

Traveling with the Turtle

TRAVELING WITH THE TURTLE: A SMALL GROUP PROCESS IN WOMEN'S SPIRITUALITY AND PEACEMAKING.

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Traveling with the Turtle

A program of Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service

2501 Harrison St., Oakland, CA 94612

Phone: (510) 268-8908 Fax: (510) 268-8799

turtle@paceebene.org

www.turtle.paceebene.org

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Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service

Pace e Bene (pronounced *pah-chay bay-nay*) means “peace and all good” in Italian. St. Francis of Assisi used this expression as a greeting and as a means of proclaiming the way of peace in the midst of a violent world.

Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service is based in Las Vegas, Nevada, with offices and program staff in Oakland, California; Chicago, Illinois; Montreal, Quebec, Canada; Perth, Western Australia, Australia; and a growing network of collaborators in North and South America. Pace e Bene offers resources to assist in the journey of personal and social transformation, such as retreats, workshops, presentations, classes, and a variety of publications, including *The Wolf*, its quarterly newsletter. Pace e Bene's staff and animating group engage in nonviolent action and work with a wide range of nonviolent movements for justice and peace.

Nevada Office

1420 W. Bartlett Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106

Phone & Fax: (702) 648-2281

www.paceebene.org; paceebene@paceebene.org

California Office

2501 Harrison St., Oakland, CA 94612

Phone: (510) 268-8765 Fax: (510) 268-8799

pbcals@paceebene.org

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Traveling with the Turtle

*A Small Group Process in
Women's Spirituality and Peacemaking*

Cindy Preston-Pile and Irene Woodward

Pace e Bene Press, Oakland, California

The turtle is a rich symbol. We have entitled this manual *Traveling with the Turtle* because, among other things, the turtle symbolizes women's wisdom and strength. For Native Americans, the turtle was associated with the lunar cycle, menstruation, and the power of the female energies. Some turtles have a total of thirteen markings or sections on their shells. These thirteen markings were thought to represent the thirteen full moons or thirteen new moons that alternated each year in the lunar calendar. Many believe this is where the association with the female energies originated—the turtle's shell revealed both the natural cycle of the planet and the fertility period of females. Women's ability, her power to create new life, was intimately connected to the rhythm of nature itself. Thus, the turtle symbolizes Mother Earth, the primal mother, Womb of All.

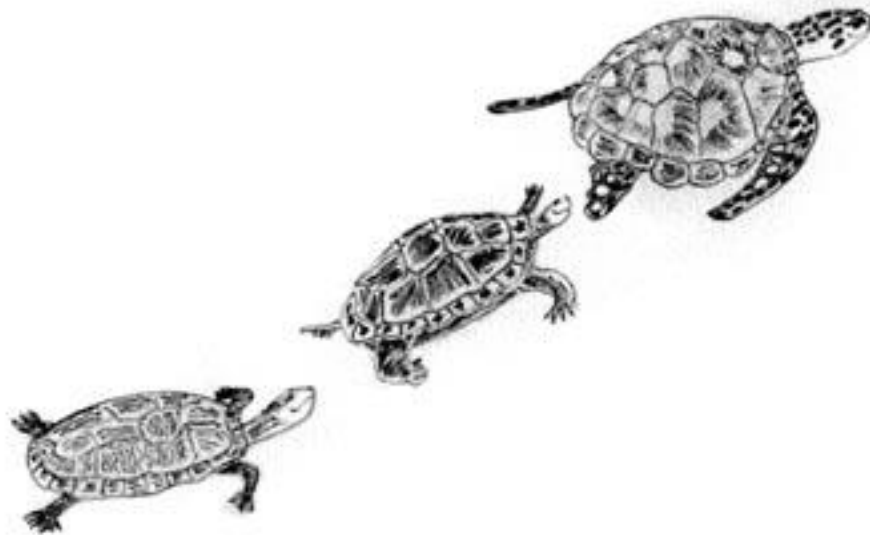


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The Odds

*A storm is up.
The wind chases
whatever it can unhinge
with its force for miles,
sets the sea panting
against a jetty
and agitates to gracelessness
the bare lilac branches.*

*The wind disturbs
those at home with gravity;
stirs what is sleeping
to the surface, pitching
bits of shells and sea glass
to the shore. There,
women are wiping
sand from their eyes,
collecting what is necessary,
what is beautiful. A storm
is up. A lone gull
shifts and presses its weight
to stay, to hover above
a circle of women
who are trying to light
a fire. They are
lighting a fire.*

L.R. Berger, from "As Rains Enter Rivers."

Introduction

Welcome

Dear Sisters,

Greetings of Peace and All Good—and welcome. We honor the sacred journey that you are embarking on by entering into this small group process together. We are filled with hope in knowing that you are forming community where you can share stories about the gifts and graces you have experienced, as well as the struggles you have encountered along the way, as women seeking to make peace with yourselves, your families, your communities, and in our society. With the turtle, ancient symbol of feminine wisdom and power as your guide, we are grateful that you are claiming your power and imparting your wisdom, wisdom that our world badly needs to hear.

In her poem, L.R. Berger observes that a storm is up! Violence and injustice swirl around us—but so does the Spirit. She calls to us, “Follow me.” She “stirs what is sleeping to the surface,” those qualities and values that we possess as women that our world so desperately needs to recognize and embrace to be made whole. Jean Shinoda Bolen summarizes this need: “Empowered maternal concern [*in its broadest sense*] is an untapped feminine force that the world needs to balance and transform aggression.”

In the midst of this impending storm, the women go around faithfully “collecting what is necessary, what is beautiful,” what is compassionate and loving. You are gathering in circles as women have done throughout the ages, trying to light the fire—a fire within that ignites a holy love of self, a fire that burns brightly with a passion for peace, beckoning others to come close and warm their hands and hearts. May this manual help kindle the fire that you are lighting as you begin this journey together. As you gather, know that the goals of the *Traveling with the Turtle* process are:

- To explore the values and practices of women’s spirituality
- To see how these values and practices help you heal and make peace with yourself, in your relationships, in your communities, and in society.

