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STILLNESS ROUTINE WORKBOOK

for

CHANGE AGENTS + ACTIVISTS

HANDBOOK

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*“There is a pervasive form of contemporary violence to which the idealist most easily succumbs: activism and overwork. The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything, is to succumb to violence. The frenzy of our activism neutralizes our work for peace. It destroys our own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our own work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.”* ― Thomas Merton*,*[*Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/404737)

**INVOCATION**

**PURPOSE:** It is very helpful to outwardly signal to yourself that you are turning towards your interiority to be in connection with Divine presence (however you name that) with a prayer, poem, song, movement, photograph, bell - WHATEVER creates a feeling that you are loosening your identification with the outer world towards the inner and more subtle Divine experience.

TOWARDS THE ONE

THE PERFECTION OF LOVE, HARMONY + BEAUTY

THE ONLY BEING  
UNITED WITH ALL THE ILLUNMINATED SOULS

WHO FORM THE EMBODIMENT OF THE ETERNAL

THE SPIRIT OF GUIDANCE – Sufi Invocation, Hazrat Inayat Khan

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“All shall be well, and all shall be well, and thou shalt see thyself that all manner of thing shall be well…” – Julian of Norwich, celebrated female 14th Century English Anchorite

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All things

are too small

to hold me,

I am so vast

In the infinite

I reach

for the Uncreated

I have

touched it,

it undoes me

wider than wide

Everything else

Is too narrow

You know this well,

you who are also there - Hadewijch of Antwerp, Flemish woman mystic from the 13th century; about whose life almost nothing is known except for her poetry

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“For most of my life I have struggled to find God, to know God, to love God/Source. I have tried hard to follow the guidelines of the spiritual life—pray always, work for others, read the Scriptures—and to avoid the many temptations to dissipate myself. I have failed many times but always tried again, even when I was close to despair.

Now I wonder whether I have sufficiently realized that during all this time God has been trying to find me, to know me, and to love me. The question is not “How am I to find God]?” but “How am I to let myself be found by him [Source]?” The question is not “How am I to know God?” but “How am I to let myself be known by God?” And, finally, the question is not “How am I to love God?” but “How am I to let myself be loved by God?” God is looking into the distance for me, trying to find me, and longing to bring me home.”

― **Henri J.M. Nouwen,** [**The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming**](https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/169164)

**BREATH**

**PURPOSE:** There is a universal connection between breath + Spirit/Divine/Love. In all major religions and spiritual traditions awareness of breath plays a central role in how we attune ourselves to our subtle inner life. Beginning your practice with a breath exercise is helpful to begin slowing the mind to the pace of the body.

Breathe in through the nose – count of 4

Exhale through the nose – count of 4

Repeat cycle 4 times

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Inhale through the nose – count of 4

Hold – count of 4

Exhale through nose – count of 4

Repeat this full cycle 4 times

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Alternate Nostril Breathing

Close RIGHT nostril + Inhale through LEFT nostril – count of 4

Close BOTH nostrils – hold 8

Close LEFT nostril + Exhale through RIGHT nostril – count of 4

Repeat a cycle a TOTAL of 3 times

Close LEFT nostril + Breathe in through RIGHT nostril – count of 4

Close BOTH nostrils – hold 8

Close RIGHT nostril + Exhale through LEFT nostril – count of 4

Repeat a cycle a TOTAL of 3 times

Inhale through BOTH nostrils – count of 4

Close BOTH nostrils – count of 8

Exhale BOTH nostrils – count of 4

Repeat a cycle a TOTAL of 3 times

**CONCENTRATION**

**PURPOSE:** One of the foundation skills of quiet stillness is developing one’s ability to hold one’s concentration so our lived experience + energies are not at the mercy of our overactive minds. Actively exercising our concentration allows for our mental plane to settle.

Inhaling – Towards the One

Exhaling – United with All

(Hazrat Inayat Khan - Sufi)

1 – 5 min.

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Inhaling – I’m arriving

Exhaling – I am home

(Thich Nhat Hanh – Buddhist)

1 – 5 min.

Belly Center Concentration - Sitting still with the eyes closed allow for yourself to settle, then bring your attention to your belly center and gently coalesce your awareness to witness its movement, feel etc. while allowing for whatever sensation or thought might arise. Play with maintaining a gentle level of concentration for 1- 5 min. that you are engaging in this exercise.

1 – 5 min.

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Choose a rock or crystal to use are your point of focus. Bring your attention to the natural object and allow it to fill your sensory awareness. Be aware when you are “thinking” about it or grasping to an aspect of it as opposed to directing attention without creating too much “content” about it. Play with maintaining a gentle level of concentration for 1- 5 min. that you are engaging in this exercise.

1 – 5 min.

Buddhist Lovingkindness Meditation

*May I be filled with lovingkindness.*

*May I be safe from inner and outer dangers.*

*May I be well in body and mind.*

*May I be at ease and happy.*

Begin practicing this love meditation on yourself (“I”). Until you are able to love and take care of yourself, you cannot be of much help to others. After that, practice on others (“he/she,” “they”)—first on someone you like, then on someone neutral to you, then on someone you love, and finally on someone the mere thought of whom makes you suffer.

