

Self-Empowerment

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Grounded Spirituality 101

My community has an adult education system called Master the Possibilities, a not-for-profit lifelong learning center. Recent course offerings have included art, literature, theater, film, technology, hobbies, cooking, travel, science, fitness, medical/health, current events, philosophy, psychology, and more. Most of the courses are free for residents of On Top of the World, but some have a reasonable cost between \$5 and \$50. Since the classes are open to the public, non-residents usually pay only \$5 more than the residents. Some of the teachers are volunteers who are residents, but many are experts or professionals from the surrounding community and beyond. I have attended more than twenty of their classes, and am delighted to have such inexpensive, interesting, informative, and educational opportunities in my own backyard.

Maybe it won't be any surprise to you that I volunteered to teach a course called "Grounded Spirituality" in April 2017. With my background and experience, it was easy and fun for me to put together a 2-hour introduction to my own mix of psychological, philosophical, spiritual teaching. Here is the course description:

Grounded Spirituality

You have had experiences that fill you with peace, love, and joy and have felt yourself to be "in the flow." Yet, maybe you continue to return to disheartening emotions, unsure of how to regain your peace of mind, especially when faced with life's challenges. Drawing on various psychological and spiritual systems, we will discuss some tools that can assist you in regaining the balance and equanimity that makes life more wonderful.

Being the "ham" that I am, I miscalculated how much time I would actually spend establishing the foundational principles that lead to greater peace of mind, more joy, and less suffering. It took up the whole first hour. After the short intermission break, the second half of the class left little time to spend on each of the 24 tools that I listed on the handouts. But, ahhh, it left them all wanting more, as written on the feedback forms and enthusiastically verbalized to me by several of the participants – so the good news is that my next course has now been scheduled for July, with the high probability of a series of classes in the Fall Semester.

Would you like a little taste of the course? Of course you would, dear readers. Just remember, this is an appetizer, not an entrée.

The Framework

What does "Grounded Spirituality" mean? I describe GROUNDED as being relatively *present*, aware, and open to & accepting of what is. As they said in Star Trek: "Resistance is futile!" A tomato plant is in the ground, with roots below, growing the tomatoes that are its nature, without arguing that it should also grow a few peppers to be more interesting. That plant is grounded, not resisting what is, simply being what it is without argument, guilt, or shame. We, too, can practice being grounded.

SPIRITUALITY is simply your *relationship* with the transcendent aspect of life, whatever is beyond the material. Many call that "God", but it has been called by many other names: Spirit, Soul, Mind, Energy, Nature, Inspiration, Higher Self, Divinity, Angels, Life Energy, God/Goddess/All-That-Is, Creator, Unconditional Love, Wholeness, Oneness, Perfection, Source, or whatever you want to call it. It is that which is greater than material existence and may or may not play a conscious role

in your life. Transcendence is where compassion, mercy, faith, righteousness, and beauty are found.

Putting the two words together, Grounded Spirituality is the process of cultivating conscious presence with a wider vision than when you are blinded by forms of resistance. We resist the here-and-now in many ways. A few examples of ways we resist presence:

- “I should” or “I shouldn’t” thoughts
- Comparisons and competitions with others
- Emotional baggage from the past
- Fears and anxiety about the future

The bulk of spiritual work is releasing ourselves from a limited self-identity, allowing for spaciousness around our thoughts and judgments as much and as often as possible for a richer relationship with the Transcendent Life, whatever we choose to call it. That is what leads to greater joy and less suffering.

The movement toward more joy and less suffering is being here now without resistance, with fresh vision that is not tainted with your stories and interpretations of your past.

However, you don’t need to do it all at once. It’s a process! Cultivating grounded spirituality into your life more and more, allowing for open-minded spaciousness around your thoughts and judgments, results in the inner peace and equanimity that passes all human understanding. It determines how elegantly you meet the changes and challenges of life.



