

A YEAR OF INSPIRATION
for the BODY, MIND, AND SOUL



FEATURING THE
BREATHTAKING IMAGERY OF
52 VISIONARY ARTISTS

MALI APPLE & JOE DUNN

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To you:

*Through your willingness and intention
to bring more happiness
into your own life,
you also bring happiness
into the lives of others.*

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A Year for Happiness

Welcome to *52 Prescriptions for Happiness*. Each of the “prescriptions” in this book is a week’s worth of simple practices to open up your body, expand your mind, and nurture your soul. As you incorporate these practices into your life, you’ll feel more connected to yourself, to others, and to the world around you—and just plain happier overall.

Happiness Prescriptions to Open Up the Body

The practices designed for the body will have you feeling healthier, stronger, more grounded, and more relaxed. You will discover

- quick and easy practices to relieve stress, keep your muscles and bones healthy, improve flexibility, and speed healing.
- simple techniques for releasing endorphins, those “feel-good” hormones that decrease pain, lower blood pressure, boost immunity, and slow the aging process.
- natural ways to promote circulation and deep breathing, putting more oxygen into your bloodstream and energizing both your body and brain.
- mini-meditations that calm the body and enhance the immune system—no mantras or special positions required!
- fun and intriguing ideas for opening up *all* your senses, including those beyond sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch.

Happiness Prescriptions to Expand the Mind

The practices designed for the mind will free you from negative thought patterns, increase your self-confidence, and enhance your creativity.

You'll explore

- a mood elevator that instantly makes you feel more positive and optimistic.
- exercises that promote imagination, quiet negative self-talk, and raise self-esteem.
- the “Magic Door” that propels you from self-doubt into self-confidence.
- thought experiments for finding peace in stressful situations and gaining new perspectives and insights.
- a personal energy inventory that will inspire you to invest your life energy wisely.
- powerful processes for releasing regrets, resentments, and guilt.
- mini-meditations that quiet your mind, improve your attitude, and relieve anxiety and stress—all in just a minute or two!
- techniques to slow age-related memory loss by stimulating your brain in new ways.

Happiness Prescriptions to Nurture the Soul

The practices designed for the soul will bring more ease into every aspect of your life: at work, in your home, and with your friends and family. You'll encounter

- heart-opening ways to connect with the people in your life and the world around you.
- practices for increasing self-love and opening up to your full potential.
- a powerful tool to instantly access your inner wisdom.
- a simple technique for coming from your center, your source of personal strength and power.
- mini-meditations that will leave you feeling centered, refreshed, and recharged.
- an effective method for recognizing and developing your intuition.
- visualizations to give you helpful insights into events and situations in your life.

The Visionary Artists

The artists featured in this book were chosen not only for their stunning images, but also for the spirit and intention with which they created them. We encourage you to give yourself a few moments to quietly contemplate each piece.

In their personal statements, many of the artists speak of dreams, meditation, music, or intuition as being integral to their creative process. Others are inspired by periods of prayer, visualization, or deep self-exploration.

Many of the pieces feature symbolic imagery from various traditions. Some celebrate the beauty and rhythms of nature, the seasons, and the earth. Others are intended to be used as meditation and healing tools: some of the artists mention working with the healing power of color or intentionally channeling healing energy into their work. Several talk about allowing the creative force to flow through them and simply being a witness as the images develop.

The intention behind all of the artwork is to uplift and inspire you, the viewer. You may find that the images offer encouragement to you on your own path and help you sense your connection to yourself and the world around you. They may inspire wonder, transformation, gratitude, serenity, joy—and, yes, happiness!

If you find yourself moved by the images, we encourage you to visit the artists' websites and support the work they are doing. They'll be happy to hear from you!



Come from Your Center Connect with Your Source of Personal Power

Martial artists in China call it the *dantian*. In Japan, they refer to it as the *hara*. This special place, an inch or so below the navel, is considered to be our body's source of *chi*, or *qi*—our life energy. Martial artists are taught to center their minds in this place and to make their movements from here.

Other people focus their attention a few inches above the navel, in the solar plexus. This area is known in Hindu, Buddhist, yoga, and other traditions as the third chakra. This chakra, or energy center, is believed to be the center of our power and autonomy. Still others think of the heart as the center of their being.

Wherever your center is, when you are away from it—such as when you're worried about what someone else might be doing, saying, or feeling—you will feel uncomfortable or uneasy. For example, the moment you immerse yourself in fearful thoughts about what your lover is thinking or allow yourself to speculate about their motives or intentions, you

disconnect from yourself and instantly feel uncertain or insecure. In other words, *you feel off balance when you're not in your center.*

This week, take some time to find your center. Standing with your feet firmly on the ground, shut your eyes. Now rock gently from side to side and back and forth, feeling for where the center of your body—your center of gravity and balance—seems to be. Don't worry about where martial artists or yogis believe the center of the body is. Find the spot that works for you.

Then, practice moving from your center. When you're walking or exercising, put your focus on that spot and envision your movements originating from there. Throw a ball, imagining that the energy you're using to throw it is coming from the center of your body. Try coming from your center when doing something that requires a burst of effort: focus on that place and let your actions arise from it. Also use this technique while riding a bike, roller-skating, or standing on one leg—anything that requires balance.

When you find yourself too much in your head, drop your attention down into your center. If you're thinking too much at night and can't fall asleep, or if you have to do something that you feel nervous or frightened about, calm yourself by focusing your attention in this place.

Coming from your center is a source of personal strength and power. Knowing how to come from your center is useful in all kinds of situations—anytime you're feeling scattered, afraid, jealous, envious, worried, ungrounded, anxious, or distracted. The discomfort you feel when you're uncentered can be your reminder to close your eyes, direct your attention to your center, and reconnect with your place of personal power.



Cristina McAllister, *Sacred State*

www.GypsyMystery.com

I am a self-taught artist and writer. My quest to infuse my work with meaning led me to explore the fascinating world of symbolic imagery, and my influences include art nouveau and art deco, tribal design, Celtic knotwork, and traditional art styles from all over the world. My art combines decorative design, sacred art, and symbols from diverse cultures around the globe into harmonious designs intended to inspire mindfulness, reverence, and celebration.



Free Yourself Lighten Up by Letting Go

Without knowing it, many of us continue to drag with us the heavy weight of things we did in the past. We often don't realize we're carrying these burdens until we happen to think about those particular events or get triggered by a similar event. To be able to let go of this psychological weight, it's essential that we forgive ourselves.

Slowly read through the list below. For any item that resonates with you, take a moment and see if you're ready to let go of blaming yourself for this past behavior. Ask yourself, "What have I learned from this experience?"

Know that forgiving yourself for something you did in the past doesn't mean you're condoning your behavior. On the contrary—it might inspire you to make amends in some way. Also understand that, given who you were at the time and the situation you were in, you did the best you could at that time.

Now say to yourself, "I'm ready to take my lessons from this and release the burden I've been carrying." Here are some suggestions for things you might forgive yourself for. And if none of these applies to you, reading them will get you in the state of mind for finding some that do!

This week I forgive myself for...

- Making a mistake
- Not doing enough or not doing it fast enough
- Being afraid
- Saying the “wrong” thing
- Getting frustrated
- Wasting money
- Being selfish
- Saying something unkind
- Being late
- Being stingy or petty
- Asking a “dumb” question
- Not feeling attractive enough
- Not feeling smart enough
- Not feeling good enough
- Making a bad decision
- Not accepting myself
- Not being a good friend
- Not being a good parent
- Getting impatient
- Wearing the “wrong” outfit
- Being thoughtless
- Not loving myself
- Being dishonest
- Not knowing better
- Getting upset
- Being lazy
- Being pushy
- Betraying someone
- Judging myself
- Not exercising
- Not eating well
- Not taking care of myself

As you go through your week, continue to watch for these and other self-blaming thoughts, and gently let them go.



Christopher Beikmann, *Full Moon Lakshmi*

www.chrisbeikmann.com

According to Hindu legend, Lakshmi was created at the same time as the moon during the great churning of the milky ocean. A central goddess in Hinduism, Lakshmi is celebrated during Diwali, The Festival of Lights. In Bengal, she is worshiped during a night in autumn when the moon is full, the brightest night of the year. It is believed she showers wealth on this night.

I consider myself a very spiritual person, but not bound to any one specific belief system. With my art I try to share my own exploration of world religion, mythology, and metaphysics. I hope my artwork inspires others to travel, learn, and discover the many cultures, people, and spiritual belief systems in this beautiful world in which we live. You may discover we're more alike than different in every way.



Create a Shortcut to Your Source Instantly Connect with Your Higher Self

Most of us have moments when we experience a deep sense of peace, awareness, or inspiration, or times when we feel in touch with our inner source of passion and wisdom. When we feel this deep connection to ourselves, we can put our attention on our current challenges and desires and receive clear guidance about how to best approach them.

A few people seem to live this way most of the time, while many of us feel connected to our higher self sporadically or only when we consciously give ourselves time to slow down, meditate, or connect with nature. At times we can feel cut off from this deep connection to ourselves—what some would call our higher self, our inner wisdom, the source, or the divine—for so long that it feels like an entirely separate entity to us.

Naming or associating an image with our higher self can help us find our way back to it when we're feeling stressed, confused, or otherwise challenged. A name or image gives us a very personal, direct connection with

our inner wisdom. The name or image can be anything, such as a mountain, an ocean, an eagle, or the wind.

- Lydia named her higher self Athena. “Athena is this beautiful, badass female gladiator,” Lydia explains. “I really relate to her strength and her wisdom.” When she’s feeling out of sorts, unsure, or worried, Lydia calls upon her inner gladiator and takes another look at the situation—through Athena’s eyes.
- The image of a fountain allows Sarah to instantly connect with the source of her creativity and passion. Sarah says, “Even if I’m not in touch with my fountain at times, I know that it is always accessible to me.”
- When Leon envisions his majestic “inner tree,” he immediately feels grounded and reunited with the source of his strength and personal power.
- Naomi sees her inner guide as an old, wise woman who offers compassion and guidance—a woman who looks at Naomi with love and understanding. “This image of myself as a loving grandmother instantly connects me with my own answers,” she says.

Naming your higher self will allow you to quickly reconnect with its essence and summon its strength when challenging times and situations arise. As Derek says, “When I feel ungrounded or unsure, I just feel for that ‘mountain energy’ inside me.”

Take some time this week to contemplate what image or symbol embodies *your* higher self. Then practice summoning that image or symbol anytime you could use the sage guidance of your inner wisdom.



Ragen Mendenhall, *Believer*

www.ragensart.com

I hope that everyone can find the thing that they most love doing in life and have as much fun doing it as I do. I have had a passion for making art for as long as I can remember. As a child, drawing and painting was completely natural to me, and now I know it to be a large part of my life's purpose. It is a ritual that reconnects me with a sense of reverence for being alive.

I hope that my work will strike a chord in people. I feel that art can serve as a mirror, and if we allow it to guide us, the emotion and beauty in art will reunite us with a more enlightened part of ourselves.



Feel the Essence

Tap Into Your Energetic Connection with Everything

Think for a moment of all the places, people, or animals you've felt an energetic connection to, a connection you can't necessarily understand or explain. Now imagine how you might energetically connect with the playfulness of a puppy, the passion of a performer on stage, the peacefulness of a sunrise, or the serenity of a sleeping baby.

This week, experiment with connecting energetically with the world around you. Can you "feel" the smoothness of a mirror, the texture of a wood table, or the prickliness of a cactus without actually touching them? Can you sense the life and warmth of a candle flame? The effortlessness of a bird soaring overhead? The stillness of an overcast sky?

What energy do you experience when you watch the surface of a lake or the ocean, just feeling for the motion of the water? Can you feel the lightness of dry leaves as they're blown around by the fall wind? Are you able to feel into the energetic essence of a flower? Can you reach out energetically and sense a connection between you and a tree?

To increase your ability to energetically connect with people, it helps to let go of any ideas you might have about what you will experience. Think of how it feels when you gaze into an infant's eyes: the space between you is so clear that you can look deeply into this little being, and he or she seems to look just as deeply into you. What gets in the way of experiencing this with adults? *Our ideas about each other.*

When we approach someone with a lot of ideas about who they are and what we're going to see, we end up only being able to look *at* them. When we approach them with an open mind and heart about who they might be, we can look *into* them.

So this week, practice looking at the people you encounter while letting go of all the ideas you might be carrying about them. You might gaze at them with an intention to feel their essence. This can be especially rewarding with older people. Look into their faces with receptivity and openness, and you will likely feel a depth of life, a rich history, and the wisdom and experience that come from a lifetime of living.



Shawna Erback Studios, *Firefly Fairy*

www.shawnaerback.com

I started painting when I was a child, but started my journey to becoming a professional artist the Christmas of 2003, a month after the death of my father. My collectors have followed the journey of a little girl through fantastical fields and forests, past sad, lonely moons and on the backs of giant turtles and fairy peacocks. They have met my special friends, like my faithful heart pet, grand giraffes and majestic lions.

I offer a unique style of dreamscapes, blending together surrealism and fantasy with gothic or whimsical tones, depending on where my mood takes me. With each stroke of my brush, I weave together a story. I draw the viewer into my world where we can sit together for a while and share a moment.



Loosen Up! If You Don't Need It, Relax It

Most of us could be a lot more relaxed than we are. Frequently tense, we tend to contract many more muscles than we actually need for everyday tasks like sitting, standing, and walking. There's no reason for your facial muscles to be engaged when you're walking or for your shoulders to be scrunched up to your ears while you're working at your desk. Perpetually contracted muscles make for a less flexible body that is more prone to injury.

Top athletes expend energy only as required. Consciously or unconsciously, they continually scan their bodies to make sure they're engaging only the muscles needed in that moment. Runners might ask themselves periodically during a race, "Is my neck relaxed? Are my shoulders relaxed? Am I clenching my teeth?" Animals naturally conserve their energy in this way, too. Watch how a cat completely relaxes when it's not playing, eating, or exploring.

This week, take a walk while intentionally relaxing all the muscles you don't need for walking. Scan your body from head to toe, checking in with each body part and feeling whether it is as relaxed as possible. When you're engaged in any physical activity or sport, bring your

awareness to which muscles are actually required for that activity and which you could let go of. This will conserve your energy, leaving more available for the muscles that need it.

This is also a great exercise if you spend your day at a desk. The act of sitting in a chair takes relatively few muscles, but you may have many more contracted than is necessary. Periodically close your eyes and scan your body from top to bottom, relaxing any muscles not needed for the job of sitting. This quick scan offers a fabulous benefit for your body in just a few seconds.

This practice can also help you relax back into sleep in the middle of the night. Putting your attention on your body takes it off of your mind and your unproductive thoughts. Direct your breath into each area of your body, expanding the area while inhaling and relaxing it while exhaling.

Relax your tight muscles throughout the day, and you'll have much more energy to accomplish all that you'd like!



Lindy Longhurst, *Sea Maid*

www.serpentmandalas.com, www.LindyLonghurst.etsy.com

Originally with a background in landscape architecture and design, I began painting and drawing some years ago after much travel, exposure to different cultures and spiritual beliefs, and a reawakening to nature. The inspiration for my art is based on a strong connection to the earth and the natural elements, as well as an exploration into the conscious and subconscious worlds via dreams and meditation.



Go Through the Magic Door The Ultimate Cure for a Bad Hair Day

On your way out of the house in the morning, you take one last glance in the mirror—and suddenly nothing seems right. Your hair isn't behaving, your pants don't fit right, your shirt is wrinkled, your shoes are worn. You're not happy with the way you look, but it's time to go.

If you've ever experienced this, you'll want to know about the Magic Door.

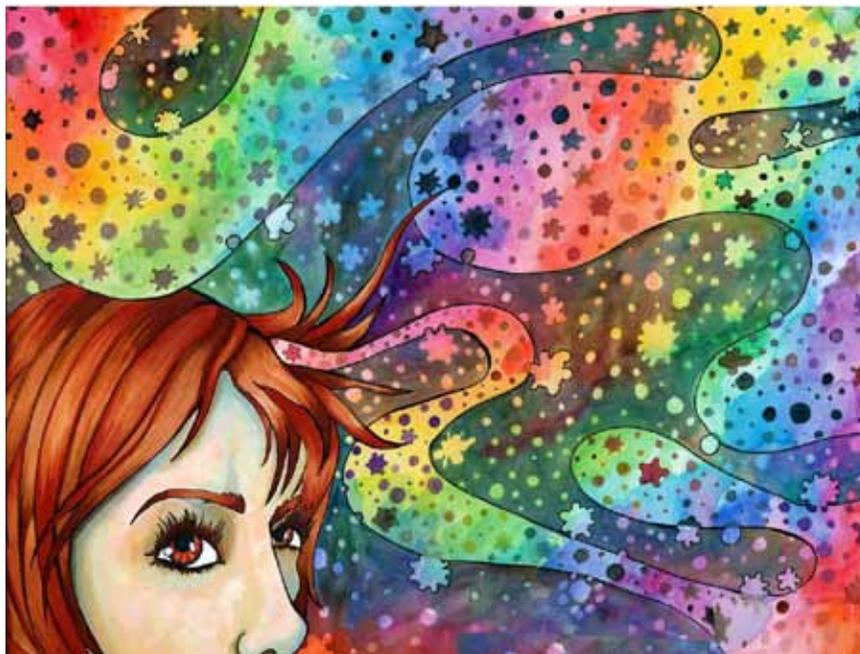
By passing through the Magic Door, you choose to be exactly who you are right now and to fully accept yourself as such. In essence, you “own” whoever you are at this moment: whatever you're wearing, whatever flaws or wrinkles you might have, whatever your clothing and hair looks like today, even all of the choices you've made up to this point. The Magic Door is your reminder that it's totally okay to be you out in the world, exactly as you are *right now*.

So when you step out your front door for the day, make it a Magic Door. Whatever is going on for you, decide to own it. Once you go through that

door, there will be no more questioning whether you're wearing the right outfit; no more putting yourself down because of the lines on your face or what you have or haven't done. Step through that door and fully take on the feeling of being as beautiful, as sexy, as comfortable, as confident, or as poised as you'd like.

Whenever you feel yourself sinking into self-doubt during the day, make the next door you go through a Magic Door—whether it's a car door or the entrance to a restaurant. You can even mentally create an archway on the sidewalk if you're walking along and that self-deprecating voice starts up.

The Magic Door instantly propels you from self-doubt into self-confidence. Rather than changing your clothes, you change your self-perception. Because at the end of the day, it doesn't matter what you wear: it's your feeling about yourself that makes all the difference.



Rachel Brown, *Breaking Open the Head*
www.paintmyworldrainbow.com

For the most part, my work is driven by my reading, traveling, and spirituality. I have volunteered in Guatemala, worked on the Navajo Nation, meditated with the Ishaya monks, and roamed much of the United States. I studied in Malaga Spain, which gave me the opportunity to dance Flamenco with gypsies, ride a camel in Morocco, camp in the Sahara, and explore grottos in Portugal. This planet dazzles me with her art, her languages, her cultures, and most of all her people, who imprint upon my heart and allow me to view things with a childlike perception and a mind open to new ways to combine and create.

