



**Children of the Earth**  
INSPIRES AND UNITES YOUNG PEOPLE

# Spiritual Activism

Handbook for Youth · The Inner Revolution for the Outer Evolution

---

REFLECT · CONNECT · ACT

Children of the Earth inspires and unites young people,  
through personal and social transformation, to create  
a peaceful and sustainable world.

---

Written by Nina Meyerhof · Edited by Deborah Moldow  
First published 2010 · This edition refreshed 2026

**childrenofthe.earth**



# ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

---

**Children of the Earth inspires and unites young people, through personal and social transformation, to create a peaceful and sustainable world.**

Spirit Action is discovering your inner self and thereby activating your potential to create a more harmonious and equitable world. You are invited to learn the path of Spiritual Activism, so that you can be the leader you are called to be.

This handbook is for young people to use for personal and social transformation. Its materials were first developed for Children of the Earth's youth hubs and chapters around the world, but they are for any young person dreaming of becoming a spiritually inspired activist. Use parts of it or the whole, and adapt it to what you need.

A companion volume, the *Spiritual Activism Training Manual*, sets the same material out as timed modules for anyone facilitating a one-, three- or five-day course.

## CREDITS

Written by Nina Meyerhof, Founder of Children of the Earth. Edited by Deborah Moldow. Contributions by Harriett Nettles Repenning, Mary K. Dennison, Etta Kantor and Diane DeTerra. With gratitude for the support of the Bay and Paul Foundation.

Originally published December 2010. This edition refreshed 2026: presentation, typography and links updated; content unchanged apart from corrected spellings and one graphic reset as credited text.

This handbook is the property of Children of the Earth. Copying is permitted with appropriate credit.

**childrenofthe.earth**

# CONTENTS

---

|                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <b>Part One — Foundations</b>                                    | 4  |
| Children of the Earth                                            | 4  |
| Model of Spiritual Activism                                      | 5  |
| Principles and Ethics                                            | 6  |
| Pioneering Spiritual Activism                                    | 6  |
| Worldview: Global Ethics in All Religions                        | 8  |
| Becoming a Global Citizen                                        | 9  |
| Pledge for a Culture of Peace                                    | 10 |
| <b>Part Two — Reflection: Inner Quest for the Authentic Self</b> | 11 |
| Meditation                                                       | 11 |
| Prayer                                                           | 13 |
| Guided Visualization                                             | 14 |
| Ho’oponopono: Self-Examination for Cleaning Perceptions          | 15 |
| HeartMath: Heart–Mind Unity                                      | 17 |
| Deep Dialogue: Knowing Consciousness                             | 19 |
| <b>Part Three — Connection: Deep Compassion for the Other</b>    | 21 |
| Transforming Relationships                                       | 21 |
| Listening to Understand                                          | 22 |
| Nonviolent Communication: Speaking Skills                        | 23 |
| From Conflict Resolution to Conflict Transformation              | 24 |
| An Elephant and the Blind Men                                    | 25 |
| Conflict Transcendence                                           | 26 |
| <b>Part Four — Action: Interconnectedness for Global Unity</b>   | 28 |
| Leadership as Service for the Greater Good                       | 28 |
| Notes on Starting a Group                                        | 29 |
| Guiding Practices of a Group                                     | 30 |
| Lateral Leadership: The Leader as a Member of the Group          | 31 |
| Circle Groups: Each Person Has a Say                             | 32 |
| Step-by-Step Facilitation                                        | 33 |
| Compassionate Listening                                          | 34 |
| World Café                                                       | 35 |
| Open Space                                                       | 36 |
| Appreciative Inquiry                                             | 37 |
| Sociocracy                                                       | 39 |
| <b>Part Five — It’s Up to You</b>                                | 43 |
| <b>We Are All Children of the Earth</b>                          | 45 |

# PART ONE — FOUNDATIONS

---

## Children of the Earth

Introduction by Dr. Nina Meyerhof Founder and Director of Children of the Earth

### WELCOME!

For many years I have worked with young people around the world. Through this experience, I have developed the understanding that each person has a unique personal gift to contribute to the tapestry of life. When this gift is discovered, the individual no longer feels alienated from or overly concerned about the social demands of the surrounding culture, but rather yearns to live as the authentic self. To be free to be that self and have a place in the world fosters greatness. I have found that those who have a sense of this inner self and tap into their personal dream and vision automatically choose to live according to higher values or universal ethics. This then serves the greater good.

At our Children of the Earth (COE) youth international gatherings we speak of spirituality and leadership. Spirituality can be found in the inner self after the layers of differences are peeled away and the basic human character is left, with a sense of who we are beyond body, mind, emotions, culture, race or religion. Leadership is identifying the depth of our convictions and being willing to stand firmly in them. From this stand, we take actions for the benefit of all of life.

This handbook is the culmination of years of work and dedication. These materials are for young people to use for personal and social transformation — the opportunity to go deeply inside and then to connect with others in a deeper sense of self and the unity of all of life.

One world...with all her children smiling!

### WHAT IS SPIRITUAL ACTIVISM?

Spirit Action is discovering your inner self and thereby activating your potential to create a more harmonious and equitable world. You are invited to learn the path of Spiritual Activism, so that you can be the leader you are called to be.

As each young person learns to be a spiritual seeker, discovering both eternal truths and personal truths, he or she is able to make a conscious decision to be of service to manifest peace and unity in the world and to link to others who hold the same intention. One by one, they become their authentic self, improve their relationships and focus on making the world a better place for now and for future generations.

The Spiritual Activism Handbook is offered as a resource for you to become a spiritual activist. Its materials were originally developed for Children of the Earth's Spirit Youth Hubs and Social Action Chapters around the world but are for use by any young person dreaming

of becoming a spiritually inspired social activist. There is a movement afoot and this handbook invites YOU to reflect, connect and take action.

It is intended for individual young people as well as youth workshops, conferences, and groups who are committed to creating change, both inner and outer. Feel free to use parts or the whole and adapt it to your needs.

Become part of an active movement that is growing around the world today. Be the Change You Want to See.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. – Margaret Mead, US Anthropologist (1901-1978)

## Model of Spiritual Activism

The process outlined in this toolkit has been strategically developed to produce a transformative human experience that empowers the will to create a life of personal meaning as well as productivity for the greater good.

Young spiritual activists learn to reach within and experience their nature beyond self-esteem and basic needs and desires, in order to find their own uniqueness and solid character where personal identity connects to the universals of life. The deeper you go, the more ethical, the more committed and the more powerful you will be as a leader for positive change.

This process can be understood in three interconnected areas that feed one another: Reflection, Connection and Action.

Connection

Action

### REFLECTION

Reflection is the individual journey that we take to awaken our gifts. The path may include meditation, contemplation, and/or prayer. As we get still enough to listen, we may hear the calling of our heart and set personal missions for our lives.

Connection bridges gaps of perceived separation to create unity. Moving beyond ourselves to see the other with loving compassion, we begin to feel ourselves to be part of a global community, which increases our desire to serve. Then even accomplishments at the local level are recognized as contributions to the welfare of humanity.

Action is taking your joy from reflecting and connecting into the world! Simple and achievable projects that are based on the principles of spirituality can make a real impact on the world. This is not ordinary action, but Spiritual Activism.

# Principles and Ethics

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Trust your intuition
- Demonstrate dignity and respect
- Communicate with honesty and clarity
- Assume the good intentions of others
- Support shared leadership
- Celebrate diversity
- Be inspired to take risks
- Allow decisions to emerge and embrace the process
- Understand the whole is greater than the parts
- Strive to support sustainability both personally and environmentally
- Honor agreements and take ownership for outcomes

Questions for dialogue or journaling: - Can you give examples of these principles in practice?  
- Do you see ways that you can implement them in your day to day life? - Which principles do you see as most challenging? - Are there other principles you would add?

## CODE OF ETHICS – ACTIONS BASED ON SELFLESSNESS & LOVE

LOVE - for the form, voice, thoughts and spirit of each person

RESPECT - for differences

HONESTY - of our feelings, thoughts and behaviors; to be transparent

TRUTH - in feelings and thoughts

COURAGE - to take a stand

HUMILITY - to reflect inner peace

WISDOM - to be a seeker

## QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between principles and a Code of Ethics?
- Do you live by a Code of Ethics in your own life?
- Do you think any of these ethics is more important than another?

# Pioneering Spiritual Activism

Spiritual Activism is a concept that originates from the understanding that youth have incredible energy. You can channel that energy into living a life based on the “will to good” and positive social change. This begins by seeking inner peace and a connection to our

consciousness that is available to us all. Thus, you can and will activate your own calling for a life of meaning reflected through daily actions and service for the greater good. This is Children of the Earth's model for Spiritual Activism.

### 1ST... INNER QUEST FOR THE AUTHENTIC SELF

As we go more deeply into the self, the understanding grows that we are not defined by our surroundings, parents, culture and religion. Rather, inside us dwells a loving human being seeking full expression.

#### QUESTIONS

- Who am I in my authentic self?
- What are the unique gifts I bring to the world?
- How can I work with others to create change?