Tools That Help To Ground You

What tools or resources are available to help with the process? There are so many different practices that nurture this process, but I chose to share the following list of 24:

1. **Conscious Slow Breath:** Breathing is free and always available. You can focus on the physical sensation of breathing, feeling the air movement in the nose, chest, or abdomen. You can count the breaths, imagine a quality to inhale/exhale (e.g. peace, love), or just experience a mini-break between thoughts.

2. **Meditation, Prayer, Contemplation, Reflection:** Many forms to choose from to connect with “inner”, “deeper” or “higher” consciousness.

3. **Journaling:** You can write, type, or record a general stream of consciousness or ask the transcendent part of yourself a specific question and allow an answer to come to your awareness.

4. **Conscious Movement:** Movements can be sacred, playful, general exercise, or targeted therapeutic movements or stretches. (e.g. Dance, TaiChi) Focus your attention on the movement and quiet the “monkey mind.”

5. **Mindfulness In Conscious Mundane Activity:** e.g. Washing dishes or doing laundry can be like a moving meditation when you bring your attention back from wandering thoughts, being fully present with the activity without judgment. (Before enlightenment, you chop wood & carry water with an anxious mind. After enlightenment, you chop wood, carry water in peace.)

6. **Mindful Self-nourishment:** Conscious feeding of your body with nutritious food (water, juice, protein, veggies, fruit, nuts, seeds). Limit or wean off of junk food.

7. **Creativity:** Nourishment of body, mind, & spirit through a hobby, passion, art, or some form of creativity.

8. Balance: Consider areas of imbalance in your life that could be brought into a greater balance: What might there be too much of, or too little of in your life?

9. Mental Discernment: Nurture discernment between the ego (characterized by the devil) and spirit (characterized by an angel). Notice which thoughts, words, and actions reflect separation, fear, anger, sadness and guilt; and which thoughts, words, and actions reflect connection, compassion, peace, joy, and love. This discernment leads to greater self-awareness.

10. Address Emotional Wounds: Seek therapy for unmanageable issues that impact your quality of life and relationships (e.g. past traumas, addictions, phobias, guilt, excessive fear/worry, attempts to control the uncontrollable, existential angst).

11. Personal Mantras and Affirmations: A personal mantra is a positive phrase or affirmative statement that you say to yourself for the purpose of inspiration or encouragement. This could be your favorite quote, proverb, spiritual truth, or religious saying that motivates and inspires you to be your best self. (e.g. "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.")

Affirmations are positive, specific statements that help you to overcome self-sabotaging, negative thoughts or behaviors. They help you visualize and believe in what you're affirming to yourself, helping you to make positive changes to your life. (e.g. In response to a particular anxiety about an upcoming life change, affirm: "I am confident and capable of meeting whatever is before me.")

12. Non-Violent Communication (NVC) aka Compassionate Communication: Method for clear empathic communication and greater self-awareness. In the Philadelphia area, call Terrie Lewine (215-928-8898) for info re: workshops.

There is an affordable year-long online NVC course taught by Thom Bond that starts June 21st; includes a weekly emailed lesson, and an optional monthly conference call www.compassioncourse.org

13. Enneagram: A rich system that describes 9 points of view, energies, values, gifts, styles, fixations, and personality defense structures for self-awareness and understanding others.

eclecticenergies.com/enneagram/introduction.php or <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/> for intro.

14. Silva Method: A self-help program that utilizes the power of the brain's alpha waves. The Silva Method teaches students specialized guided imagery techniques to rewire their subconscious and negative programming, tap into their true potential and achieve their goals.

<https://www.silvamethod.com/>

15. Byron Katie's "The Work": Question your thoughts with this process of inquiry by which you dismantle suffering thoughts. The "Judge Your Neighbor Worksheet" is a brilliant tool. Her books are wonderful and there are many videos on youtube of her working with individuals. There are 4 questions & the turnaround: "Is it True? Can you absolutely know that it's true? How do you react when you think that thought? Who or what would you be without the thought?" Judge your neighbor. Write it down. Ask four questions. Turn it around.