My goal is to create something new and colorful, full of symbols and meaning, to tell a story only I can tell, to breath life into paint, to become fleetingly godlike in that harmonious moment of creation. I created this painting after reading Daniel Pinchbeck's *Breaking Open the Head*, his journalistic endeavor into the jungles of South America, the grass huts

of the Bwiti in Africa, the mountains of Mexico, and the hippest festivals of the United States. His book is the compilation of his research on shamans and the potentially healing properties of indigenous plants. After reading it I sat down and created a gorgeous copper-haired girl with a psychedelic swirl emerging from her open mind.



Free Your Inner Filter

Kiss Your Assumptions Goodbye

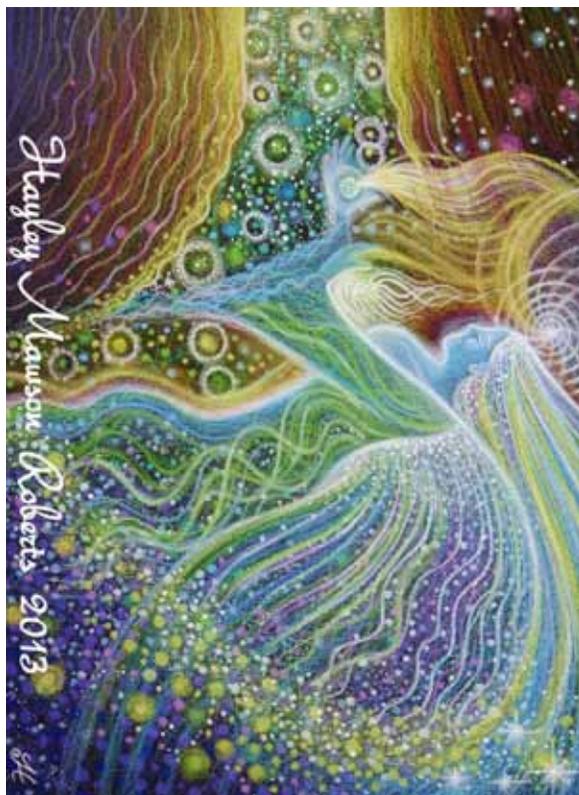
We make assumptions about people all the time. Some assumptions make navigating our lives easier or help keep us safe. We may instinctively cross to the other side of the street, for example, to avoid someone who's ranting deliriously.

Many of our assumptions about others, though, do us more harm than good. These may include some we picked up from our family or society: "People who don't do such-and-such weren't raised properly and aren't worth knowing." Others might come from our own limiting beliefs: "I'm not going to talk to that woman because she won't be interested in me."

By locking us into ideas about who other people are, our unexamined assumptions can do us a big disservice. We may draw false conclusions about what someone is like, what their point of view is, or what their likes and dislikes are. We may miss seeing things about them that we would actually enjoy or could learn from. Our assumptions about a close friend, family member, or even an intimate partner can prevent us from truly seeing them as they grow and evolve.

This week, examine your assumptions about other people. Bringing your awareness to those assumptions can free you from being controlled by them. If you see yourself making assumptions about someone's behavior, remind yourself that you would probably understand the behavior if you knew all the relevant circumstances. They may have grown up in an abusive family, have a loved one battling cancer, or be preoccupied with a challenging situation. If someone seems to be driving too slowly and you start to react, remember that they might have a passenger who's feeling sick or that there might simply be something wrong with their car!

Here's another practice to try out this week. Think of someone you've made assumptions about and imagine actually *being* them. This might be someone you know fairly well or someone you see on a regular basis. Put yourself in their position—with their body, their set of beliefs, their family, their upbringing, their education, their interests, and their life experiences. Imagine what it's like to look at the world through their eyes. While you can never truly know another person's experience, this practice will help you understand and connect with them in ways that you couldn't before.



Hayley Mawson Roberts, *The Gift*

www.HMRsoul.etsy.com,

www.facebook.com/visionaryartisthayleymawsonroberts

In my early teens, I went through a time of intense spiritual growth and transformation. I experienced on a daily basis past life memories, prophetic and lucid dreaming, sensing and communicating with the angels and spirit realm. All the while, my art continually brought me into peace and balance, allowing me to stay grounded while on this “awakening” journey. Forever changed by these experiences, I was opened to new pathways of communication and loving guidance from the celestial realms. My artworks are my sacred offering back to life. They are prompted by visions, dreams, angels, and celestial beings that I psychically sense and communicate with. The artworks act as doorways,

connecting the viewer to the ever-present loving energy of the angels and celestial beings.

The Gift is the greatest gift we can receive. It is the understanding that life is a constant, harmonious process of giving and receiving, gathering and releasing. It is the trust, to the core of our beings, that there is infinite abundance surrounding us and enriching us every single moment, to be gathered and released and given and received through the portal of our hearts. This gift of understanding makes us a “gift” to the world as we begin to live with open hearts and understand the divine harmony and balance that is constantly unfolding all around us, in the highest good for all.



Give Yourself Permission It's Okay to Be Human!

Giving ourselves permission to be human frees us. In the long run, life will be better not only for us, but for everyone around us. When we acknowledge our humanness, we give the other people in our lives permission to be human, too.

Choose three items—either from this list or that you think of yourself—to give yourself permission for this week. Pick the three things that you know in your heart will make the greatest difference in your own happiness.

This week I give myself permission . . .

- To ask for help
- To make a mistake
- To play
- To speak my truth
- To do something I love
- To relax
- To not know the answer
- To dream
- To start over
- To do something for myself

- To be nervous
- To enjoy myself
- To not be right
- To take care of myself
- To heal
- To be creative
- To believe in myself
- To forget someone's name or birthday
- To laugh at myself
- To exercise
- To experience pleasure
- To fail
- To follow my heart
- To not know how to do something
- To have fun
- To feel
- To take a few minutes for myself
- To do nothing
- To shine
- To look stupid
- To be fabulous
- To say the wrong thing
- To ask a question
- To be authentic
- To not be perfect
- To fall in love
- To be successful
- To feel comfortable in my body
- To change
- To be scared
- To like myself
- To love myself
- To be who I am
- To be human



Vesna Perkovic, *MaliJoe ~ Essence ~ Merge*

blueflamestar.wix.com/spiritualart

I am an artist who channels twin flame energy and imbues it onto canvas in acrylic and paper in pastel to represent the merged energy of the souls. Within the process of creating a painting, specific energies of the reunited twin flame energy is expressed. These images are energy/frequency carriers, as each painting is attuned to the unique energy pattern of the subject who, upon viewing the painting, will sense an immediate change in their auras. I created this portrait of Mali and Joe so that the energy/frequency of their Being, reunited in the personality of the two, could express the ONE Being that is Mali and Joe in their incarnated state expressing the spirit that they hold as twin flames.

From Mali and Joe: We feel this is not a portrait of Joe and Mali, separately, but of who we are together. There is a blending of the masculine and feminine, the yang and the yin, which is very much how we are as a couple. Then there is the creational aspect: These two souls are intertwined for this time to create, and the creation arises out of the meeting of their two souls.



Turn Off Your Autopilot Activate Your Body and Brain

Some routines, like a mid-morning cup of tea, can be a welcome blessing. They offer us space for quiet reflection amidst the daily tasks of our busy lives. If we're not paying attention, though, long-entrenched, habitual ways of doing things can cause our bodies and brains to begin to shut down. This week, take some time to consciously notice your own ingrained habits—and wake yourself up by going off autopilot.

Start by clasping your hands together, interlocking your fingers, and noticing which thumb is on top. Then re-clasp them, switching your fingers so that the other thumb is on top. How does that feel—a little awkward? Good! Different parts of your brain are stimulated when you do something different from what you're used to doing. Now try the same thing behind your back.

When we're young and continually learning new skills, our brains are naturally being challenged every day. Continuing to stimulate our brains in adulthood keeps the mind alive—which in turn keeps us *feeling* alive! Even when we're older, our brains can be stimulated to grow new neurons. This means we can slow down age-related loss of memory or motor skills by continuing to activate our brains in new ways.

Notice which foot you habitually start up the stairs with, and try starting with the other. Hold the phone or turn the faucet on and off with the opposite hand. If you typically cross your legs a particular way when you sit or your arms when you stand, recross them. Notice which thumb you usually (or always!) use to press the shift key or space bar on your keyboard, and try using the other. Eat, write, paint, draw, or play a game of cards or Ping-Pong using your non-dominant hand—and have fun feeling uncomfortable!

If you're an athlete, switching it up once in a while will naturally make you more aware of what you're doing. Throw with your non-throwing arm, catch with your non-catching hand, or serve with your non-serving hand once in a while. Try walking or running backwards.

If you're up for a real challenge, switch your computer mouse to the other hand for a day. This is guaranteed to feel unnatural! Rather than growing frustrated by comparing what you're able to do with this hand to what you can do with the other, spend a little time just feeling into this new experience and being grateful for the miracle that your body is.

By waking up your body and brain, you'll experience yourself, and the world, in new ways.



Mary Ann Holley, *Creative Power*
www.HeavenOnEarthSilks.etsy.com

I created this mandala to symbolize the creative power that is in all of us. The purple flower (the Seed of Life) is the element from which all things come; it is the source of spiritual wisdom and insight. The yellow center is our personal power. The four butterflies represent transformation into physical form, and the green leaves represent creating through the heart.

I am a spiritual artist. All of my work comes through to me during meditation and is created for the “soul” purpose of uplifting those who are in contact with it. Mandalas in particular make wonderful tools for meditation.



Look for the Life It's All Around You

When we're out in the world, most of us are used to focusing our attention on the people around us and the things we've constructed—the buildings, roads, vehicles, and other objects that fill our lives. We often overlook the beauty of the natural world that surrounds us as well. Intentionally putting our attention on nature, even for a few moments, renews and refreshes us.

This week, as you go about your days, open your eyes to signs of life. Put your focus on all the living creatures—plant, animal, and even insect—that are sharing the space with you. Whether you're traveling by vehicle or on foot, take special notice of the living things you pass by. At your office, notice the plants that people have on their desks or that you can see through a window. In the grocery store, find a leafy herb or a small plant to focus your attention on for a moment.

Even if you live in a big city, nature will be evident almost everywhere you look. Notice the flowers blooming in a window, a spider weaving its web in a neglected corner, the trees offering shade in a park, birds soaring by overhead, a weed sprouting up through a crack in the pavement.

By resting your eyes and your mind on the natural world for a moment or two, you'll rediscover that place of stillness and serenity that also resides in you.

The next time you notice that you're feeling rushed and ungrounded as you make your way to a destination or appointment, remind yourself to look for the life—it's all around you!



Karen Casey-Smith, *True*

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My spiritual flower mandalas are created from my own photographs and are about light and energy. Each has its own vibrational frequency and radiates healing energy. Capturing the peace and perfection present in all things is my focus. My hope is that each viewer will experience a connection to the spirit, the truest essence of my subjects, and this in turn will assist them in connecting to their own peace and perfection.

This flower mandala began with my photograph of lily of the valley and wild violet leaves. The title, *True*, is my vibrational interpretation of the energy of this image. This *True* energy is alignment: BE-ing your genuine, authentic, beautiful self.



Resonate!

Connect with the Feeling of Sound

For a moment, imagine the sound of a dog barking. Can you hear in your mind's ear a bark that feels playful? How about a bark that feels threatening or angry? Weak or tired? Energetic or happy?

All of the sounds we hear have the potential to evoke a “feeling sense” in us. When you hear a hammer in use, for example, it might feel tentative, steady, powerful, or insistent. The sound of the wind moving through the trees or between buildings might have a soothing or scary feeling about it. A bird's song can feel cheerful, romantic, or melancholy.

You don't have to be out in nature to experience this. Listen—what can you hear right now? One at a time, focus on each sound. Whether it's the movement of people in the next room, the traffic outside your window, or the hum of your computer, how does each sound feel? The feeling might be quite subtle, but can you detect whether the hum of your computer feels irritating, rhythmic, or even reassuring?

This week, practice listening to sounds with your whole self. Rather than hearing them with just your ears, open all your senses to them, even your intuitive senses. Then, whatever you're sensing in the sounds, feel for those qualities in yourself.

Does the sound of running water or rolling waves feel tranquil, joyful, wild, or alive? Feel inside yourself for those qualities. Can you find something in yourself—perhaps an emotion, a physical feeling, or a memory—that feels tranquil? Joyful? Wild? Alive?

If you hear the call of a bird that feels longing, peaceful, spacious, or celebratory, search inside for a place where that quality resonates with you. If the sound of children laughing feels happy, magical, or sweet, find something inside yourself that feels the same way.

And the next time you hear a sound you love, like the sound of your best friend's laugh or of children happily playing, listen with your whole self!



Sharrhan Williamson, *Joyous Cosmology*

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fineartamerica.com/profiles/sharrhan-williamson.html

Music was my first love—I began playing piano at five and have been performing for over 30 years—so it finds its way into all of my art, one way or another. Visual artwork is such a wonderful contrast to music for a performer—the latter being so ephemeral in many ways. You create an improvisational music piece on the spot, and unless you happen to be able to record it in that moment, it’s “lost and gone forever,” except in memory. Visual artwork, on the other hand, is tangible: you can put it on the wall and look at it for the next 25 years if you want to.

More than anything, my approach to art has a large spiritual component. I like to play, experiment, revel in color, and enjoy the energy and bliss that beautiful art can impart, but what I am always trying to express is the ineffable, invisible infinite consciousness that lives in the heart of matter.



See the Full Spectrum Brighten Your Life with Color

What color are your eyes? Is there even a single answer to that question? What we see as an object's "color" is really the wavelengths of light that are being reflected off the object's surface at that particular moment in time. Move the object into different light, and it will "have" a different color—or, more precisely, colors. Because what looks to us like a single color is usually a spectrum of colors, a variety of hues and shades that we perceive as one. Prove this to yourself right now by looking very closely at something nearby—almost anything: wood, fabrics, plants, your clothing. Do you see just one color, or several?

Get intimate with the next flower you see. Look very closely and notice the variations of color that compose the petals. The veins may be quite a different color from the petals, and the petal's edges might be darker or lighter than the interior—yet from a distance, it all blends together and you may "see" just a single color. Also notice how the light filtering through the petals creates shadows, contrasts, and areas of darkness and light. If possible, move the flower into different lighting and watch how the colors shift.

The human eye can discern millions of colors. Millions! And variations in the structure of our eyes and brains can make the same colors appear slightly different to different people. Some people, such as the rare individuals who are color-blind in just one eye, even see different palettes of colors out of each of their eyes.

Really look at people's eyes this week. Enjoy the incredible array of patterns and colors—you'll be treated to streaks of gold, gray, and violet and flecks of brown, bronze, and black. Ask your friends to move into different lighting and you'll see that some people's eyes vary greatly with their surroundings, while others vary only a little. Also notice that no one's eyes are exactly alike: just like fingerprints, no two irises are identical. And eyes can change color over time. Infants' eyes, in particular, may change color dramatically over their first few years.

Here's another fun color experience: when you're taking a walk, focus for a few minutes on greens, then browns, then blues, then whites, observing everything you see of each color. You can also try this just sitting at your favorite cafe or in your home. Scan the entire scene with each color in mind, and see what you find.

And make sure you look in a mirror this week—a magnifying mirror if you have one—while asking yourself, “What color *are* my eyes?”



Anna Arnold, *Violet Eyes*
annaarnoldsuniverse.blogspot.com

A professionally trained artist and art educator, I find immense joy in creating close-up, highly expressive portraits and paintings that celebrate and express the individual. An innovative and authentic expressive painting style has emerged as I create more from spontaneity charged with emotion.

I am infinitely curious and excited about exploring many moods, styles, and materials. To begin my creative process, I embark on a journey of self-exploration through vibrant acrylic self-portraits such as *Violet Eyes*.

Violet Eyes is an intimate, unflinching expressive close-up portrait in bold, vibrant colors. Violet eyes are very rare and a sign of true beauty. However, it's not the color of the eyes that makes some one beautiful—it is what is reflected in those eyes that reveals the soul of a person..

More than anything, my approach to art has a large spiritual component. I like to play, experiment, revel in color, and enjoy the energy and bliss that beautiful art can impart, but what I am always trying to express is the ineffable, invisible infinite consciousness that lives in the heart of matter.



Open Up Some Space

Make More Room for Life in Your Life

Space. It's all around us, yet many of us feel we don't have nearly enough of it. Our lives feel overcrowded, filled with too many demands and too much to do. In response, we experience the stress and anxiety of feeling constantly under pressure of one sort or another.

This week, experiment with inviting more space into your life. If you're always multitasking, try doing just one thing at a time, even if only for a few minutes. If you listen to the television while making dinner, switch it off and bring more mindfulness to the process of preparing your meal. If you habitually turn on music in the car, choose to drive for a while in silence, listening to the sounds around you instead. If you tend to talk continually when you're with a friend, just sit quietly for a few minutes, enjoying the simple pleasure of being in their presence.

Even if you live in a big city, you can get a sense of spaciousness. Look out your window, just noticing the space that's surrounding the plants and the people, the vehicles and the buildings. Contemplate the great expanse of sky above.

This week, create spaciousness in your life by letting go of something you don't really need or want to do, even if you've already said yes. Many of us feel we should say yes to all invitations, if at all possible. But with the Internet, email, and social media, we're connected to many more people than our parents and grandparents were, which means a lot more invitations. Just be gracious: "You know, I'm feeling very pressured this week, and I'm realizing that I've overcommitted myself. I love you—and I need to stay home instead of attending your party." Your example might even give other people permission to take care of themselves when *they're* feeling overcommitted.

Clearing out physical space will bring more harmony into your home and into your life. We sometimes hold on to things for sentimental reasons, but much of the neglected clutter in our closets is just stagnant energy. If you can't tend to an entire closet this week, you might go through just a single drawer. Giving away the usable items you no longer need or want will free the energy that was tied up in them, offer someone else the opportunity to appreciate them, and give you more space to enjoy the things you really *do* like having around.

You can also create space inside your body by sitting up a little taller and standing a little straighter. Breathe deeply, and you will feel your rib cage expand, making more space for your internal organs.

Put a single flower, a leaf, or a small stone on your desk this week as a simple reminder to bring a little more space into your life.



Julie Magers Soulen, *Barn Swallow Sky*

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Hush. Do you hear it? The silence that permeates the forest and envelops each branch, twig, and creature. Listen. Breathe. Now you hear it. Now you feel it. The beat of your heart, the whisper of a breeze, the rhythm of life.

