



**INTENTIONAL  
SPIRITUALITY:**

**EXPLORING MY  
GROWING EDGE**



# INTENTIONAL SPIRITUALITY:

# EXPLORING MY GROWING EDGE



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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Introduction: Overview

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Welcome to something new. At altSpirit, our mission is:

*To guide individuals in the discovery of their own values, to lead them in more intentionally embedding these values in their lives, and to foster communities to sustain this work*

We hope that through being a part of this work, as a leader or participant, you will find meaningful ways to build on your own interests and values to become more fully engaged in your community, and your world.

Many of us get caught in continuing to do what we have always done, whether it is at work, with our friends and family, or in our interactions with the world at large. We become focused on solving the problems that come up and feel like most of what we are doing is reacting. We would like to find more meaning in what we are doing or to try to do some new things entirely. How can we allow ourselves to explore different possibilities, ones that might allow us to begin living into a new dream of our future? In the materials that follow, we present a semistructured process to enable this reimagining.

These guiding materials have been honed over hours and hours of experience in a variety of settings. The way you will approach your goals is informed by the principles of Appreciative Inquiry. The various exercises are based on effective educational practices. And the content is rooted in the experience and research of experts in the field.

This multisession module provides time for you and your group members to reflect on your spiritual life in a way that creates a path forward. Utilizing the Four D's of Appreciative Inquiry (Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny), it establishes both the understanding and skill sets needed to engage in ongoing Intentional Community.

Before getting to the sessions, we will provide some brief introductory material. It will be useful for you, as a leader, to read through these materials prior to leading a group.

- *The Basics of Appreciative Inquiry*
- *The Role of the Facilitator: From Leader to Member*
- *Session Overview*
- *Not Finishing a Session*

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Introduction: The Basics of Appreciative Inquiry

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How can we create an experience that has the capacity to generate an open exploration of our emerging self that is not tied to some predetermined set of principles? Is there some way to foster a deeper and more expansive sense of the human spirit without having to conform to a particular set of religious ideas? Is there a way to meet myself where I am and then invite myself into the next phase or chapter in my own story in a way that is healthy and connected to others?

We believe that this type of process can best be built on a theoretical (and practical!) model called Appreciative Inquiry. The sessions that follow are self-sufficient, and participants do not have to have any additional understanding of Appreciative Inquiry to benefit from the work they will do. However, understanding the basics of this model can help those who participate have a clearer sense of what to explore and focus on as they move through the process and can help in planning for any continuation of groups past the set number of sessions. This understanding can also help leaders see how the sessions relate to each other.

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### What Is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a model for change that is based on the idea that people (and organizations) have a great capacity for change and growth that is limited by focusing on problem solving and enhanced by looking to imagination and possibilities. There is a very large body of material available to explore the conceptual framework of AI. (See the bibliography at the end of this overview). AI first gained popularity after its use at GTE in the 1990s and since then has been used in a variety of corporate and nonprofit settings. For our purposes, the principles of AI are put in place to expand participants' capacity for spiritual and personal growth and ability to live into that capacity.

One of AI's underlying principles is that what we talk about and what we focus on create a new platform that allows us to move into a reimagined future based on the past experiences that most resonate with our values. It is a method of inquiry that builds on the positive rather than examining what is wrong and attempting to fix it. AI creates a conversation using those stories that best exemplify

the area of focus. For example, AI might frame the question "Tell me about a time when you felt like you were living out from your core values." Building on this story, the AI process encourages individuals to *discover* aspects of themselves that are closely aligned with their values; then to *dream* of a future that is grounded in this story; to *design* some steps to work in that direction; and then to begin living those steps, living into a new *destiny*. This process is summarized as the Four Ds.

### The Process of AI: The Four Ds

These Four Ds form a cycle over time. None of us reach the end of the process and then find that we are complete—that our dreams are fulfilled and we are living completely into the life we seek to live into. The following diagram provides a summary of the process, with details following.

