



Inner Exploration Guide – Month One

Welcome to your first month of Mapping Our Inner Experiences! This written guide will help you get oriented and begin your Inner Exploration. You are not alone in this endeavor yet your journey will be unique. We stand ready to support you along the way.

Getting started: Please review the elements of this written guide so you can become acquainted with the layout and some of the guiding terminology. Within this document you will find the following **elements:** quotes, articles, readings, video links, practices, and reflective questions. You will note, I **recommend a starting place**, however, please begin wherever you feel drawn.

One request is to **sample at least one item from each of the elements**. The group meeting will be far more beneficial if each of us is familiar with some of the material; have answered some reflective questions; and have tried some of the practices.

Feel free to do everything included if you want to. In general, you will likely find that some materials and practices fit your life, approach and character more than others. In some cases a challenging question or practice may be just what you need and at other times, you may find you need something peaceful and calming. Pay attention to your own needs and as you have questions or comments, please email or call.

Month One- Intellect

We have many thoughts every day. Some believe we control our thoughts and others feel that thoughts arise as reactions. In fact, most people have 20-40,000 thoughts per day (even life-long meditators have 12,000+ thoughts per day). That's a lot of inner traffic to direct and yet even with the number of thoughts that come up, we are quite capable of utilizing our minds to focus on; act upon; and react to; a whole variety of complex life situations.

As we begin month one of this program, it might be wise to begin a journal to write down what you're observing within. There will be some space included within this document to write or type answers as well as a blank journal/note page as the last page of this document.

This month, we'll explore our thoughts (intellect) in order to better understand ourselves within.

Quotes to Consider:

As a starting place, spend 3+ minutes meditating (or thinking) about one of the following quotes.

"The mind is a wonderful servant but a terrible master." - this quote has been attributed to Robin Sharma, David Foster Wallace, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Yogi BhaJan although it is likely ancient wisdom.

"... If you can think – and not make thoughts your aim; ..." from "If" by Rudyard Kipling

"There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." - William Shakespeare

"For as he thinks within himself, so he is. He says to you, "Eat and drink!" But his heart is not with you." – Proverbs 23:7

*“Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny.” –Gandhi*

Reflective Questions:

What did you do (internally and externally) during your meditation time?

Did you notice other thoughts emerging as you attempted to stay focused on the quote you picked? Write down as many of those arising thoughts as you can recall now.

Can you recall the decision process you used regarding the quote you picked? And further, what conscious and unconscious inputs may weigh into this decision and or other decisions you make?

What story do you tell yourself about who you are?

Content for Review:

Article, Huffington Post “Is Your Mind the Servant or the Master?” by Dr. Amy Johnson, PhD
https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-your-mind-the-servant_b_7822304

Article, Center for Action and Contemplation “The Dualistic Mind” by Richard Rohr, OFM
<https://cac.org/the-dualistic-mind-2017-01-29/>

Video, Concepts Unwrapped – Cognitive Dissonance
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_ICO2cBNts

Video Talk, “Watch Your Thoughts & Feelings” by Alan Watts
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sT-VLNrk-F8>

Article, Healthline “10 Tips to Help You Stop Ruminating” by Erica Cirino and Dr. Timothy Legg
<https://www.healthline.com/health/how-to-stop-ruminating>

Video “There Is No Problem To Solve” by Loch Kelly
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40_SANHRmkk

Reflective Questions:

1. After reading the article/s above, as you reflect on the Rene Descartes quote “I think therefore I am”, what are your inner reactions?

2. Reflect on the reactivity of your own mind and thoughts vs. your ability to focus. What, if any, of your other bodily functions work like our mind/thought process?
3. What other books, articles, ideas, people, movies, artwork, objects, locations, etc. came to mind as you looked at this information? Chose, photograph, write or create something to share with the group when we have our group meeting.

Practices:

1. **Count Your Thoughts** - How many thoughts do you have?
 - Time yourself for 1 minute and note the number of different thoughts you have in that time? Multiply by 1440 (minutes per day)
 - Reflect on your experience: Do you think all those thoughts or do they just emerge from somewhere within? Where do they come from? Reflect on this for a moment and ask yourself how many thoughts you can act on per day? How do you decide which thoughts to allow to be in your conscious and also to act on?
2. **Centering Prayer** is a method of meditation developed by Christians placing a strong emphasis on interior silence. The modern Centering Prayer movement can be traced to several books published by three Trappist monks: Fr. William Meninger, Fr. M. Basil Pennington and Abbot Thomas Keating. The name was taken from Thomas Merton's description of contemplative prayer (a much older and more traditional practice) as prayer that is "centered entirely on the presence of God".^[2] In his book *Contemplative Prayer*, Merton writes "'Monastic prayer begins not so much with "considerations" as with a "return to the heart," finding one's deepest center, awakening the profound depths of our being".

