Carey, n.d., p. 3). The reflections are usually of religious teachings and intended to bring the words into one's daily life rather than as something that

Dr. Carey's image of Lectio Divina

happened in the past, or that did not relate to current choices and actions.

I first practiced this meditative contemplation at St. Andrew's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Valyermo, California. It is not necessary to choose religious writing to contemplate. If you have something you want to consider in greater depth from other sources, it can be as rewarding. People set aside at least an hour. Some spend entire days in this mindful silence. It is common to find this as an exercise at contemplative retreats. It may be a bit daunting the first few times to be completely silent.

St. Andrew's Abbey, a Benedictine monastery in Valyermo, California information can be found in the Tools section of this workbook.



Preparation for Lectio Divina

Set aside an hour or more for contemplation. Sunrise can be a wonderful time for this practice.

Identify the reading you want to explore.

Enter into silence. No words are spoken, and no loud noises are made. An effort is made not to disturb others or to change the energy. This is not a time to do chores while thinking – let those burdens wait and take the time to engage in this silent process

Steps or movements of the Lectio Divina

1. Lectio – What does it say?

Ask yourself what do the words say – what is the meaning. What was happening when they were written that helped shape this understanding, this view.

2. Meditatio – What does it say to me?

When considering your own life, do the words mean the same thing as what the author intended? Do you have a different understanding? How do these words relate to your life now?

3. Oratio – What does this call me to do?

What is in my heart that I need to do? When considering the reading from a religious or spiritual framework, the question is, what is the Creator asking me to do?

4. Contemplatio – trust and let go

This is a mindful release of the decision to the Creator. There is a belief that there is a greater force in the universe at work and that our role does not dictate the outcome.

Lectio Divina - an example of this Contemplation
Using a brief quote to help show the process.

"Most of the shadows of this life are caused by standing in one's own sunshine." Ralph Waldo Emerson



Lectio – read

The darkness in my life is my creation

Meditatio – these words mean to me in my life?

It says to me that sadness and despair are things I have created. Because I block the light – when I shift, I may return to the light.

I might ask myself what areas of my life are in darkness. I might explore these areas to see where I am responsible for the current circumstances.

Oratio – what shall I do?

How shall I take action? Will I forgive myself? Will I reach out to another and listen to their story? Will I observe and wait for insights.

Contemplatio – letting go

I submit to what I know. I release the thoughts and deeds to the universe.

Note: Contemplatio process does not mean we have made a perfect choice. It means that given our understanding, we looked deep within our heart and were called to act. If we realize at a future time that we are being called to follow a different path, then we follow the different path.

Requirements of this section

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- ❖ Follow the path of Lectio Divina once a week for a minimum of 30 minutes
- ❖ Journal daily using the prompts or write from what is in your heart
- ❖



Garden Fairy



Mindfulness Journal Prompts

You may select a prompt or write from what is in your heart. Please write for 5 minutes.

GRATITUDE



I am happiest when...

The most important part of my life is...

I am thankful for...

Learning about _____ changed my life, and now I...

I dream of becoming...

CONTEMPLATION of emotions

When you tell me _____, I feel...

It hurts my heart when...

I feel sad when...

I feel angry when...

I am confused and want to understand...



THE PAST

I dreamed of becoming _____, and now I am...

Each time I imagined something important...

The lesson I can share is...

I never understood...

The best hug I ever received was...





My Journal – I am

[illegible]



My Journal – I am

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



My Journal – I am

[illegible]



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My Journal – I am

[illegible]

Short Quotes for Lectio Divina

"The rose is a rose from the time it is a seed to the time it dies. Within it, at all times, it contains its whole potential. It seems to be constantly in the process of change: Yet at each state, at each moment, it is perfectly all right as it is." – Paulo Coelho

"Pay bad people with your goodness; fight their hatred with your kindness. Even if you do not achieve victory over other people, you will conquer yourself." – Leo Tolstoy

"Challenges are gifts that force us to search for a new center of gravity. Don't fight them. Just find a new way to stand."
— Oprah Winfrey

"Awareness is not a giver of solace – it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity." – Robert K. Greenleaf

"It takes a great deal of courage to stand up to your enemies, but even more to stand up to your friends." – J. K. Rowling

"Don't compromise yourself. You are all you've got. There is no yesterday, no tomorrow, it's all the same day." –Janis Joplin



Lectio Divina Notes



Lectio – read – what does it say

Meditatio – what do these words represent in my life

Oratio – what shall I do

Contemplatio – letting go

Lectio Divina Notes



Lectio – read – what does it say

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Lectio Divina Notes



Lectio – read – what does it say

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End of Part One

Silence