Therefore, in this manual, you will consider women’s experiences of violence and conflict and habitual responses to them, and then learn concrete ways of making peace that are practical, creative, inclusive, and nonviolent. You will be one of an increasing number of circles of women that are acting together for peace.

The History of Traveling with the Turtle

Traveling with the Turtle draws from the work of *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*, a program of Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service that invites participants to discover the power of

nonviolence for personal and social change. After facilitating *Engage* workshops for several years, we began to hear the need for a similar resource designed specifically for women. At one workshop, several women raised questions and concerns such as: “How do I feel and constructively express my anger?” and “Are you equating staying in an abusive relationship with nonviolence?” No, we are not.

Unexpressed or inappropriately expressed anger. Always trying to smooth things over. These are deeply ingrained responses that women have learned to use in the face of conflict and violence. *Traveling with the Turtle* is a response to these and other questions and concerns that women are raising as part of their peacemaking journeys.

Women are struggling with similar issues globally. Cindy Preston-Pile, one of the authors, participated in *Asking the Right Questions: Nonviolence Training and Gender Consultation*, a conference held in Thailand in 2004. There she met women from Africa, Asia, Eastern and Western Europe, the Americas, and Canada, who were seeking to convey in their nonviolence trainings they offered for women, and many times men, the belief that ending violence and discrimination against women is an integral part of peacemaking. These trainers sought to empower women to break out of roles that were often narrowly defined for them by their societies. Women who participated in such trainings felt more confident, valued, and liberated in their lives as they began to reclaim the power that a violent, male-dominated system had stripped from them. *Traveling with the Turtle* is an attempt to stand in solidarity with women and men, who are working to end violence—both internalized messages of oppression and external forms of violence—against women.

Her life-long endeavors of accompaniment as a professor and a spiritual director led Irene Woodward, the other author, to further discoveries. She met numerous women thirsting for a greater understanding of women’s spirituality, for a validation of their own experience of themselves and of the Divine. She found that as these women probed more deeply the experience of this Spirit, they discovered others from many religious traditions and backgrounds asking the same questions, and found a connectedness, indeed a sisterhood, in this spiritual search. As part of this journey, the women whom Irene met embraced inclusiveness and mutuality as ways of being in the world, as well as the common desire for healing the wounds of our Earth and of other people.

Traveling with the Turtle is based on the premise that women’s spirituality is a powerful force for peacemaking. Throughout the thirteen sessions you will reflect on different aspects of this spirituality, and how they heal, support, and empower you on your peacemaking journey.

Spirituality

What is spirituality? This is a rather elusive term. Sometimes it is equated with formal religious worship. Other times it is viewed as an alternative to such a structured practice. In this manual, we believe that spirituality pervades the entirety of our lives. Our life pilgrimage, our

journey toward wholeness, is a spiritual undertaking. We encounter Spirit as we delve deeply into our own lives, into that inviolable part of ourselves sometimes called soul, and discover our own beauty, strength and goodness, our passions, and life's purpose. We encounter Spirit as we form relationships both with those whom we love deeply and with those who are different from us, who perhaps challenge us, as they help us to grow and enable us to glimpse the Divine who resides within us all.

We encounter Spirit in the presence of creation, of Earth and all of her glorious creatures. And, we encounter Spirit as we come together as families, as communities, and in movements for social change to struggle for justice and peace or, as Carter Heyward writes, "to re-create the world." Our lives are holy. We are sacred beings. Spirituality embraces all of this. It is the ground upon which we walk, the deep well from which we draw throughout this process.

Important Elements of Women's Spirituality

Women's spirituality believes that it is important that we, as women, acknowledge that we, too, are created in the image of the Holy One whom, throughout this manual, we sometimes refer to as Her, the Feminine Divine. Many other times we simply say "the Divine" or "the Holy One."

In addressing the Divine as feminine, our intent is not to exclude but rather to include women who perhaps have felt that addressing the Holy One in exclusively masculine language has meant that they cannot relate to this divinity, that they are not made in His image. New language seems to be needed to express the multitude of ways that women experience the Divine, and so we hope that, in the spirit of inclusivity embraced by women's spirituality, we will open ourselves to an array of ways of imaging the Divine.

Another important feature of women's spirituality is the understanding of power that it offers in both intimate relationships and political realities. A question that often arises with respect to power is whether or not power is a bad thing, as when one person exerts control over, another's life. Drawing on Starhawk's and Pamela Cooper-White's schemas, we call such control power-over, domination of another person, an entire people, or of Earth. This is an abuse of power.

At the same time, power can be an extraordinary, wonderful, creative, life-giving energy. The New Oxford American Dictionary offers us the following definitions of power: 1) the ability to do something or act in a particular way; 2) the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. Women's spirituality seeks the empowerment of women, the ability to make decisions that affect our lives—at home, in the workplace, in matters of religion, and in many other areas. In order to do this, we draw on our power-within, that deep wisdom and intuition that wells up inside of us. In listening to this voice deep within us, as Audre Lorde writes, "we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of."

Power-with or power-sharing “carries the dignity of power-within into relationship.” Peacemaking. Nonviolence. We seek to enable other people to experience this same power, strength, freedom, expression of our truest self, that we have felt. As the circle widens, power-with blossoms into community power and, eventually sisterhood—or people power. These thirteen sessions are structured around these four themes—Power-Within, Power-With, Community Power, and Sisterhood. As you move through this process, we invite you to delve deeply into your own power, to consider how you want to use it—and then act—that together we might transform the domination, the power-over that we have experienced in our lives as women and in the life of our world.

The Structure of This Process

Traveling with the Turtle is a process developed by women for women. It is comprised of 13 two-hour sessions.

Session 1 introduces you to women’s spirituality.

Session 2 explores empowering images of the Divine.

Part I (Sessions 3-5) helps you claim your power-within.