### 2ND... DEEP COMPASSION FOR THE OTHER

Next we become conscious of how we can best express ourselves in the world for the highest good. Transforming conflict, using language that recognizes the other, appreciating without judging — all these can occur when we no longer judge our self. We begin to act as part of a whole, building oneness rather than needing to assert our separate ego. A sense of unity occurs that can be called love or spirituality in action.

#### QUESTIONS

- How do we find connectedness and build a purposeful unity?
- How do you hear the inner heart of another person?
- What are the universal dreams of all human beings?

### 3RD... INTERCONNECTEDNESS FOR GLOBAL UNITY

The third step is based on the recognition that there is a global community of young people who are waiting to connect with you. All are the new leaders of this evolving consciousness for social change. They share a growing awareness of how to live as stewards of all of life. From this new consciousness, there will be new models of how to live in our world and, more importantly, there will be a sustainable future for humanity.

#### QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to live as a spiritual activist?
- How do we work collaboratively so that all voices are heard?
- How do we link together to develop a movement of conscious change?

Worldview

## Worldview: Global Ethics in All Religions

Our authentic self knows that it exists in connection to all that is, but, in fear, we may see ourselves as separate and vulnerable. Any time we do harm to those whom we falsely believe to be separate from us, we actually harm the intricate web of life in which we are embedded. This is known as the Law of Cause and Effect: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Whether recognized by religion or science, the law still exists. Every religious faith offers this basic ethic to guide each choice we make in how we behave towards others.

**Baha'i Faith** — Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself. *Baha'u'llah, Gleanings*

**Hinduism** — This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you. *Mahabharata 5:1517*

**Buddhism** — Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. *Udana-Varga 5.18*

**Confucianism** — One word which sums up the basis of all good conduct: loving-kindness. Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself. *Confucius, Analects 15.23*

**Taoism** — Regard your neighbour's gain as your own gain, and your neighbour's loss as your own loss. *T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien, 213–218*

**Sikhism** — I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed, I am a friend to all. *Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299*

**Christianity** — In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets. *Jesus, Matthew 7:12*

**Unitarianism** — We affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. *Unitarian principle*

**Native Spirituality** — We are as much alive as we keep the earth alive. *Chief Dan George*

**Zoroastrianism** — Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself. *Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29*

**Jainism** — One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated. *Mahavira, Sutrakritanga*

**Judaism** — What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary. *Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a*

**Islam** — Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself. *The Prophet Muhammad, Hadith*

*The Golden Rule as expressed in thirteen traditions. The widely reproduced poster of these texts is the work of Scarboro Missions, Toronto.*



## Becoming a Global Citizen

As we begin the journey inwards, we also work outwards from the principles towards becoming a global citizen. It is the process of seeing the whole or being holistic. We move from the principles to serving the collective good, from a world of competition to a world of mutual collaboration.

The shift from what exists to what is possible involves the choice to live in a different way.

### VALUES: OLD VERSUS NEW

Competition Collaboration Materialism Non-attachment and Nature Violence Compassion  
Separation Wholeness Dualism Unity Conflict Peace Nationalism Global Understanding  
Reason or Logic Imagination Knowledge Wisdom from Within Domination Empowerment  
Cultural Multicultural Competition Collaboration

### QUESTIONS

- Can you think of examples where you have seen the shift from the old values to what we consider the new global values?
- How do we live based on the awareness of our unity and interdependence?
- What are some commonly shared values in the fields of the environment, economics, or religion?
- What are steps you could take to foster peace in the world?

Japan Meeting: Building A New Civilization



*Japan Meeting: Building A New Civilization.*

## Pledge for a Culture of Peace

We invite you to join other peace-builders around the world who have signed the UNESCO Manifesto for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence, initiated by a group of Nobel Laureates. This is a very real way to build the recognition that we are all part of a growing body of individuals heading for the "tipping point" that will shift the tide of civilization. Keeping a copy of the pledge on your desk or wall can serve as a reminder of the global community we are seeking to establish. Additional information can be found on the UNESCO website at [unesco.org](http://unesco.org).

Because the year 2000 must be a new beginning, an opportunity to transform - all together - the culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence, Because this transformation demands the participation of each and every one of us, and must offer young people and future generations the values that can inspire them to shape a world based on justice, solidarity, liberty, dignity, harmony and prosperity for all, Because the culture of peace can underpin sustainable development, environmental protection and the well-being of each person, Because I am aware of my share of responsibility for the future of humanity, in particular to the children of today and tomorrow,

I PLEDGE in my daily life, in my family, my work, my community, my country and my region, to:

Respect All Life Respect the life and dignity of each human being without discrimination or prejudice;

Reject Violence Practice active non-violence rejecting violence in all its forms: physical, sexual, psychological, economical and social, in particular towards the most deprived and vulnerable such as children and adolescents;

Share with Others Share my time and material resources in a spirit of generosity to put an end to exclusion, injustice and political and economic oppression;

Listen to Understand Defend freedom of expression and cultural diversity, giving preference always to dialogue and listening without engaging in fanaticism, defamation and the rejection of others;

Preserve the Planet Promote consumer behavior that is responsible and development practices that respect all forms of life and preserve the balance of nature on the planet;

Rediscover Solidarity Contribute to the development of my community, with the full participation of women and respect for democratic principles, in order to create together new forms of solidarity.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

# PART TWO — REFLECTION: INNER QUEST FOR THE AUTHENTIC SELF

---

"The moral code of conduct and practice of meditation for mankind is the most effective shortcut by which we can restore the human mind to the inner source of happiness. Through moral conduct and meditation the mind can gain access to the intuitive wisdom that is the source of pure intention. The influence of pure intention will allow our natural virtues to manifest themselves for the benefit of the world around us as virtuous deeds and words. In a nutshell, inner peace is the foundation of world peace that we have for so long overlooked. If only the people of the world could experience inner happiness and peace for themselves – from the hearts and minds of each man to his fellows, peace could spread throughout the world – the true and lasting peace which we all await." — Ping Worakate, a youth from Thailand from Dhammakaya, a youth Buddhist group

"Prayer to me is when one goes deep sea diving with the thoughts. Prayer is a heightened awareness that there is a greater force out there and that we are having a 'conversation' with that force or God or the Universe." — Colin Lee of Australia, youth leader

## Meditation

There are many books and teachings on meditation. Our hope is that you will find a way of approaching the sacred that resonates with you.

Meditation is a means of quieting the mind — the wild monkey of thoughts that never stops. It involves going beyond the mind to connect with the compassion of the heart, which transcends the personal in order to reach the infinite. In meditation we merge with the vastness of the universe beyond our identification with our personalities or limiting beliefs. In this space, all things are possible and our hearts begin to beat with the global heart. We merge into a sense of oneness with all creation, into an awareness of the primal source from which we all arise. In this space we cross the boundary between the finite and the infinite, the real and the potential.

If we learn to meditate daily and in a regular manner, then our minds will quiet and lead us to a deeper understanding and higher consciousness. Meditation offers the potential to know our inner self and feel the interdependent connections of all life. In this state, we recognize that we are really one human family.

Science and spirituality have been seen as separate, even contradictory, but today with tremendous advances in technology, the two fields are merging with very exciting outcomes. Quantum physics reveals that the materialistic world view only scratches the surface of a reality that is pregnant with possibility and much more in keeping with the ancient mystical teachings.

## CONCENTRATION OF THE MIND

What is called meditation is a state of being, and not a thought process. The first requisite for a proper meditation is to reach a state of concentration of the mind. Once the mind is concentrated on only one thing, the state of meditation can be reached, where the subject who concentrates and the object on which the mind is concentrated become one.

## MINDFULNESS

In mindfulness meditation, we focus all our attention on whatever task is at hand, releasing all other thoughts. Since the various meditation techniques are often associated with religious or sectarian traditions, the term mindfulness is often more acceptable in secular settings, such as schools and businesses.

## MANTRA

Meditation can be understood as closing off our focus on the external world and bringing undivided attention to the stillness and vastness within. Here we move into realms where words are not sufficient. The Hindu and Buddhist traditions often utilize a mantra, or the repetition of sacred sounds to focus the attention and quiet the endless chatter of the ego mind. By repeating "OM MANI PADME HUM" or "OM NAMAH SHIVAYA," we sink deeper into the silent universe within, the reflection of the vast and mysterious universe without. We gain access to the state of pure being that can be called love.

There is a place inside ourselves that is the center of peace. When we learn to access this space within us, nothing can hurt us, none can affect or offend us. And if the whole of humanity lived from this space all the time, war would not be a way to resolve our differences.

**Exercise: Observing the Breath** The simplest meditation practice involves watching the breath, silently observing the rise and fall of inspiration, allowing the thoughts that arise to drift away. We learn to observe our thoughts without becoming attached to the emotions and judgments that they produce, returning always to the vastness within. As we explore the depth of stillness, we observe the beauty within the moment, choosing peace instead of turmoil, choosing love instead of fear, accepting what is with gratitude.

