

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart, your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

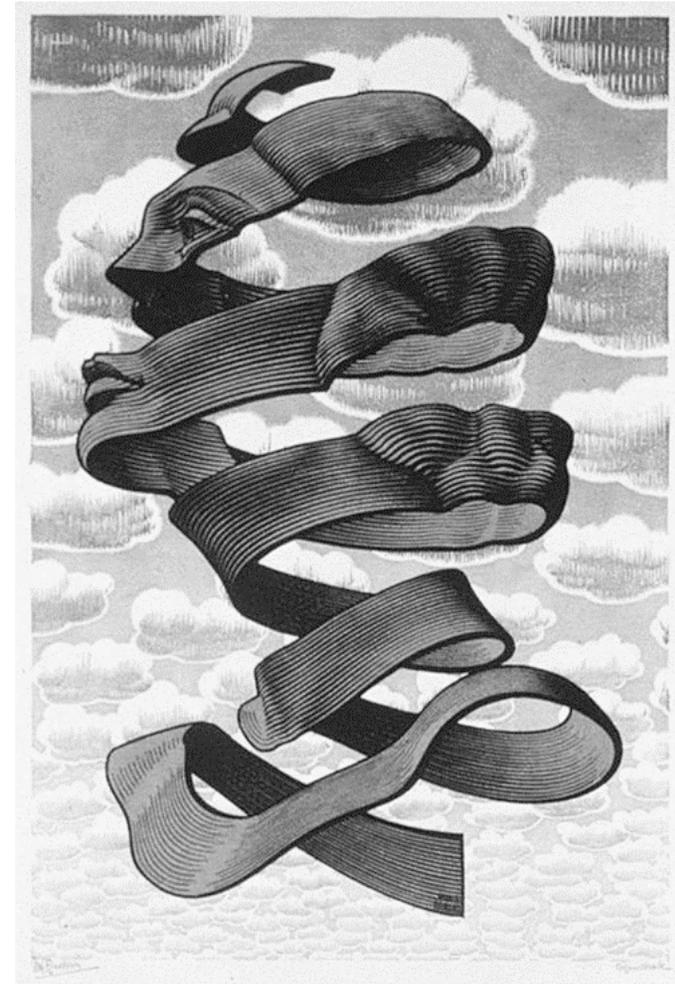
The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Self-Nurturance



Rind, M. C. Escher

Self-Nurturance

Chalice Lighting

As this candle is lit we notice the candle. It provides the sustenance for the clear strong flame. Flames must be fed to grow bright and strong. Similarly our spirits must be fed to be nurtured. We are called today to make the commitment to nurture ourselves, to provide fuel for the flame of our spirits.

—Mary Morell

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

Surely the strange beauty of the world must somewhere rest on pure joy.

—Louise Bogan

May my eyes perceive the grace
in petals on a stream
I seek the gentle flow of a lucid
waking dream.
May my lips taste the sweetness
in the lingering honeyed dew . . .
May my heart gather strength
from the roots of the willow tree
As I seek to persevere
rather than to flee . . .
—Alexandra Villard de Borchgrave

You will do foolish things but do them with enthusiasm.
Collette

I don't do anything that's bad for me. I don't like to be made nervous or angry. Anytime you get upset it tears down your nervous system.
—Mae West

[Self-nurturance] is a much underrated duty.
—David Baird

Today a new sun rises for me; everything is animated, everything seems to speak to me of my passion, everything invites me to cherish it.

—Anne de Lenclos

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: During the silence, how did you feel as you gently stroked your own hand?

Round 2: Please share your thoughts and stories about self-nurturance related to any of the quotes, activities, or questions in the homework or bulletin.

Round 3: Talk about new insights you have had about self-nurturance as they relate to your life.

Closing Words

Meditation from the Dalai Lama

In breath, "May I cherish myself."
Out breath, "May I cherish others."

Closing Song

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: Self-Nurturance

The act of self-nurturance is a dangerous act. It says, “I am a good and valuable person.” Like any dangerous path, the wisest position lies in the middle. On one side, excessive focus on self (which is not nurturing) leads to the “me” generation.

Try to begin things you feel you can do. To begin is enough—there is a boldness in beginning.
And in boldness lies genius and magic.

—David Baird

One must never for whatever reason turn one’s back on life.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

I will press myself with such force against life, with an embrace so fierce and a grip so tight, that before the sweetness of the day is stolen away from me it will be warmed by my entwining arms.