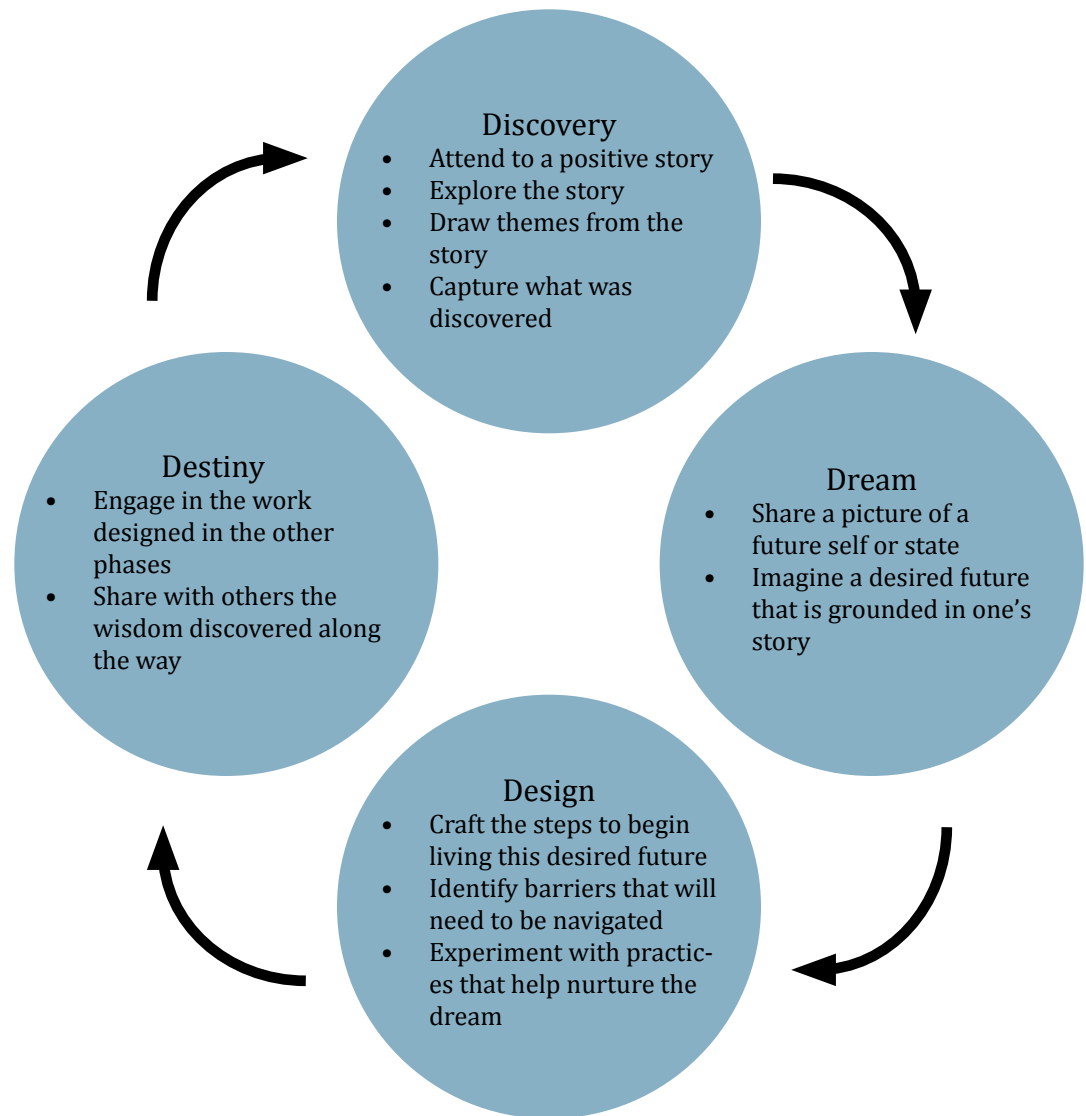
*Discovery* – The first phase of this process is to focus attention on a positive experience that embodied the spirit of the particular inquiry you are engaged in. The discovery phase is often initiated with a positive open-ended question that



invites the participant to recall a time or a story that resonates with the inquiry. For example: “Tell me about a time when you experienced a degree of compassion that moved you to a greater sense of your place in the world.” Such a question moves participants to capture a story that allows a deeper examination of the theme and links it to where they are in their own personal journey.

As the story is recalled, a conversation partner can help draw out the themes within the experience. What was it that made this so powerful for the participant? What were some of the elements that created such a positive dynamic? Posing such questions is the way an appreciative-style inquiry into each story can happen. Capturing what was discovered in this process allows the participant to begin the dream phase.

*Dream* – This second phase allows participants to build on what was discovered in the discovery phase. It is designed to help them project out beyond their current situation the themes and ideas that were generated as they shared and explored their story. What would my life look like if I lived more fully into the discoveries I made in the first phase? How would I be a bit different if I were engaged in these experiences more fully? What might a future self look like? How might I envision the world more fully if I were engaged in this dream?



This phase moves from discovery to help participants dream of who they might be and what they might do that reflects their most meaningful self. As with most dreaming, it is perfectly fine to dream big. This is not the time to engage in practicalities but to simply imagine what might be. A bit like designing a personal utopia, it allows for a healthy and positive imagination to participate in the process of becoming.

*Design* – This is where the dreaming phase gets practical. The design phase allows participants to work through the pragmatic steps that will be needed to engage the dream more fully. This phase involves the creation of a strategy that both acknowledges barriers that need to be removed and new practices that need to be engaged in. Here the participants design the early steps to creating

an environment that is more reflective of the story they long to live into.

The work done in this phase is what creates a degree of accountability. For example, a participant might see that a silent walk in nature once a week creates an openness that generates a healthier self. This practice is shared with the community, which becomes an accountability partner that both inquires and encourages the participant to engage in this practice. In future sessions, the insights gained from such a practice can be shared to reinforce the positive capacity experienced as the participant engages in this work.

*Destiny or Deploy or Do* – The final phase of this process is always a little gray and is usually framed in the notion of destiny. The intent is to work the process so that some degree of transformation can take place. But the process is never really complete. Participants will find it helpful to utilize the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases in new ways once they begin to live more fully into the work they are doing. The Destiny phase helps them reframe a more desired future for their lives as they engage in the practices that are generated via this process.

You can read a lot about AI in the sources provided, but briefly, for an individual or a community, AI is a way to:

- Lean into the varieties of positive human experiences ([Discovery](#))

- Collaborate in the creation of new and open possibilities ([Dream](#))
- Construct personal and collective intention and practices ([Design](#))
- Alter or transform who you may become in the unfolding of your life ([Destiny](#))

It is a process rather than a destination. Engaging in this process provides continued growth and capacity in ways that are important for all involved.

## Bibliography

Branson, Mark Lau. **Memories, Hopes, and Conversations: Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change**. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2004. Print.

**Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization toward a Positive Theory of Change**. Ed. David L. Cooperrider, Peter F. Sorensen, Diana Whitney, and Therese F. Yaeger. Stipes Publishing L.L.C., 2000. Print.

Watkins, Jane Magruder, and Bernard J. Mohr. **Appreciative Inquiry: Change at the Speed of Imagination**. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, 2001. Print.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Introduction: The Role of the Facilitator

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Facilitating an Intentional Community requires an understanding of the basic benchmarks that you expect community members to meet along the way. Structuring conversations and activities to guide participants toward these benchmarks is the role of the facilitator. Although some degree of intuition is involved, there are some clear group dynamics you are trying to foster as you move along. Here is a broad-brush look at the process to give you a framework for the journey.

Remember that if, at any point in the process, you would like some additional information or coaching, you can visit the altSpirit site ([www.altspirit.org](http://www.altspirit.org)) to contact us.

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In the early stages, the facilitator functions as a leader in a fairly direct way: helping participants understand the steps, modeling the steps, managing dynamics that might get the group off track, and so on. By the late stages, the role of the facilitator almost disappears, because the participants are so deeply engaged in their journey that they tend to drive the sessions. If you are a facilitator, one of your tasks is figuring out how to slowly dissolve your role along the way.

***Early-stage community benchmarks*** – fostering a healthy and informed group dynamic

Participants:

- Increase their degree of comfort and trust with each other
- Achieve greater capacity for both deeper sharing and deeper listening
- Demonstrate nonanxious openness to alternative views and practices
- Increase use of creative language and insights
- Are confused, as evidenced by the predominance of puzzled looks and requests for clarification

***Middle-stage community benchmarks*** – fostering risk-taking and deeper interpersonal connections

Participants:

- Own their own language and process, with greater confidence
- Have greater compassion toward each other's journeys
- Increase the number and diversity of one-on-one conversations
- Gain greater confidence in and understanding of the process
- Increase their use of spiritual practices outside of group sessions

***Late-stage community benchmarks*** – fostering a group-led integrated dynamic

Participants:

- Begin to structure and lead sessions with a growing degree of comfort
- Regularly use spiritual practices outside of group sessions
- Increase their desire to invite others into the process and/or increase their engagement and conversations with others outside the group about their journeys
- Have their internal and external awareness increased and experience a high degree of excitement about the effects of the group within daily life and daily interactions with others
- Feel the peace or joy that tends to settle in as people feel more integrated at some level

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Introduction: Session Overview

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This section summarizes all of the sessions in this module. You will notice that the Four Ds of Appreciative Inquiry are developed over the course of the sessions. In addition, the format of the sessions, and the deepening of the material over time, foster the type of development of the community members that we talked about in “The Role of the Leader.”

Each session typically consists of:

- A Centering Ritual to help the community transition into the work of the day
- Individual Reflection that allows for participants to consider their own thoughts and dreams about the topics at hand
- Intentional Conversation that allows for careful talking and listening about the topic of the day
- A Sending Ritual that helps summarize the work done and gives participants a way to carry their work with them between sessions

The session outlines include detailed descriptions of the sessions as well as summaries, materials lists, and setup instructions.

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### Session 1- Introduction and Covenant

1. The Four Ds of the Intentional Community process
2. Centering ritual: Create a common bond
3. Intentional Conversation: Identify places that feed your soul / spirit
4. Individual Reflection: Craft the language of community covenant
5. Sending ritual: Commit to community

Attachment:

The Basics of Appreciative Inquiry  
Sample Covenant

Attachments:

Participatory Listening  
The Place of Story

### Session 3 – Story Births a Dream (Dream)

1. Centering ritual: Honor the character of your story
2. Individual Reflection: Birth a dream
3. Intentional Conversation: Find your life within a dream
4. Sending ritual: Embrace your dreams

### Session 2 – Explore a Growing Edge of Your Journey (Discovery)

1. Centering ritual: Begin with intention
2. Intentional Conversation: Tell me about a time...
3. Individual Reflection: Explore your story for content
4. Sending ritual: Claim your spirit’s intent

### Session 4 – Shape a Spiritual Practice (Design)

1. Centering ritual: Explore ways to practice your spirit’s intent
2. Intentional Conversation: Find your way into a practice and create a level of accountability
3. Individual Reflection: Shape a practice
4. Sending ritual: Name your emerging self

## **Session 5 – Reflect on Practice Within Community (Destiny)**

1. Centering ritual: Contemplate the first steps in your practice
2. Intentional Conversation: Reflect on the diversity of practices and methods of accountability
3. Sending ritual: Celebrate a new frontier

## **Session 6 – Create a Path Forward**

1. Centering ritual: Project your practice into daily life
2. Individual Reflection: Explore places of resistance
3. Intentional Conversation: Share places of resistance
4. Future sessions discussion: Collaborate to craft a pattern for ongoing group sessions
5. Sending ritual: Create a more open path

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Introduction: Not finishing a session

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You'll notice that in our materials, we often give estimated times for the parts of the session. Although it is valuable to try not to let people get too off-topic, there may be times when sections require more or less time than stated, depending on how the group interacts with the materials. In that case, it is important to let the group have enough time to fully engage in their stories and reflections. This may mean cutting out part of the session.

Here are some options for how to catch up if you end up having to miss part of a session:

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Probably the easiest way is to plan for some extra time at the beginning of the next session:

- At the end of the current session, ask if you can add in the extra time needed at the next session. Make sure to allow time to include the sending ritual and share any follow-up for the next session so that you'll be able to jump back in.
- At the next session, complete the pre-session and centering ritual, and use any necessary materials from the previous session, such as note cards. Then complete the steps from the previous session before moving on with the materials in the current session.