**Exercise: Deep Breathing** Deep, rhythmic breathing is the easiest and most reliable way to begin getting in touch with our inner, peaceful selves. Whenever you breathe in or hold your breath, you increase tension in your body. As you breathe out, your body automatically releases tensions and, in the pause before you inhale, relaxes naturally. Deep breathing takes concentration and practice to be effective. First find a quiet place, get comfortable and close your eyes. Now, pay attention to your breathing. Follow your breath as you breathe in... and as you breathe out... in through the nose and out through the mouth. Breathe in for a count of 4... Hold your breath for a count of 8... Exhale for a count of 12.

**Exercise: Breath of Peace** Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Buddhist monk, offers the following meditation, which can be done while sitting or walking: As I breathe in, I breathe in

compassion and kindness; as I breathe out, I breathe out peace to the whole world. Practice saying "peace" as many times as you can on the out-breath.

### QUESTIONS

- What practice do you use to quiet the mind?
- Is it an individual practice or group one?
- How do you understand the NOW moment? What is presence to you, and how do you cultivate presence?

## Prayer

You are more than what you think you are. You are the inner self exploring life to its fullest. So do not define from outside, but look inside to find what it is you want and how you want to create it.

Prayer is a means of invoking and evoking, asking for what we want based on personal or global need. We ask and so we receive. The intention of what we want creates an aura of the potential to create that response, whether from God or angels or energetic intention. You are what you seek. You create your own reality. You are your own destiny.

Prayer is a tradition that is familiar to many, though it may take many different forms. Prayers can be readings from a sacred book, repetitive phrases said on beads, chants, hymns, etc. Prayers can be shouted out in crowded places of worship or whispered in the quiet of our lonely hearts. Whatever the tradition, prayer offers a way to connect with the sacred and bring peace inside our heart.

### EXERCISE

Find a prayer, poem, or quote that inspires, that leads you to feel a step closer to the Infinite. It could be from your religious heritage or another tradition. Repeat it each morning as you awaken and each night as you go to sleep.

### QUESTION

- What was the effect of this pursuit of inner prayer?

Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi

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

## Guided Visualization

Visualization, or guided imagery, is another way to listen to our inner voice. When used as a relaxation technique, it involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether a tropical beach, a favorite childhood spot, or a quiet forest. You can do a visualization exercise on your own, with a facilitator's help, or with an audio recording.

### EXERCISE

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Take three deep cleansing breaths, in through your nose and out through your mouth. Imagine you are in a very restful place... perhaps a special place from your childhood any place where you can relax and feel at ease (Pause). Picture it as vividly as you can. What do you see around you? (Pause) What do you hear? Are there perhaps insects or birds singing or any sounds at all? Are they near you or off in the distance? (Pause) Breathe deeply through your nose. What do you smell, perhaps flowers, the scent of pine trees, or food cooking in the distance? (Pause). Next to you is a picnic basket that you brought along with you. Open it and eat your favorite food first. How does it taste... sweet, sour, refreshing? (Pause). Before you leave, lie down, relax, and be mindful of all that is around you. (Pause). As you sit up, you notice someone walking towards you. The person hands you an envelope. You open it and read the letter inside. How does the message make you feel? Now gently open your eyes. Take a deep breath. Then take a few minutes to sketch your relaxing spot and reflect on the message.

### QUESTIONS

- How do you feel?
- Was there any part of the exercise that was stressful to you?
- Is there anything you would like to share from the experience?
- Can you think of any situations where visualization might be helpful to you?

A natural altar can sanctify your processes. Collect your stones and light a candle. — Joaquin of Peru





*A natural altar can sanctify your processes. Collect your stones and light a candle. — Joaquin of Peru*

## **Ho'oponopono: Self-Examination for Cleaning Perceptions**

Over the years, scholars and educators have examined many models of change and character building. In the past, self-esteem was found to be the primary indicator of whether a human being would be successful. But when looking at the potential creative power of the inner self, Ho'oponopono offers a very different perspective. Based on an ancient Hawaiian healing tradition, Ho'oponopono was redeveloped as a model of self-cleaning by Dr. Ihaleakala Hew Len. According to this practice, whatever we see in the outer world is a projection of what we hold inside, based on our many experiences. If we are able to clean our perceptions inside, then the outside will alter itself. Keep on cleaning until the light shines through you.

Ho'oponopono is composed of three elements: repentance, forgiveness, and transformation. It is based on the premise that what you see in another is also in you, so that all healing is self-healing. No one else has to do the process but you.

## EXERCISE

Identify a situation that is presently giving you difficulty. Example: A longstanding issue has existed between a sibling and yourself.

Begin the healing process by going inside and feel like you are cleaning out your mis-perceptions. Say, "I'm sorry" and "Please forgive me." You say this to acknowledge that something — without knowing what it is — has gotten into your body/mind system. You're not asking the Divine to forgive you; you're asking yourself to forgive you. As you forgive yourself, your perception of your anger, the other's anger and the disagreement changes.

Next say, "Thank you" to yourself and then say, "I love you." When you say, "Thank you," you are expressing gratitude. You are showing your faith that the issue will be resolved for the highest good of all concerned. The "I love you" gets you unstuck and flowing again. It reconnects you to the Clear Light of who YOU are. This helps you get to the "zero state," the state of pure love. Whether you call this Divine or call it Self, it is pure.

You no longer see the other person as you saw her or him before. You are free inside of yourself to redefine the relationship. The other person experiences this and becomes free to be other than what she or he was.

You may be inspired to take action or perhaps do nothing. If you aren't sure about it, use this same healing method on your confusion. When you are clear, you'll know what to do.

## QUESTIONS

- Was the problem you outlined at the beginning of this exercise similar to any other repeating problems of your past?
- Did you gain any insights?

## EXERCISE

Try the Ho'oponopono technique with an issue that is affecting the world. Here is an example offered by Masaru Emoto, the Japanese author of Messages from Water, in May of 2010, when there was a vast oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico:

"Now let's give energy of love and gratitude to the waters and all the living creatures in Mexico Gulf by praying like this:

To the water, whales, dolphins, pelicans, fish, shellfish, plankton, corals, algae and all creatures in our Gulf of Mexico,

I apologize. Please forgive me. Thank you. I love you."

## QUESTIONS

- Can you think of other situations that might be addressed using Ho'oponopono?
- How do you think this exercise could help you in your present work?

Resource: [www.hooponoponohelp.com](http://www.hooponoponohelp.com)



To ask yourself and others as you go deeper: Do I experience joy in my work? When do I feel most happy at work? How often? How does it relate to the challenges and effort I put in? How can I increase my sense of joy? Do others benefit as a result of my work? What are the direct benefits? What are the indirect benefits? How can I increase the benefits to others? What do I learn at work? In what practical ways is my work a learning experience? In what personal ways am I learning? In what spiritual ways am I learning? How can I increase my learning at work? How do I help others learn at work? In what practical ways do I help others learn? In what personal ways do I help others learn? In what spiritual ways do I help others learn? How can I help others learn more? How is my work benefiting generations to come? In what ways is my work supporting the needs of the young people today? How does my work contribute to the development of future generations? How can I strengthen this contribution? How is my work evolving? How am I helping my work to evolve and improve? Isira, Spiritual Teacher from Australia [www.isira.com](http://www.isira.com)

## HeartMath: Heart-Mind Unity

Even in our modern culture with its emphasis on thinking processes and the rational mind, the wisdom of the heart has always been acknowledged. As Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince" said, "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye." What is new is that we can now study the heart's wisdom scientifically. Researchers at the Institute of HeartMath have determined that the electrical power of the heart is 60 times greater than that of the brain. The heart's electromagnetic signal affects the brain, and one person's heart frequency can actually affect another person's brain activity. Have you ever walked into a room and felt positive or negative vibes? This could be why.

The heart's rhythm, the heart rate variability (HRV), is a kind of intelligent language that affects every aspect of the body, including the brain. Negative emotions like fear, anger and frustration produce an incoherent HRV. Positive emotions like love, acceptance and appreciation produce coherent patterns in our heart rate variability (HRV). When the mind is operating in harmony with the heart, the effect is a low- frequency/high-amplitude coherent wave. If, in contrast, the mind is not operating in harmony with the heart, it produces an incoherent wave form.

According to this theory, the heart "links us to a higher intelligence where spirit and humanness merge." Coherence in our hearts is brought about by feelings of altruism, compassion and forgiveness (emotional states that psychologists call the qualia). Caring for others affects the immune system and the autonomic nervous system.

A coherent energy system is one free of the patterns of dammed-up thoughts and emotions. A coherent system is one in which all sources of intelligence are under the direction of a single, unifying, central principle — the heart — which is the vehicle for deeper understanding. A coherent energy system says, "Yes!" to everything life has to offer, with total and unconditional acceptance.

Coherence can be cultivated in a community of practice. This way of relating to one another is a starting point to the fulfillment of our human promise. Without this kind of gathering and the clarity it provides, there can be no nourishment, no grace, or possibility beyond the current world chaos. This is an invitation to look to the heart for healing and wisdom. Recognize each other, link up, and hold fast to the dream of a better world. Shift how we relate to one another. Learn to appreciate our common source as well as our vast difference. Be transparent and honest. Then watch what happens.