Part II (Sessions 6-8) explores your familiar responses to conflict and violence, as well as creative, nonviolent ways of making peace.

Part III (Sessions 9-10) considers how you can build inclusive communities.

Part IV (Sessions 11-13) honors the many social change movements initiated by women and guides the group through the process of developing and carrying out a nonviolent action. Session 13 concludes with a celebration of your lives that commissions you to go forth and continue to make peace.

Each session uses a variety of learning styles and methods to explore women’s spirituality and peacemaking: ritual, story-telling, role-plays, small and large group discussions, meditation, creative imagination exercises, movement, singing, and action. Throughout the process, you are encouraged to express yourselves in a variety of ways using images, movement, song, as well as written or spoken words.

In between sessions, you are asked to engage in a Life Practice, respond to journal questions, and reflect on several readings.

The Elements of Each Session

Opening Ritual You will honor the sacredness of each other and your time together by beginning each session with a ritual that may include meditation, prayers, music, movement or symbolic gestures. We invite you to savor this time of centering and re-collection.

Sharing, Reflections on Life Practice, Journal Questions, or Readings

At the beginning of each session there will be time to share with a partner insights, questions and concerns that arose between sessions through engaging in a life practice, journaling, or from the readings for that session.

One or Several of the Following Activities:

Creative imagination exercises

Sharing in pairs, small and large groups about exercises or readings

Guided meditations

Role-play

Movement

Closing

You will end your time together with a closing ritual or circle activity.

Life Practice

Life practices help you embody what you have learned in each session.

Journal Topics and Questions

We offer questions and topics to reflect on before the next gathering.

Readings

Each session will include several articles that may be read in preparation for the following session.

Using This Process

It is our hope that this material will be adapted for an array of groups, so please adapt *Traveling with the Turtle* to meet the needs of your group or community. (Keep in mind, however, that this process is not designed to be used as the main resource for a therapy or support group.)

If you wish to concentrate on certain parts of a session because you feel that those areas are most important for your group or you need to change the agenda as stories are told and important issues and conversations arise, please do so. If you want to bring in new resources, again, do so. You may want to go through all 13 sessions or you may wish to do fewer. (For instance, you could do Parts I and II that address personal and interpersonal power and then close with the Sending Forth ritual in Session 13.) You may also want to gather for a preliminary session, perhaps over a meal, to share personal stories so that group members will get to know each other before beginning the *Traveling with the Turtle* process. Or, you may want to meet an hour before the first session.

Your group can meet every week, every other week, or once a month. We cannot say it often enough—make this process your own to whatever extent you desire. And, if you adapt a session, or sessions in a way that worked well, let us know.

Blessings

During the time Cindy was surrounded by the incredible group of women who gathered in Thailand, she dreamt of visiting a zoo filled with vibrantly colored turtles who came in a vast array of shapes and sizes. This dream turned out to be relevant because, as the title of this process explains, the turtle symbolizes women's wisdom and strength. Here again, we stand in the midst of circles of amazing, beautiful, courageous, passionate women— all of you. We pray that this turtle will walk with you as you slowly and faithfully travel this new, yet familiar path. May you be blessed by the wisdom and power of all of the women who have gone before us, all of the women who now walk with us, and all of those yet to be born.

Cindy and Irene



In Gratitude

We thank the many women who have walked with us as we have struggled to give birth to this book:

Members of our Consultative Body— Marilyn Wilson, BVM, Rev. Cynthia State-man, Brenda Vaca, Liz Sweet, Joi Morton-Wiley, and Miriam Cooney, CSC. Sister Miriam also assisted us generously in our fundraising projects.

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And to all of the strong, beautiful, good and holy women out there making this world a better place. Thank you!

Session 1

*Women's Spirituality:
A Force for Nonviolent Peacemaking*

Session 1

Women's Spirituality: A Force For Nonviolent Peacemaking

In this Session We Will

- Get to know each other
- Learn about the goals of *Traveling with the Turtle* and the format for each session
- Begin to explore women's spirituality and its relationship to peacemaking

Agenda

Welcome and Introductions — 5 min

Opening Ritual — 20 min

Getting to Know Each Other — 15 min

Shared Agreements — 10 min

Our Experience of Women's Spirituality — 50 min

A Description of Women's Spirituality — 10 min

Closing — 5 min

Looking Ahead — 5 min

Life Practice

Journal Topics and Questions

Readings

Materials Needed

- Name badges
- Felt tip pens or markers for writing names and recording the Shared Agreements
- Sign-in sheet
- Compact disk or audiotape player
- Recorded music
- Small prayer table
- A colorful cloth to cover the table, perhaps one that has special meaning for the group
- A candle for each woman, large enough so that she can take it home and light it regularly
- Matches
- A bell for the "babbling" exercise
- Flipchart
- Easel paper
- A basket
- Sheets of white 8 ½ x 11 paper, cut into small strips, two for each participant

Facilitator Notes

Session preparation — A month before

- Consider gathering for a preliminary session, perhaps over a meal, dedicated to sharing personal stories so that group members will get to know each other before beginning the *Traveling with the Turtle* process.
- Or, you may want to meet an hour before the first session.
- Let participants know about an earlier gathering if you choose to hold one.

Session preparation — The week before

- Review the Facilitation Guidelines found near the end of this manual.
- Review the entire session. Practice reading any visualizations or meditations, and role-play or practice setting up and facilitating exercises beforehand. Whenever possible, put material into your own words. Feel free to make notes on 3x5 cards or in the book next to the written instructions.
- Write “Women’s Spirituality” at the top of a piece of easel paper and then the bullet points describing it. (Found in A Description of Women’s Spirituality, Session 1, page 19).

Session preparation — The day of

- Arrange the chairs, including your own, in a circle, with a small table in the center. Place the cloth, candles and matches on the table.
- As people arrive, ask them to sign in with their contact information (at some point, group members may need to be in touch with each other).
- Make sure everyone has a copy of *Traveling with the Turtle*.
- Play some background music as people arrive, if desired.