Another way is to add in an extra session. If a portion of the session takes a very long time, it may indicate that the follow-up to that part may also take a long time. In that case, you will need to insert an additional session at the end of the scheduled meetings.

- For the current session, end with the sending ritual, but do not include the follow-up for the next session (as you won't actually be getting to it in the next session).
  - For the next session, use the same centering ritual and sending ritual as in the previous session.
  - Bring any materials needed from the previous session and complete the skipped portions.
  - Include the follow-up for the next session to get back on track.
- 

The most important consideration is not to rush people through the process of doing the work just to stay on schedule. The work gains value through depth of focus, and sometimes that can't be bounded by set time periods.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 1 - Introduction and Covenant

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### *Session 1- Outline*

1. Centering ritual: Create a common bond.
2. The Four Ds of the Intentional Community process.
3. Intentional Conversation: Identify places that feed your soul/spirit.
4. Individual Reflection: Craft the language of community covenant.
5. Sending ritual: Commit to community.

This session helps the group understand the Intentional Community process, engage in a shared ritual that fosters intentionality, learn how to share a personal story that functions as a source of discovery and insight, and make a commitment to journey together.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Medium-size smooth river rocks in a basket (one stone for each participant)
- Bowl that will both accommodate the central candle and hold all the stones (see photos that follow)
- Basket to hold the stones prior to the ritual
- Lighter or matches
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- A pencil for each participant
- Writing paper (preferably creative card stock)
- A few sheets of poster-size paper and a large felt pen
- Recorded music to play as participants arrive (see music resources on [altspirit.org](http://altspirit.org))
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals (see singing bowl photo)
- “Basics of Appreciative Inquiry” and “Sample Covenant” handouts (included in this session)
- Name tags, as needed.

#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the bowl in the center of the table.
- Place the pillar candle in the center of the bowl. You will light it during the opening ritual.
- Set up the basket of stones.
- Have pencils and paper or card stock on the table.
- Make copies of the “Basics of Appreciative Inquiry” handout for all participants.
- Make sure the room feels inviting and is the right size for the number of participants.

## Session Details

### Pre-session

Play some music as people arrive, to assist in the transition to this Intentional Community experience. Greet people as they enter, and model a calm and peaceful engagement style, to help all prepare for the centering ritual.

### Centering Ritual

Once all the participants have arrived, let them know that the session will begin with an opening ritual designed to connect them to the session theme. Pass the basket of stones around, and ask the participants to pick out one stone that feels like it might reflect them in some way. Every stone has a little personality! Have them sit around the table holding their stone with both hands (see picture).



- Start by ringing the bell or striking the meditation bowl.
- Ask them to sit up in their chair with their feet flat on the floor in a comfortable posture as they hold their stone.
- Ask them to close their eyes and spend some time feeling the energy and weight of the stone they hold in their hands.
- Ask them to take three slow breaths: In (count to 3) and Out (count to 3) for each of the three breaths.
- Use the following statement to guide them in a reflection:



*“Take this time to imagine that the stone that rests in your hands is the accumulated weight and shape of all of your life. Take a few moments, and let yourself begin to invest in this stone important experiences and moments that come up for you. Spend some time allowing your memory to embrace the experiences that have shaped who you are, and then let them rest within the weight of your stone. Continue to breathe slowly. It’s common to occasionally get distracted with other thoughts when centering yourself like this. If you do lose focus, I just invite you to calmly bring your focus back to the feeling of the stone in your hands and then continue to allow all that you are to sink into your stone.”*

- After three to five minutes, invite them to open their eyes and focus on the candle in the center of the bowl. Encourage them to continue to feel the weight of their stone as their focus shifts to the candle. Prior to lighting the candle, read the statement below:

*“We remember that each of us lives within the wider gift of life itself. Like a light that shines on us all, this life finds its expression as it brings color, shape, and tone to all that we are. We are each held within its warm embrace.”*

- Light the candle in the bowl. Then invite the participants to place their stones around the outside of the bowl. Ask them to spend some time noticing their own stone in relationship to the others and within the warm glow of the candle that shines on them all. Allow time for the participants to both



release their stones and to reflect on the scene before them.

- Close by ringing the bell one more time.
- Go around the circle to allow participants to share any insights they gained in the experience. Alternatively, have them share with a partner first and then invite just two or three participants to share some of the insights they and their partner discussed with the whole group.



### *The Four Ds Intentional Community Process*

Use the “Basics of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) Summary” handout for introducing the Four Ds process. This material provides the framework you will utilize in this series. The Four Ds framework allows all the participants to discover, within their own personal significant moments, patterns of spiritual formation that will allow them to dream, design, and give shape to a deeper destiny. A basic understanding of the dynamics of this process is helpful prior to going through the next sessions.

### *Individual Covenant Reflection*

This exercise provides participants with an initial exposure to the Four Ds process in order to generate a community covenant.

Pass out the card stock or paper and pencils to all participants. Ask them to think about and remember a place in their life that provided a deep opportunity for reflection or that helped feed their soul/spirit—a place where their soul/spirit felt safe and nourished. Tell them to let that place come alive in their imagination and allow themselves to experience as many details as possible. For example, they can notice the texture, feel, smells, movement,

location, and people in that place. Have them notice as much as they can about the space and construct the memory in their mind’s eye. Invite them to mentally place themselves in that space again, and have them write down what made it significant for them. This is a brainstorming session in which participants can begin to notice the energy, feelings, and physical aspects of such a space. Invite them to jot down all the ideas they can about what allowed them to feel spiritual, grounded, and open in this space.