First, there are many more neural pathways running from the heart to the brain (afferent) than the other way (efferent). The heart, in fact, has its own brain — some 40,000 neurons and support cells whose arrangement resembles the cortex. Published research demonstrates that our heart-brain can learn, remember and sense. It secretes hormones that strongly affect our behaviors. Some of the nerve ganglia in the heart receive information directly from the skin — making it physically possible, it seems, for someone to literally touch our hearts. Other nerves in the heart run directly to the small muscles in our faces, making it hard to keep the content of our hearts hidden. But signals run the other way, too. Studies have shown that putting on

a big smile, even a fake one, shifts our being (through the heart) from anxiety or grief towards joy.

Our head-centered culture has focused on the human mind the negative things we find there... such as anger and fear. Instead, we can take advantage of the strong impact that positive emotions have on our well being to create coherence in our HRV that can override stress hormones and lead to good health.

There are techniques we can learn to access our heart's intelligence. The first step is to pay attention to our hearts, and the simplest way to do that is to sit still, feel the heartbeat, and then imagine breathing through the heart. Imagine (with your heart) someone or something that you love, and use your breath to "lock in" the good feeling that this someone or something brings you. In this state, your HRV is coherent. Good things are happening in your body, and you're sending good vibes to others. With practice, we can spend more time in this healthy state, which is the state that wisdom traditions have long taught us. Now science is proving its effectiveness.

## **EXERCISE**

Think of a time in your life when you felt deep anger or violence. (After this stage one's heart rate is erratic.) Close your eyes. Go inside your heart and feel appreciation for a happy time in your life. (At this point the heart beat becomes more stable.) Ask your heart what it has to say about your problem. Listen to your heart.

## **QUESTIONS**

- Can you see it differently?
- Do you feel differently about it now?

Resource: [www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)

"I believe spirituality is the key to harmony and oneness. It is a way to overcome our fears, doubts and limits. Because spirituality to me, is reaching into one's divine self and realizing what life is all about. Like no clouds could ever harm or violate the sun, I believe that no experiences, thoughts or action could ever harm or violate the deep soul within. Therefore I feel it is our mission to reach out and awaken all the beautiful souls. And from there we can all start acting towards peace and oneness." — Yuka Saionji, youth leader from the Goi Peace Foundation, Japan

## Deep Dialogue: Knowing Consciousness

Deep Dialogue is another technique to build our awareness of how to go beyond the ego into a state of mutual truth of higher insight. When we really speak from our hearts with the insight of our minds connected, then we no longer use our ego to prove ourselves right and others wrong, but rather build to unite — to find a deep place of union where all paths meet. The manner in which you do this in writing is to put double brackets around the words that are not meant to come from your ego, but rather are expressions of an inner truth that you have been seeking and wish to share, such as ((we are one)).

Here is a sample quote from Dr. Ashok Gangadean of Haverford University, who pioneered this technique:

"((As you know for me the "technology of consciousness" or how we are using our mind, our mind operating process, is key for ((spirituality in action)). Are we lodged in /egomental/ practice and habits, or are we being ((mindful in this moment))? The Buddhist example of ((mindful use of hands)) as a deep-dialogue process turns on mind-shifting from /egomental/ consciousness to ((deep dialogue = holistic = integral = heads up awareness in this moment)). Making this ((mindful presence)) a ((habit of life)) is the key for me of ((spirituality as action)). I link the ((deep dialogue)) dynamic with ((mindfulness in the moment))...which is ((global spirituality))."

Exercise: Free Writing Free Writing is based on a Buddhist practice of keeping the hand in motion as it connects with the heart. Ask yourself what is your goal in life and what is your personal gift — and then write about this for ten minutes. Never stop, always keeping the hand moving. When you need to think, then write "I don't know" but keep moving the hand to keep the heart active. When you have finished, put double brackets around the thoughts you think that are of higher consciousness. This tells you what is from the inner you and what might be your mind. Share this with your friends.

### QUESTIONS

- How do you write differently in a free flowing writing?
- What new ideas came to you?
- Can you double bracket words that are from inspiration versus single bracket words that are from mind?

Resource: [www.awakeningmind.org](http://www.awakeningmind.org)

# PART THREE — CONNECTION: DEEP COMPASSION FOR THE OTHER

---

"Connect youth who live oceans apart by awakening the realization that we are all related to one another and the Earth." — Peter Lukwiya of Uganda, youth leader

"We must strengthen the dialogue between the generations, between today's and tomorrow's decision makers." — Princess Ogechi Ukaga of Nigeria, youth leader

## Transforming Relationships

Next we become conscious of how we can best express ourselves in the world for the highest good. Transforming conflict, using language that recognizes the other, appreciating without judging can take place when we no longer judge our self. We begin to act as part of a whole, building oneness rather than asserting the separate ego. A sense of union occurs that can be called love or spirituality in action.

### WE SEEK RELATIONSHIPS IN WHICH WE

! Come from love versus fear ! Seek unity versus separation ! Use harmlessness in words ! Act in a spirit of cooperative integration ! Discover leaderless leadership ! Go to selflessness, not ego ! Accept diversity and weave the tapestry of beauty

"Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." — His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama

Even when we realize that we are all interconnected, we still need to learn to create relationships with others that reflect our intention to build unity and harmony with others. This section will introduce communication skills that enable individuals to connect in empowering partnerships.

Mayan Elder in Guatemala teaching as we listen. Deep listening is listening with the heart to both what is said and what is left unspoken.



*A Mayan elder in Guatemala teaching as we listen. Deep listening is listening with the heart to both what is said and what is left unspoken.*

## Listening to Understand

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LISTEN?

Hearing someone speak is not the same as listening to them with compassion and acceptance. When we listen, we open ourselves to what the other is saying rather than on what we are thinking. We try to understand rather than judge.

One of the greatest gifts we can give to one another is to listen to each other with respect, without interruption.

### REFLECTION

Think of a recent argument you were involved in. Perhaps you were listening to the person in front of you, but at the same time you were thinking, "You're wrong! It didn't happen that way! Let me tell you how it happened!" Watch yourself the next time a friend comes to you with a problem. Watch how quickly you want to jump in, give him advice, tell him what to do or give him your ideas.

When we are able to trust that someone is willing to listen patiently without judgment, we are able to open our hearts to the miracle of being healed of our hurt, anger and insecurity. In an instant, the pain and suffering inside can be released. Better yet, we can find the courage to

face the lessons that our experiences bring, rather than avoiding them through blame or denial.

## EXERCISE

Find a partner. One person will speak about a personal problem for ten minutes while the other listens. Either do this in total silence or with comments that clarify or reflect the meaning back to the person speaking. Switch roles and debrief.

## QUESTIONS

- You may ask: How did that make you feel? I can see you are upset. Tell me more about what happened. What would you like to see in the future?
- How did it feel to be listened to?
- Was there anything the listener said that made you feel understood?
- Was there anything that made you feel uncomfortable?

## Nonviolent Communication: Speaking Skills

One of the greatest challenges to peace-building is the difficulty of communicating in a way that brings people together, even when they are in conflict. Nonviolent Communication (NVC), developed over the last 20 years by Marshall Rosenberg and his trainees, strengthens our ability to respond compassionately to others and to ourselves. Through its emphasis on deep listening — to ourselves as well as others — NVC fosters respect, empathy, and a mutual desire to give from the heart. The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative. These skills emphasize personal responsibility for our actions and the choices we make when we respond to others.

NVC guides us to reframe how we express ourselves by focusing on observations (free of evaluations), feelings (straight from the heart), needs, and requests (expressed clearly in positive action language). The process of NVC encourages us to focus on what we are observing, why we are each feeling as we do, what our underlying needs are, and what each of us would like to have happen.

By observing ourselves, we learn to hear our own deeper needs and those of others, and to identify and clearly articulate what we are wanting in a given moment. When we focus on clarifying what is being observed, felt and needed, rather than on judging, we discover the depth of our own compassion.

Nonviolent Communication contains nothing new: all that has been integrated into NVC has been known for centuries. The intent is to remind us about what we already know—about how we humans were meant to relate to one another. By dealing with major blocks to communication such as judging and blaming, we learn to express our feelings without attacking. This minimizes the likelihood of defensive reactions in others. The skills help us make clear requests. They help us receive critical and hostile messages without taking them



personally, giving in or losing self-esteem. These skills will be useful with your family, friends, supervisors, co-workers, and in your own internal dialogues.

Nonviolent Communication can dramatically improve relationships by helping people understand the needs of others without compromising their own needs. It gives people tools to express their real feelings and needs openly and honestly, yet without blame or criticism. Even in situations of long-standing conflict or hostility, the NVC process can open new doors to compassionate connection and action.

Using "I" statements, give your perception of the situation. When we are angry or upset, we often blame others for our problems. It is important to take responsibility for our feelings and to acknowledge that all we can ever know is our own perception. Realize that the other person's perception will be different. When we avoid blaming others and accusing them, we are far more likely to transform the conflict. Allow for different points of view.