I have always felt at home in nature. As a child I was outside more than inside, exploring the leafy deciduous woods near my Ohio home. Since moving to Colorado more than 20 years ago, I have been an avid outdoors enthusiast. For 12 years, we lived in a remote mountain home powered by solar energy and surrounded by acres of pine forest. Living off the grid connected me to the environment in a very personal way, and living closely to nature's rhythms became a way of life.

Nature has a way of teaching you if you simply pay attention. I suppose that's why I enjoy landscape and nature photography so much. When I

“see” a photo of nature in all her beautiful colors and forms, it puts me in the present moment where time does not exist. At times it is hard to take the shot because I just want to fully absorb whatever I’m looking at. But then the desire to share that beautiful moment with my viewer invigorates me and overcomes my stasis.

Stillness. Happiness. Lightness. So simple yet so powerful, they are words to live by.



Let It Shine!

Light Up from the Inside

What can you do right now, without moving from where you are, that can accomplish all of the following?

- Reduce stress and lower blood pressure
- Improve your mood and give you more energy
- Make you look younger, more attractive, and more confident
- Make other people more relaxed and more willing to connect with you

Have you guessed it?

Sometimes called the “natural happiness drug,” we’re talking about the simple act of smiling. Studies confirm that the expression on your face sends information back to your brain. Smiling signals the brain to release “feel-good” hormones that act to reduce anxiety and stress, decrease the experience of pain, lower blood pressure, strengthen the immune system, improve the memory, and slow the aging process. A simple smile can make you feel more positive and optimistic. It may also increase creativity and help alleviate depression.

And that's not all. People, even infants, instinctively react positively to a smile by relaxing and taking more interest in us. Smiling is also the quickest and easiest way to improve your appearance. Did you know that it takes almost twice as many muscles to frown as it does to smile? Think of all the extra strain on your face when you frown! Close your eyes and frown for ten seconds, then smile for ten seconds. Notice any difference in how you feel? See if you can feel the energy of your smile radiate through your body.

Scientists disagree about the extent to which smiling can elevate mood, but some research suggests that it is positively correlated to happiness, long-term health, and even successful relationships. Full smiles involving the mouth, cheeks, and eyes have the biggest measurable effect on mood, but even a hint of a smile will do more for us than a frown ever will.

This week, experiment to see what the benefits of adding a little more smiling to your life might be. Practice smiling when you're alone and when you speak on the phone. If it feels uncomfortable to smile at strangers, focus instead on simply smiling more often at the people you see every day. See if you can double the number of genuine smiles you typically give others in a day. When you notice other people's smiles, even from a distance, allow them to naturally draw out yours in response.

You might even try smiling a genuine smile when you're not really in the mood. If this is difficult, try recalling a happy memory or imagining a peaceful scene like walking along a sunny beach or watching a sunset. Smiling a genuine smile might just be enough to *put* you in the mood!.



Sue Halstenberg, *Green Tara's Face*
www.SueHalstenberg.com

My paintings are a reflection of my journey into deeper self-discovery. I start with only a general idea for a piece, often inspired by meditative music or a mythological symbol. Then I let go and allow the creative force to flow through me. The image continues to develop as I add many layers of color and textures. The finished painting always turns out to be a surprise, ending up looking much different than what I started with. I encourage everyone to experience the joy of drawing and painting and surrender any preconceived ideas of how their artwork should be.



Play with Patterns

Feel Them with All Your Senses

Nature is bursting with patterns: the spiraling seeds in a sunflower, the movement of ocean waves, the formation of sand dunes, the branching of rivers and leaf veins, the almost mystical number patterns hidden in the geometry of pineapples and pinecones.

The ability to recognize patterns is essential to navigating and understanding the world. One of your brain's primary functions is to sort through the billions of pieces of data it receives, recognize patterns in those data, and make predictions and decisions based on those patterns. If your brain didn't perform this function, you couldn't read a book, operate a computer, or drive a car. Think about this: a written word is simply an arrangement of lines that your brain recognizes as being associated with a particular meaning. And without your brain's ability to make predictions based on past experiences and the sensory information you're taking in, driving a car would be impossible.

Look around you right now. What patterns do you notice? As you continue to scan your surroundings, more and more patterns will become apparent. Take yourself deeper into this inquiry by just "feeling" for the repetition all around you, without thinking about it.

All your sensory systems—not just your visual system—are capable of recognizing patterns. Pattern recognition enables you to easily imagine how an orange would feel, smell, and taste without actually holding one in your hands. You're able to hum tunes you haven't heard for years, because of the repeating patterns of the notes. Your body can even feel patterns, like the vibration of a drum or the rhythmic motion of a vehicle you're riding in.

This week, notice patterns with *all* your senses. When you detect a pattern, experiment with “feeling into” it with your whole being. For example, close your eyes as you run your fingers over the surface of a piece of wood, a leaf, or tree branch, feeling for repetition with your fingers. Then experiment with “feeling” the pattern with your eyes.

Listen to a piece of music you know well, this time feeling for patterns in the music with your whole body. Is there a steady beat throughout the piece? How many different rhythmic patterns can you detect? Now focus on just a single voice or instrument. Do you notice any new patterns?

Here's one more way to play with patterns. When you unexpectedly sight a sequential number this week, like 12:34 on a digital clock, make it your reminder to be grateful for something wonderful in your life.



Patricia Robin Woodruff, *Sacred Geometry*
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I've been exploring the imagery that connects us to nature, beauty, peace, serenity, joy, and love. My goal is to create artwork that comes from spirit and goes beyond the visual—to connect with your mind and soul.

Sacred geometry can be found in so many things, from the tiny curves of seashells to the logarithmic spiral in galaxies. We recognize it on an intuitive level, as we find joy in the perfect curve of the beautiful nautilus shell or the symmetry of a snowflake. But if you take time to find out more about sacred geometry, it's even more astounding. This picture is a good reminder that there are patterns to our life, even in the smallest of things.



Try Not Knowing Ignorance Really Can Be Bliss

Do you know what a rose smells like? Are you sure? Did you know that there are thousands of varieties of roses—and that even a single variety can smell different depending on such things as the temperature, the soil conditions, how much water the plant has been receiving, and how long the flower has been open? Not only that—our own sense of smell is affected by things like how we’re feeling, whether we have a cold, how dry our mouth is, and what we’ve recently eaten. And our sense of smell changes over time: we tend to become less sensitive as we age. Given all this, smelling a rose believing we already know what it’s going to smell like could cheat us out of a really beautiful experience!

Have some fun with this idea. Can you imagine taking a drink of water or a bite of food with no expectation of what it’s going to taste like? You’d be surprised how different something can taste when you consciously let go of the idea that you already know what its flavor will be. This week, practice eating and drinking with curiosity. This takes experimentation—which is half the fun of this practice.

Bring that same sense of curiosity into other areas of your life. We often go through our daily routines on autopilot. This does help us navigate our

lives, but it also means we miss out on a lot! At work, try out not knowing how your day will go, or not knowing that the difficult customer you've dealt with in the past will be difficult again this time. Bring a curiosity to who your friends are—and, if you have them, to who your partner or your child is. If you're grocery shopping, experiment with not knowing exactly what you might buy—which may lead you to try a new vegetable. Not knowing who or what you might encounter in the store might also lead to an intriguing conversation with another customer or to seeing the cashier in a new way.

Experiment with letting go of your preconceptions—and you'll be instantly rewarded with richer experiences. And the next time you pass by a rose, take in its scent with no idea at all of what this particular flower will smell like today.



Orit Baron, *Dreams on the Beach*

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I am fascinated and inspired by the beauty of nature, love, and music. In my abstract and figurative work, I love to experiment with interesting compositions, colours, and textures. I especially enjoy creating pieces of the perfect size and colors to breathe new light into a particular room or space.



Make Nature Your Meditation And Feel Its Perfection in You

You've no doubt heard of the many benefits of having a meditation practice. There are psychological benefits (like improving mood and reducing anxiety, stress, and worry), physiological benefits (such as increasing blood flow, reducing blood pressure, and enhancing the immune system), and spiritual benefits (including increasing compassion, wisdom, and happiness).

But many of us just can't seem to find the time or patience to sit still for 15 or 30 minutes. Or we've tried certain kinds of meditation and found them helpful, but just aren't motivated enough by the results to make it a priority in our lives.

If this sounds familiar, you might benefit by incorporating simple mini-meditations on nature into your day. Just a minute or two, a couple of times a day, will allow you to clear your head, calm your body, and leave you feeling uplifted and happier than when you began.

You don't have to say mantras or sit in a special position. Just step outside and focus all your senses on whatever nature is nearby—whether it's a tree, some bushes, or the flowers in a pot. If you can't go outside,

is there a window you can open so that you can see, hear, or smell some plant life outdoors? Even if you work in a high-rise office building, there is almost always a place you can go for a minute or two, even if it's just an indoor planter where a few flowers are quietly growing.

Once you've found an element of nature to focus on, just relax, breathe, and "feel into" the plant, flower, or tree using all your senses. Observe leaves shimmering in the sunlight and tap into their light, free, lively feeling. When you meditate on a tree, which is so alive and yet so still, you might get a sense of its strength, flexibility, or peacefulness. Connecting with these qualities in the tree will help you reconnect with the same qualities in yourself, which is especially helpful during times of stress.

Incorporate all your senses into these mini-meditations. Listening intently to the cheerful call of a bird can help you feel uplifted. Deeply inhaling the aroma of a eucalyptus tree might give you a feeling of aliveness or expansiveness. Focusing all your senses on a rock can reward you with a sense of endurance, longevity, and stillness.

You might even bring a small plant into your office for this daily meditation. By contemplating this one plant for a few moments each day, you will begin to resonate with its peacefulness: so still, yet fully alive. You might become so familiar with the plant that you begin to notice changes in it from one day to the next.

Nature exists in great contrast to our hectic lives. Placing your attention on the beauty, perfection, and magnificence of nature for just a minute or two a day can reconnect you with the beauty, perfection, and magnificence inside *you*.



Robert Bridges, *Dharma Lite Bomb*

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thewayoftheflower.wordpress.com

My most cherished childhood memories are of sitting on the ground with my grandmother in her garden. I don't remember actually doing anything or any clear sense of what she was doing. I only remember the love. The love I felt radiating from my grandmother and the garden planted the early seeds of equating love and beauty, flowers and serenity.

Over the years I have found that no two flowers are alike. I do not look for perfection; I look for beauty. Sitting among flowers, I often sense there is something magical about a camera. I practice contemplative photography, using my camera as a meditative tool and as a means of cultivating qualities of curiosity, playfulness, concentration, mindfulness, gratitude, serenity, and joy. Each time I pick up the camera, it is an opportunity to see the world with fresh eyes and to "shoot from the heart."



S-t-r-e-t-c-h Yourself! Stay Flexible for Life

A grandmother who's in relatively good health but can't get down on the floor to roll a ball with her granddaughter. A 60-something uncle who says no to a walk with his nephew because he's been inactive for the last ten years. A couple who aren't as playful in bed as they used to be—not because they've lost interest, but because they're just too stiff. Allowing our bodies to become inflexible can have negative consequences on our relationships, yet a lot of the stiffness that comes with aging can be avoided by easy, regular stretching.

As we age, our muscles tighten, our range of motion decreases, and our joints grow stiffer. Stretching can help prevent stiffness in the muscles and ligaments that support our joints and can actually help keep arthritis from settling in. It decreases our chance of injury. Stretching also increases circulation, which in turn gives us more energy. The list goes on: stretching can improve coordination and posture, relieve stress and pain, and help us maintain joint mobility.

This week, pay attention to where your body could benefit from a little stretch. Before you get out of bed, encourage circulation by rotating your hands and feet, rolling your head from side to side, and rolling your legs

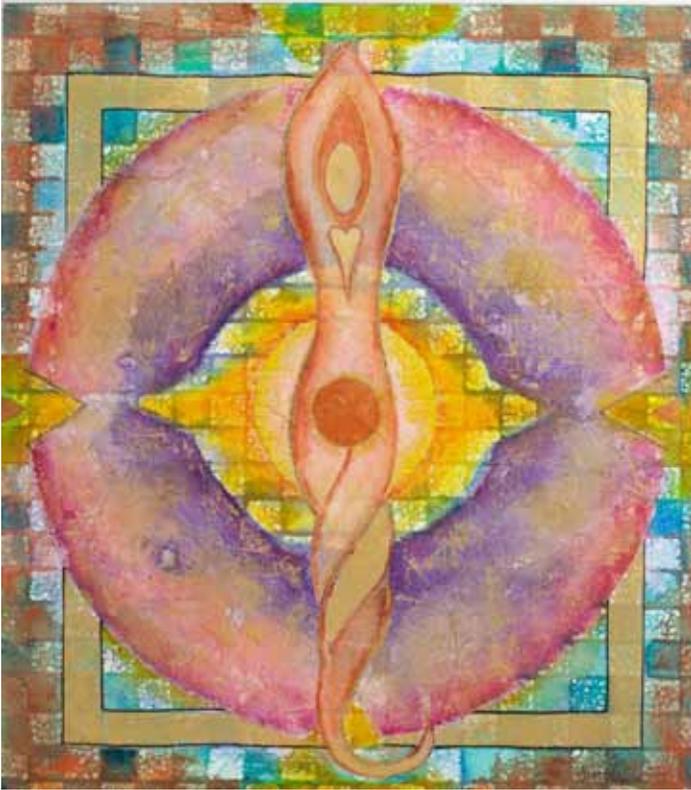
and arms in and out. Massage the fingers of each hand if they feel stiff. Reach up and reward your neck with a 15-second rub.

It's unhealthy to sit cramped over a desk for hours without a break, especially if what you're doing involves repetitive motion (yes, like using a computer!). Check in with your body periodically. Can you feel stress or stiffness settling in? What can you do to relieve it for a few seconds? Take a minute to stand up and move around. Stretch breaks are also essential for keeping the spine and back supple. There are many good resources on the web, with photographs and video, demonstrating stretches you can easily do at your desk—just take care of yourself by making sure each stretch feels right for you. You can stretch your eyes as well: simply look up from your work periodically and focus on an object that's farther away.

Standing in line is a great opportunity to stretch. Alternate between lifting your toes and dropping them; then rise up to stand on your toes. Gently bend back the fingers of each hand to loosen your wrists. Step one foot back and press down on that heel for a welcome calf stretch. For a nice shoulder opener, gently stretch one arm across your body using the other hand. Clasp your hands behind your back and gently raise your arms, pulling down and away from your shoulders. Yes, people might notice what you're doing—which could inspire them to do some much-needed stretching of their own!

If you watch television, keep your body happy by stretching during your favorite shows. When you're sitting in a theater, put an ankle on the opposite knee and press down gently on your thigh muscle to stretch your groin. On an airplane, make it a priority to take a few minutes—in the restroom, if standing in the aisle is not an option—to give your body a little stretching break.

Staying flexible makes it more likely you'll be mobile enough to explore all of what life has to offer. And once you're in the habit of scanning your body for where it's feeling tight, you can use that same skill to scan your life and your relationships for where they're feeling stiff, and consciously bring more flexibility into them, too.



Cheryl Irwin, *Breathing in the Balance*

www.cherylirwinarts.com

My art explores the junction of the physical and spiritual worlds within our own bodies. I am fascinated by the human body/mind and the incredible power of our attitudes to not only influence but to create our own realities. To me, abstract painting is a process of going to the edge of conscious thought and bringing back the news. I am connected to the intrinsic energy of my soul while I work, and I know that the beauty I create is harmonising and balancing for all of us.

My intention is that you, the viewer, will see my art as a gateway and take a few deep breaths and relax yourself into the intricate beauty and, by doing so, will sense your own connection to the limitless power of the universe and see shining within yourself the astonishing beautiful light that is your own being.



Take a Personal Energy Inventory And Invest Your Life Energy Wisely

We have only so much energy to spend on all the various things in our lives. We could call this our “life energy.” Check in to see where you’re spending your life energy. If you discover that you’re squandering it on something that doesn’t serve you, you can redirect it into something that does.

Assess how much energy you use in these four areas:

Area 1: Identify any roles you currently have that require a regular expenditure of energy. You might be a mother or father, a sister or brother, a daughter or son, an employee or boss, or a student. For each role, ask yourself whether you feel you have enough life energy available to devote to this role.

Area 2: Now identify any groups you belong to or any organizations you volunteer for. Include groups you’re just naturally a part of, such as a neighborhood or circle of friends. Consider that it requires some amount of energy to maintain these commitments and relationships. Do you feel you have the energy you’d like to have for each one?

Area 3: Look at any interests or hobbies you have. These might be activities you do on a regular basis, or sports or other physical activities you participate in—anything you do that you regularly dedicate a certain amount of energy to. Do you feel you have enough energy for each of those things?

Area 4: Finally, look at places you'd rather not use as much of your life energy as you actually do use. These might be activities you enjoy to some degree—like texting, watching television, or surfing the web—but that you'd rather not be spending quite so much time and energy on.

If everything in Areas 1, 2, and 3 feels as if it's receiving the perfect amount of your life energy, fabulous! But if there's a desire to have a little more energy for any of the activities in the first three areas, the easiest place to look is Area 4. Consider each activity in this area with the idea that, for instance, "If I don't use so much of my life energy surfing the web, I'll have more energy available to enjoy my family."

You might take a similar assessment before saying yes to an invitation or making a large purchase. When we acquire something—a pet, a home, a car, or even a new rice cooker—what we pay for it is not just the price in dollars. We often don't factor in the true cost of the energy, time, and attention the item is going to require.

And if you always find yourself overcommitted to friends, family, or whatever it is—then just once, *undercommit!* You'll move more easily through the things you have agreed to, and you'll have space left over—space for some of life's magic to show up.



Aurelien Pumayana Floret, *Seed of Life*

www.luminaya.com, www.luminaya.biz, www.pumayana.com,
www.pumayana.etsy.com

This mandala represents the five elements: Earth, Fire, Air, Water, and Ether. At the center you can see a Tibetan *vajra*, the Wheel of Life, the Earth, the quintessence of the creation and the seed of life from where all life patterns emerge. I created this mandala after deep meditations, inner journeys, and “work” on myself. All my images have a deep meaning and history, but part of their meaning is your own to discover.

The sacred art I create on the computer is inspired by meditations and dreams as well as my various journeys—both inner journeys and those around our small luscious planet. My images resonate with people: they are tools, like mirrors, that reflect our true self. My intention with them is to help people understand their own journey and consciousness.



Listen for the Music

The World Is Your Symphony

Your brain selectively screens out sounds you don't need to hear. The vibrations still reach your ears and the electrical signals still travel to your hearing centers, but your brain decides which sounds are important enough to actually pay attention to. The rest are ignored as insignificant background noise.

This amazing ability of the brain is a real gift when it comes to navigating the often complicated and noisy circumstances of our lives. But it also means we might be missing out on some beautiful sounds!