### *Sharing with Partners*

Once this process is completed, break up the group into pairs (as leader, join a pair or partner if necessary). Start by giving an overview of active listening, a skill that takes intentionality and practice. An active listener listens mindfully, attending to all that the speaker is saying, with the intention of deeply understanding what the person is communicating. It includes using verbal and nonverbal communication to let speakers know they are heard, such as sitting with an open body position and paraphrasing or summarizing as a way to reflect what was heard and confirm understanding. Active listening is an essential and integral skill used in the AI Four Ds processes (see the “Participatory Listening” handout in Session 2 for more information).

Ask each pair to spend the first 20 minutes in the following way, letting them know you’ll ring a bell at each five-minute interval to allow them to shift to the next step:

- Participants choose a location to talk where they will feel comfortable. This may be in the main room or in another part of the meeting space.
- First five minutes: Participant 1 describes his or her place and reflects on why it feels or felt significant. Participant 2 actively listens.
- Second five minutes: Both participants explore what might be some important themes emerging from this description and write them down for later.
- The members switch roles and repeat the process for another 10 minutes.

When this process is complete, call the group together. On the large poster paper, begin to note all the aspects of space that made the participants' personal spaces inviting and safe places. What was it about the space that allowed them to reflect more deeply?

Close by collectively identifying themes and trends that showed up in the sharing. Craft a few sentences that describe the places that have invited the participants into their deepest selves. These sentences or phrases will form the basis for the group's community covenant. The Intentional Community will use the covenant to provide a healthy environment for all the participants to explore, share, and grow within the group.

### *Sending Ritual*

Have all the participants gather again around the table, in their earlier seats, so they have access to their stones. Have each of them look at the list of insights generated. Invite them to pick one that is particularly meaningful to them. Ask them to take a minute and write it in a sentence using the following model. "We strive to be a community that ...."

Once the individual work is done, invite the participants to take a centering breath. When the participants would like to share, they are invited to read the line they wrote and then move their stone



into the bowl in the center of the table. This act represents their shared creation of this Intentional Community and reminds them of their commitment to this process. Remind them that each time they gather, they will all strive to live into the shared values and themes generated. This ensures a safe, open, and creative community that exists for all to seek their deepest spiritual selves.

At the end, all the stones will be in the bowl. If it is your tradition, you can close with a prayer or a blessing of community for those who have gathered. Alternatively, simply sit in silence for a minute or two.

Ring the bell to close.

## **Between Sessions**

Before the next session, have one group member type up the statements and see if they can be crafted into a community covenant. See the "Community Covenant Model" handout for an example.

Use the candle/stone display as a part of your gathering each week, along with a small sign with your group's covenant on it. If you like, the sign can be placed at the entryway each week as a reminder. Alternatively, the basket of stones can be placed next to the bowl and as folks arrive, they are invited to place a stone in the bowl as a way to acknowledge their place in the community and to remind them of the practices that help keep this community healthy and whole.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 1 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 1 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 1 - The Basics of Appreciative Inquiry

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How can we create an experience that has the capacity to generate an open exploration of our emerging self that is not tied to some predetermined set of principles? Is there some way to foster a deeper and more expansive sense of the human spirit without having to conform to a particular set of religious ideas? Is there a way to meet myself where I am and then invite myself into the next phase or chapter in my own story in a way that is healthy and connected to others?