Here are some basic ground rules of NVC: - Agree to Work it Out. Brainstorm solutions, choosing one that meets the needs of everybody involved.

- Identify the Needs of the Individuals. By just asking the simple question, "What do you need here?" you can clarify if there really is a conflict at all.
- Reframe the Concern so it is more acceptable.
- Use Active Listening, which is listening with the heart, to help diffuse hostility.

## EXERCISE

Think of a recent argument. Identify the personal needs of both parties and what they really wanted to have happen. Play the different roles.

## QUESTIONS

- How would the argument have been different with NVC?
- In what circumstances could you use NVC?
- How does each person feel when his or her needs are being met?
- What requests did you make?

Resource: [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)

## From Conflict Resolution to Conflict Transformation

To go beyond conflict means instead of looking at a problem as a difficulty, we see it as an opportunity to find a means to come to a new understanding. It is not based on the issues, but rather that what is most important is how to get a better relationship. It looks at not only the question of the present crisis, but rather the system that creates the difficulty and how to rearrange that systemic thinking so it works for everybody. We accept that there is conflict, but we attempt to look at a problem not from the level where it occurs but rather from the bigger picture. Then we can see how each viewpoint is intertwined as a unit and not two separate issues.

For instance, in the Palestinian versus Israeli crisis each side only wants the same: peace and security. So once we recognize this, then we would encourage the parties involved to be willing to start from the universal rather than fight for their individual needs.

All our problems are our creation. All our problems have solutions. If we are to unite as one, then nothing is ever outside of us. In this state of knowing, we form a world of universal ethics to abide by. This is our choice — let it be yours also. Freedom is in knowing you are able to choose your own behaviors. Choose wisely.

### Conflict Transformation

“There is no human being who does not experience conflict. The difference lies in the way each of us addresses conflict when it arises. Conflict is an opportunity to come to a new understanding. At its core we can understand conflict as a contradiction of perceptions, values, feelings, principles, interests or positions.

Conflict transformation helps each party recognize the interdependence of human life and see “if you are part of the problem, you are also part of the solution.” Conflict transformation helps to build a new, shared vision of the future with the understanding that it is best to aim for a win-win resolution in order to have a sustainable peace. There is no more powerful wisdom as in the African tradition of UBUNTU, which means, “I am who I am because you are who you are.”

— Corina Simon, youth leader from Patir Organization, Romania

Conflicts often arise and are based on seeing the identified concern differently. It is in the totality that there are answers. We all know conflict resolution as a means of reaching compromise. Conflict Transformation is looking at the whole and the relationship to reach a collective solution.

## An Elephant and the Blind Men

Once upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, “Hey, there is an elephant in the village today.” They had no idea what an elephant was. They decided, “Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway.” All of them went where the elephant was. Every one of them touched the elephant.

“Hey, the elephant is a pillar,” said the first man, who touched his leg.

“Oh no! It is like a rope,” said the second man, who touched the tail.

“Oh no! It is like a thick branch of a tree,” said the third man, who touched the trunk of the elephant.

“It is like a big hand fan,” said the fourth man, who touched the ear of the elephant.

“It is like a huge wall,” said the fifth man, who touched the belly of the elephant.

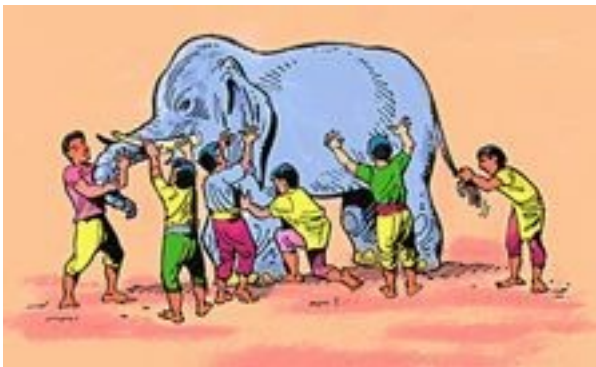
"It is like a solid pipe," said the sixth man, who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue about the elephant and every one of them insisted that he was right. It looked like they were getting agitated.

A wise man was passing by and he saw this. He stopped and asked them, "What is the matter?" They said, "We cannot agree to what the elephant is like." Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like.

The wise man calmly explained to them, "All of you are right. The reason each one of you is telling it differently is because each one of you touched a different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features you described."

"Oh!" everyone said. There was no more fighting. They felt happy that they were all right.



*An elephant and the blind men.*

## Conflict Transcendence

Conflict Transcendence is beyond conflict resolution and beyond conflict transformation, rising above the situation into the totality of all that is. When we experience a conflict we normally dive into it as a reflection of our sense of what is right and what is wrong. But truly when we can rise above the conflict and look down from a higher viewpoint, we see all the sides that are within it. Einstein told us that the only resolution to a problem is to go above it, that no problem can be solved on the level it was created. As spiritual seekers and spiritual activists, our goal is unity. To unify is not to understand, to compromise or to tolerate but rather to unite all aspects into their inherent oneness. To be one and know we are united means that when a conflict arises we realize that it is our own problem as well as that of the other. Because it is self-created, the only solution lies in realizing that both sides can be looked at as the dualities of life: to know a cloud is to be able to know the sun. The synthesis is that they are both aspects of the weather.

Our problems are part of the human condition, but we need not identify with the pieces or issues that are really expressing parts of a greater whole. As we begin to do this, then the need for an answer that fortifies a position dissolves. The issue begins to look like a pattern showing that we are universal human beings with cultures, religions and ideas. As this

universal human we can see from above that the problem is just an expression of our differences and within that is the essence of what is the same. Thus formulating a means to an answer becomes acknowledging we hold this sameness in our hearts, so that the external differences become mere minor concerns. We transcend the 'I' and become a 'WE,' and thus all parties are responsible for the solution.

### **EXERCISE**

Identify a problem with someone else. Discuss the problem as if it is an IT. Create an experience for all parties to feel the unity through meditation or self- expression. Look at the problem from inside out. Incorporate the problem into the WE arena. Discuss how the WE created the problem. Resolve to answer the problem as if it was created by you and not the other...since there is no other.

### **QUESTIONS**

- How were you able to see more than your view of a problem?
- How did you feel and was his different?
- Did your solution come out to be the same solution of the other person?

# PART FOUR — ACTION: INTERCONNECTEDNESS FOR GLOBAL UNITY

---

"Take action, start doing something, make the change and serve this world." — Christian Marx and Mark Conrad of the Philippines, youth leaders

"There is no greater peace than knowing that we are on the higher path of evolution and that we are fulfilling our mission upon the Earth by helping and caring for others; by being vessels of compassion wherever we go." — Karoline Buys of Colombia, youth leader

## Leadership as Service for the Greater Good

There is a global community of young people who await connection with you. All are the leaders of this evolving consciousness for social change. They share a growing awareness of how to live as stewards of all of life. From this new consciousness, there will be new models of how to live in our world and — more importantly — how to secure our human future.

His Holiness Shri Shri Shri Saidas Baba of India gave the following qualities of a true leader in a talk to the Second International Youth Leadership Conference of the Apeadu Peace Center in Ghana:

L Love E Energy A Acceptability D Discipline E Egolessness R Respect

### WHO IS A LEADER?

A leader is a person who has an idea and is willing to step forward. Look at the civil rights movement, look at the women's movement, and now look at the youth movement that is coming alive through pioneers of change. Leading takes conviction. Leading takes believing in yourself. Leading takes work, but it is all worthwhile if done from an inner drive for a better world. To serve with your life for a cause that is bigger than the little self is to have meaning and take the lead.

Who is a spiritually inspired leader? A spiritually inspired leader has done a great deal of inner reflection and has a deep sense of what his or her purpose is, as well as the need to manifest this into the world without following the pressures of society or the emotional needs of self. There is a willingness to step into the abyss... just knowing one step at a time what feels aligned with one's own destiny.

Who are you as a spiritual activist for peace-building? Each person is entitled to be a leader — a person who knows what is needed and steps into the inner plan of his or her own life. A spiritual activist is a person whose inner path leads to an alignment with what is needed for the greater society as a whole.

## Notes on Starting a Group

The time has come for you to prepare for the new responsibility of convening others. When you are the leader, on the one hand you must be clear about the direction you wish to move towards and not let the group get lost in circles of decisions and discussions, and yet on the other hand you must be open to change of direction and also input that may alter the outcome or require program adaptation. To allow for this, you must feel grounded in your goals for the program, as they must never change — it is the road there that may alter.

It is good to have a small planning group so that you have the benefit of a variety of ideas. This group comes together and discusses the goals of the program deeply before the group arrives. When you convene your group, place yourself and members of the planning group in different spots around the circle of participants. You are all the holders of the energy. It is not what you say that sets the tone, but rather your ability to vision and experience the totality. This means that each of you sits and observes, while guiding the discussion toward the goals of the program. You are like a painter or weaver, and the participants are working with you to create a harmonious tapestry.

Keep in mind that it is never about a particular person speaking, but rather about what is to emerge for the whole. You can see yourself as a antenna sending and receiving messages all the time. Thus, the intention of the goals will be set energetically and you will see the group coalesce into its full potential.