Session 1

Women's Spirituality: A Force for Nonviolent Peacemaking

Welcome and Introductions — 5 min

Convey in your own words:

Welcome to our first gathering of *Traveling with the Turtle*! My name is (or we are) _____ and _____, and we will be facilitating this process.

We will be meeting for thirteen sessions to reflect on women's spirituality and its contribution to peacemaking. The goals of the *Traveling with the Turtle* process are:

- To explore the values and practices of women's spirituality
- To see how these values and practices help us heal ourselves and make peace with others
- To consider women's experience of conflict and violence and habitual responses to them
- To continue to learn concrete ways of making peace that are creative, practical, inclusive and nonviolent
- To form an increasing number of circles of women that are acting together for peace

Each session will include an opening; time to share insights that arose between gatherings; activities such as guided meditation, creative expression exercises, role-plays and small and large group reflection; a closing; and a life practice or action, journal questions, and readings for the next session. In the second to last session, our time together will include planning and carrying out a group action for peace.

During this session, we will be introduced—to each other, to the general approach of this series, and to an understanding of women's spirituality as a powerful force for healing ourselves and for making peace in our families, our communities, and our world.

Explain any housekeeping details.

Opening Ritual — 20 min

Begin by inviting group members to take a few minutes to center themselves and become present to this time, this circle, by paying attention to their breath. Breathe in and out, in and out.

If you desire, play a song in the background.

Then share the following in your own words:

We gather in the presence of the Holy One who comes to us in many forms—Creator, One Who Brings Peace, Companion, She who is woman like us, the Divine Feminine. Be here with us now, O Mother. Fill us with your presence, your passion, your peace. Guide us in the weeks and months ahead, showering the Wisdom of your way upon us that we may walk in beauty, embracing our sacredness and recognizing the sacredness of our sisters and brothers throughout the world. As we open this holy circle, we thank you for the gift of this time together. *(Pause for a moment.)*

As we embark on our journey together, I invite you to come forward, light a candle, and share with the group your reason for wanting to enter into this process—a hope, a need, or an intention you have as we begin this exploration of women’s spirituality and peacemaking.

You may wish to model this by going first. After each woman has shared her response and lit a candle, conclude with:

We gather up these hopes and desires and acknowledge how sacred they are. We will take these candles home with us to light each time that we write in our journal, or reflect on each session’s theme. During those times may we remember both our own hopes and needs and the hopes and needs of the other women in this group. Like these candles before us, may you, O Holy One, burn brightly in our hearts, lighting before us the path to peace.

Getting to Know Each Other — 15 min

Tell the group:

We will now get to know each other better through an exercise called “Babbling,” which comes from a process called InterPlay. Find a partner. Decide who is person #1 and who is person #2. *If there is an uneven number of people, simply group the remaining folks into a triad.*

Then say:

Person #1, I am going to give you a word and you are going to talk about that subject—whatever you have to say about it—for 30 seconds. What you say doesn’t have to be interesting, or logical, or even fast. Person #2 will just listen. Your word is _____.

Give them a common, concrete subject such as dust, flowers, hair, or spoons. Be creative!

After 30 seconds or so ring a bell or say "Stop." Give person #2 the same instructions:

I'll give you a word and you talk for 30 seconds. The word is_____.

After 30 seconds or so ring a bell or say "Stop."

Do this again, being creative with your choice of words.

Repeat the same sequence once more. This time the words will be "woman" and "peacemaking." After both partners have had a turn, ask them to share anything they noticed with their partner for about 30 seconds, either about what they shared or about the exercise itself—or anything else that came up.

Have them stay with the same partner for the fourth round. Give the following instructions:

Share your name and a word that describes you, something you would like the group to know about you, with each other. Again, begin with Person #1.

Have them thank their partner, remain sitting next to each other, and face the circle. Invite all of the pairs to introduce each other to the circle.

Source: Adapted from Phil Porter and Cynthia Winton-Henry, *Leading Your Own Life: The InterPlay Leadership Program. Secrets of InterPlay I.*

Shared Agreements — 10 min

Making Agreements

Read or put in your own words:

We have created a sacred space. We have gotten to know each other a little bit. We are now going to develop some shared agreements together so that we can maintain this safe, sacred space in order to be able to share our stories with each other. This is an important aspect of women's spirituality: our ability to reflect deeply on our own experience and to share that experience with the group and have it received and validated. This is holy ground.

What, then, do you need to feel safe and comfortable in this group?

Go around the circle and invite each participant to offer something. Record the group's responses on easel paper. After everyone who has wanted to share has a chance to speak, ask if there are any other additions. If the following agreements have not been expressed, add them to the list and explain what they mean to the group. You can also refer everyone to the Proposed Agreements found below.

During our time together:

- I agree to share and participate at whatever level I feel safe and comfortable.
- I agree to maintain confidentiality.
- I agree to Step Up/Step Back. *(You may want to explain this agreement. It encourages participants to practice speaking up if they tend to be more hesitant and to step back and give others the opportunity to speak if they tend to share often in groups.)*
- I will strive to appreciate and honor our differences.

Ask if the group will agree to use these guidelines. When agreement is reached, post the list on a nearby wall for this and all of the following sessions. Also explain that since the facilitator(s) may or may not notice when one of these agreements is broken, all participants should feel empowered to interrupt the process if they notice this happening and ask that the situation be addressed.

Proposed Agreements

I agree to share and participate at whatever level I feel safe and comfortable.

- I will share what I want to share. If I choose not to share, or to share a little, that's fine. If I want to share more, that's fine. Together we will create an environment where our feelings and thoughts are respected.
- While I have the opportunity always to share at whatever level I feel safe and comfortable, I may be open to voluntarily take opportunities as they arise to feel uncomfortable when that might help facilitate my growth. In every case, this is up to me.
- The facilitators are not acting in the capacity of professional psychotherapists or counselors. They are ordinary people helping us explore alternatives to the violence in our lives and the larger world. If something comes up for me during our time together that would warrant or benefit from consulting with an appropriate health professional, I am encouraged to do so.