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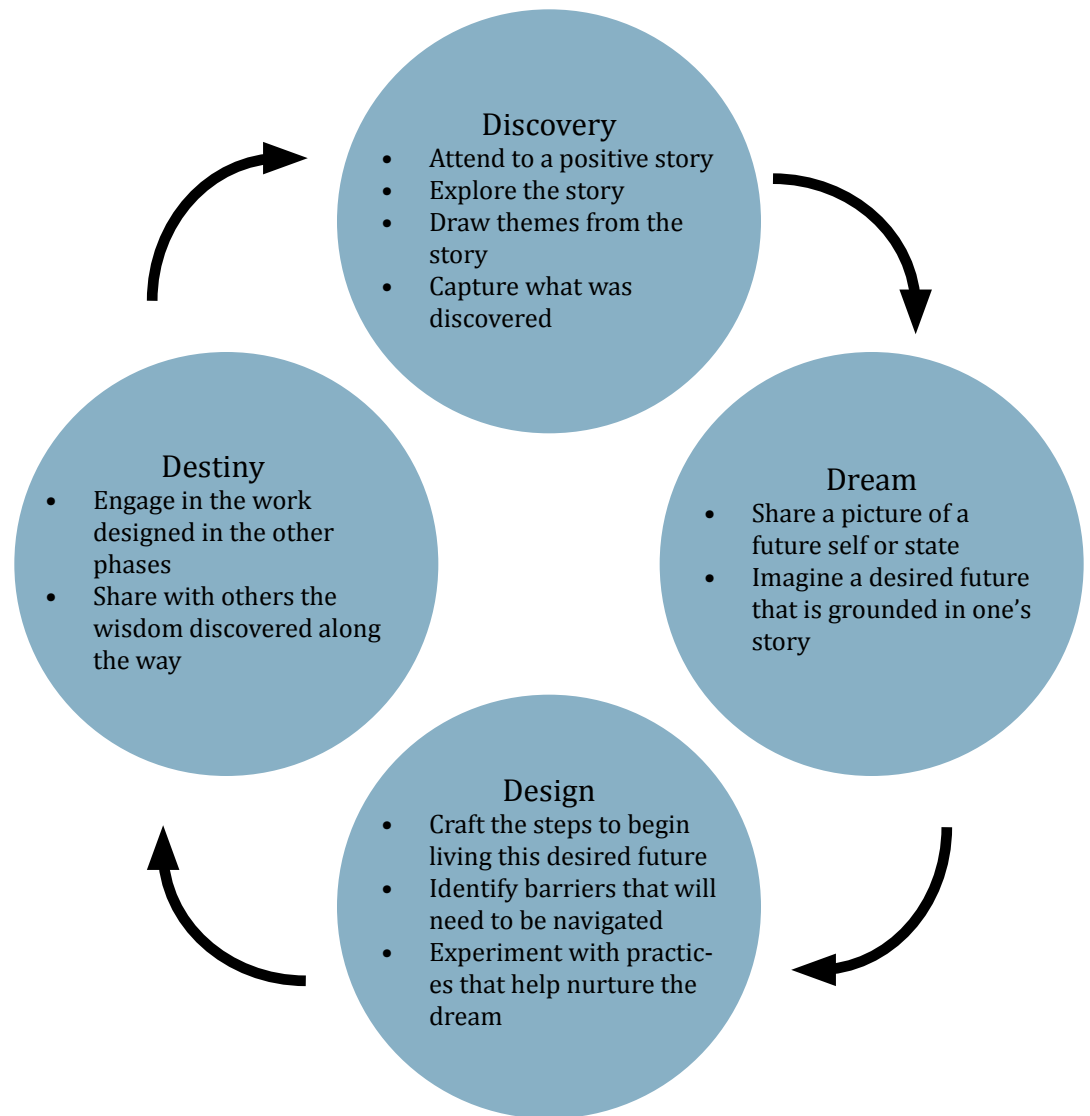
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an environment that is more reflective of the story they long to live into.

The work done in this phase is what creates a degree of accountability. For example, a participant might see that a silent walk in nature once a week creates an openness that generates a healthier self. This practice is shared with the community, which becomes an accountability partner that both inquires and encourages the participant to engage in this practice. In future sessions, the insights gained from such a practice can be shared to reinforce the positive capacity experienced as the participant engages in this work.

*Destiny or Deploy or Do* – The final phase of this process is always a little gray and is usually framed in the notion of destiny. The intent is to work the process so that some degree of transformation can take place. But the process is never really complete. Participants will find it helpful to utilize the Discovery, Dream, and Design phases in new ways once they begin to live more fully into the work they are doing. The Destiny phase helps them reframe a more desired future for their lives as they engage in the practices that are generated via this process.

You can read a lot about AI in the sources provided, but briefly, for an individual or a community, AI is a way to:

- Lean into the varieties of positive human experiences ([Discovery](#))

- Collaborate in the creation of new and open possibilities ([Dream](#))
- Construct personal and collective intention and practices ([Design](#))
- Alter or transform who you may become in the unfolding of your life ([Destiny](#))

It is a process rather than a destination. Engaging in this process provides continued growth and capacity in ways that are important for all involved.

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 1 - Sample Covenant

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You will want to take some time to brainstorm ideas about how this group will best help foster sharing and growth. It is important to develop a covenant that can guide the group and function as a tool for monitoring behaviors that might not foster a healthy environment. Below is a sample covenant generated after several brainstorming sessions.

### Our Common Goals:

*Together we are crafting a spiritual path for each of us, including:*

- Fostering our spiritual growth
- Reflecting upon and celebrating each journey
- Learning from, about, and with each other

### Our Operating Principles

*In all of our interactions, we will bring:*

- Trust
- Humor
- Reflective inquiry
- Noncompetitiveness
- A spirit of openness, honesty and respectfulness
- Personal accountability

### Our Commitments to Each Other

- We seek out and affirm the diversity of each other's ideas and experiences.
- We honor confidentiality.
- We actively listen to and build on each other's ideas.
- We support and challenge each other.
- We make time in our life for this group and our practices.

### Our Meeting Logistics:

*In our discussions:*

- We use both whole-group and small-group sharing.
- We give permission to skip your turn during sharing.
- We use varied modalities, including movement.
- We share leadership.
- We plan for check-ins.

### Our Meetings:

- We meet two Sundays per month.
- Meetings run for an hour and a half (4:00 to 5:30 p.m.).
- Childcare is provided.



# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 2 - Explore a Growing Edge of Your Journey

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### *Session 2- Outline (Discovery)*

1. Centering ritual: Begin with intention.
2. Intentional Conversation: Tell me about a time...
3. Individual Reflection: Explore your story for content.
4. Sending ritual: Claim your spirit's intent.

In Session 2, participants identify an area of focus that provides a pathway to a heightened sense of wholeness or centeredness. The participants will have the opportunity to explore their own personal story in order to gain insight into the themes that will guide them through this process. They will have time to begin this work on their own and continue in pairs and with the whole group. Finally, they will explore some of the themes that run through their story.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Medium-size bowl filled with sand or gravel
- Lighting sticks (thin sticks of wood similar to long matchsticks)
- A lighter or matches
- Votive candles and candle holders for each participant
- Recorded music for presession
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- Card stock (approximately 2 x 8½ inches) for each participant
- Note pads or scratch paper
- A pencil for each participant
- Draft community covenant statements, prepared by a participant after Session 1
- Copies of the handouts for this session (as per setup)
- Bowl of stones from Session 1

#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Set up the bowl of stones used in Session 1 near the entrance.
- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the pillar candle in the center of the table.
- Place the bowl of sand on the table and the lighting sticks in the sand.
- Place the votive candles on the table in a circle around the pillar candle.
- Prepare card stock ahead of time, and set it aside with pencils.
- Display the draft community covenant statements.
- Make a copy of the "Participatory Listening" handout for each participant.
- Refer to the "Place of Story" handout in preparing for the session.