This week, periodically check in with your ears. Listen for sounds that would normally go unnoticed: voices of coworkers down the hall, birds chirping in the distance, a plane passing overhead, the wind whistling by your window. Even in your own home, doing your everyday tasks, stop for a moment and listen intently. What do you hear that you wouldn't typically notice? You might even listen to a piece of music or a song you love two or three times through, with your eyes closed. Each time, follow a single instrument or voice all the way through. Do you hear something new?

Anytime you close your eyes, your sense of hearing becomes more acute. This week, experiment with this idea by closing your eyes for a moment here and there and noticing how the sounds around you become richer and more vibrant. This is especially nice to do when you're listening to a voice you love, such as that of your child or your lover.

Find a place outdoors where there is a rich variety of sounds—on a bench in a park, the edge of a lake, or even a city street corner. Close your eyes, get comfortable, and for the next two minutes, listen as though there is a musical composition being performed all around, just for you. Let go of trying to identify what's making the various sounds, and just listen to them as a whole. Imagine that everything you hear—the birds, the wind, the vehicles, the voices—is a special instrument in this one-of-a-kind, never-to-be-heard-again musical composition.



Reina Cottier, *Gaia Speaks*

www.facebook.com/reinacottierart

I rediscovered my passion for art after I had children, which opened up a whole new side of myself. My art comes from an authentic place inside, aligning with my inner quest for a greater understanding of life expressed with vibrant, alive colours and flowing shapes. I can't plan or think when I create; it just flows and what will be, will be.

I love life! I love mixing with all walks of life and do not judge someone for what they look like or what they believe in. I am focusing on living fully in the now, being true to myself, evolving, learning, and expanding my horizons. What I am today, I may or may not be tomorrow, as each new experience reshapes me every single day. I am a strong free spirit, empowered and proud, and I feel this is expressed in my art.



Feel the Love

Celebrate the Memory of Someone Special

When you've lost a close friend or loved one, it's natural to take a little time on their birthday or the anniversary of their death to remember them. But you don't have to wait until one of those days comes around again to celebrate them and their role in your life. Give yourself time this week to celebrate the memory of someone who was special to you—a close friend, a family member, a teacher. Or you might choose to honor someone from your past whom you're no longer in contact with, someone who contributed a great deal to your life.

Take some time to reflect on the many ways in which knowing this person influences you today. How is your life different because of knowing them? Look around your home—can you see their influence? What expressions, sayings, or interests did you pick up from them? In what ways are you like them?

Do some things this week in honor of this person. Eat a meal they liked, go somewhere you used to go together, play a game you used to enjoy together, watch a movie or TV show you both loved, listen to music that

reminds you of them. Remember stories they told you, conversations you had, things you did together, things you laughed about. Call or get together with someone else who knew them, and share your memories.

If you have any cards or letters from this person, take some quiet time to read them. Look at any pictures you have of them—really look. Notice details. Get into the feeling of the photos and watch for any new memories that surface.

Everyone has their own particular brand of wisdom. What was this person's? How does their wisdom live on in you? When a challenge arises this week, ask yourself, "What advice would this person have given me in this situation? How would they have approached this?"

Reconnecting in this way with someone you love honors their memory and helps keep their spirit alive in you.



Sofanya White, *Essence Portrait of Rudy and Rosie*

www.sofanya.com, www.jewelintheforest.com

I am an artist blessed to live and work in the redwood forest of Big Sur, California. My intention and underlying basis for my work is to depict the reality that *we are nature* and not separate from it, that everything is energy, vibration, and frequency, and that all things are connected.

Creating what I call “Essence Portraits” is a process of allowing the person whose portrait I’m painting to watch their inner landscape unfold in brilliant colors while discovering their spirit guides, angels, animal spirits, and soulmates while I tune into the healing frequencies of colors, the imagery coming through the patterns, and the information revealed in the process. Each essence portrait begins with a short meditation in which I perceive the person’s colors. The inks appear to burst onto the moistened paper, flowing and mingling to create beautiful and interesting color patterns. Other images might appear, often revealing pertinent lessons, guidance, and information. When the portrait is complete, we explore the significance of the colors, images, and patterns. Many people continue to notice more imagery as time passes and experiences reveal them.



Move into the Slow Lane See What You've Been Missing

You're probably familiar with some version of this scenario: The meeting took longer than you anticipated, and now you're worried you'll be late for your next appointment. So you grab your things and rush outside, but stumble on your way through the door. As you fumble around trying to get the key in the lock, you drop the bag you're carrying and the contents spill onto the ground. You frantically make your way through traffic, checking the time about as often as you check the mirrors. Arriving at your destination with a couple of minutes to spare, you suddenly realize that you forgot to bring the documents you need for your appointment.

Contrary to what our churning minds are continually telling us, *hurrying is inefficient*. When we're in a rush, we're more likely to trip, drop things, forget things, or injure ourselves—all in all, pretty unproductive behavior!

Hurrying is a state of mind. It's a feeling of anxiety we create in ourselves by thinking we should be doing more things and doing them faster—or, worse yet, should *already* have done them! For many people, hurrying is habitual. Or we may unconsciously believe we're more important if we're always busy. Take a look inside to see if this might be true for you.

Also investigate whether you sometimes cause yourself to feel rushed because of poor planning. Would ten extra minutes to get ready in the morning help your entire day feel more focused? Would five minutes to review your plans for the day pay off in less stress and pressure? Are you overcommitted? Is there one thing you've scheduled this week that you could let go of in order to open up a little more space in your life?

We may also react to other people's state of "worry and hurry" by matching it with our own. The next time you sense that someone is giving you a signal to rush, try closing your eyes for a second. Before you respond, notice the feeling of your feet on the ground, and take a breath.

This week, practice moving with focus and intention—and without the scattered energy of hurrying. See how relaxed you can be in getting to your destination. If you typically drive in the fast lane, check out the slow lane. Fast is not always the most effective way to get somewhere. Besides the fact that traffic won't move faster just because you're in a rush, you might miss out on some beautiful scenery. You'll also be less likely to react calmly and intelligently in an emergency.

Slow down just a little this week, and notice how time opens up.



Rachael Inch, *Solitude*
www.inspirationalart.co.nz

Painting with spirit and freedom is the only way to paint, because the magic in painting comes from within, from a sense of knowing that this is what you are meant to be doing. When you work with spirit and freedom, your energy flows in every sense. Each stroke and paint drip correlates to emotions that will eventually shape themselves into the whole painting.

Each time I pick a brush or a colour, I allow my “gut” to guide me and my spirit to be free. I don’t know what I am doing; I have a picture in my head, but as I work with my painting, it moves with me and then I see something else in it, and a new picture forms in my head and I work towards that. It’s not until the end that I step back and see the journey I have taken.

People often ask how long it takes to do a painting, but I can’t honestly answer that because I take a never-ending journey with each one. A painting is never really finished to me; it is a “puzzle piece” that fits into my next painting—painting a picture of my journey through life.



Feel into the Beauty And Find It in Yourself

This week, allow the beauty around you to connect you with those same aspects of beauty in yourself. In this practice, first ask yourself *why* something is beautiful to you. Then feel for a matching feeling or quality inside yourself—some way in which you are energetically similar to the quality you’ve identified.

Alexandria, for example, was attracted to a flowering tree, and what she found so lovely was how bright it was. Then she searched for where she had that quality of brightness in herself—and discovered it in her laugh. Kerrin was drawn to the wild nature of the grasses and flowers growing on a hillside and identified with that wildness as her adventurous side. Robert says the light, cheery feeling of a mockingbird’s song reminds him of his own positive attitude towards life.

Does a bird in flight feel playful to you? In what ways are you playful—even if only on occasion or only in a small way? If you’re drawn to the surface of a lake because of how it reflects the light, *feel* the quality of that reflected light and then feel for that “reflected light” quality in yourself—such as the way you return other people’s smiles. Do you find a

warm breeze soothing? Find that soothing quality in yourself: When or with whom have you been like a warm breeze?

Does the elegance of an orchid connect you with how you feel when you dress up for a special evening? Does the sweetness of a single drop of rain remind you of the way you curl up with your cat? Does the fresh aliveness of a young child's face remind you of something in yourself that feels freshly alive, like a new understanding you're coming to?

Rather than just seeing whatever you're observing with your eyes, try to *feel* into it with your whole body. Open all your senses to this experience, including your intuitive senses. Does the sunrise feel gentle or magical? Is the moon serene or majestic? Does the tree feel calm or powerful? Is the sunlight warm or soothing? Does the ocean feel alive or expansive? When or where have you been each of these things?

Every aspect of beauty is in you, somewhere. This practice gives you an intimate link to your own inner beauty. The abundance of beauty you will find in yourself will astound you!



Kathleen Tennant, *Soar*

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A self-taught mixed media artist, I create one-of-a-kind journals, sketch-books, and wall art in my studio using bold color paints, inks, torn paper, the odd photograph, and lots of imagination. I love to see how paper, acrylics, inks, spray paint, and photographs mesh together to become art! I am constantly evolving and looking to better myself as an artist by challenging myself to create new and different art all the time, so each piece is a representation of my journey through life.

I believe art is a form of therapy that can heal and help others find happiness and hope. My art often contains an inspirational message conveyed through words or images. In *Soar*, the message “beauty is YOU” is a reminder that beauty lies within all of us—not just outwardly, but our inner beauty radiates and creates who we are and all we represent.



Release Your “Stuff”

Simple Practices for Letting Go

No matter how content we are with our lives, most of us have things we’d love to let go of. Too much “stuff” can clutter up our minds and leave us feeling fatigued, anxious, and overwhelmed.

Here are just a few things you may have a little too much of:

- Regrets, resentments, or guilt
- Negative self-talk, limiting beliefs about yourself, or feelings of unworthiness
- Phobias, addictions, or unhealthy habits
- Worry, stress, anger, or anxiety
- Envy or jealousy
- Negative thought patterns (such as always imagining the worst)
- Obsessive thoughts (such as dwelling on things you can’t change)
- Fears of failure, rejection, scarcity, or the future

There are many techniques that can help you clear away things like these. You might try meditation and visualization; tapping acupuncture points; hypnotherapy and inner-child work; exercise, yoga, and tai chi; or deep breathing, relaxation, and mindfulness practices. More and more scientific

research is accumulating to explain how these techniques positively affect our brains and bodies and why they are so beneficial.

It's easy to add simple letting-go practices to your everyday activities. The simplest visualizations are sometimes the most powerful. In your mind, for example, see yourself walking beside the ocean. Imagine that the motion of walking, the feeling of the air, and the sound of the waves are all cleansing you of something you're ready to let go of.

Anytime you're in contact with water, you can allow the motion of the water to assist your clearing-away process. When you're standing in a shower, imagine the water washing away your belief that you're not capable of accomplishing something you'd like to do. In the bath, gently bathe your skin while visualizing what you're freeing yourself of—such as negative thoughts about your appearance or repetitive worries about the future. While washing dishes, mentally see the water cleansing you of a fear you have, such as a fear of not having enough or a fear of being rejected. If you go for a swim, allow the water flowing past your body to take your worries or anxieties with it. During strenuous physical activity, imagine that you're sweating out negative habits or patterns.

Once you get the hang of it, letting-go visualizations are easy to make up in the spur of the moment. A walk or run can turn into a moving meditation as you give yourself the mental suggestion to leave behind a regret you're tired of dragging along with you. Anytime you feel a breeze moving across your skin—as when you're on a bike or riding in a car with the windows open—let the wind carry away your worries. The next time you're enjoying a fire, allow the flames to incinerate your fears that you aren't enough.

These practices may help you let go of some things entirely, while more deeply ingrained habits or beliefs will take longer. Each time you put your attention on actively letting go of something that isn't serving you, you will make a little more space for creating what you do want in your life.



Faith Evans-Sills, *Waterflower*

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In my work I draw inspiration from nature, love, Asian art, textiles, fairy tales, and most importantly the relationships that shape me. I live with my husband, a fellow painter, and our three young children in our dream house near the ocean where I maintain a close connection to my inspirations in nature through walks on the beach, teaching my children to surf, gardening, and frequent trips to wild places. I can most often be found by the ocean, drinking in the wild air from my favorite spot underneath the palm trees!

Through creating my art, I seek to inspire hope and manifest change and beauty. I use the lotus as a symbol for awakening to the spiritual reality of life. It holds possibility and transformation, giving us hope in the dark places.



Open Up to Your Intuitive Voice It Has Something to Tell You

Your intuition, or inner wisdom, deserves your trust. Yet, like many of us, you may have been taught to ignore or deny what that feeling or voice is trying to tell you.

Whether you prefer to think of your intuition as your vastly intelligent mind communicating information to you from the millions of pieces of data it takes in and processes, or simply as divine guidance, you continually receive relevant messages through senses other than the “big five” (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). Developing your intuition, then, is really a matter of learning to listen for and follow the guidance you’re already receiving. This includes recognizing the difference between the voice of your intuition and the voice of your fears or desires.

Start by looking back through your life for times when you chose not to act on an intuitive feeling and later realized the outcome might have been better if you had. Just by recalling those experiences, you will learn from them.

Intuitive guidance may be communicated verbally. Sophie heard the word “*Don’t!*” in her head as she walked down the aisle to marry her fiancé, who turned out to be abusive and addicted to gambling; the

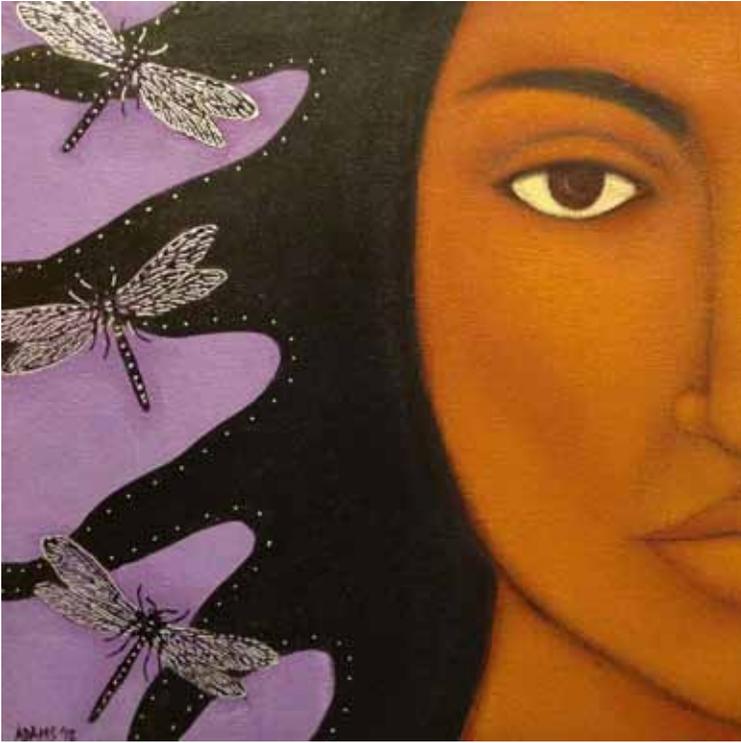
marriage was annulled six months later. Or your intuition may speak to you through a feeling or a physical impression. Ana felt the sun on her arm and had a sudden “knowing” that if she kept exposing her skin to excessive sunlight, she would end up with skin cancer. Some people say they recognize their intuitive voice because it feels as if it’s not theirs or it’s not coming from them. What you want to do is to identify how *your* intuition speaks to you.

This week, tune in to your inner voice. Feel for information coming from somewhere other than through your five commonly used senses. Listen for a voice that doesn’t sound like your own thoughts. As you practice, let go of the urge to question the voice’s origin or to evaluate the information, as your doubt can mask your intuitive guidance. If you’re constantly questioning, it will be more difficult to open up and just *listen*. It’s like trying to learn to play an instrument while judging every sound you make.

Experiment with asking yourself questions. If you’re dealing with a particular health issue, get quiet and ask your body, “Where is this coming from?” And then listen. Your mind might come in first with ideas and explanations, but you can recognize this voice as that of your mind—you’re likely pretty familiar with it! Say to yourself, “Okay, I acknowledge those ideas—and now I’d like to hear from somewhere else, somewhere deeper.” Then listen for something beyond your mind’s normal chatter. If you hear nothing, that’s okay. Just stay open to the idea and remember that your inner voice may speak to you at any time and in many ways, words being only one way.

If you have an intuitive idea this week and there’s an opportunity to act on it, take it! However your action turns out, it will help you develop your intuition. This is true even if you learn that that’s *not* the guidance you’re listening for and that you were actually hearing your mind, your hopes, or your fears speaking.

Learning to listen to and follow your intuitive guidance will reward you in countless ways. After all, you rarely hear someone lament, “If only I *hadn’t* listened to my intuition!”



Tamara Adams, *Dragonfly Portrait*

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Encountering the divine can be as simple as a moment of quiet contemplation. These moments are a theme of my work and something I enter into while exploring my own beliefs and divine potential through art, writing, and healing practices.

My intention with my Mexican-inspired acrylic paintings of women and children and contemporary interpretations of traditional iconography is to pay tribute to the beauty, mystery, and strength of the female spirit and to create a powerful vision of women who are truly blessed. Drawing much of my inspiration from mythology, culture, spirituality, and religion, it is my sincere wish that the concepts and values reflected in my work inspire people of all faiths to a deeper spiritual connection.



Challenge Your Body Stay Strong for Life

Did you know that for your muscles and bones to grow stronger, you need to challenge them?

When you exercise a muscle, or “stress” it, you’re actually stretching the muscle fibers and putting small micro-tears in them. Your body then goes to work to repair those tears. As it does, it lays down new muscle fiber. Those micro-tears are a signal that the muscle needs to be stronger to do the work it’s being asked to do.

Your body builds new bone in a similar way. When you exercise, your muscles put stress on your bones, and the bones develop tiny, microscopic cracks. These cracks signal your body to make new bone.

Stressing our muscles and bones to keep them healthy is especially important as we age, as this helps slow down the loss of both muscle strength and bone density. Of course, your body needs proper fuel and rest for this rebuilding process. And it’s essential to be careful not to overstress your muscles and bones, or you could end up with larger tears or cracks that take much longer to recover from.

So this week, use some muscles you haven't used in a while. Pick up the pace in your evening walk. Run, swim, or bike a little farther than you're used to, or with slightly more intensity. Challenge your body by trying something new—chosen *because* it makes you feel uncomfortable or uncoordinated.

The new sensations you feel when you do something unfamiliar or put a little extra “oomph” in your exercise routine may well have your brain responding with thoughts like, “This is uncomfortable, this is unpleasant, you need to stop *now!*” Many of us have learned to cease what we're doing when our brains give us messages like these. But we can actually retrain our brains to interpret these sensations differently. Breathe into the sensations, and remind yourself that they are signs you're growing stronger. Your brain will soon learn to recognize that this isn't “bad uncomfortable,” it's “good uncomfortable”!

Every time you challenge your body to get stronger or to do something new, your body is a little freer. The freer your body is, the freer you are to experience life in new ways. And the more ways you can experience life, the more life you will experience!