I agree to maintain confidentiality about personal stories or experiences shared in my small group or in the large group, unless I have been given permission to share them with others.

- In this process we work in small and large groups. I will not share a story or experience that someone else has shared in either small or large groups unless she has given her permission. When in doubt I will err on the side of caution and not share the story or experience. I will feel free, however, to share any insights that this story or experience may have stimulated.

I agree to Step Up/Step Back—to try to speak up if I tend to be more hesitant and to step back and give others the opportunity to speak if I tend to share often in groups.

- I will listen with my full and complete attention when others are speaking, and wait until a person has completed her thoughts before I speak.
- I will allow silence and accept space for various forms of communication.

I will strive to appreciate and honor our differences.

- Diversity is an opportunity for me to grow and learn in a new way. I will try to nurture an openness to, and celebration of, persons, approaches, and ways of being that are different from mine.
- As part of this, I recognize that there are power dynamics in every group, including this one. I will do my best to be sensitive to the use of power based on race, ability, sexual preference, money, or class. If someone uses power over someone else in this group (for example, if someone discounts another person's experiences), I will try to respond to this situation in a clear and loving way.

Source: Adapted from Slattery, Butigan, Pelicario, and Preston-Pile, *Engage: Exploring Nonviolent Living*.

***Our Experience of Women's Spirituality* — 50 min**

Beginnings — 15 min

Introduce this exercise by sharing the following in your own words:

Woman. Peacemaking. We began our exploration of women's spirituality and its relationship to peacemaking as we "babbled" and when we stated our hopes and intentions for entering into this process. We will now spend a more extended period of time reflecting on and expressing what a spirituality embraced by women looks like to us.

When you get Jewish, Catholic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Sufi women all practicing their faith in the same room another religion emerges, which is feminine spirituality.

Carol Lee Flinders

Place the basket in the middle of the circle on the prayer table. Give each woman two strips of paper and then ask the group:

When you hear the phrase “women’s spirituality” what do you feel? What words, phrases, images, or beliefs arise for you? Write or draw two of your responses to these questions on these pieces of paper.

Give everyone several minutes to complete this task. When they are finished, invite them to place their pieces of paper in the basket. Pass the basket around the circle and ask each woman to take out two strips of paper. Go around the circle and have the women, one at a time, read or share whatever is on their pieces of paper. Then have them place their strips of paper on the prayer table.

Sharing in Pairs — 15 min

Invite everyone to find a partner and ask them to reflect on what they have heard so far or on what they wrote or drew as a description of women’s spirituality. Tell them you will ring a bell midway, so that both partners will have time to share.

Large Group Reflection — 20 min

Invite everyone to return to the large group. Ask them to respond to the following question:

How does your spirituality, as a woman, influence your desire to heal that which is broken, to act for peace?

A Description of Women’s Spirituality — 10 min

Convey the following:

We have shared our personal experiences of women’s spirituality and the influence that that spirituality has had on our desire to be women, and people of peace. As a further contribution to this conversation, here is one description of women’s spirituality that we have found helpful because it makes clear the connection between this spirituality and this desire. In each session we will highlight a different aspect of this spirituality.

Listen to the description and then add any other aspects of women’s spirituality that came up during the previous exercise that are not already listed.

Tape the following description to the wall and then read it:

Women's Spirituality is: a worldwide awakening of womanpower whose vision is the transformation of our selves and our societies. The ancient spiritual voice of woman now speaks its long-hidden wisdom....

This emerging voice speaks of:

- a deepening appreciation of the Feminine Divine in whose image we are
- the empowerment of ourselves as women
- the possibility for both women and men to become whole human beings
- the loving of our bodies, emotions, minds, and spirits
- the importance of stories of our lived experience that are gateways to self-knowledge, wisdom, and self-validation
- the awareness that everything and everyone is sacred, especially ourselves
- the recognition and release of our creative power, individually and communally
- the necessity of community
- reverence for the Earth, the celebration of her seasons and cycles, and those of our lives
- the recognition that all life is interconnected
- the creation of world peace, social justice, and environmental harmony

Source: Quoted and paraphrased from *Woman of Power*.

If the group has other aspects of women's spirituality to add to the list, write them on the easel paper.

Closing — 5 min

Conclude by saying:

Let us close our time together by expressing with our bodies what women's spirituality means to us. We are going to create a group sculpture, a still, nonverbal (and, perhaps joyful) pose.

I invite one woman to enter the circle and choose a pose that embodies women's spirituality for her. Then, as you feel moved, I invite the rest of you to join your pose with hers until we have created a beautiful piece of group artwork.

Hold this group pose for a few moments.

Or, the group may simply close by gathering in a circle, offering thanks for being together and then saying together: We are women of spirit. We are women of peace. We seek healing and wholeness for ourselves and our world.

Looking Ahead — 5 min

Share the following in your own words:

At the end of each session, we will conclude by offering suggestions for reflection and action between now and the next session. These include a Life Practice, topics and questions for journaling, and readings in preparation for the next session.

Life Practice

Life Practice will help you embody what you have learned and reflected on during each session. Before the next session:

- 1) Choose one or two aspects of women's spirituality that most speak to you. Each evening, reflect back on the ways that you have lived out or expressed these values during the day.

- 2) Choose an object that is special and, possibly, sacred to you. Bring it with you to the next session. To open Session 2, the group will create an altar together with the objects that each woman brings. You will have the opportunity to share why this object is important to you.

Journal Topics and Questions

You are encouraged to keep a journal as a part of the *Traveling with the Turtle* process. Journaling is a valuable vehicle for self-discovery and self-knowledge.

You may use the pages provided in this book or your own notebook to record your response to the topics and questions that are provided at the end of each session. Feel free to express your responses in whatever form you are most comfortable with—words, images, a collage, doodling, etc.