## Session Details

### Presession

Play some music as people arrive, to assist in the transition to this Intentional Community session. Greet people as they enter, and model a friendly but calm engagement style, to help all prepare for the centering ritual. Share the community covenant statements that were developed in the last session, and invite participants to reflect on them. Take a moment to read through the covenant in a creative way. For example, participants can all take turns reading one statement or the group can read some parts together chorally while other parts are read by volunteers. You may choose to invite participants to briefly engage with the bowl of stones from Session 1. Light the center candle.

### Centering Ritual

- Start by ringing the bell or striking the meditation bowl.
- Ask them to sit up in their chair with their feet flat on the floor in a comfortable posture.
- Ask them to close their eyes or to focus on their own candle or the centering candle.
- Ask them to take three slow breaths: In (count to 3) and Out (count to 3) for each of the three breaths.
- Ask the participants to focus only on their breathing: the feeling of each breath coming into and out of their nose and the feeling of their diaphragm rising and falling. Remind them that as other thoughts come up, they can just let them go and come back to noticing their breathing.
- Once you sense that the group has settled in, use the following statement to guide them into lighting their own candles from the center candle.



*"Each of us gathers to be attentive to the ways in which our lives might find greater focus. We each seek to explore the way we experience our connection to the world in a way that brings meaning, purpose, creativity, hope, and joy to our lives. We gather trusting that there is a source of life that burns within each of us. We come to explore the way that light might guide us into wholeness. When you are ready, use a lighting stick to carry the light of the center candle to your own. As you do, trust that there is a vibrant spirit within you that can bring its warmth to your experience of life."*

- After a total of three to five minutes, signal the end of the ritual with the bell or meditation bowl, and ask the participants to take three more deep breaths and come back to the group.
- Ask the participants to return their candle to a ring around the center candle, and move on to the individual reflection.

### Individual Reflection

Pass out the 2 x 8½-inch card stock and pencils to all participants. Ask them to write the word *Discovery* on the top of the card. Have them think about a specific moment or experience in their life when they felt a deep unity with life, or a connection to god or spirit, or a deep resonance with their values. It is important that they find an actual story that holds this moment.

What was the setting? What were they doing? Who was with them, if anyone? Have them take some time

and think through the whole framework of this story from start to finish. Encourage them to relive the story in their mind's eye, looking for all of the details they can. Give them the option of taking notes on a notepad or piece of scratch paper.

On the "Discovery" card, have them write out as many aspects of the story as they can remember in an outline or in bullet points that will help them share the story with another.

As you guide them into this process, note that the phrasing of these prompts is important. We want the participants to think of a story important to them and to build from that story. Their focus should be on returning to that story and discovering as much as they can there. Encourage them not to draw any conclusions but, rather, to function as biographers attempting to record everything they can about the story itself.

Refrain from giving examples, as this almost always guides participants to a specific type of story, which may not be their own story. Give them the time they need to dig deep into their own experience.

As they work you can play music softly in the background, or find another way to honor and protect the creative process that is required to do this level of personal reflection.

### *Sharing with a Partner*

Once this process is completed, break up the group into pairs (as leader, join a partner or pair if necessary). Start by handing out the "Participatory Listening" handout and giving an overview of its contents.

Ask each pair to spend 20 minutes as follows:

- Participants choose a location to talk where they will feel comfortable. This may be in the main room or in another part of the meeting space.
- First five minutes: Participant 1 shares his or her story while Participant 2 actively listens.
- Second five minutes: Participant 2 suggests some themes expressed in the story or asks questions to seek greater clarity about the meaning of the story. What might be a spiritual longing or key value in the story? Does this resonate with Participant 1? How can this be best described or clearly defined? The two participants discuss some options, and Participant 1 jots them down on his or her card.
- The participants switch roles for a further 10 minutes.
- When they are done, invite them to come back into the common space.

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### *Sending Ritual*

Ask each participant to turn over the "Discovery" card and write *Dream* on the top of this side of the card. Invite the participants to take a moment to reflect on the discovery work they did. When ready, they should use the "Dream" side of the card to construct a brief sentence that captures some of the wisdom generated from their story, using one of the following prompts: "I am whole as I ...," "I am centered and grounded when I...," "I am most connected to my god when I ..."



This is an initial insight that they will explore through this process. Once all are done sharing, invite them to move their candle so that it is positioned on the card illuminating their sentence (see picture).

Invite participants to share their sentence or a word from their sentence with the group. Ask them to pause after each person shares, allowing the group to take a breath and simply honor each reflection in silence. After all have shared, take a moment to reflect on the group process and celebrate the wisdom that has emerged during the session.

Ask participants to leave their “Discovery”/“Dream” cards in the meeting space for use at the next session. This material will be used in the centerpiece as participants arrive.

### **Between Sessions**

It is important that the participants leave the “Discovery”/“Dream” cards with you for use at the next session, so that they will be able to jump back into the work in Session 3 - in our experience, several participants forget to bring them back each week if they take them home.