Melissa Harris, *Dance Gypsy*

melissaharris.com

Painting is my medicine. Through decades of a sometimes erratic and ever-evolving life, painting has been the one constant. Relationships and homes have come and gone, but my paint box is always with me.

My passion for life is continually renewed by the joy and magic I experience as a result of my intention to open to the Goddess and Spirit. A

connection to Mother Earth as well as my relationships with others fuels my being and inspires imagery.

In addition to my own artwork and writing, I work as a professional psychic and also teach classes that combine painting with meditation. It is my continuing practice to try to live fully in each moment, keeping in mind the desire for the best for all concerned. I live in gratitude each day for the wonders of my life.



Sense the Temp!

Enjoy the Stimulating Sensations

Most people recognize that we have more than five senses. One, for example, is thermoception, or the ability to sense temperature. Close your eyes and try to sense the temperature of all your skin at once. Can you sense the temperature of your hands, face, neck, arms, back, belly, legs, and feet?

Rather than sensing temperature directly, our skin actually senses *changes* in temperature. There are two types of temperature sensors in our skin. Cold receptors sense drops in the skin's temperature, while hot receptors sense increases.

Obviously, we need to keep our bodies safe from temperature extremes, but many of us have a tendency to interpret *any* deviation from a neutral temperature as unpleasant. You can enjoy the feeling of cold air on your face or the hot sun on your skin when you know the sensation is temporary. Rather than going into a hot or cold environment thinking, "Endure," instead think, "Enjoy the heightened sensory experience"!

If you have the opportunity this week, stand in cold or heat for a few minutes, consciously letting go of any "I don't like cold" or "I don't like

to sweat” notions and allowing yourself to simply experience the sensations that arise. Instead of waiting for your shower to reach the perfect temperature, hop in early and enjoy the little shock of cold. Have fun with this! If the weather is very cold or very hot, stand outside and take a sip of liquid of the opposite temperature. Close your eyes and thoroughly enjoy the sensation of cold or warmth as it travels down your throat and spreads throughout your body.

Take a walk while paying attention to the variations of temperature on your skin. When you exercise, enjoy the feeling of your body warming up in response. Observe how sweat begins to form on your arms, legs, chest, neck, or face, and then how that sweat helps to cool you off. Appreciate how efficient and effective your body’s cooling system is.

Have a “temperature encounter” with a cup of warm tea. Move your face over the cup and allow the steam to rise up and warm your face. Feel the temperature of the cup and the handle in your hands, and then the edge as it comes into contact with your lips. Feel the temperature of the liquid in your mouth and all around your tongue, and then follow the sensation as it travels downward. How far down can you sense the change in temperature? Does the cup’s temperature feel the same to your fingers as it does when you touch it to your cheek? Notice how the temperature of both the cup and the liquid slowly change. And finally, can you enjoy the tea just as much when it has cooled off?



KL Bailey, *Reaching for the Stars*

www.klbaileyart.com, www.klbaileyart.etsy.com

I draw inspiration from the natural world, so trees and flowers feature predominately in my work. Many of my paintings are inspired by the seasons. I like to use bold colours and brushstrokes and to represent subjects in a contemporary way. I also enjoy exploring science through art and representing it in a figurative and sometimes abstract way. From microscopic views all the way to outer space, there is a lot of beauty to be found in many scientific concepts, and my hope is to represent this through my art.

I create art because I want to make people happy. I absolutely love the idea of one of my paintings hanging on someone's wall and making them smile!



See Your Path as Perfect Even If It's a Zigzag

Many of us have a pretty clear vision of where we'd like our lives to go. Yet sometimes we're blindsided by unexpected events, challenging situations, or unsupportive people. When things don't seem to be going our way, it's human nature to stomp our feet and protest, "This isn't supposed to be happening! How am I going to get where I want to go with *this* in my way?"

Look back at your life, at all the twists and turns that have led you to where you are today. Recognize that all those zigzags are an unchangeable part of your path so far. When we stomp our feet and protest recent events, we're essentially turning around, glaring back at the path we've just traveled, and announcing to the universe: "This is not the path I'm supposed to be on—I'm supposed to be over *there*!"

But of course, there's no going back. It's just not possible to take away the experiences we've already had and return to a previous point on our path. The only direction we can ever move is forward.

If you find yourself caught up in a negative attitude about something that's happening, and you feel ready to move forward beyond that

attitude, try a little experiment. Take one of these sentences and complete it as if it were true:

- If everything in my life is helping to prepare me for my greatest dream, then this might be happening because _____.
- If this situation is happening in order to help me create what I want, it could be doing that by _____.
- Who I am today is based in part on everything I've experienced. If this event has something positive to contribute to my life, it could be that _____.

These ideas don't have to actually be true. Simply considering them can help you shift your perspective and guide your thinking in a new, more beneficial direction.

The real gift in this idea is that it encourages you to reflect on everything that's happened in your life with the intention of making the most of those events. This can quickly take you out of a negative frame of mind about how you got to where you are today and help you look ahead and begin moving again.



Maya Telford, *Soul Portrait of Linda G.*

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I have been an artist for most of my life and have been giving “life readings” since my twenties. I am now combining my artistry with what Spirit shows to me and turning this information/vision into a “soul portrait.” Through color, images, and symbols, a soul portrait touches on issues of the soul as well as past-life significances that reflect what is presently happening in the person’s life. Each portrait is evocative of who the person really is at a soul level and how that is impacting their life today. Life lessons and life-purpose information are uncovered. As visual cues are very powerful, having this painting to refer to daily will greatly assist the person on their spiritual path.



Widen Your Horizon

Gain Insight by Seeing All Sides

People who are instinctively able to see all sides of a situation are natural mediators, managers, and counselors. Their broader perspective allows them to quickly grasp the essential aspects of a situation and see possibilities and solutions that other people can't. The intelligence and creativity with which these people can approach any situation is something we all have the ability to tap into.

We all naturally interpret any circumstance, event, or interaction through the lens of our own upbringing and cultural conditioning, our past experiences, our belief systems, and our dreams, desires, and goals. Remembering this—and applying this knowledge in your interactions with others—will give you valuable insight with which to make decisions and take action.

If you happen to find yourself in a disagreement this week, you might say, "I want to pause for a moment and really try to see this from your perspective." Then imagine that you are the other person, with their experiences, beliefs, and goals. How would the situation look to you? The idea here is to interrupt your instant interpretation of someone

else's actions, words, or ideas by bringing more awareness to that interpretation.

This practice doesn't mean you are condoning someone else's position or "giving in" in some way. And the practice is valuable even if you strongly disagree with the other person's ideas and you reach the same conclusions you did before. The insight and information you gain by looking through the other person's eyes to see what they're seeing will put you in a much better place to communicate, compromise, negotiate, and avoid or resolve arguments. When someone feels that you understand their perspective, it's much easier to find common ground.

Here's another way to apply this idea: When you're feeling irritated or angry about what someone else did or said, imagine that you or someone you love unconditionally had done or said it. Would you feel differently? Would you have more patience or compassion? Or if you're irritated or angry at *yourself* for something you did or said, imagine that someone you love unconditionally had done or said it. Would you feel differently? Would you have more understanding or compassion for yourself?

Being able to view a situation from multiple perspectives is also invaluable in group situations. Next time you're involved in a discussion with family, friends, or coworkers, use the opportunity to practice taking on each person's beliefs, history, experiences, and positions as best you can and then viewing the situation through that lens. If you enjoy visualizations, you might imagine yourself watching the scene from above and viewing it from the perspective of each person. This practice will give you insight that can improve communication and help the group make better decisions.



Matthew Hamblen, *Sunset Dream*

www.mattsart.etsy.com

Art has always been a huge part of my life, and I'm trying to spread positive energy to everyone who sees my work. I've truly been blessed in that what I paint seems to have an effect on people, often triggering cherished and important memories and emotions. As an emotional (dare I say sensitive?) guy, my work having that distinction makes me feel honored beyond words. To me, what I paint is a communication. My paintings are an effort to establish a connection with people.

I'm a part of the "peace and love" generation of the late 60s and 70s, but these days my hair is shorter, I have a normal life with a lot more "stuff" that keeps me in one place, I've put down the guitar, and I've stopped writing preachy antiwar protest songs. Still, spreading positivity and living simply, modestly, and happily are the only things I've ever wanted out of life. Some things truly never change.



Be Tactile

Tune Into Your Largest Sensory System

Try a little experiment. Run a finger along your thigh and see if you can tune in to the sensation from the perspective of just your leg: How does it feel to have a finger move along it? To really get a sense of this, imagine that it's someone else's finger touching your leg. Now switch your perspective to your finger: How does your finger feel as it runs along this leg? Again, you might imagine that this is someone else's leg you're touching. Once you're able to tune into the sensation from the vantage point of your leg, see if you can feel *both* sensations at once.

Skin is by far your body's largest sense organ. Millions of receptors and nerve endings in your skin give it the ability to sense pressure, texture, vibration, pain, and temperature. Deeper in your skin, as well as within tendons and muscles, are receptors that can tell when and how your arms and legs are moving and rotating and when the skin itself is being stretched.

Close your eyes and feel your face with your fingers. Notice all the textures of the skin in various areas. How does the skin on your cheek feel

compared to the skin on your forehead or nose? Feel the cartilage in your nose and ears. Trace the bones underneath the skin—your cheekbones, eye sockets, forehead, and jaw—as well as your teeth. As you press on the different areas of your face, and run your fingers through your hair, feel the sensations that are being transmitted from the receptors in the skin through the neurons to the brain.

Now clasp your hands together and feel all the different surfaces of your fingers contacting one another. Check out all the other ways your skin stretches—as you open and close your fingers, for example, or as you bend your legs and flex your feet as you walk. Feel the skin of your neck stretch as you turn your head and the skin of your chest and belly stretch as you breathe.

Be grateful for your sense of touch this week. Feel the weight and smoothness of your cell phone in your hand, the feeling of the keyboard under your fingers, the surfaces of the fork, chopsticks, cup, or glass when you're eating or drinking. When you walk, notice the sensations caused by the movements of your clothing, your hair, or the air against your skin. Feel the skin on your feet inside your socks or shoes.

We don't usually associate our mouth, ears, nose, and eyes with our sense of touch, but they all have that capability, too. Touch receptors in the mouth help make eating pleasurable—think of the texture of a smooth avocado or a dry cracker. What do you feel with your ears? Can you detect your hair brushing against them, or the movement of the air? Can you feel the breeze moving across the surface of your eyes? If that's easy for you, try this: feel your eyelids opening and closing, first from the perspective of your eyeballs, and then from the perspective of your eyelids.

As you're experimenting with your sense of touch, enjoy any goose bumps you experience. You might even play with making them appear on your arms and legs, as some people are able to do just by thinking about them!



Joanna Whitney, *Trip to Taos*
www.joannawhitney.weebly.com

Apparently God put me on this earth to make art because that is what I do. My inspiration is derived through prayer, meditation, and intuition. I enjoy exploring themes of unity and separation, abstraction and realism with intuition as the catalyst. I teach drawing, color theory, and intuitive painting, as well as giving psychic readings from my paintings. I also practice and teach Surautomatism, which is surrealist technique without conscious self-censorship.

Trip to Taos was inspired by a trip I took to see old friends. The city is filled with amazing “found art” creations: a colorful cup of rainwater with a tree reflected in it, a turquoise door, weathered wood lying around, a cowboy shirt in a thrift store with gold trimmings. When we see through the eyes of intuition, art is everywhere!



Love Your Body And It Will Love You Back

Our bodies are nothing short of miraculous. For all they are and everything they do for us, they deserve our compassion, appreciation, and even reverence. Yet we often treat them with disregard, ignoring their needs or outright criticizing them.

Spend a few minutes each day this week finding some way to honor your body. Here are a few ideas for how you might do that:

- Look in the mirror and find something you like about your face—such as your eyes or your smile—and remind yourself to focus on that feature when you see your reflection this week.
- Choose one body part each day to give a little massage to—your feet, hands, neck, knees, lower back, face, or shoulders.
- Relax for a minute or two in the middle of your day. Sit quietly, listening to your breath as it travels in and out of your body. Feel for your heartbeat.
- Instead of asking your taste buds what they would like to eat or drink, ask your body.
- Give yourself a two-minute stretch break.

- When you're standing in the shower, imagine that the water is washing away any unloving habits you have, such as making self-critical remarks, treating your body poorly, or berating yourself for not living up to some impossible standard or ideal.
- When you skip a workout and are about to get down on yourself, remind yourself that you're human and still learning.
- When you catch yourself criticizing your body, try speaking to yourself the way you would speak to a good friend.
- If you use affirmations, craft ones that you can believe in—like “I am strong, worthy, and capable”—and repeat them to yourself when you're feeling self-critical.

Finally, if someone compliments you this week, take a moment to absorb what they've said and find all the ways it is true about you. If they can see it in you, it is there to be seen!



Lisa Kubik, *Illuminating Essence*

www.lisakubik.com, www.wrappedupinlove.com

I create colourful, spirited paintings through my intuition to convey messages of love, hope, and inspiration. My intention is that these paintings can be used as a tool for healing the soul, as it is from my soul that I visualize, perceive energies, and then create art from that space. During the creative process, my thoughts gravitate towards the moment of relief and release, free flowing and never knowing what I'll end up with.

I just let it channel through me. I visualize the colours and the image on canvas before I begin listening to what my intuition tells me.

Emotions of sadness and wistfulness pervade my work. I often paint when I need to release tension—an artist’s meditation of sorts. My hope is that when one sees my paintings, the emotion would be “Ahhhhh.” The sadness has disappeared, and in its place serenity descends, allowing the light to shine in once again.



Uncover the Connections The Insights Will Surprise You

Here's an interesting exploration that can help you gain valuable insight into your life.

Begin by taking a look at something you are in the process of discovering about yourself. Here are some examples:

- I'm discovering that I'm actually more creative than I've given myself credit for.
- I'm realizing that things often work out better for me when I don't try so hard.
- I'm seeing that maybe I really can accomplish what I've always dreamed of.
- I'm learning that people are more comfortable around me when I let myself be me.

Or it might be something you're discovering about other people or about life in general:

- I'm learning that everyone has something to teach me.
- I'm realizing that people are pretty much going to do what they do, regardless of how I feel about it.

- I'm discovering that no matter what I do or don't get done today, the sun will still rise in the morning.

Now take a minute to pick out three random events or situations you experienced this week. These could be something unusual or infrequent, like getting back in touch with a friend you haven't seen for many years. Or they could be minor or incidental, like having a conversation about your summer plans with a coworker, or an injury you had. Just jot down whatever comes to mind.

Take the first situation or event you thought of and see if you can find any connection between it and what you're in the process of discovering. Is there some way you could apply the understanding you're currently gaining to the situation or event? Or could you use the situation to assist you in what you're in the process of discovering?

Now ask the same questions of the second situation or event, and then of the third.

What's the value in looking for such connections? This is a way to bring more awareness to your current areas of discovery. By putting your new-found knowledge to use, you will expand even more in that direction. As Joshua says, "When I see that I'm more creative than I thought I was, it inspires me to bring out more of my creativity."



Shanna Daley, *Colours of Nature*

www.shannacreations.ca, www.shannacreations.etsy.com

Art is my passion, my soul, my heart. I find colors and images fascinating; the idea of turning a blank canvas into something appealing to the eye is brilliant and very rewarding. I tend to fall in love with each piece I create and become so attached I have a hard time putting it up for sale—but then I realize I have no empty walls left in my home to hang any more of my art!

Over the past several years, I have been fortunate enough to live in the beautiful Clear Lake Country in Manitoba with my husband every summer, where I paint amongst the nature and wildlife. I look over the crystal blue Clear Lake and am able to admire the birds, deer, moose, black bears, and beavers—just to name a few. I am astonished by the beauty in the world and amazed by and grateful for all the splendor and colors of my surroundings.



Ease Up on Expectations And Experience More Appreciation

The weather report for tomorrow: Sunny and warm.

When you hear a weather report like this, do you form an expectation that tomorrow will be sunny and warm? There's one sure way to know: When tomorrow gets here and it's drizzling and cold, do you react negatively? Are you frustrated about the rain? Irritated that your plans have been affected? Angry at the weather reporter?

That's the downside to these kinds of expectations. When they're not met—and let's be realistic, they often aren't—we cause ourselves suffering in some form: disappointment, irritation, frustration, anger, resentment. So the fewer expectations we have, the less suffering we will experience. More than that, as we reduce our expectations, our experience of gratitude and appreciation will naturally increase in response.

Think about this: If your husband makes you tea every morning, and one morning he forgets, what experience will you create in response? Are you disappointed or irritated? If so, suppose you cultivate *not* having an expectation that he will make you tea every morning. Then, when one

day he doesn't, what would show up is appreciation for all the days he *does* make you tea.

Most of us have so many expectations about so many things that it should be easy to find some to experiment with letting go of this week. One way to uncover expectations that aren't working for you is to watch for separating emotions—like frustration, disappointment, irritation, blame, or anger. Whenever you experience one of these emotions, it probably points to an expectation you have that isn't being met.

When you recognize that you have a particular expectation, ask yourself, "How much satisfaction has this expectation brought me in the past?" This simple evaluation can help you free yourself from the "expectation trap."

And if you can't find any expectations to play with this week, just remember this: Tomorrow's weather will be absolutely perfect—no matter what it is!



Mary Beth Volpini, *Stop and Smell the Flowers II*
www.drawntocolor.com, www.marybethvolpini.com

I am an artist, an interior designer, a therapeutic fine art facilitator, and most important, a mom. I use collage and color to express myself and what I have to say. I simply love color, and I love to share my love of all things creative.

I am also a breast cancer survivor. Cancer and my treatment of the disease taught me many lessons. So many of us rush through life not even taking a brief moment to enjoy God's creations. If I had to choose only one lesson, this would be it: Slow down and take a moment to enjoy the beauty that is all around us.



Be Like Water

Flow with Ease and Serenity

Here's another short, simple, and very effective meditation that doesn't require you to set aside a portion of your day or sit in a certain position. You don't even have to remind yourself to do this meditation. Just allow it to naturally come to you whenever you encounter water. Happening upon a fountain, for instance, can be your reminder to stop for a moment and contemplate the water's movement. Watching the motion of water is soothing, and the tranquil sound of running water is magically relaxing.