To facilitate means that you lead by hearing others and holding what they are saying and bringing closure to the group always. Leading laterally means informing the group of the program and setting the structure. You inspire and motivate and invite others to speak, keeping on topic and targeting the goal. At the beginning and end of each session, you review what is to occur and what has occurred and how this will lead to the next session. Everything has a reason.

When you have workshops, each one should be introduced in a way that shows the relevance to the broader conceptual model. Be clear about timing and support the speakers, allowing them to do it their way. Bring closure at the end.

Now, this is important: you are YOUTH — the YOUTH in charge. Adults often want to help by sharing their knowledge and wisdom, often setting a tone of being the known experts. This is YOUR meeting. Each adult, even if invited to be a workshop leader, is a guest. They can sit in circle with you, hold energy for the group, offer their skills, or interject their thoughts as a participant who may be an expert in the field. Their presence can very important, as they bring credibility to your work. But do not allow them to direct the process. Please be aware that well-meaning adults who want to share may take away from the discovery of new models that could emerge from the evolving consciousness of youth. Each generation to come has more available consciousness. Adults are the gatekeepers from the old asking youth no longer to imitate what has come before but rather to encourage the new.

After each session or workshop, invite those who want to join the planning group to meet with you and review where you are, whether you are aligned with the goals you set, how the sessions are going, whether the work is gender balanced, whether there are individuals who might be too overpowering, cultural questions, etc. Then you can revamp the schedule and next activities of your plan accordingly. It is never about personalities, but rather about arriving at a smooth, harmonious and effective process.

Meet regularly with your planning team. It is best to start this planning meeting with a short prayer or meditation to bring the small group into harmony as one voice and not many voices with strong opinions. Remember that the goal is to get CLEAR and go on to the next session naturally.

Always be prepared so that you are not stressed as you share in each responsibility. Try sharing responsibilities instead of delegating them, as this is your group's collective work and each one of you knows the others' strengths and roles.

Groups often experience certain phases as they grow. They begin in the joy and peace of creativity, but after a while they may move into some altercation and friction. Then finally the group finds its stability and harmony. This is known as "forming, storming and norming." Never fear, but simply walk with the changes. Keep your eyes on the outcome and see the group as a whole, as an organism finding its direction.

Keep good notes. You can take turns, asking for a reporter in each group. Exchange times for leadership so it is not about who is leading but rather what is getting done.

ENJOY and spread JOY; others will feel this. In the end the change we want to see is the love we feel for each other.

You will be amazed by how much you have accomplished. At the conclusion of your project, make sure you have a written report or post your achievement on a website.

## **Guiding Practices of a Group**

When you are ready to express your leadership by forming a group, you can bring your principles, practices and vision for action into actualization along with others by forming a group with a shared intention. This group may be a club at school, a youth group within your religious community, or a chapter or affiliate of an existing organization expressing high ideals of service.

A powerful way to structure your group is around the experience of Reflection, Connection and Action.

Connection

YOUR GROUP Action



## REFLECTION

Reflection, about the individual journey that we take to awaken our gifts, can also support the foundation of your group. You can begin your meetings with a time of silent reflection or soft music to encourage everyone to come into a unified field of intention. A member of the group may volunteer to lead a spiritual opening, or you may want to take turns. You may also want to observe a few minutes of silent meditation before discussing issues of particular importance.

Connection, which bridges gaps to build unity, is essential to group coherence. Practices such as icebreakers, learning about one other's faiths and religious traditions, or paired sharing can begin to help people feel connected. Sometimes, a retreat or a day of fun serves as a healthy break from the routine of meetings, increasing the group's feeling of friendship and common purpose.

Action is how your group takes your joy from reflecting and connecting into the world. Simple and achievable projects that are based on the principles of spirituality can make a real impact on the world. This is not ordinary action, but Spiritual Activism.

## Lateral Leadership: The Leader as a Member of the Group

For us today it is no longer most appropriate to have one person totally in charge and others who do what is dictated by the person on top. We are learning that everyone counts, so everyone must have the ability to have a voice in decision making or in information gathering or in the expression of feelings. We learn that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This means that group work, if done well, can bring about more answers and greater possibilities than any one person could have imagined. Now this is not easy, as everyone needs to be present in their minds and hearts as well as in their commitment to the task at hand. But if this willingness is there, then things move smoothly and everyone enjoys the process, knowing the road to success is the road travelled together in a trusting manner for the greater good.

Acceptance: A Model for Group Decision Making Democracy can be a problematic method of decision making because when the majority rules there are winners and losers. Consensus builds on everyone's input, but it can take a long time for everyone to fully agree on what is being decided. What is needed is a new model that allows individuals to be heard and decisions to be made efficiently. A model that is useful within lateral governance is acceptance, which is a means to consent to a decision suggested by one member of the group that does not require full agreement. The person making the suggestion asks each person in the circle if he or she is able to accept the suggestion. This makes for quick rounds of voting to achieve group acceptance. If a member of the group truly does not find the suggested decision acceptable, then he or she can object and give reason for the objection, then propose an amendment or begin some further discussion. This is an efficient manner in which to run a meeting and have the group work cohesively as a unit, without waiting for consensus or having democracy rule.

## Circle Groups: Each Person Has a Say

The circle symbolizes unity, wholeness, and oneness in all cultures and since the time of our earliest ancestors has been used to bring people together to celebrate, to communicate and to solve conflicts. Today in our hurried world of responsibilities, commitments, and deadlines, many of us yearn for a sense of connectivity and authenticity in our lives. The circle calls, inviting us to slow down, to communicate with ourselves and with one another, and to connect with the natural wisdom of our communities.

When we gather in circle, we are all equals — there is no one authority to tell us how it should be. The circle encourages connectedness because we are able to see each person's face as he or she is speaking.

Circle processes encourage us to speak deeply and honestly about what is important, to listen with full presence even when we disagree with others, to respect all voices, and to seek collaborative solutions to our problems that are inclusive of the needs of all present.

In indigenous traditions, circles (sometimes called council) were used as a form of governance, conflict resolution and problem solving. A talking stick was used by Native American cultures to encourage listening in a deeper way than in ordinary conversations. Only the person holding the talking stick may speak, preventing the tendency to interrupt.

The guidelines of dialogue process are simple:

Open-Mindedness \* Acceptance \* Curiosity \* Discovery \* Sincerity \* Brevity

- Use "I" statements. Instead of reacting to or criticizing what others say, speak your own truth.
- Be brief.
- Maintain respect and appreciation for the other voices around the circle. You may be surprised to hear others say just what you are thinking!

As the Circle Keeper or facilitator, you have the responsibility to be sure that the group agrees to the guidelines and that they are followed.

Exercise: Leading a Circle Group Everyone sits in a circle. The Circle Keeper is responsible for the following:

Center: Place something beautiful in the center of the circle. Intentions: Listen from the heart, speak from the heart, speak spontaneously, speak truthfully.

Opening: Open the circle with a few words of welcome. You may light a candle or ask for a volunteer to do so. You may offer a poem or a bit of inspirational writing for the circle to respond to, or set a theme for the meeting. Beginning: "We're now in council where we're going to really listen to each other." Explain guidelines and ask for agreement. Talking Stick: Provide an object to serve this function. Explain that only the person holding it may speak. They also have the option of "passing," as the talking stick travels around the circle. Focus: Explain the purpose of the meeting. An example would be to say, "The focus for our circle is

to share what brought us here and our hopes and vision for the group.” Facilitation: Give everyone a chance to be heard. Honor everyone’s contribution. Offer your opinions as little as possible, rather synthesizing what others have said. Closing: Have some ritual or statement to acknowledge when the group is finished.

### QUESTION

- What does it mean to be the change you wish to see in the world?
- What is a spiritual action?
- How do you want the world to be ten years from now?

Resource: [www.ojaifoundation.org](http://www.ojaifoundation.org)

“To lead people, walk beside them... As for the best leaders, the people do not notice their existence. The next best, the people honor and praise. The next, the people fear; and the next, the people hate... When the best leader’s work is done the people will say, ‘We did it ourselves!’” Lao-Tzu

## Step-by-Step Facilitation

What does it mean to facilitate a group? Someone must offer to take on the role of bringing the group together in mind and spirit.

Everyone counts. When a group is working well together, it can bring about more answers and greater possibilities than any one person could ever have imagined. Facilitating a successful group is not an easy task, as it requires everyone being present in their minds and hearts as well as in their commitment to making a contribution. In Ken Hood’s “Step-By-Step” model, the key to excellent facilitation lies in asking the right questions.

### FACILITATOR’S JOB

Be certain that each member is heard. Assist the group by asking good questions, but not providing the answers. Be able to formulate:

- Focusing Questions (Broad questions, for example: what barriers exist in our community that keep it from being more inclusive to refugees?);
- Factual Questions (How many refugees live here? What countries do they come from?);
- Probing Questions (Could you describe what made you leave your country to move to the U.S.?);
- Clarifying Questions (You said that you wouldn’t want to go back to your country. What did you mean by that?).