What you write can be just for you or you might want to share some of your reflections with other group members during each session. You will be given the opportunity to do this with a partner at the beginning of each session.

Next Session's Readings

To prepare for the next session, read the selections found at the end of this session.

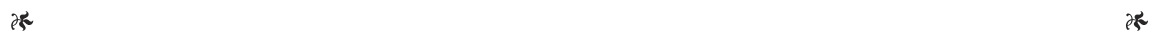
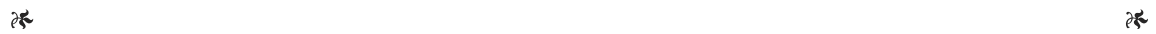


Journal Topics and Questions

1) Why did you decide to enter into this process? Reflect further on what you shared with the group. Is there anything in particular that you would like to learn or do during the next 13 sessions? Any special needs you have? Keep these desires and needs in mind as you continue this journey.



2) If you have, how did you come to know the Holy One? What have been some of your most significant experiences?



Readings for Session 2**Guadalupe: The Path of the Broken Heart**

By Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Listen young ones...you write to me because you have heard of our La Sociedad de Nuestra Senora, Guadalupe, our group of social activists dedicated to being contemplatives in the world. And you wish to know what to call the experiences you have been having. The old fashioned words are appearances and apparitions. But I advise you to just call them by simple words. They are visits, as from a great and beloved sistermother....

Now you write that all around you everything seems often in complete mayhem and this causes you great sadness. I would agree completely. Our own sorrows seem heavy enough.... But watching others hurt and hurting is the breaker of most any heart....And so here are your hearts still unruined. This is a very good sign...there is great power in the broken heart....The heart broken open can be a blessing beyond compare. It not only allows you to see others, it allows you to constantly see her....

When I was seven years old, the grownups from my home and school life told me that I had at last reached "the age of reason." Apparently, in spite of my many childhood jailbreaks, running away from the house to be in the massive cathedrals of the forest, or baptizing flowers and children smaller than I in the creek, or staying late in the forest at night to see the eerie swampfire, in spite of these semi-terrible transgressions, I, the little ecstatic childwanderer, was now qualified to be "reason-able."...

My aunt having told me that in the next thirteen days I would see thirteen things that would affect me for life, "that will call for your help, your hands, your heart for the rest of your life," I now tried to keep my eyes truly open. She had said, "You are a little child and you can still see what most who are older no longer care to see, you can see what needs help."....

So, many things did I see during those thirteen holy days that my aunt had prepared me for. But one of the most startling I saw [was] as I wandered down a dirt road through the far woods. A little ways down the road a big sheriff's car, in an even bigger cloud of dust, skidded to a stop off to the side of the road where a little deeper in the woods was a stick-pole encampment of some of the hobo people who regularly jumped from the freight train uproad and stayed for periods of time in our neck of the woods.

I think there are times when you can smell mal-intention coming. I quickly jumped into the field at the roadside and lay down to hide....The deputies jerked aside the canvas flap of the stick-pole tent and charged right in. Less than a minute later, amidst all hell breaking loose and with terrible sounds of cook pots clanging and falling and scuffling sounds, and much crying out and epithets, one deputy dragged a half-naked man in manacles from out of the canvas hovel.

He was dressed like many who lived hidden in that part of the woods, many who came up from the hills, some of whom I had made best friends with. His torn strappy T-shirt was gray with oils, his trousers were stained with paint and dirt. He was unwashed, unshaven, uncombed, and, like a bull roped to the ground, his eyes were rolling, his mouth slobbering as he cried out what sounded to me like, "Milady! Milady!" The deputy shoved the disheveled man into the patrol car and slammed the door and ran back to the tent.

As I watched frightened and horror-stricken, I thought I heard in my head a calm and gentle voice asking, "Do you love me?"

"Love you? Love you?" I thought. My anguish over what I was seeing was so great I could hardly comprehend the words being spoken into the ear of my heart.

"If you love me, comfort them."

"What?" I thought, trying to understand. Before I could react, the deputies dragged a screaming woman from the tent. She struggled against their manhandling of her. She had a short lit cigarette between two fingers, and she wore only one shoe, a broken-down black flat....The men had hold of her so-thin arms, like a corpse's almost, and right before my eyes they bent her arms backwards to angles not truly possible. And she was all flaming words and flailing limbs. She screamed and screamed and for one breathtaking moment I felt she looked directly at me, appealing directly to me, though surely she could not have seen me in the dense field across the road, "Help me, help me," she screamed again and again.

I heard a calm voice in my panicked heart ask:

"Do you love me?"

"If you do, then help me."

I felt deeply confused, yet I shot up like a quail. I had sudden turbines in my legs, my arms reaching ten feet ahead of me, my lungs filling with a gigantic thundercloud. My head back, I ran like a crazy child the distance down and across the road. The deputies were pushing her into the car, they were slamming the door on the couple. The officers piled into the front seat and slammed their own doors. I could still hear the woman screaming.

"Help me, help me."

Completely panicked but somehow able, I thought, "Yes, I will help you." Agonized still, but in a new way, I thought, "But how? How?"

I came up alongside the back end of the big sedan just as the car began pulling away. I yelled out loudly—I hope I called out in a voice that could be heard from earth to the heavens, but I am afraid that I was so filled with fear that maybe I only croaked. Yet, I felt I pulled in the breath of windstorms and that I thundered out as strongly as I could...."In Her name and all that is holy, do these people no harm!"

The deputies startled and braked the car. I just had enough time to throw myself across the trunk where the faces of the two haggard and manacled souls gazed up at me with what seemed like excellent wonder. I just had enough time, one split second, to use three of my fingers at once to make the Sign of the Cross on the dusty back window and cry out, "These souls are

under my protection.” Now the car window was rolling down on the driver’s side. I skidded off the car and fell to the road....Now the door was opening on the driver’s side. I scrambled to my feet, and ran as though a demon were chasing me....