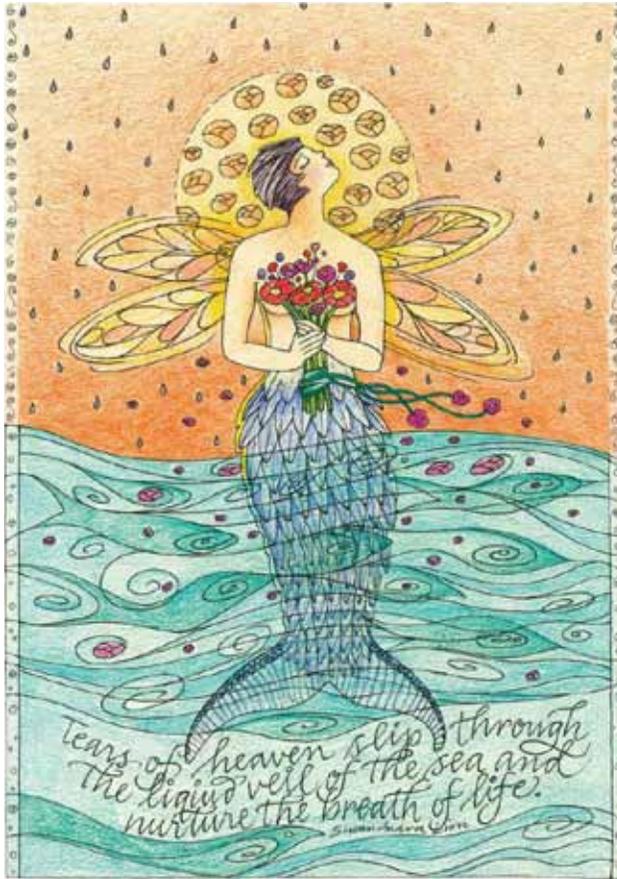
When you encounter water in motion, feel for that ever-changing flow within yourself, that natural movement from one thing to the next to the next. Imagine moving with similar ease in every area of your life: in your work, at home, with your friends and family.

You can even do this meditation when you get yourself a drink of water. As the water pours into the glass, rest your attention for those few moments on the movement of the liquid. Feel how easily the water flows and how effortlessly it takes the shape of the glass into which it's flowing.

Meditating on water that's still—as in a pond or a pool—can be wonderfully calming. Focus your attention on the tranquil surface of the water

and allow your thoughts to fade into the background as you reconnect with that same sense of tranquility inside yourself.

You can even meditate on still water as you enjoy a cup of tea. With each sip you take, rest your attention for a moment on the surface of the liquid in your cup. Set an intention to carry that feeling of serenity, innocence, and harmony with you as you flow back into your day.



Sue Lion, *Moon of Growth*

www.suelionink.com, www.suelionink.etsy.com

“Tears of heaven slip through the liquid veil of the sea and nurture the breath of life.”

Mermaids—what a magical realm. When I was asked to draw a series of them, I had no idea what a delightful journey it would be. With original drawings and poetry, my “Mermaid Moons” reflect the connection of earth, moon, and sea as they celebrate the cheerful playfulness of mermaids and acknowledge their mystical power. I also researched the meanings and naming of the monthly moon in different places in the

Northern Hemisphere, which gives each drawing an added layer of symbolism.

Myth or reality, I am surrounded by powerful messages and my challenge is to have the time in one lifetime to put them all on paper. I continue to be amazed with the subtle workings of the earth, the tender whisperings of the wind, and the power of a colorful sunset. My hope is the energy I've instilled into my drawings will give you hope and let you live with harmony, at least at this moment.



Turn Up Your Sensory Radar Switch Off One Sense to Amplify the Others

Do blind people have keener senses of hearing and touch than people who can see? Research suggests that the blind don't have better senses of hearing and touch; they simply use these senses more effectively. In other words, they develop a much greater *awareness* of the information they receive through their other senses.

Of course, this isn't true only of the sightless. People who are impeded in or missing a particular sense naturally pay more attention to the other sensory data they're receiving. For example, being more visually aware of their surroundings makes many deaf people better drivers than those who can hear.

Wherever you are right now, close your eyes and notice what you perceive that you didn't just moments earlier. Do you hear sounds you didn't hear before? Feel vibrations? Notice the temperature of the air or the feeling of the clothing on your skin? Do you feel any different now than you did a moment before?

Experiment with turning off one or more of your senses this week. Let's say you enter a restaurant. You sit down and look around, noticing that about half of the tables are filled. It's a little busy, but feels welcoming. Then you close your eyes. The noise level seems to instantly increase. It sounds as if there are a hundred people in the room rather than forty: talking, laughing, coughing. Plates and silverware are clinking, doors are opening and closing, air is moving through the cooling system, and music is coming from speakers above your head that you hadn't noticed. The atmosphere feels much more chaotic than it did just moments ago.

You open your eyes and press your index fingers to your ears. Though you can't shut out all the noise, you can somewhat imagine what the room would be like if you could hear no sounds at all. It instantly feels more serene. You begin to notice things you didn't see before: a lovely fire in the fireplace along one wall, candles decorating the tables, couples cuddling, the moon shining in through the window.

Now imagine how your experience of the restaurant might be different if you didn't have your sense of smell, or taste, or touch. What would you notice? How would you feel?

These exercises obviously won't give you a real experience of what it's like to be without a particular sense. But they might encourage you to make more of the senses you have. And the more you open your senses, the richer and more vivid your experiences will be.



Shiri, *Full Moon*

www.bewonder.etsy.com, www.Pele-art.com

I draw inspiration from many people, cultures, and of course nature herself, and try as much as possible to employ recycled materials and to use what is available with the understanding and experience of abundance. I took my liberty to wander around our beautiful planet; my most travelled paths went through Australia, New Zealand, India, Thailand, Japan, Philippines, Spain, Greece, and Italy, as well as Israel, where I grew up and now live. This experience really transformed me. It made me feel like I'm a drop in the ocean—one drop in a vast reality. My drop can dive deep and swim with dolphins, turn into a cloud and find its way to a mountaintop, or crash upon an unknown shore. And I can choose to stay in happiness and fulfillment no matter where life takes me.

Full Moon represents all the stages in the feminine cycle of nature and was inspired by many full moon celebrations at rainbow gatherings all over the planet. Rainbows are metaphysical, representing an ancient promise from God to humankind. Using all the colors of the rainbow, I become joyfully creative and my happiness radiates powerfully like the full moon in this painting.



Rejuvenate!

Give Your Body the Gift of Touch

Karina came home from an eight-hour workday, collapsed into a chair, and moaned, “My feet are killing me. I wish someone would give me a foot massage!”

It didn't occur to Karina to simply reach down and give *herself* a foot massage. True, it's a lovely feeling to have someone else attend to our aching muscles. And there's the added benefit of physical connection with another human being. Yet self-massage can often be just as beneficial, it's always available, and it's free! We just have to remember that the option is there.

A sore neck, aching knees, tense jaw? There's so much you can do right now to help relieve them. In self-massage, you use your fingers, thumbs, and palms, and even your forearms and elbows, to massage your own skin, muscles, ligaments, and tendons. There are hundreds of free videos online that demonstrate easy and effective self-massage techniques.

Massage reduces stress and tension, relieves fatigue, promotes circulation, and improves flexibility. Studies have shown that it can also help relieve anxiety and depression, boost immunity, regulate blood pressure,

improve the effectiveness of cancer treatments, and speed healing. It increases the mobility of the joints, reduces tension in the skin, and leaves us feeling both relaxed and energized. And it has these effects whether it's someone else's hands or your own massaging you.

Neck, face, and scalp self-massage can alleviate headaches and neck pain. Massaging your jaw can reduce the discomfort of TMJ (temporo-mandibular joint) disorders. Massaging the fingers, hands, and wrists can reduce the stiffness and pain caused by using a keyboard or doing other repetitive tasks, as well as ease the symptoms of arthritis and carpal tunnel syndrome. And giving yourself a lower back massage can relieve pain accumulated from standing or sitting for long periods.

If you have the opportunity to indulge in a massage from someone else, enjoy it! But if not, why not do your feet a favor for all they've done for you? You might even choose one body part each day—hands, neck, knees, lower back, face, or shoulders—to reward with some special hands-on treatment. Your body will thank you—possibly with many more years of service!



Krista Lynn Brown, *Heart Offering*

www.devaluna.com

I consider artists to be modern-day mystics, the seers and translators of Mystery. Their work is the negotiation of two worlds: the sphere of mapped and predictable exteriors perceived as “reality,” and the veiled otherworld of permeating undercurrents that pulses with potential. Artists succeed when they bring “into reality” something nourishing and accessible from forays into the place beneath and beyond what we know.

Having no formal art education, I developed my expression through a mix of inspiration and experimentation. My work is influenced by the shapes and metaphors of nature, universal mythic elements of story and dream, psychedelic explorations, feminine perspective, spiritual folk art, the drawings of young children, art deco and nouveau design, emotional and sexual energies, dark underbellies and folk magic. I am voraciously interested in the underpinnings, where things connect: bodies and psyches, religion and science, dreams and realities. I also relate closely with the element of water, which allows me to stay creatively fluid, open to intuition, and at home in the wells of imagination.



Conduct a Thought Experiment

Expand Your Perspective

Thought experiments are used by physicists and philosophers, mathematicians and economists, and anyone else wanting to mentally test out a theory. In a simple thought experiment, we consider an idea as true for the purpose of seeing what it might mean if it *were* true.

Let's try a thought experiment with the popular notion "everything happens for a reason." People argue passionately about whether this is true or not, but for the purpose of our exercise, it makes no difference. Whether you believe this idea or not, you can still use it to gain insight into something that's happening in your life.

Suppose someone bumps into your car in the grocery store parking lot, and you start to get angry because now you're going to be late for an appointment. Here's how your thought experiment might go: "Okay, if everything happens for a reason, maybe this accident is preventing me from being in a worse accident on the freeway in a few minutes. Or maybe this has happened so that I have an opportunity to be gracious to this person, who seems extremely frantic—which might help her relax and be a more attentive driver. Or maybe this happened to give me

practice in handling unexpected events in a calm way, which would benefit me at work.”

You will probably never find out whether the “I avoided another accident” or “I’m helping her to relax” ideas are actually true, *but just coming up with them as possibilities will make you feel calmer*. And the idea that the incident is providing you practice with handling the unexpected is something you make true simply by recognizing it as a possibility!

You were upset when the woman first bumped into you. Now that you’ve run through these possibilities in your mind, you will very likely approach her much more calmly than you would have otherwise. *Which means that this thought experiment has been useful to you even if you don’t buy the idea that the accident happened for any of these reasons.*

In addition to using thought experiments to find peace in stressful situations, you can also use them to break free of limited thinking patterns, to gain new perspectives on situations or experiences, or to generate new ideas.

Here are some other thought experiments to try out this week:

- This situation is trying to tell me something. (What could it be trying to tell me?)
- Everything contributes to my life in some way. (What contribution might this situation be making?)
- This situation is happening to open my eyes to some aspect of myself. (What might that aspect be?)
- I’m meant to meet this person. (What might I learn from them?)
- This event is helping me to create what I want in my life. (How could this be helping me to create what I want?)



Amanda Clark, *Midnight*

www.earthangelsart.com, earthangelsart.blogspot.com

I am an artist, illustrator, and maker of sacred, mystical, and healing arts and crafts, and am inspired by mystical and spiritual ways of being, such as Celtic folklore, nature spirits, and fairytales. I live in England, among some beautiful hills, and feel so lucky to be here amid Mother Nature and her creativity. *Midnight* was inspired by the silence and depth of a moonlit summer night, and by Glastonbury, a sacred place in England.

My very best time for working is early morning, when everything is quiet and I enter into a field of insights that seem to manifest themselves into colour, pattern, and form. I feel art should be available to everyone because of its ability to transform and bring joy!



Reframe Your Experience And Watch Irritation Dissolve

Knowing how to find something positive in the most negative-seeming circumstances is the greatest secret of truly happy people. When you become skilled at this, every challenge that shows up in your life becomes an opportunity for learning something new.

One trick for embracing small annoyances is to look at them through the eyes of someone who wouldn't be annoyed by them. When you find yourself feeling frustrated or irritated this week, ask yourself, "How can I see this differently? Who *wouldn't* see this the way I'm seeing it?"

For example, if you find yourself complaining because it's raining for the eighth day in a row, ask yourself, "Who can I think of who *wouldn't* see this as an annoyance?" People living in a drought-stricken area might come to mind. They would be so overjoyed to experience a week's worth of rain that they would probably go out and dance in it!

If you begin to feel upset when the waiter brings you the wrong order, ask yourself, "Who *wouldn't* be upset about this?" You might immediately recognize that someone who doesn't have enough to eat would probably feel immense gratitude for any food at all.

Who *wouldn't* be irritated by that rattling noise? Someone who had temporarily lost their hearing and had just gotten it back. Who *wouldn't* be irritated by having to get up and go to work when they were feeling tired? Someone who's been out of work and whose children are depending on her. Who *wouldn't* be irritated by the kids being noisy—again? Someone whose child has been sick with a serious illness. Who *wouldn't* be annoyed by catching a cold that lasts two weeks? Someone who just found out they're cancer-free.

This trick quickly defuses our typical “I'm irritated” response to things we're resisting and moves us into a place of gratitude. Simple but true: “life is bad” thinking makes you feel bad; “life is good” thinking makes you feel good.



Farron Garling, *Rooftop*
farronartandphoto.com

My process as an artist is more of a default setting, the automatic way I see the world around me. As a child, I was always drawn to details of things, or the way the light falls on an object; the shadows, the lines, and the overall composition of an object. I see the world through the lens of a camera and want to share those moments, in their simplicity, with as many people as possible. Quiet moments not given a second glance by most can become a lasting impression, captured in time as a moment that will never be repeated.

This particular photograph really helped me to put things in perspective. Noticing the details on such grandeur, knowing that even the smallest detail was deliberately hand painted, made me realize that small moments really do matter and every choice is important.



Take It Easy

Lighten Your Approach to Life

When you watch a bird soaring overhead, its motion seems almost effortless. This is no illusion: birds expend as little energy as they can to stay aloft, taking full advantage of any air currents and updrafts. Do you suppose birds would be better fliers, or fly farther, if they took a harder, more intense approach to the business of flying?

A serious, “heavy” attitude doesn’t necessarily help us get more done faster. In fact, you’ll find that with a light, easy attitude, you’re naturally more efficient—expending less effort on each task and leaving more energy for the next.

Approaching our lives with a light, easy attitude also gives us space to be more aware of what’s going on around us. You might have noticed that some drivers tend to tightly grip the steering wheel and drive as close as possible to the car in front of them. By taking a light, easy approach to driving, you naturally give yourself more space—both between your body and the steering wheel, and between your vehicle and the next. That extra space allows you a wider field of vision and more time to react: you’re more likely to notice if something unexpected happens in any direction. With a light, easy approach to driving, we’re not only less likely

to be involved in an accident, we're also less likely to earn ourselves a speeding ticket!

This week, invite more serenity into your life by approaching your days with a lighter, easier attitude. Here are some ways to experiment with this idea:

- How relaxed can you be as you get ready for your day? Make your way to work? Talk with your coworkers? Sip your morning beverage?
- A light, easy approach to everyday tasks such as grocery shopping, doing the laundry, and preparing meals will give you “micro-moments” of relaxation that help you recharge for other activities.
- Take a light, easy approach to your to-do list. This doesn't mean being lazy; it just means approaching what you need to get done with a feeling of ease.
- Have you ever noticed that a serious or heavy-handed attitude makes people back away from you? Try a light, easy approach to your interactions with others, such as when you have a challenging conversation, call your credit card company to dispute a charge, or return a defective product to the store.
- Try a light, easy approach to having your kids do their chores and you'll probably find ways to make the process fun and enjoyable rather than stressful.
- Try taking a light, easy approach to things you might typically approach with anxiety, like dealing with that speeding ticket, sitting down to pay bills, or going to a job interview.
- A light, easy approach to your ex-lover or ex-spouse can make interactions with them more harmonious and your conversations more pleasant.
- Take a light, easy approach to exercise: view getting active not as something you *have* to do, but as something you *get* to do. A light, easy attitude can make any physical activity—even moving furniture or shoveling snow—much more enjoyable.

And when you encounter someone with a very serious attitude this week, have them serve as a reminder to practice going through your day with a light, easy attitude.



© Corey Wolfe, *Discovery*

www.CoreyWolfe.com, www.TheArtOfSpirit.etsy.com

My life has been an amazing journey of inspiration and intuition. Things out of the ordinary have always been part of my life. At age 11, I began seeing past lives overlaid onto people's faces. That began my study of the mysteries of life. Theosophy was a good foundation. My art philosophy involves trying to "code" the art with something that will lead the viewer to a sense of wonder or peace. I want the viewer to be a participant and feel a need to peruse truth on his or her own path.

I try to live my life by three lines that I watched my hand write with no will of my own. Some people call this automatic writing. I feel it's a way for your individual Higher Self to communicate directly to you. The lines were:

KNOW THYSELF

NOW THYSELF

NO SELF



Open Your Heart

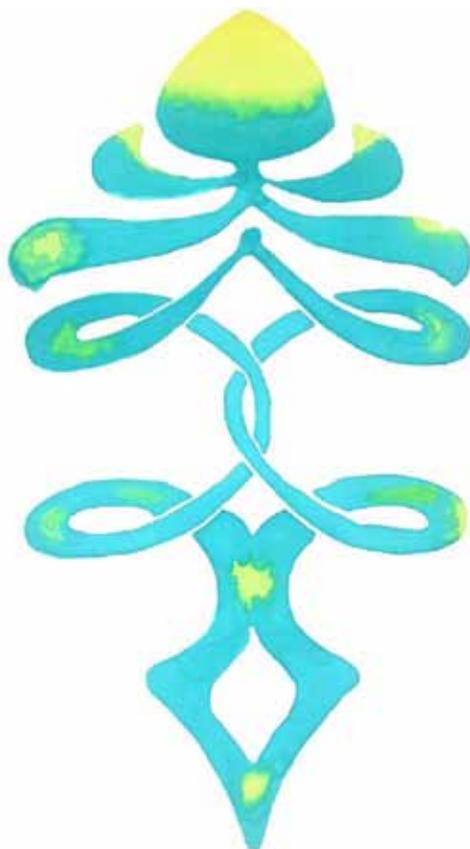
Make a Connection with the People in Your Life

Despite the ever-increasing number of ways we have to connect with others—email, cell phones, social networking sites, texting—many of us are feeling less connected than ever. This week, spend a few minutes here and there really connecting with people in your life. Here are a few ideas:

- Thank someone for what you have learned from them.
- Apologize for something you haven't apologized for, and make amends if you are moved to.
- Reach out to someone you haven't connected with in a long time.
- Ask a friend, "How are you?" and really listen.
- Summon the courage to clear up a misunderstanding or disagreement.
- Let someone know how much you appreciate them.
- Ask someone, "How can I help? What can I do for you?"
- When you have a positive thought about someone, express it: "Great job!" "I just called to tell you that you're an amazing mother." "You look beautiful today."

- Say “I love you” to someone you love but haven’t yet told.
- Make an effort to connect with people you see every day. Take a few seconds to check in with the janitor at your workplace or the person who serves you coffee every morning.
- If you’re inspired to do something for someone, don’t second-guess that act of generosity—enjoy it!