—Anna, Comtesse de Noailles

The danger of the other side of the path is the habit of nurturing *only* others. For some this seems the only good choice. When our life consists entirely of doing good for others, we call it *sainthood*, or, more recently, *codependence*. When we do not nurture ourselves, we often end up expecting others to nurture us, and if they don’t we may end up thinking “after all I did for them.” This is a thought that flows out of emptiness. It is our own responsibility to feed ourselves spiritually. These days, there are hundreds of books and thousands of people offering us guidance. Being good to ourselves will place us in the nurturing context of a community that respects us and joins with us in the task of nurturing all.

Day after day I struggle, I hunger.

—Sappho

Hungry, we are hungry for the whole world.

—Linda Hogan

There are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them.

—George Eliot

Then did I learn how existence could be cherished, strengthened and fed.

—Emily Bronte

Years ago a group of child development researchers took babies under the age of one, put them on a tarp-covered floor, and presented them with food of many various types, hoping to learn what babies would eat if they didn’t have adults choosing for them. The babies surprised them. The study was almost cancelled when one baby ate nothing but butter for several days. Then the baby stopped eating butter, and ate no more butter for the remaining six weeks of the study. Careful observation and measurement of the babies’ meals revealed that over the six weeks, virtually all of the babies chose a well-balanced nutritious diet, although almost never at a single meal. Apparently, the researchers concluded, self-nurturance was instinctual in humans.

The movie *Super Size Me* showed that humans can be taught to ignore this instinct. Restricting his diet to the menu at McDonalds (as it was in 2002), Morgan Spurlock documented the devastating effects of this restricted diet. He went from a weight of 185 to 210 pounds, he developed heart palpitations, and he became depressed. Despite the fact that he freely chose his diet, as did the babies, Spurlock chose to restrict his choices of nurturance. It was not a healthy decision.

Activities to Ponder

Before gathering, practice self-nurturance with one or more of the following activities.

1. Make a playdate with yourself. Set aside at least fifteen minutes. Take a pair of socks with you to a place where you can feel comfortable talking out loud to yourself. When you get there, put one of the socks over your nondominant hand. This sock puppet represents passions of yours that your daily self has not recognized in years. Apologize to the sock puppet for ignoring its wisdom and promise to listen to and follow through with its suggestions. Ask your sock puppet some of the following questions:

- What is your favorite color?
- What is your favorite bedtime story?
- How do you feel about blowing bubbles?
- Where is your favorite place to walk and why?
- What are your passions that are unfulfilled and have been pushed aside?
- What do you miss in your life?
- What do you need to tell me?

Make a list of the sock puppet's responses, and then add ten more ideas to the list. Do at least one of these things in the next week. How do you feel when you do it?

Go to a craft store and buy lots (forty-seven or more!) of stickers that you like. When you do one of the items on your list, put a sticker next to it on your list.

2. It has been said that the portals to our soul lie in our bodies. Take a page, and list one of your senses at the top (e.g., sight, smell). Fill the entire page with things that you love that are related to that sense. Do it again with another sense. Reread your pages, and highlight sensations you choose to experience within the next thirty days.
3. While watching TV, mute the sound during a commercial period. Try this meditation (from the Dalai Lama). As you breathe in, say, "May I cherish myself." As you breathe out, say, "May I cherish others." Continue until the show returns. Do this again with each new show, including the news. Does this practice nourish you?

Leader's Guide: Self-Nurturance

This session focuses on the self-nurturance in our lives.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting found in the bulletin.

As this candle is lit we notice the candle. It provides the sustenance for the clear strong flame. Flames must be fed to grow bright and strong. Similarly our spirits must be fed to be nurtured. We are called today to make the commitment to nurture ourselves, to provide fuel for the flame of our spirits.

—Mary Morell

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to tell in one or two sentences: "How you are today?" Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

First 30 seconds: "During this time we will start the process of self-nurturance. Please take your right hand, and gently massage the back of your left hand. Notice how this makes you feel."

After 30 seconds, end the activity. Now give your group the gift of two minutes of silence. Time it! "Now we will continue in silence."

Shared Readings (5 min)

Go around your group, letting each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do your rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that all get to share at least once.

Round 1 (10 min): "Share how you felt during the silence, when you gently stroked your own hand."

Round 2 (40 min): "Please share your thoughts and stories related to any of the quotes, activities, or questions in the homework or bulletin."

Round 3 (15 min): Talk about new insights you have had about self-nurturance as they relate to your life.

Closing Words (1 min)

We'll do the meditation from the Dalai Lama from our homework. We'll do this for several minutes. You may want to close your eyes.

On the in breath, say to yourself, "May I cherish myself."

On the out breath, say to yourself, "May I cherish others."

When the time is up, say, "Thank you."

Closing Song (1 min)

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.