<http://thework.com/en>

16. Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) aka Tapping: EFT is a form of psychological acupressure, based on meridian points to clear blockages in your body's bio-energy system to restore balance and healing. Simple tapping with the fingertips is used to input kinetic energy onto specific meridians while thinking about the problem to be solved (trauma, addiction, pain) and voicing positive affirmations. There are many good resources for EFT including www.eft.mercola.com,

books by Nick Ortner, and Brad Yates' videos on www.youtube.com/user/eftwizard

17. Forgiveness & Gratitude: There are many ways to practice forgiveness. Do it to release yourself from the burden & poison of held grievances, hurts, disappointments, & resentments!

It also clears the decks of projecting old wounds onto others. Colin Tipping's Radical Forgiveness website: <http://www.radicalforgiveness.com/>

There are also many ways to practice gratitude. You can journal, make lists, and shift your focus of attention from a negative circumstance to a positive “gift” of learning or compassion in challenging circumstances. A deep practice of gratitude is about cultivating the ability to be grateful for both blessings *and* challenges. We can feel the pain of loss and change, *and* we can be grateful for the ways in which such experiences crack us open, shatter the illusions of the ego, and wake us up to compassion and wisdom. Such experiences allow us to see, feel, and experience our interconnection.

I find forgiveness and gratitude to be intertwined, as if two sides of a single coin.

18. Ho’oponopono: An ancient Hawaiian practice of reconciliation and forgiveness that has been updated by Dr. Hew Len.

(aka SITH Self-I-dentity-Through-Hooponopono.com) One popular Ho’oponopono tool is to say “I’m sorry, Please forgive me, I love you, Thank you.”

<http://www.wanttoknow.info/070701imsorryiloveyoujoevitale> is Joe Vitale’s miracle story of Dr. Hew Len, a therapist in Hawaii who cured a complete ward of criminally insane patients without ever directly treating any of them.

19. A Course in Miracles (ACIM): A self-study spiritual thought system that teaches a way to universal love and peace, or remembering God, by undoing guilt through forgiving others. <https://www.acim.org/AboutACIM/>

20. Spiritual Mind Treatment: This form of healing prayer with roots in Christian Science is a 5-part structured affirmative prayer practiced in New Thought churches. “Are You Ready to Receive” as a mnemonic device for R U R T R:
Recognition: God is All There Is (One Source, Divine Essence, the opposite of temporal forms)
Unification: I am one with God (no separation from the Oneness, Divine Essence is within me)
Realization: I accept the desired good as mine by birthright (Divine Essence transcends any currently experienced lack or limitation)

Thanksgiving: Extend full gratitude for answered prayer (opens us to receiving the good that is being claimed)

Release: Let go and let God (trust that answer to prayer is manifesting for the highest good)

21. Voice for Love / Inner Wisdom: There are various systems, including *A Course in Miracles*, that describe “2 voices in the mind” – the thought systems of ego & spirit. Ego seeks pleasure and attempts to avoid pain, but pleasure is not the same as joy, and pain is not the same as suffering. Pleasure is based on what feels good to a separate body which interprets life through past stories, while joy is an essence quality of the spirit that is always there, whether or not you are conscious of it *yet*. Pain is a temporary state of physical or emotional reaction to a stimulus, while suffering is a chronic replay of painful thoughts that extend beyond the original stimulus. We all have potential access to the voice of the spirit which can guide the mind back to peace, *if you want it*. This is threatening to the ego, so don’t assume you *always* want it. By accessing the voice of spirit, you open the door to guidance, healing, and comfort.

22. Michael Beckwith’s “Life Visioning” program: describes 4 levels of consciousness: victim, manifester, channel, and being/unity. He teaches a process that is powerful, and the 4 levels of consciousness are helpful benchmarks for spiritual growth. https://agapelive.com/store/life-visioning-learning-kit-with-workbook-a-step-by-step-process-for-realizing-your-highest-potential/#.WL8XuG_yvDc

23. Music: Whether it is beautiful, sacred, positive, or fun – find the music that lifts you out of negative thought patterns and feeds your spirit. You can sit quietly with your contemplative music, or you can dance and jump around like a joyful child to upbeat music. Let your spirit fly on the wings of inspiring music. Be present with it and let it do its work on you!