I did not know what I enacted then or later. I am not ever certain yet these many years later. I only know I followed rather than led....

I do not know what the man and woman did wrong. Likely nothing. Vagrant. Talking too loud, making love too loud, or just by their presence disturbing the gentry who had come to build big houses out in the woods and who we knew were made uncomfortable by us, the truly rustic. I only know that the sounds of thuds of fists on bone is a truly sickening sound and the sound and feel of these were not unfamiliar to me before or after. Life went on. But for me, not as before. . . .

Though I could go on as before, pick self up for thousandth time, millionth time, and go on because there was nothing else to do...—still, I could never forget. I had a strange moment in time, what I someday would come to understand as the transformative moment, as when lightning strikes, and all vision and knowing is changed in an instant. On the road with the people in the woods, I thought I had seen the holy people being manhandled. Through the back of the car window, those poor imprisoned innocents, I thought I saw for a moment, both of them, man and woman, as *mi Guadalupe*. I thought for a split second, I saw in both of them *mi Guadalupe* suffering. I thought I saw Her being assaulted. This was the end of my life as I had known it to that time. “Do you love me? Then help me.” This was one of my thirteen post-consecration callings.

When I told my aunt what had happened, she cried and took my hands. “You do not have to ask who says, “They are under my protection,”” she said. “You already know.”

I felt I did know.

Twelve years later, when I was nineteen, I heard this from Her:

“Do you love me, my sister?”

I answered, “Yes, my Dear One, I love you.”

“How much do you love me?”

“With all my heart, my Beloved.”

“Will you then visit me in prison?”

“In prison?”

I was afraid to go to prison. But I went, as I would go on pilgrimage in the ensuing years to other prisons, those made by government, and those many, many soul prisons, human-made, and to my own imprisonments, as well, some of choice, some by fate.

I promised then that if I kept hearing Her call, I would try to keep going where sent. As you can see, I am a fool for Her completely. I am still going. This time it is the immigration jail; other years, it has been pilgrimages several times a year to other places—the locked institution for boys aged eighteen to twenty-one, the locked institutions for girls and boys aged twelve to eighteen, the men’s penitentiary, the women’s federal prison, the city and the county

jails, the state prisons, sometimes ministering to patients at city hospitals brought in chains for a needed surgery.

It goes on, as it always has. Do you love me?

Yes, I love you.

Will you then come visit me in the home for unwed mothers? I would—and there the next sword was run through my heart.

Do you love me?

Yes, I love you.

Will you help run a shelter for battered women? Will you lick the wounds of the wounded?

Yes. Another sword. Do you love me?

Yes, I love you, my Dear.

Will you walk with me through skid row with alcohol swabs and wipe hands and feet teeming with bacteria, the cuts and hurts of the men and women who can hardly be told apart. Will you do that for me?

Yes. A big sword.

Do you love me? With all that I am.

Will you stand in the cold of a Chicago night in the dead of the winter listening to me dressed as an old man telling his life's tale with the worst breath you could ever imagine?

Yes, this I can do.

Do you love me? Do you love me?

Yes, yes, a thousand times yes.

So, m'hijas y m'hijos, now I am at the end of this missive to you. You have asked me the way to continue and to deepen your devotion to Her. I have this great feeling in my bones that you already well know the way and just need a tiny little reminder: She comes in untidy ways mostly, often in very big and very bold form rather than demure. You will recognize Her on sight, for She is a woman who looks just like you and all that you love.

Mi Guadalupe is a girl gang leader in heaven.

She is unlike the pale blue serene woman.

She is serene, yes, like a great ocean is serene.

She is obedient, yes, like the sunrise is obedient to the horizon line.

She is sweet, yes,

like a huge forest of sweet maple trees.

She has a great heart, vast holiness and like any girl gang leader ought, substantial hips.

Her lap is big enough to hold every last one.

Her embrace can hold us,

All.



History of the Goddess

“In the beginning, people prayed to the Creatress of Life....At the very dawn of religion, God was a woman. Do you remember?” So wrote Merlin Stone in a book that inspired many to seek to uncover the history of the Goddess.

Paleolithic Era

The first evidence of religious ritual originates several million years after the famed “Lucy” and her ancestors—thought to be the first humans—appeared in Africa. From 70,000 to 50,000 B.C.E., Neanderthal peoples often buried their dead in the fetal position, perhaps returning them to the Mother of the Living and the Dead.

From 32,000-10,000 B.C.E., the late Old Stone Age, many carved female statues were produced. Images of animals were painted deep within well-known caves. Historian G. Rachel Levy proposes that Paleolithic people understood the cave to be the womb of the Creatress, the Great Mother. In Neolithic and Bronze Age Crete, rituals were celebrated in caves, entering into the darkness of the womb in order to be reborn.

The Neolithic “Revolution”

During the Neolithic Era or the New Stone Age (10,000-8000 B.C.E.) women’s status was high because they played central roles in farming, weaving, and the making of pots. These new discoveries, such as the invention of agriculture where seeds grew to be plants that in turn became food eaten by the community, were seen as mysteries brought by the Goddess. The primacy of the Goddess in Neolithic religion was a reflection of the indispensable roles of women in this society.

Old Europe

Archaeologist Marija Gimbutas uses the term Old Europe to differentiate the Neolithic and Copper Age cultures of southern and eastern Europe from 6500 to 3500 B.C.E., from the patriarchal societies that came after them. Gimbutas describes the first culture as matrifocal, where power and possessions are passed down through women, and peaceful, while the second one is patrifocal and warlike. In Old Europe, the Goddess was worshiped as the Giver, Taker, and Renewer of Life. In this worldview, all of nature was seen as part of her body and symbolic of her power. Women played central roles in the creation of Old European religion and probably in its rituals.

Catal Huyuk

Archaeologist James Mellaart found a culture similar to that of Old Europe in the Neolithic town of Catal Huyuk (c. 6500-5650 B.C.E.) where central Turkey is now located. Mellaart

suggests that there, too, women played important roles in the cultural and religious life of the town. The Great Goddess was worshiped and no evidence of warfare was found.