Centering Prayer Practice – (adapted from Pennington's steps):

1. Sit comfortably with your eyes closed, relax, and quiet yourself. Be in love and faith to God or your concept of Love.
2. Choose a sacred word that best supports your sincere intention to be in the Love's presence and open to Divine action within you.
3. Let that word be gently present as your symbol of your sincere intention to be in Love's presence and open to Divine action within you.
4. Whenever you become aware of anything (thoughts, feelings, perceptions, images, associations, etc.), simply return to your sacred word, your anchor.

In addition, Fr. Keating writes, this method consists in letting go (as possible) of every kind of thought during prayer, even the most devout thoughts.

- 3. Describe Your Thought Process:** Are you aware of how you make decisions on the inside? What steps do you take for instance in deciding things as simple as: when to take the trash out; or as complex as when to get married; change jobs; etc. Many of us have external activities that reflect our inner processing. Often our external or intellectual activities are justifications for what we've already decided deep inside. For this exercise, spend some time thinking about how your inner processing works and try to describe or diagram it. If you need help, ask someone who knows you well to help you. Listen carefully to what they say - anything surprising? - just take it in and let truth emerge.
- 4. Koan:** A riddle or puzzle used by Zen Buddhists and others during meditation to help them unravel greater truths about the Universe and themselves. Don Dianda, author of "See for Your Self: Zen Mindfulness for the Next Generation," put it this way:

The koan serves as a surgical tool used to cut into and then break through the mind of the practitioner... Koans aren't just puzzles that your mind figures out suddenly and proclaims, "Aha! the answer is three!" They wait for you to open enough to allow the space necessary for them to enter into your depths—the inner regions beyond knowing.

Koan Practice: Spend some time reflecting on the well-known Koan,

"what is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Reflect: *What happened as you tried to think about this question in your mind?*

What thoughts did you have before you started the practice?

What thoughts emerged during the practice?

What did you notice about your intellect and thought process?

What, if anything do you take away from this exercise?

Try writing your own Koan or follow this link for more...

<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/green-koans-the-green-yogi/>

And finally, there are some that suggest Jesus used some Koans - stories, questions and phrases. One such excerpt is from the Bible, John 12:25; anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Think of other people you've known or read about who utilize a Koan style in their communications.

Passage Meditation Sacred / Inspirational Writing: Passage meditation is practiced by thousands of people around the world to find more calm, peace, meaning, and purpose in their lives.

Practice Passage Meditation – adapted from Eknath Easaran

In this form of meditation, you concentrate on the words of an inspirational text or passage from one of the great wisdom traditions.

You start by choosing an inspirational passage and memorizing it. The passage for meditation should be positive, practical and uplifting, and there are lots of passages you can choose from. Some are short, others longer, and they're from all different traditions.

Once you're ready with your passage, then

- Sit in a chair, or on a cushion on the floor.
- Sit upright and close your eyes.
- Go through the words of your memorized passage slowly and silently in the mind.
- Do your best to concentrate on the passage – when distractions come, just bring your mind back to the words.
- At the end of the passage, go back to the beginning, or start a new one.

Reflective Questions for Further Consideration:

1. What practice did you find most supportive and which one most challenging?
2. Did you discover any new authors, writers, thinkers, practitioners, etc. that you really connected with? Any you'd rather not spend more time with? Spend a few minutes thinking about what connected you or didn't connect you?
3. What did you learn about yourself as you experienced your inner world from this view? Anything you did on your own that helped you take an inner view and learn about yourself?
4. Consider writing a 6 word recap to explain your inner thought process. What might you include? What words are valuable to you with regards to how you think and process?

Notes:

Date:

What I'm hearing / observing externally.

What I'm noticing (thoughts, feelings, emotions, questions, etc.) within me.

My external response or movement.

Inner experience (words or phrases or draw/describe an image or picture or identify a feeling or sensation within).