24. Laughter: Healing for body, mind, and spirit can be supported by the healthy practice of laughter. It decreases stress hormones and

increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, improving your resistance to disease. Laughter also triggers the release of endorphins, the body's natural feel-good chemicals which promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve physical pain. A good belly laugh helps your cardio vascular & lymph systems, too. Try clapping your hands and enthusiastically say 3 times, "Ho, Ho, Ha-Ha-Ha", then raise your hands in the air and shout, "YAY!" You can even do the Hokey Pokey to turn yourself around. Why? Because that's what it's all about! What? The Joy of Life!!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGNOF8DVI>
PQ (Info about Laughter Yoga)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzaUsSn-vZg>
(News clip re: Laughter Leader training)

<http://www.worldlaughtertour.com/> (Laughter Leader training)

I loved teaching the class, sharing with others the enthusiasm I have for living a Self-Empowered Life of more joy and less suffering. While I am still in process – still learning and growing – there is great satisfaction in meeting others who also have the desire to learn and grow.

A day or two after that class I came upon this quote about nutrition by Robyn Openshaw, aka "Green Smoothie Girl"

The popular proverb "You are what you eat!" is not necessarily true. More accurately, you are what you assimilate. Optimal nutrient absorption depends on a healthy GI tract at every stage of digestion.

The insight came to me that (like the issue of food assimilation) there are points in my spiritual journey when I may intellectually know lots of truth statements, wisdom, and various practices – but until I assimilate them, practice them, and live them, I don't receive the full benefit of them.

Being a work in progress, I recognize the value of doing this work and feeling the huge differences in my relationships and my well-being.

That's what I call Heaven!

Wishing you more joy, less suffering, and lots of love! Blessings Always!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev. Jill*



'Zen And The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' Author Rober M. Pirsig Dies At 88

Robert M. Pirsig, who inspired generations to road trip across America with his novelistic autobiography, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, died Monday, April 24, 2017, at the age of 88. His publisher William Morrow & Company said in a statement that Pirsig died at his home in South Berwick, Maine, "after a period of failing health."

Pirsig wrote just two books: *Zen* (subtitled "An Inquiry Into Values") and *Lila: An Inquiry into Morals*.

Zen was published in 1974, after being rejected by 121 publishing houses. "The book is brilliant beyond belief," wrote Morrow editor James Landis before publication. "It is probably a work of genius and will, I'll wager, attain classic status." Indeed, the book quickly became a best-seller, and has proved enduring as a work of popular philosophy. A 1968 motorcycle trip across the West with his son Christopher was his inspiration.

The whole intent of Pirsig was to break through and heal what he saw as compound fractures between our thinking and feeling, science and art, reason and emotion, our outer and our inner selves.

The protagonist of *Zen* attempts to resolve the conflicts between "classic" values that create machinery like the motorcycle, and "romantic" values like the beauty of a country road. He discovers all values find their root in what Pirsig called Quality:

"Quality . . . you know what it is, yet you don't know what it is. But that's self-contradictory. But some things are better than others, that is, they have more quality. But when you try to say what the quality is, apart from the things that have it, it all goes poof! There's nothing to talk about. But if you can't say what Quality is, how do you know what it is, or how do you know that it even exists? If no one knows what it is, then for all practical purposes it doesn't exist at all. But for all practical purposes it really does exist."

Thank you, Robert Pirsig, for sharing your thoughtful inner explorations. Peace and Blessings!

Daily Word

I affirm my oneness with God.

Affirmations are declarations of faith – useful tools that keep me focused on the positive aspects of life. Positive statements – such as I am a happy, healthy child of God or I am prosperous, successful, and free – place me in a positive frame of mind that allows me to visualize blessings coming my way. The combination of speaking affirming words and visualizing their fruition is a powerful exercise in faith.

I can cut out Daily Word pages and tape them to my mirror or wall for reminders, or I can write my own unique affirmations specific to my goals. The important thing is that they are personal to me and from the heart.

As I pray today, I use words of faith to help me stay positive and focused.

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