These ideas are just to get you started. You’ll discover that simply having an intention to connect with people in your life will bring you numerous opportunities to do so!



Amanda Calderon, I Am Blossoming

www.colourharmony.co.uk, facebook.com/colourharmony4u

I embarked upon my own healing journey about twenty years ago and along the way have learned much about holistic medicine and healing. I am trained in the EMF Balancing Technique, the ancient Chinese art of feng shui (with a western slant), and colour therapy. I've also studied crystals, aromatherapy, Bach flower remedies, homeopathy, and the effects our emotions have on our physical bodies. At times my journey has been challenging, but through it I've learned a lot about balancing emotions, discovering who you really are and expressing that, and finding inner peace.

I am trained as a colour therapist and work as a healer, teacher, artist, and psychic. A very sensitive, intuitive person, I've always been able to tune into the emotions of others and feel a tremendous empathy and understanding. I have had to learn how to manage this gift, and am now able to help others who are also highly sensitive to do the same. I have also combined my colour therapy training and my love of painting to create Colour Therapy Art. *I Am Blossoming*, which is painted on silk to give the piece an exquisite ethereal quality, is designed to help you at times of transformation as you blossom from one state of being to a new, expanded one.



Free Your Inner Artist Let Creativity Flow

You are creative.

If your inner critic wants to argue with that statement, recognize that creativity comes in many forms. Though we tend to associate creativity with things like art, music, or design, the product of a creative endeavor isn't always something tangible like a painting or a song. We often think we're not creative because we're gauging our abilities against those of someone who happens to be a more traditional type of artist. *The idea that you're not creative is the greatest block to creativity!*

We're all creating all the time, in one form or another. A new solution to an old problem is a type of creativity we're all familiar with. Even a conversation is something we're creating. We might be minimally creative in a conversation and have essentially the same exchange with someone we've had in the past. Or we might come to a topic with fresh ideas, letting go of the thoughts we happened to have about it before, and approach it in an entirely new way.

Look back at your life to see ways in which you've been creative. Can you recall times when you came up with an unconventional or creative

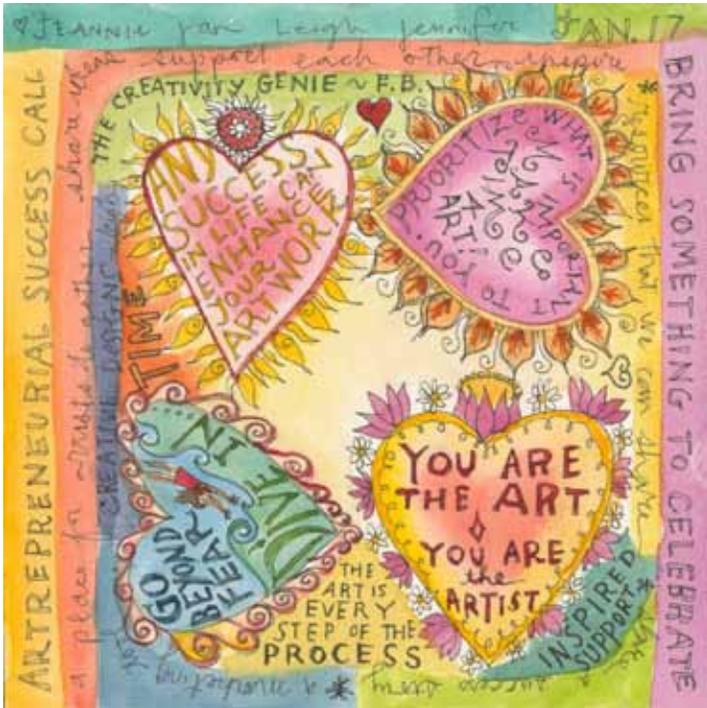
approach to a perplexing problem? Or thought of a clever way to repair something? Or were simply inspired to create something new, from a special meal to a system for sorting the clutter in your workspace?

Especially if you're one of the "least creative" people you know, getting in touch with how you've been creative in the past can help you tap into your own special brand of creativity. Have you ever given someone a creative gift—not necessarily something you made, but something that came out of a burst of inspiration? Have you ever taken a different path from what your parents, teachers, friends, or even doctors would have recommended? How have you gone your own way or not done the expected thing? What makes you stand out? In what ways—even small ways—are you not like everyone else? How are you one of a kind? Your answers to these questions can give you insight into your own unique brand of creativity.

This week, notice when you say to yourself, "I'm not creative." This might take the form of something like, "I'm not good at that." Then quietly ask yourself, "Well, if I *were* creative, what might I do in this situation?"

Another secret for opening up to your creative potential is to approach a problem with a totally open mind. Rather than considering all the things that have already been done to try to solve the problem or allowing yourself to once again run through all your previous thoughts about it, look at the situation from a new perspective. This way, the directions in which your creativity might take you won't be restricted by the knowledge of what's already been tried.

Experiment with small acts of creativity this week. Pick up a brush, a pen, or a spoon and set your inner artist free: paint without a plan, write without an outline, cook without a recipe.



Jennifer Mazzucco, *You Are the Art, You Are the Artist*

www.jennifermazzucco.com

As a devotional artist, I am on an artistic journey towards connecting to the divinity within. I am deeply inspired by the images, symbolism, and colors found in the artwork of India, Tibet, and Mexico. Along with painting deities, one of my main passions is the marriage between image and the written word, which takes the form of a daily art journal. Painting serves as a conduit to healing, a tool for spiritual growth, and a beautiful way to connect with communities around the globe.

This watercolor painting is from *Opening Up in Sweet Surrender*, a self-published journal I kept during a year of my life that was full of transition, purging, and transformation. It captures the essence of a conference call I was grateful to be a part of with other artists led by Jeannie Thomma that focused on letting go of fear and making a commitment to creating artwork.



Focus More on How You Feel And Less on How You Look

It sometimes seems as if the whole world is trying to convince you to focus entirely on the external and overlook or even ignore the internal. Yet so much of what's important in life occurs on the inside. This week, practice shifting your focus from the outer world to your inner world. Here are a few ideas:

- If you are in a yoga or other exercise class and find that you're comparing yourself to the person next to you, gently move your focus off of them and onto how your body is feeling right now. If the room you're exercising in has mirrors, go ahead and check your form by observing your reflection, but then take your focus inward and notice what good form *feels* like.
- If you're walking somewhere and notice that you're worrying about what others might be thinking about how you look, move your attention inside. Notice all the physical sensations associated with walking, how the clothing and air feel against your skin, and how your feet feel as they come in contact with the ground.
- If you're giving a presentation and find yourself feeling anxious about how you might be received, take your focus off your anxious

thoughts and put it fully onto what you're doing. Really get into your subject matter: connect with what you're saying by feeling the truth in the words as you say them. You'll not only feel more comfortable, you'll likely be far more effective!

- Meeting someone for a first date? You'll be ready for more fun and connection by just enjoying the excitement that first dates can generate than by dwelling on what your date might be thinking about you.
- Moving your focus from how you *look* on the outside to how you *feel* on the inside works wonders in the bedroom, where worrying about what you look like can easily lead to dissatisfaction and disconnection (and won't change how you look!). Get into your body and how it's feeling—which is bound to be more attractive to and exciting for your partner than if you're focused on how you look!

The practice of moving your attention from the external to the internal will help you be comfortable in any situation that may have made you feel self-conscious in the past. *Self-conscious* means you're looking at yourself from the outside, which can feel uncomfortable and unstable. Feeling yourself from the inside is a much more grounded and centered approach, no matter what you're doing.



Leslie Escoto, *Magic Mirror*

www.facebook.com/leslieescotoart

Although always a passion of mine, painting in earnest has come to me late in life. I dabbled with pencil and brush in my youth but then set it aside for the more practical callings of wife, mother, and public servant. Several years ago, I suffered an intense period of self-exploration, questioning my purpose and my worth. A mirror became my enemy. I could not look upon myself without seeing a small life that was without color, everything simply fading to black.

Magic Mirror, as are most of my other paintings, is born of my dreams and splashed with the brilliant colors of our world, while exposing the

suffering we experience when we look at life through the narrowness of despair, ignoring the richness, wonder, and joy of our unique humanity. My hope is that when you view this painting, dear one, you will see the brilliance of your world, of our world, and look out from the darkness into the light.



Sing Out!

Open Up Your Voice

When you sing, endorphins are released into your bloodstream. Endorphins are those magical little chemicals that improve mood, relieve tension, lower blood pressure, and strengthen your immune system. Singing also promotes deeper breathing, which puts more oxygen into your blood—good for both your body and your brain. To put it simply, singing makes you feel better!

Countless studies show that experiences with music as well as art are highly beneficial in other ways, too. They promote brain activity, self-development, imagination, creative thinking, communication skills, and problem-solving ability. They boost self-confidence and self-esteem. Yet many of us have acquired the belief that we must be “good” at singing—or painting, or drawing, or writing, or any other form of self-expression—in order to do it. If you’ve always held back, opening up your voice can help you uncover other ways you are blocking your own creativity.

So if you’re self-conscious about your voice, loosen it up a little! The car and the shower are great places to practice. Sound waves reflect off the walls in enclosed spaces like these, producing a rich sound and

making it harder to notice if you're off-key—so you sound better and are less likely to self-criticize! You might also experiment to find the range that's most comfortable for you by singing along with different artists and songs.

Research shows that the benefits of singing are amplified when you sing along with others. So if you're one of those who stands in the back and hopes no one notices your lips aren't moving, join in on "Happy Birthday" when you have the chance. Or say just one quiet "om" with the other students in yoga class. You might also give group chanting a try, like the increasingly popular Indian practice of *kirtan*. In addition to giving you an opportunity to open up your voice, chanting helps to quiet the mind and relax the body. To feel more comfortable, take your attention off of the sound of your own voice and focus instead on how your voice is supporting the others and contributing to the overall sound.

And the next time you're invited out for an evening of karaoke, consider saying yes!



Devika Keskar, *Only for You*

www.devikasart.etsy.com

I have always created opportunities in my life to keep the artistic and creative flame burning. Born and raised in India, I had an early and enduring interest in art. While working as an architect in the United States, I continued to develop my artistic skills and vision, undertaking one artistic venture after another—experimenting with pottery and ceramics, oil painting, and stenciling children’s furniture, to name a few. During my recent years-long stints in India, I reconnected with my desire to create art and now follow my passion for painting with zeal and abandon.

My paintings are explorations of media and texture and show my unrestrained obsession with color. Sometimes a color scheme will compel me to start a painting; at other times an image from nature will. Colors are wonderful tools to express one's inner self, moods, and emotions, and my paintings very much reflect the emotions I experienced while creating them. Movement and energy in a painting are every bit as important to me as the colors that make it. To me, there is no better visual treat than a vividly colored piece of art that is charged with energy.



Engage Your Inner Senses Feel Yourself from Within

Pause for a moment, right now. Can you feel your heart beating? Some people find this easy to do almost anytime. For others, it's possible only when they're lying still and quiet. If you can't detect your heartbeat, touch your fingers to your chest and move them around until you feel it. Then close your eyes and see if you can follow the beat spreading out from your heart—perhaps farther out into your chest, into your belly, your shoulders, arms, or hands.

When you have the opportunity, lie very still in a quiet place with your eyes closed. What can you feel going on inside your body? What kinds of sensations do you detect—tingling, vibrations, pulsing, pressure, fluttering, pinpricks? What do you feel in your hands and feet? In your arms and legs? What physical sensations are occurring inside your head, chest, or belly? Is there anything happening inside your tongue? Now, can you feel all of these sensations simultaneously?

This week, investigate the sensations you experience through each of these systems:

Your circulatory system: Feel for your pulse, resting your fingers on your neck or wrist if necessary. If you're very still, can you feel your pulse

throughout your body? Now try to feel both your pulse and your heart-beat. If you can, focus on the rhythm of your heartbeat combined with the pulses you feel throughout your body. Are you also able to feel the blood flowing through your blood vessels? (This sensation is often easiest to notice right after you've exercised.)

Your respiratory system: Listen to your breath, to the sound it makes as it travels through your mouth or nose. As you inhale and exhale, focus on all the effects your breathing has on your body. Feel the expanding and contracting of your chest and stomach. Feel your skin stretching and releasing. Notice the movement of your rib cage. Breathe for a half a minute or so, noticing all of these things as you do so.

Your digestive system: What can you feel happening in your digestive system? The next drink you take or meal you eat, see if you're able to sense the liquid or food on its travels through your body. This can be easier to do if you're very thirsty or hungry to begin with.

Your muscular system: Standing with your eyes closed, focus your attention on all the little muscle movements that are supporting you in this position. Notice how all these muscles are working together to keep you upright and in balance. Now take a few steps and pay attention to all the muscles, tendons, and ligaments you can feel. When you exercise this week, scan your body for exactly which muscles are working. Pay attention to what feels good and what might not be feeling so good. Developing this kind of awareness during exercise can help prevent injury.

Your skeletal system: Can you actually feel the bones inside your body? Slowly rotate your head, wrists, and fingers. Can you feel the bones moving? What do you notice about the motion of your bones as you walk, run, or dance?

When you've experimented with these ideas, lie very still again in a quiet place with your eyes closed. *Now* what can you feel going on inside your body?



Melanie Myhre, *Naiad*

www.melaniemyhrephotography.com

I was born into an artistic family of painters, writers, and musicians, so expressing myself creatively came naturally and was further fueled by my curiosity for the natural world. Armed with a sketchbook and a sense of wonder and innocence, I spent my days roaming the wilderness of Northern Minnesota. The forests, prairies, and wetlands around my home provided endless inspiration. I currently reside in the Eureka Springs area of Arkansas and enjoy exploring the little nooks and crannies it has to offer. My discoveries have often led long-time residents to ask, “Where is that?”

With my photography, I invite the viewer to explore the world from a more intimate perspective, often evoking a haunting remembrance of the innocence of childhood. Emotional elements are an important ingredient in my work, which has often led it to be described as haunting, mystical, and magical.



View Your Life as a Movie Appreciate the Perfection in the Connections

When a great movie ends, you can often bask in the feeling of it for a long time, reflecting back on all the connections and how everything came together just right in the end. While you were in the midst of the story, it may have been unclear how the lives of all the characters were interconnected or why particular events were happening, what their purposes could be, or how they could possibly be resolved in a way that felt satisfying. Even if the movie didn't have a traditional happy ending (and many great films don't), you might still have come away with a deep sense that everything worked out right for everyone involved.

Life can be the same way.

This week, try a little visualization. Close your eyes and imagine that you are past the end of your life and looking back on it from the perspective of already having lived it. View your entire life with the idea that everything that occurred was perfect for you to become the person you were meant to be and to learn what you were here to learn. (There's no need to *believe* this is true; just *imagine* that it's true for the purpose of this visualization.)

Imagine that you can clearly see all of the connections and all of the serendipitous things that happened to you: how every person you interacted with played the perfect role in your life, minor or major, and how every situation, event, and challenge—even those that appeared to be unfortunate at the time—actually conspired to move you in just the right direction. From the perspective of the end of your life’s movie, see how every incident and relationship shaped you. Notice that if you had made a different decision—like turning left at a major crossroads instead of right—your life would have turned out entirely differently. From where you’re standing now, know that it turned out just perfectly; see that turning right at that particular point was the right choice for you.

This little visualization can bring a deep sense of peace into your life right now. You might be able to view family situations and friendships from a broader perspective, or see how one seemingly chance event, like meeting a particular person, changed the course of your life for the better.

Before you open your eyes, imagine that your entire life—all of the events, circumstances, and people in it—is leading you in a particular direction. See your whole life as a movie: a movie that brings all of the different stories together and has just the right ending, a movie that you can bask in the warmth of long after it’s over.



Laurie Bain, *Alignment*
www.LightworkerEnergyArt.com

I practice all kinds of energy work and have an advanced reiki degree. Reiki is the practice of connecting with the Source and channeling light and healing energy into the recipient, who can then direct that light to wherever they need it most for the highest good of all. My diabolical plot is to spread light and love by channeling healing energy and intentions into my art: I turn off my brain, connect with the Source, and allow the energy to flow through me and into the image in the form of light, colors, patterns, and vibrations. My sincere hope is that my art will have an uplifting effect on the body, mind, and soul for myself, others, and the planet.

Alignment is a chakra angel energy print focused on the fifth and sixth chakras, which are associated with the colors blue and purple. The fifth chakra is involved with recognizing and speaking our truth; the sixth is about intuition and perceptions. This angel helps us align with the Source so that we can recognize the truth in our intuitions and stay true to our highest purpose.



Savor the Flavors

Season Your Food with Awareness

The feeling of a cool grape bursting in your mouth, the crunch of a carrot, a warm cup of tea on a cold day: food is one of life's great pleasures. But with our full schedules, many of us put little thought into what we eat, or we eat our meals quickly or while doing something else. Eating mindfully is a way of being grateful for the food we have. It also enhances the flavors of our food and our entire eating experience. Spend time this week bringing a little more awareness to what goes into your mouth.

When preparing a meal, reflect for a moment on all it took for this food to reach your table: the farmers who planted and cared for it, the sun and rain that nourished it, the people who gathered and transported it. Pay attention to how you arrange the food on the plate. You might add a garnish for decoration or color—an edible flower, a sprig of an herb, a slice of fruit.

When you take a drink, notice the temperature of the liquid in your mouth. When you swallow, follow the sensation as it travels down your throat. How far can you feel it go?

Before you take a bite of food, notice its smell, its color, and its texture. Feel the weight of it as you bring it to your mouth. Food tastes different

in different areas of your mouth; pay attention and experience those variations in flavor. Close your eyes and you'll notice that the flavors instantly intensify. If you're really adventurous, eat an entire meal in the dark!

You might also become more aware of how various foods affect your body. If you tend to eat meals quickly, notice how you feel when you eat with more awareness.

Foods taste different to different people in part because of the distribution of the various types of taste buds in our mouths. We also carry associations from childhood that affect how we experience food. These might be traumatic (being forced to eat something we didn't like) or pleasant (foods that were served on special occasions). When you're dining with friends or family, ask everyone to share their unique experience of a particular food. They might describe the flavors (think of all the words used to talk about the taste of a wine, like *flowery*, *big*, *green*, *peppery*, *tart*, or *smooth*) or anything else that comes to mind.

Eating this way, mindfully, will naturally slow down the dining process. This is better for digestion and makes mealtime a more peaceful, pleasant, and enjoyable experience.



Danny van den Groenendael (Studio Yuki), *True Colours*

www.studioyuki.etsy.com,

fineartamerica.com/profiles/danny-van-den-groenendael.html

When I was a child, I used to walk around with my hands folded like a camera before my eyes to see what the world looked like through my own little window. Not much has changed since then.