### GROUP’S JOB

Take responsibility for good manners. Establish or agree to ground rules and periodically evaluate how well the group has adhered to its own rules.

## GROUP & FACILITATOR'S JOB TOGETHER

- 1) Come to a clear understanding of the challenge or problem.
- 2) Set out a plan.
- 3) Act on the plan.
- 4) Assess progress.
- 5) Reflect on plan.
- 6) Repeat the cycle of: plan, act, assess, and reflect.

Systems Thinking = Being able to see the connection between the parts and the whole. Being able to connect past events and future goals.

Emotional Intelligence = Being able to monitor and manage your own emotions so they do not interfere with the group's process.

Exercise: Working with a Focus Question Every facilitation session starts with a focus question (see above). Make sure it is not too broad. Write this question in large print at the top of a page or white board using a marker. Give an index card or small piece of paper to each person and ask them to write all the responses to the focus question they can think of in three or four minutes.

Rewarding Answers — the "whip-around" phase. Go around the group at least three times or until all answers have been shared.

Expanding Answers — Each person in turn expands on their initial response. They are asked to add any thought they might have about their first answers.

Summarizing — the stacking method. What are some of the issues talked about more than once? You may want to organize into smaller groups, then ask the participants to try to put the data into categories.

Questions for a Group: - How do youth create a movement? - How is a Youth Movement different from Spiritual Activism?

Resource: Ken Hood's manual, "Step-By-Step"

## Compassionate Listening

Cultivating compassion is learning the ability to live in the heart so as to experience the feelings of the other person. A person who takes this on as a personal practice increases the ability to suspend judgment and to "walk in the other person's shoes." This fosters the ideal of being harmless — not threatening to anyone — thus allowing for people to be themselves and share from their hearts. It is also important to express gratitude whenever possible and to practice forgiveness.

In a group setting, compassionate listening begins the possibility of communing together at a deeper level, finding understanding and trust that empowers the whole group.

## QUESTION

- How does one determine what to discuss in a group?
- What do you want to accomplish in the group meeting?
- What is your particular interest?

Resource: [www.compassionatelisting.org](http://www.compassionatelisting.org)

## World Café

A Café conversation is a creative process for leading collaborative dialogue, sharing knowledge and creating possibilities for action. It is based on seven design principles:

- Set the context
- Create a hospitable space
- Explore the questions that matter
- Encourage everyone's contribution
- Cross-pollinate and connect diverse perspectives
- Listen together for patterns, insights, and deeper questions
- Harvest and share collective discoveries

You begin your World Café by setting up the room with enough tables to accommodate your participants splitting into groups of six or eight. Have a question ready. Gather small groups at tables with the question you prepared, and make sure everyone understands the instructions. Ask each table to choose a "table host," who will stay at the original table when everyone else moves on.

Ring a bell to begin the conversations.

After a short time (perhaps ten minutes) for introductions and discussion of the question, ring the bell again to indicate that it is time to switch to a new table. Each time people switch, the "table host" gets new participants and shares the essence of that table's conversation thus far. The newcomers relate any threads that they are carrying from previous discussions and the conversation continues, deepening at each round. This enables everyone to know what each table group has said to that point.

After three or more rounds, the whole group gathers to share and explore emerging themes, insights and discoveries, which are captured on flipcharts or other means for making the collective intelligence of the whole group visible to all.

The meeting may end there, or further rounds of conversational exploration and inquiry may begin, with additional questions formed from the results.

## EXERCISE

Choose a question and convene a World Café.

## QUESTION

- How can we establish a spiritual youth platform that links young people around the world?

Resource: [www.co-intelligence.org](http://www.co-intelligence.org)

## Open Space

Open Space is a way to facilitate inspired meetings or events to create extraordinary outcomes. Over the last 20 years, it has proven to be a powerful self-organizing process that can get people and organizations going, getting more done than top-down, hierarchical processes.

To begin the process, the facilitator explains the theme and focus of the group work together, such as creating a club, planning a gathering or a service project, holding interfaith dialogue, etc., and invites participants to think of specific topics about which they want to hold discussions.

The facilitator then invites participants with a discussion topic to come to the center of the circle to announce what they would like to discuss and work on related to the theme. They may choose whatever they want to talk about — whatever has heart and meaning for them — around which they are willing to convene a 60-minute discussion group.

Those who want to create sessions come to the center, write down the topic that inspires them, announce it to the group and post it on the wall. After all topics have been posted, the facilitator announces the locations for the various groups and the space is opened.

Participants gather into groups and begin to talk, trade ideas and learn from one another. The focus is always on individual responsibility and personal action. For instance, if the topic is creating a group for spiritual activism, the focus is not just on rules, but on what we can do as individuals and what actions we want to accomplish. Each group should choose someone to be the note takers and someone to be the reporter. Then they may move on to their next group, and their next group, and so on — to whatever topic inspires them.

At the end of the Open Space, participants come back to the group to share what emerged in the small groups.

## THE BASICS

- Whoever comes is the right person. You don't need every person in the group, just whoever cares the most. And if you're the only one who comes, you might actually have some rich, focused quiet time for thinking and writing on that issue.
- Whatever happens is the only thing that could have, so let go of your expectations and work with whatever unfolds.
- Whenever it starts is the right time: creativity doesn't happen on a schedule.

- Whenever it's over, it's over. If you find a solution in twenty minutes, move on to the next group. If it takes two hours, keep the conversation rolling.

Be prepared to be surprised. Don't carry in your own agenda too tightly and by doing so miss some amazing thing that could come out of additional creative minds working on the same issue.

There is only one rule, called "The Law of Two Feet": if you are not learning or contributing in a session, you are required to get up and leave to join another session where you feel you'll be more useful and inspired.

### EXERCISE

- Experiment with Open Space — and see what happens.

### QUESTIONS

- What is youth spirituality?
- How does one bring out spirituality at youth meetings?
- What are ways to get more youth involved in action for a better world?

Resource: [www.openspaceworld.com](http://www.openspaceworld.com)

There is a blueprint that exists within humanity... a blueprint of a potential future that transcends and elevates all other possible futures. Every human being that walks this earth holds a piece of that magnificence in the Song of Their Heart. Each individual can take accountability and response- ability within the whole, dare to open their heart and let their individual being shine with the strength of a thousand suns.

Now is the time, more than ever, to dare to Sing our Heart's Song. Now is the time, more than ever, to answer our soul's call to the adventure. Now is the time, more than ever, to consciously create collective success, as humanity, as unity. This is the most exciting time in human history this time of immense paradox — of stress, change, crisis and beauty, all existing at once. It is time to begin unleashing the Song that lives and breathes us into being. It is time to enter our centers and impact through resonant causation by becoming and actioning our most treasured values. It's time for humanity to Sing its Highest Possible Symphony. — Oran Cohen of South Africa, youth leader

## Appreciative Inquiry

What are you really about, what does the group want and who does what? Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful tool that is used in organizational development worldwide, using systemwide dialogue through a process of appreciative interviews. Using the 4 D's — discovery, dream, design and destiny — AI recognizes the best in people and asks the whole group to come together and share their strengths and resources.

From A Positive Revolution in Change: Appreciative Inquiry by David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney.



Ap-pre'ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value. Synonyms: VALUING, PRIZING, ESTEEMING, and HONORING.

In-quire' (kwir), v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: DISCOVERY, SEARCH, and SYSTEMATIC EXPLORATION, STUDY.

Features of Appreciative Inquiry:

- Positive Thinking: Rather than beginning with a deficits-based analysis that focuses on problems and the past, we begin with an awareness of the group's strengths and the future the members envision together.
- Systems Thinking: Systems thinking requires more diversity and less hierarchy than is usual in a working meeting, and a chance for each person and stakeholder to be heard and to learn other ways of looking at the task at hand.
- Action Oriented: Because the whole system is involved, it is easier to make more rapid decisions, and to make commitments to action in an open way that everyone can support.
- Dialogue and Inquiry, not problem-solving, are the bases for communication. The intention is to collaborate and take responsibility for our perceptions and actions, avoiding the pitfall of blaming.
- Finding Common Ground, rather than conflict management, is the frame of reference. We honor differences and then discover areas for action where there is strong common ground.

Here is an example of the 4 D's at a meeting using Appreciative Inquiry to establish a National Peace Academy:

A meeting based on Appreciative Inquiry often begins by asking people to pair up with a partner whom they do not know well. In a given time frame (perhaps twenty minutes each), each one interviews the other. Then the pair returns to their table and each introduces the other to the group from what they learned in the Appreciative Interview.

An Appreciative Interview may also be held on a topic, such as personal experience with the issue of the larger group discussion. The results of the interview are reported back to the table, always by the listening partner. Someone is appointed to give a summary of what the table group discovered to the group at large.

Meetings convened in this manner often uncover a rich layer of relationship and experience that produces highly creative group thinking and cohesion.

## EXERCISE

Have the forming leaders of the group explain why they created the meeting. Let them share the focus of their intentions and dreams for the future. Then ask the group for discussion of

these concepts, starting with paired sharing. After this, see what topics emerge for breakout groups to form according to interests.