**OPEN AWARENESS**

**PURPOSE:** While the concentration portion of the practice is about actively (however gently) directing one’s will the open awareness portion is about developing one’s capacity for a more receptive awareness or presencing. It allows us the opportunity to experience ourselves in a more direct, subtle and expansive strata of being.

*Tips: Before beginning open awareness practice tell your mind and body how long you will be engaging in practice. It sounds goofy, but I’ve found it helps the mind and body settle.*

*Also, if you find your mind is very active or “full” it can help to write down your what is preoccupying your thoughts on paper and then set it down next to you.*

Take some time (1 – 5 minutes to start with) and find a comfortable place to sit. Allow your eyes to close and settle into the body. It’s fine whether you are tired, sad or enthused. What’s important is the basic act of “coming home to yourself” with some greater degree of spaciousness + depth. Expand your field of awareness to include ALL that you are sensing without grasping/drilling down into the content of any of it. When you find yourself (AND YOU WILL) stuck on a thought or feeling or discomfort pull your attention back like you are pulling into a wider camera angle with your attention. Whatever is possible in those few minutes, you are staying true to what’s important.

At the end of this period, step back and ask yourself how your state has changed. We often notice something in our personal practice. Even when we thought our minds were wandering the whole time, we can still discern an effect on a deeper strata. It’s interesting. Even if our minds and bodies felt constantly active while we’re sitting, we notice at some level something has shifted. See for yourself if this is true.

* Taj Inayat + Gayan Macher, *Three Foundations of Spiritual Practice: Inspiration + Practical Guidance Amidst the Demands of Modern Life*

**CLOSING**

**PURPOSE:** When you have completed your practice it is important to conclude your session with some sort of acknowledgement be it a bell, bowing of the head, prayer or whatever feels true as an expression of gratitude (and not pretentious or cheesy). You efforts have created a field of energy and closing with intention is a way of “sealing” in all you have created. It is also a way to help the body/mind/spirit transition back into the outer world.

SACRED REST STOP PRACTICAL TIPS for BUILDING A ‘STILLNESS’ ROUTINE

**LENGTH OF ‘STILLNESS” TIME** – Try not to psych yourself out by not having enough time in your day to carve out a stillness routine or thinking that you need to block out hours of your day to start. Pick an amount of time (including 1 min.) that you feel comfortable to committing to as you can ALWAYS add more (or less for that matter).

**TIME OF DAY** – Set a time of the day that you are the most clear headed and hearted. Is that mornings, afternoons or evenings? Trust your intuition about it and try to stick with it. And ALSO, if doing it at the same time of day throws you off too much, DON’T stick with it! You’ll need to give yourself space + time to find your own groove.

**ANTICIPATE THE NEED FOR MOTIVATIONAL HELP** – Do you need to have some accountability to someone else? Ask a friend to be your stillness routine accountability partner. Do you work better if there are rewards involved – like putting a check or sticker in a calendar (sounds dumb but it can help!) Choose a healthy way to acknowledge your effort.

**‘STILLNESS’ ROLE MODEL** - Be conscious of people/places/things that put you in touch with the numinous; be it your favorite band, poet, picture of nature, pet WHATEVER. What allows you to settle in deeper with yourself and utilize *that* as an anchor for yourself when your faith/interest in your own inner life starts to feel too much like more ‘work’.

Name 3 ways that you can keep motivated when your discipline waivers.

1.

2.

3.

**EXPECT TO QUIT AND THEN PICK IT UP AGAIN (A LOT)** - Expect that you will miss a day (or days) and have your habit of NOT being still get the upper hand. Get comfortable with being imperfect about this and remind yourself that this is about developing what might be a very different relationship to yourself. Do not get too hard on yourself when it takes time to stabilize your engagement level and rhythm.

**BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF ABOUT YOUR RESISTE**NCE – Write out at least five things that you are anticipating negatively affecting your ability to being and have discipline around your ‘stillness’

1.

2.

3.

4.

**CONTEMPLATIONS to AID IN CREATING OUR STILLNESS RELATIONSHIP**

What or whom do you have the feeling that you can (more or less) ALWAYS make time for? Good mental check in about how we are prioritizing our inner selves as we can easily fall off the list of the direction outwards that we give our attention to.

Free write and finish this sentence:

In my family busyness was…

In my family ‘stillness’ was…

How much do I currently self identify with my level of activity?

What is my current state of my relationship to the essence of who I am?

Spiritually hearted teachers/writers/artists/poets with great LOVE wattage to check out!

* Hazart Inayat Kahn – Sufi
* Rev. agnel Kyodo williams – Buddhist, activist, writer
* Thich Nhat Hahn - Buddhist
* Sharon Salzburg – Buddhist
* bell hooks – writer, activist
* Sylvia Boorstein - Buddhist
* John O’Donohue – Celtic mystical poet
* Hafiz – Persian mystical poet
* Henri Nouwen – Catholic priest, writer
* Pema Chodron – Tibetan Buddhist, writer
* Adrienne Marie Brown – writer, afrofurturist, visionary thinker
* **Abraham Joshua Heschel – Rabbi, Jewish theologian, activist**
* James Baldwin – novelist, playwright, activist
* Richard Wagamese – author, journalist + poet
* Julian of Norwich – 14th century anchoress + writer
* Llewellyn Vaugan Lee – Sufi
* Pir Zia Inayat Khan – Sufi
* Thomas Merton – writer, theologian, mystic poet