I live in the Netherlands, in a small town close to the forest with my husband, little boy, and two grumpy cats. When not chasing my son, I love to travel, experience other cultures, and make beautiful photographs that capture the beauty, richness, and global feel of the country or region. I especially love to photograph people, nature, animals, and quirky things that put a smile on my face. In the spice market of Marrakech, pictured here, I'm like a kid in a candy shop!



Listen to Your Body It Knows What It Needs

Your body is intelligent—far more intelligent than you may be giving it credit for. And when it isn't feeling right in some way, it will always let you know. The question is, will you be listening?

Your body changes every day. It changes in response to what you've been eating, how much rest you've been getting, your recent physical activity, and the amount of stress you've been under. You can't truly know what your body's needs, limitations, and desires are unless you listen.

By being aware of your body's signals throughout the day, you can make immediate adjustments. If you feel stiffness in your neck or hips, you can take a 30-second stretch break to help alleviate the tightness before it has a chance to settle in and cause other issues. If your mouth or lips feel dry, it may be your body signaling that it's thirsty. If you feel sluggish or weak after a meal, this might be feedback that a particular food isn't the best choice for your optimum health.

Beyond developing more of an awareness of your body throughout the day, you can also try this revealing exercise for gaining insight into what's going on inside you:

Sit or lie quietly with your eyes closed. Begin to feel your body from the inside, from the top of your head all the way down to your toes. Rest your attention on each part of your body as you come to it, feeling for any places that feel out of balance, stiff, or just uncomfortable in some way. You may have some areas of chronic pain, or you may notice something you haven't before. When you find an area that has some degree of discomfort, irritation, or pain, just feel into it without thinking about it.

Once you've fully felt the sensations in that part of your body, ask the area this question: "What can I do for you?" If your mind wants to analyze the cause of the issue or what you should do about it, let go of those thoughts and just listen to your body. See if you get any impressions about what is happening or what you might do to assist in healing that area. The messages you hear may be in words, like "Drink more water" or "Rest more" or "Stop running every day." Or you might just receive a general impression, like an impulse to stretch or to massage that part of your body in a particular way.

If this idea seems too magical to be true, remember that your body—in fact, every cell in your body—is vastly intelligent. The different parts of your body are in constant communication with each other through a vast network of nerves and the chemical messengers called hormones. In its own way, your body may recognize, for example, that your stomach has gotten upset every time you've eaten a certain food, even if your mind hasn't yet made that connection.

Give your body an opportunity to communicate its knowledge to you, and you might be surprised at what you learn!



Danielle Daniel, *Honor Your Body*

www.danielledaniel.com

I am inspired by true stories, those I have lived and those that I have had the privilege to witness. I believe we can heal ourselves by sharing our stories and help heal the world at the same time. Each painting brings me deeper into myself and allows me to explore the unspeakable. My painting process is mostly about listening. I am also deeply inspired by the visions in my dreams, and I trust this guidance and follow its direction. There are equal amounts of vulnerability and strength in my work, because I believe that the truth lies where they meet.



Reflect on the Light

Brighten Up from the Inside

Here's a feel-good meditation that requires no special postures or props: meditating on light.

This is wonderful as a walking meditation. Simply focus on the light as you walk. Notice how the sunlight streams between buildings and trees and how it filters through branches and leaves. Watch how it bathes objects in its glow and how colors shift and change depending on the amount of light that's falling on them. Contemplate the tremendous difference in color between the part of an object that's in the light and the part that's not. Watch how the sunlight moves: observe the patterns it makes, the shadows it creates, the textures it reveals. If clouds are moving across the sky, observe how the intensity of the light shifts from one moment to the next. Feel the sunlight on your face and skin; notice the warmth that this life-giving natural wonder brings.

Sunlight on water, whether in an ocean, a pond, or a puddle, offers a truly magical meditation experience. Water and sunlight dance so beautifully together: playful, peaceful, and always in perfect harmony. Watch how the light reflects and sparkles off the water's constantly changing

surface; be captivated by the endless patterns that the two create. Or immerse yourself in the ocean or an outdoor pool where the sunlight is playing and meditate on the reflections up close. Focus on feeling the reflecting light rather than *thinking* about it, and you may very well experience yourself becoming part of the dance.

Even on a cloudy day, you can meditate on whatever natural light is available. If you're indoors, spend a few moments contemplating a sunbeam streaming through a window or reflecting through a crystal. Or light a candle and simply observe the flame, allowing your thoughts to drift away as you focus all of your attention on the colors, warmth, and motion of the candlelight.

Continually in motion, yet effortless in its movement, light is alive and ever changing. Its radiance is so simple, yet so life giving. This magical element is the perfect focus for a moment's meditation that will leave you centered, refreshed, and recharged.



Sharon LaCasse, *Full Moon*

www.LaCasseArt.etsy.com, www.delarosegallery.com

I graduated from college with a computer science background and worked in the corporate world for a few decades, but one of my lifelong loves has always been creating fine art. Studying with internationally known artists over the past twenty years only fueled my passion to paint. So it felt natural to answer the call to become an entrepreneur at my own gallery twelve years ago. With gratitude and an open heart, I am pleased to say that today my paintings hang in corporate and private collections throughout the world.

Working predominantly in water mediums (watercolor, acrylic, gouache), my heart and essence is mixed with vibrant colors to reflect a higher realm of beingness or, some might say, “soul.” I strive to convey depth and intense light in each image as well as portray our connectedness to one another, our surroundings, and the Universe. The subjects I use remain limitless: angels, landscapes, waterscapes, abstracts, and so much more. It is my hope that a portal is opened for each viewer to experience the intrigue, inspiration, and intrinsic energy that each image longs to convey.



Just Add Gratitude

A Recipe for Happiness

Take a look around you. How many things can you find to appreciate about being where you are right now?

Gratitude is the feeling of thankfulness that comes from recognizing you've received something of value, like the experience of joy you receive from witnessing a sunset. You naturally feel grateful when something special happens or when you recognize the many wonderful things in your life.

Consciously bringing more gratitude into our lives is its own reward. Whether it arises naturally or is induced by intentionally focusing on what's good in your life, *gratitude positively changes your body chemistry*.

It's quite simple. Stress—brought on by thoughts of worry or anxiety—produces hormones and other chemicals that make you feel bad. Feeling gratitude, and expressing it to others, produces hormones and other chemicals that make you feel good.

You don't have to wait until everything is going your way to feel grateful. *Gratitude is a choice*. Sometimes it's a difficult choice to make,

since focusing on the negative is often a deep-seated habit. Making a conscious choice to appreciate what at first appears to be a difficult, negative, or “bad” situation is a skill you can develop through practice—and life will give you plenty of opportunities to practice!

Situations that seem stressful can look quite different through the eyes of gratitude. (It’s difficult to feel frustrated, resentful, or angry when you’re feeling grateful!) So this week, if you happen to notice you’re getting upset, worried, or anxious, step back and do your best to find *something* to be grateful for—even if it’s just for the air you’re breathing.

Getting upset when you’re visited by one of life’s eventualities—like your cell phone or computer dying—never makes the situation easier to deal with. It does make you, and those around you, much more tense. So the next time your cell phone dies, take a moment to put things in perspective. Remember that dealing with breakdowns is just part of owning any electronic device, and appreciate all that your phone has brought you up until now. Bringing in a little gratitude will help you to move through the challenge with more wisdom, insight, and grace.

In short, gratitude generates happiness. Isn’t that reason enough to practice it?



Yiqi Li, *365 Days of Happiness*

www.qiqigallery.com

Being an artist has always been my dream. When I was only five years old, I started drawing trees, houses, horses, and anything I could get my hands on. This love of art has been part of my life ever since. I received private training in Chinese brush painting at an early age and fell in love with oil and acrylic painting a few years ago. Painting is a part of my life, just like air and food.

I paint, day after day, finding joy in colors and shapes. Nature has always been my inspiration, and art is my heart, my way of expressing my observation of the beauty of nature. I am inspired by life and my dream to share my vision, and my happiest moment is when I know that my work has brightened someone's day.



Challenge Your “I Don’t Like” Beliefs And Enhance Your Sensory Experience

Most of us can easily rattle off foods, music, or types of art we don’t like. There can, of course, be physical reasons why we don’t care for something. For example, some people have food allergies and sensitivities. We also each have a unique set of taste buds that affects how food tastes to us. And people who have lost some or all of their sense of smell find that foods taste radically different from before—and not nearly as enjoyable. It’s also possible that genetics plays a role in some of our aversions to particular foods.

But many of our ideas about what we do and don’t like are learned. If our parents didn’t care for country music, we might have grown up feeling the same way without ever investigating whether that style of music actually appeals to us. If we were raised in a family that avoids bitter or spicy foods, we probably won’t enjoy them as adults. And we sometimes take on “I don’t like” attitudes in the process of creating an identity for ourselves. We might announce that we don’t care for modern art because we think this makes us sound sophisticated rather than

because we've thoroughly explored contemporary art styles and found none of them appealing.

Another reason we form "I don't like" beliefs is in response to negative experiences: "I don't like yellow because I got teased for wearing yellow pants in first grade." Or we might develop an aversion to a food after having a bad encounter with it, like consuming something spoiled or being forced to eat something we didn't want to eat. Smells can also be associated with uncomfortable memories or emotions. Christine hates the smell of lavender because it reminds her of her grandmother's stuffy sewing room, where she had to sit for hours when she really wanted to be outside playing. Although such associations may be quite strong, these aversions are still learned, not part of our genetic or biological makeup.

This week, watch for your "I don't like" beliefs to surface, and experiment! Bring some curiosity to a food you've always avoided. If you hear a song or a piece of music you dislike, listen for something you've never heard before. Open your mind and take in a painting or sculpture you don't like, allowing yourself the opportunity to feel what people who do like this artwork experience when they look at it.

Learning to challenge your "I don't like" beliefs will make you more open to sensory experiences. Without a belief that you don't like country music, modern art, or the scent of lavender, you're much more likely to enjoy listening to a banjo-strumming street musician, visiting a friend's art show, or smelling the sachet your niece made you. In fact, challenging your "I don't like" beliefs might reward you with some of the most sensuous experiences of your life!



Laurence Van Oliver, *Roselets*
laurence-oliver.artistwebsites.com

My art is my release. I created *Roselets* from flowers I gave to a woman I love and admire. Here is the poem that accompanies it:

Dear God,
The lady reading this is beautiful, classy and strong, and I love her.
Help her live her life to the fullest.
Promote her and cause her to excel above her expectations.
Help her shine in the darkest places where it is impossible to love.
Protect her at all times. Lift her up when she needs you the most,
and let her know when she walks with you, she will always be safe.



Harness the Energy of Intention

Get the Most from Every Experience

An intention is a personal declaration of something you'd like to experience. You can think of an intention as an “energetic game plan” that helps to shape and guide your experiences and bring more meaning and joy to them. It works behind the scenes to focus your energies, direct your actions, and help you stay aware of what's important to you.

Many people are familiar with setting long-term intentions, such as an intention to get into better shape or to start a new business in the coming year. Intentions are also quite powerful for supporting you in *anything* you're doing. They can be made for any experience, like a walk, a dinner date, or even a phone call.

An intention can be just a single word, like *breathe* or *relax*. It might be a simple concept, such as self-love, self-acceptance, happiness, or peace. Or it could be a more specific idea, such as an intention to feel calm and content.

Have fun experimenting with intentions this week. Here are a few possibilities:

- In the morning, set an intention for your day, such as “I am focused on my goal of _____ and I am not distracted by inconsequential

things.” Or “I am making consistent and steady progress on my project today.” If you find your focus wandering, repeat your intention to yourself, feeling the truth in the words as you say them.

- If you attend a meeting, you might set an intention to bring a spirit of cooperation to the group or to help everyone find common ground. See if beginning with such a focus makes a difference in your experience.

If you’re going someplace where you might feel a little nervous, try an intention to stay grounded throughout the experience or to keep your focus on learning all you can.

- If you’re trying something new, you might make an intention to fully accept yourself—including any mistakes you make or any knowledge you don’t have. This can make a new experience interesting instead of frustrating.
- At the start of an exercise class, try an intention like “I am here to explore all that my body is capable of today.” This can keep you from comparing yourself with the people around you. When you notice your mind wandering, reaffirm your intention to yourself.
- Take a walk with the intention of feeling your connection to everything and everyone you pass by.
- If you’re getting together with people you sometimes experience conflict with, you might enter the situation with an intention to enjoy yourself and not get caught up in other people’s drama.
- At a party, try an intention to meet someone new or to experience a different side of yourself.
- Finally, experiment with setting a “dream intention” before you fall asleep. For example, “I am exploring my creative potential in my dreams tonight.” When you wake up, recall any dreams you had and look for any connections to the intention you set.



Elena Diadenko, *Full Moon*

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I believe art should be powerful and complex. Art should encompass our emotions, experiences, and beliefs. It should tell stories, protest injustices, inspire the imagination, nourish spiritually, make people think, please, amuse, inflict pain, confuse, enlighten, and sometimes anger. Everybody feels these feelings, but artists transform these feelings into paintings, sculptures, poems, movies, songs, and plays. My own passion is painting: using color, line, and a variety of art methods to express myself.

I love art so much that it is like breathing to me. I do it because I cannot live without it; I see the whole world through the eyes of an artist. My art speaks for my soul. Sometimes, it is happy and pleasing. Other times, it is sad and controversial. Always, it is colorful, unique, and imaginative. My art reflects my love of humanity, the power and beauty of women, and the confusion life brings to us.



Play with Synesthesia

Heighten Your Sensory Sensitivity

Suppose you're sitting with your eyes closed and a cat is resting on your lap. You are stroking its silky fur and listening to its rhythmic purr. Quieting your mind, you begin to get a sense of this animal that goes far beyond what you're touching with your fingers and hearing with your ears.

Cross-connecting areas of the brain—such as the areas that process auditory (sound) and visual information—can produce an “overlapping” of the senses and give you a much richer picture of what you're sensing.

This experience of “blended” senses, or synesthesia, can be quite pronounced. There are blind people, for example, who describe their world as being filled with music. Everything they hear has incredible depth and life. There are many different kinds of synesthesia. Some people “see” music or “taste” colors. For some, colors are associated with specific sounds; for others, numbers are linked to particular colors.

This week, experiment with opening all your senses at once. Many artists and musicians report having sensory-overlap experiences, so playing with synesthesia may also help open your creative pathways. Here are three ideas to get you started:

- Awaken all your senses to the experience of enjoying a warm drink. Clear your mind as you focus on the feeling of the warm cup in your hands, the steam caressing your face, the scent of the liquid, the motion of the surface, the feeling of the cup against your lips, and all of the internal sensations you experience as the warm liquid travels down your throat.
- Listen to the wind with your whole body: hear it with your ears, feel it with your skin, and watch for all the effects it has as it moves past plants or people or blows leaves down the street. Take in all the information you can. Try to get a sense of the wind as a whole.
- Have a synesthetic experience of light on water. Watch a body of water in the moonlight—a lake, the ocean, or even a puddle. Take in everything at once. Let go of your thoughts about it and use all of your senses in concert to experience the motion of the water, the sound and feeling of the breeze, the light reflecting off the water's surface in its rhythmic but unpredictable way, the smell of the evening air.

As you experiment with opening all of your senses to a particular experience, you may begin to get a feeling that everything belongs, that everything is connected. Allow yourself to sink deeply into that peaceful feeling of perfection.



Shayla Maddox, *Sacred Space*
www.shaylamaddox.com

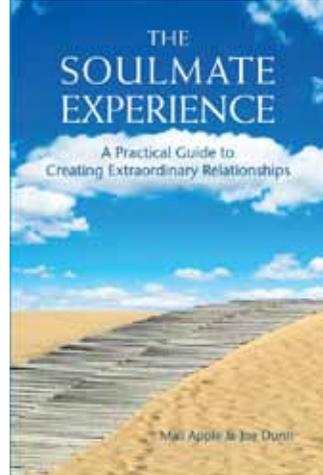
I paint thin spaces—moments in which it feels as though something more profound is happening than just what you see with your eyes, beyond the boundaries of time, space, and reality. I use light as a medium, along with acrylic, phosphorescent pigments, beach sand, glass, crushed seashells, and candle wax. Each painting is meditative and changes appearance throughout the day, season, and year. My art is also light reactive into the UV spectrum and will continue to glow in the darkness.

I also paint circles. Atoms, molecules, planets and stars, the cycles of time, and the universe itself all exist within a circle, radiating outward, with no beginning or end. In Zen, every circle is unique and can be seen as the fingerprint of the artist who created it. Some hold that a Zen circle is the depiction of enlightenment itself.

Also by Mali Apple & Joe Dunn

The Soulmate Experience: A Practical Guide to Creating Extraordinary Relationships

Winner of the 2012 International Book Awards Gold Medal and the 2012 Living Now Awards Silver Medal, *The Soulmate Experience* has been called “A relationship guide masterpiece” and “A catalyst for transformation in life, relationships, and self.” Countless people are using the transformational ideas in this book to find and sustain relationships that are profoundly connected on every level—emotional, intellectual, sexual, and spiritual—or to simply add more “soulmate experience” to the relationships they already have.



Available everywhere books are sold, including Amazon [US](#), [UK](#), [Canada](#), [Germany](#), [Italy](#), [Spain](#), [France](#), [Brazil](#), [Japan](#), and [India](#). The audiobook is available worldwide, including at [Audible.com](#).

Mantras for Making Love

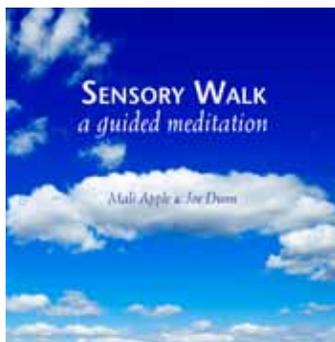
This 17-minute mp3 of soul-opening mantras and affirmations will inspire you to create a space for profound intimacy. By using these heart and soul opening statements, you will infuse your lovemaking with more connection, more passion, and more pleasure. You can use them to relax when you're feeling nervous, to heal limiting beliefs about yourselves or your bodies, and to deepen your connection and intimacy. Whether you're single or in a relationship, listening to the mantras will inspire you with new possibilities.



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Sensory Walk: A Guided Meditation

Load this 20-minute mp3 onto your iPod or portable media player and head out for a journey into your senses. During this guided walking meditation—which you can take in a busy city, in the countryside, or just around your own neighborhood—you will experience a profound opening of all your senses, become aware of a world you may have never noticed before, and feel deeply connected not only to yourself, but to the world around you.



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Overcoming Jealousy: A 23-Day Online Course

Jealousy can be emotionally intense and physically exhausting. Jealousy can overtake us in an instant and leave us feeling insecure, embarrassed, paralyzed, angry, or out of control. Whether you're currently in a relationship or not, you'll come away from this course feeling confident about your ability to approach jealousy in the future in an empowered way—and you'll never look at jealousy in the same way again.



Course available at TheSoulmateExperience.com/OvercomingJealousy.

Join the Community!

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