### QUESTIONS

- Since this group comes together and is planning for the future, then what is it that it wants to actually do and how do people actively commit to the roles needed to make it possible?
- What is the title of this work?
- Who does what?
- What is the vision and the mission?

Resource: [www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://www.appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)



*Consent decision making, after the Dynamic Governance summary.*

## Sociocracy

How do you run a new small organization so that everyone has a say and there is group leadership?

As your group forms and develops its basic vision, values and mission, perhaps through methods such as World Café, Open Space, and Appreciative Inquiry, you are likely to want to develop projects. Projects need organization and leadership. To manage those projects in ways that everyone enjoys, are efficient and really get things done, and honor everyone's spiritual paths, you may want to consider a method known as sociocracy. Like democracy, sociocracy is an egalitarian way of making decisions and organizing. Democracy means

governance by the “demos” — the general mass of people. In this model, some win and some lose. Sociocracy means governance by the “socios” — people who have a social relationship, like you and your friends.

Sociocracy has two aspects — a structural part and a decision-making part. The structure is based on organizing people around their projects. Each project should have its own circle of people dedicated to getting the project done. If you have several projects, you will want to have a support circle composed of people who support each project by handling finances, arrange for computers and places to meet, getting supplies, etc. Each circle meets together to set its own policies for how to carry out its work. The circle needs a leader to guide its day-to-day activities, a secretary to arrange agendas and keep meeting records, and a facilitator to run the circle meetings. The leader and the facilitator can be or need not be the same person.

There is one other structural consideration — an idea called “double linking.” If you have several project circles and a support circle, those circles will need to meet periodically as a general circle. It’s much more efficient to have a meeting of the day-to-day leaders of each of the circles plus an elected representative from each of the circles plus a general manager for all of your activities. The general manager gives day-to-day leadership to the circle leaders. The elected representatives are the so-called “double link.” They ensure that everyone’s voice is heard in an efficient way in overall decision-making.

A final note on structure: It is a good idea for you to form a “top circle.” A top circle (which can also be called a board) consists of the general manager, one or more persons elected as double link representatives from the general circle, and elders or experts in areas that concern you. For example, you might invite a spiritual leader, an expert on the environment, an expert on handling finances, and an expert on the local government. The top circle can help you make realistic plans, find resources, and avoid unpleasant surprises from your human and natural environment.

Sociocracy is a way of making decisions in circle meetings known as “consent decision making.” Consent means that no one has a major objection to a decision. It does not indicate that I agree, but rather I do not object. In consensus, I would need to agree, but in sociocracy, I affirm that I do not object — or, in other words, that I can accept the proposed decision. Sociocracy supports lateral leadership (see page 34).

When someone makes a proposal, everyone has a chance to ask questions to be sure they understand it. The meeting facilitator then asks each person in turn for their quick reactions to the proposal. These reactions give the person who made the proposal a chance to adjust or amend particular points that may not be clear. The facilitator then goes around the circle asking each person in turn if they have a paramount objection to the proposal. The facilitator is asking for consent to accept it as it is. If no one has an objection, then the facilitator announces that the decision is made. If there is a paramount objection, the facilitator leads the circle in a creative process, using “both-and” thinking, to resolve the objection.

Welcome any paramount objections. They are your best insurance that you will make a complete and wise decision about how to get your project done. As long as the circle stays focused on getting its project done, the paramount objection will not be a



*Electing a role by consent.*

block, but rather a starting point for creatively thinking, for figuring out, "Well then, how can we get the project done?"

## EXERCISE

Elect a facilitator using sociocracy as the process.

1. Discuss the job to be performed, the length of time the person will do the job, and any special qualifications.
2. Each person writes privately on a slip of paper: his or her name, the word "nominates" and then the name of the person he or she wants to nominate. If you want to nominate yourself, that is fine. Each person hands the slip of paper to the facilitator.
3. The facilitator looks at each slip of paper and asks the person for his or her reasons. For example, "Susan, you nominated George. Would you please tell us your reasons for doing so?"
4. After all slips of paper have been read and explained, the facilitator goes around to each person and asks if, based on the reasons given for each nomination, whether "you want to change your nomination?" Often, people will change their nomination because of the arguments other people offered.

5. After each person has had a chance to change his or her nomination, the facilitator carefully weighs all of the reasoning and decides whom to propose. "I am going to propose that we elect Mary because of reasons x, y, and z." The facilitator asks each person in turn whether he or she has a paramount objection to Mary, asking Mary herself last.
6. If there is no paramount objection, the facilitator announces the decision and the circle celebrates. If there is an objection, the facilitator leads the process of resolving that objection, then announces the decision — again a cause to celebrate.

In making a consent decision, the process of the facilitator going to each person in turn is called "a round." Rounds are important because they guarantee that each person's voice is heard — quiet people, loud people, shy people, not so smart people, very smart people — everyone. Asking for paramount objections rather than a majority vote means that the majority will not silence and ignore the minority. It guarantees that everyone's voice and each person's spirit is heard and joins in the decision.

### QUESTIONS

- Does the group feel that this is an effective means of making decisions?
- Can each person have a say and feel heard while a group decision is made?
- Does the decision making process go around efficiently and effectively within a short amount of time?

Resource: [www.socionet.us](http://www.socionet.us)

# PART FIVE — IT'S UP TO YOU

---

What does it mean to be an active global citizen and care for our world?

The time has come for each of us to see ourselves as relevant leaders and work together with others to change our world. The famous quote from Mahatma Gandhi, "Be the change you want to see in the world," is applicable. So how do you do this?

As a positive contributor and collaborator, you start to find your team partners. Your group is welcome to become part of the family of Children of the Earth by forming a Hub or a Chapter. Spirit Youth Hubs are groups of youth who meet to focus on spiritual exploration and intentions, while Social Action Chapters are youth humanitarian projects conceived as a result of an inner transformation.

You are invited to either focus on your spiritual development or socially responsible local actions with a group of others and link to [childrenofthe.earth](http://childrenofthe.earth). Here you will find many others who are doing similar work. We also have a monthly Newsletter that will publish your stories. In addition, if you choose to be a Hub or a Chapter we have Starter Kits available for you to use in your forming process. Each kit includes a CD with a PowerPoint presentation to help you fully understand our work. We are on the Facebook social network as Children of the Earth. We also have a presence on Twitter. You become a member of a movement.

More important is that you consider yourself an activist and take responsibility. It is vital to link with others and be part of a social networking group. We also have "Pray It Forward" cards for you to share with your friends.

On our website you can see how many youth are exploring their potential already. Mark in the Philippines is creating envelopes of school supplies for local children while another Mark in Toronto is taking a group to Nepal to work with Jimmy on rebuilding his classrooms in a local village. Peter is doing bee keeping with his community's

women, while Ashfaque in Pakistan is right now with children who have suffered from the floods. The youth in Switzerland are doing Free Hugs and meetings. This is all up to you!!

Our dream is to see YOU participate in any way possible. This means linking and networking and building. The dream is in your hands. Contact us and we will help you each step of the way. Our International Program Director is also available to work with you online, and COE Trainers are available to come and help you set up if you can pay the airfare and lodging.

Please share your abilities — and step into the world of Spiritual Activism.

Nina Meyerhof, President Children of the Earth

Children of the Earth inspires and unites young people, through personal and social transformation, to create a peaceful and sustainable world.

One Earth...with all her children smiling!

<http://childrenofthe.earth> Email: [nina@coeworld.org](mailto:nina@coeworld.org) Skype: nina\_meyerhof

His Holiness, The XIV Dalai Lama handed Nina Meyerhof the TORCH OF HOPE in 1990 and said, "Children are the most untapped resource the world has." Thus the Torch of Hope for Children went around the world.



# WE ARE ALL CHILDREN OF THE EARTH

---

Children of the Earth is a 501 (C)(3) tax-exempt corporation established in 1990 and received recognition as a non-governmental organization of the United Nations for its work with young people around the world in 1992.

We dedicate our work to the building of a better future. We deliver programs, which provide young people with the empowerment and leadership skills necessary to advance peace in the world today and in the future. We foster building networks of cooperation, multicultural understanding, spiritual values, and ethical living skills.

Children of the Earth inspires and unites young people, through personal and social transformation, to create a peaceful and sustainable world.

This handbook is the property of Children of the Earth. © December 2010 Copying is permitted with appropriate credit.

Written by Nina Meyerhof, Founder of Children of the Earth Edited by Deborah Moldow  
Contributions by Harriett Nettles Repenning, Mary K. Dennison, Etta Kantor, and Diane DeTerra

We are grateful for support from the Bay and Paul Foundation.

Thank you to Oran, Karoline, Corina, Kelly, Melissa, Jimmy, Ashfaque, Mark, Mridu, Sarah, Rosie, Lawrence, Colins, Colin, Yuka, Ping Ping, Augusto, Princess, Jacquie, Joshua, Chimay, Zeke, Sammy, Peter, Sushil, Sarah, Ruba, and the many other young people who helped gather us together as family, loving me and allowing me to love them!

Nina

MAY PEACE PREVAIL ON EARTH