The Rise of Patriarchy and War

In a survey of sex roles and power based on information from 150 different societies, Peggy Reeves Sanday discovered a strong contrast between societies that celebrated “female power” and those based on male domination. She found that in societies where nature is considered sacred, women have more power but are not dominant. There is a strong correlation between Goddesses or female Creators, the participation of women in religious roles, and female power in society.

Societies based on male domination are organized around hunting, animal husbandry, and larger-scale agriculture. These societies are not egalitarian. Women and nature are viewed as objects to be exploited or ruled. A male priesthood leads to worship of male gods.

In keeping with these findings, the peaceful and egalitarian matrifocal societies of the Neolithic Period came to an end as nature was harnessed through centrally organized agriculture. This development allowed some individuals to control large areas of land. The invention of deadly weapons and the establishment of warfare as a way of life, perhaps to protect one's land, hastened this process. Other societies were attacked by warrior groups. Carol Christ states, “In my opinion, the institutionalizing of warfare as a way of life (however it occurs) is the single most important factor leading to the subordination of women.” (p. 61) Men are trained to become violent and dominant and are rewarded by the right to rape “enemy” women.

Slaying the Goddesses

In classical Greek and Near Eastern myths, Goddesses of the Neolithic and Paleolithic eras are slain or made subordinate to the new Gods of the patriarchal warriors—e.g., Zeus. “The goal is to dethrone the Goddess and to legitimate the new culture of the patriarchal warriors.” (p. 62) In the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well, Scripture attempts to halt worship of the Goddess. In Genesis 2-3, Eve is called “The Mother of All the Living.” She and the snake, an ancient symbol of the Goddess, are blamed for bringing suffering into the world.

Contemporary Goddesses

The Goddess, the Divine Feminine, lives on in the Jewish image of Shekinah, in Sophia/Wisdom in Judeo-Christian Scripture and in Mary in the Christian tradition. In Mexico, the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe is built on a hill sacred to a pre-Aztec Goddess. In Ireland, the sacred fire of the Goddess Brigid was kept burning by nuns living at a monastery said to be founded by St. Bridget.

Today in India, Hindus worship the Goddess Kali, as the one who brings both life and death. In Buddhism, Tara, the Mother of All Deities, is prayed to for an end to human suffering, and Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Compassion, is a source of deep understanding and compassionate wisdom.

Source: Adapted from Carol Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*.

Ritual

By Patricia Mathes Cane

From earliest times, the clan, group, or community gathered together to ritualize significant moments of life, death, and passage. With the advance of modern culture the focus of ritual shifted away from the circle of community, and the power to lead was taken over by priests or leaders....In many cultures ritual has been a resource for people to deal with grief, loss, and emotional pain. Rituals and gatherings in the circle have provided ways to reclaim the healing power of community and to make meaning out of difficult moments that people have experienced individually or as a group....

The power of the gathered circle is recognized by Christina Baldwin in *Calling the Circle: The First and Future Culture*. Baldwin describes meetings in a circle as challenging five thousand years of enculturation. In the gathering “power will be shared, opened up, dealt with differently, so that we may find a new way of being together.” The ritual circle also offers a way of moving from being a passive spectator to being a creator of the ritual experience. Maria Harris, writing on feminist spirituality, says that it is important to create rituals that “do include us, speak for us, and place us in the position of celebrants and full participants in the community work of acknowledging the continuing Presence of Goodness gifting our lives...”

Besides formal religious ceremonies, there are also many other kinds of rituals that touch the ordinary moments of life. One definition of the word “ritual” is “a pattern of activity that is repeated over and over again,” like a ritual afternoon cup of tea, a ritual bath, or the way some families eat their main meal together. Elinor Gadon in *The Once and Future Goddess* describes another aspect of the word: “‘Ritual’ comes from ‘rtu’, Sanskrit for menses. The earliest rituals were connected to the woman’s monthly bleeding....Women’s periodic bleeding was a cosmic event, like the cycles of the moon and the waxing and waning of the tides. We have forgotten that women were the conduit to the sacred mystery of life and death.” With mindful attention to the many human and ordinary moments of life, ritual can imbue them with extraordinary meaning.

Personal Rituals

- Candle Rituals: Lighting a candle to connect with the Light within—at a difficult moment, a time of distress or depression, at a time of joy, for a dinner celebration, to honor the memory of a loved one.
- Cleansing Rituals to cleanse negative energy or difficult memories: a ritual prayer; a ritual shower or bath; a cleansing diet or fast; use of water, salt, music or incense to clear negative energy.
- Forgiveness Rituals to forgive and let go of the past: a prayer, a ritual gesture with another person.
- Thanksgiving Rituals to acknowledge the blessings of life: a prayer, candle, flower, gesture.
- Rituals of Remembrance to connect with: persons who have died, events of the past, special moments.
- Creation of a Sacred Space: an altar or some simple place in the home where images, flowers, photos of loved ones, momentos, elements of nature, and written prayers may be reverently placed.

Source: Patricia Mathes Cane, *Trauma Healing and Transformation: Awakening a New Heart with Body Mind Spirit Practices*.

Feminist spirituality:

- *Regards the human race as one humanity in [varied] genders and sets out to make the fullness of humanity available to [all] of them.*
- *More than that, it undertakes to release the energy of the human race. When female talents, gifts, and ideas become accessible to the human enterprise unhindered by social barriers or official limitations, then and only then...will we get a glimpse of the full face of [the Divine]....*
- *Commits itself to the equality, dignity, and humanity of all persons to such an extent that it sets out to secure the societal changes necessary to achieve that reality for both women and men....*
- *The real development of the human race...depends on the equal partnership of women and men, not the oppression of one for the indulgence of the other. Feminism makes humans of us all.*

Source: Joan D. Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A Feminist Spirituality for Women and Men*.