Still, many participants have found it helpful to contemplate their initial “Dream” statements over the time between sessions. If participants are interested in this, invite them to take versions of their statements with them, either by jotting down a copy, taking a photo, or leaving themselves a voicemail with the statement. Participants then have the option of using the statement as part of a meditation ritual, reading through the statement, sharing it with someone, or finding some other way of embracing it.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 2 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 2 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 2 - Participatory Listening

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What kind of conversations are you trying to foster in this group? The conversations that take place in an Intentional Community challenge the participant to find a new way to listen. It is a participatory style that moves beyond the role of passive listener and avoids the natural leap into problem solving. Here we strive to listen with our hearts engaged in order to foster a deeper sense of compassion. Although this takes practice, there are a few key elements that can help.

### *Foster a Compassionate Curiosity*

The role of any conversation within the community is to help open windows and doors for the people who are sharing so that they may explore and discover even more about the landscape of their journey through the invitation of the listener. As a listener, you are really trying to hear within the story or conversation where there might be cracks or openings that reveal something holy or places to pause that might provide wisdom. Phrases such as “Tell me more about that moment when....” or “What struck you as powerful about that?” can help the ones who are sharing discover what might be going on for them to see a bit behind the story to glean some wisdom there.

### *Refrain from Doling Out Advice*

It is always tempting to try to solve problems or dole out some advice. It turns out that this is not helpful, because it tends to shift the conversation toward seeking a solution rather than deepening or enriching the journey. The goal of these conversations is not to fix the person but to help them exercise their own imagination as they navigate through their own story. They should walk away from the conversation with more questions than answers as they keep journeying deeper into levels of awareness.

### *Parallel Universe Temptation*

The human experience takes place on such common ground that there will always be moments when listeners feel like they have had the same exact experience and will be tempted to say something like “Wow, that sounds exactly like the time I ...” and, all of a sudden, the conversation is



about the listener’s story and not that of the one sharing. Try not to leap into your experience when listening. Stay with the experience of the other.

### *Patience*

There are moments in a story when the next step or twist in the road is not clear. There are times when

just pausing to allow the person who is sharing to process or reflect is appropriate. Get comfortable with silence, with times to pause and wait or to simply table the discussion until the person has time to explore internally where to go next.

### *Body Language*

Attentiveness to the way one's body is positioned during the listening process can help provide a safe and open experience. An open body that leans forward a bit and implies a soft tone is helpful. Facial expressions should be linked to the conversation in the spirit of inquisitiveness, and the listener should refrain from any judgmental expressions or vocalizations. Each person has a different way to be present for another. The key is simply awareness. Pay attention to the effect your body language has,

and monitor your own body responses as the conversation unfolds.

### *Trust and Confidentiality*

To engender a higher degree of trust in your conversations, it is important to establish the levels of confidentiality within the group and to revisit these from time to time or as the exercises shift. It is best to assure everyone that what gets shared in the group stays in the group. Integrating the degree of confidentiality you create into the covenant statement that guides the group is also important. Anytime along the way, if a member of the group is sharing, it is perfectly reasonable for them to remind people of the confidentiality agreement so that they can feel safe to share.



# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 2 - The Place of Story

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Within an Intentional Community, the participants' own stories become open windows through which they explore the world more fully. The stories of others provide vistas and insights that create a range of options as the participants explore pathways to wholeness. The stories and reflections are allowed to drift out from the participants just enough that they can see themselves with fresh eyes, and then the stories guide the participants into some deeper understanding and serve as a guide. Taking the time to allow the development of a meaningful story to guide participants is an important part of this process.

### *Finding Meaning in the Everyday*

Within Intentional Communities, the story functions almost like a religious icon. In the case of a religious icon, a simple object—a coat, a shard of wood, a painting—takes on a greater meaning. As one looks at the object in a different way, it becomes transparent and reveals something beyond itself. In the same way, in intentional conversation with another, the participants begin to see beneath the surface of their lives. They begin to tease out from their own lives the movement of the spirit. This movement is rooted in their own spiritual experiences, their religious tradition,

and their personal values. Their stories become a bridge into new ways of finding meaning.

### *The Impact of Telling the Story*

Another aspect of story that becomes powerful is simply the telling. The way the participants tell the story can change the way they think about themselves. So as they seek out the stories that have meaning to them, they begin to connect with that meaning. The way they talk about the stories begins to change the way they think about themselves and their lives.

### *A Participant Reflects on the Power of Story*

"I find that sharing my story with another is simply a way to discover language that can layer into my own self-reflection and then serve me as a guide into my emerging identity. I remember telling the story of how I felt so moved as I began to shift some of my investment dollars to an organization that creates microcredit loans for the poorest of the world's poor. As I told the story about why I liked Oiko Credit, I began to reframe the way I thought about my financial self and stumbled into the world of my shifting values. I found new words to attach to the experience, and I began to adjust practices and behaviors that went even deeper than my investment practices. The language I used began to shape me."



# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 3 - Story Births a Dream

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### *Session 3 - Outline (Dream)*

1. Centering ritual: Honor the character of your story.
2. Individual reflection: Birth a dream.
3. Intentional conversation: Find your life within the dream.
4. Sending ritual: Embrace your dreams.

In this session, the participants dig deeper into the story they constructed in the last session and begin to dream about what these insights might mean for them in their own lives. They work to bring clarity, shape, and language to a dream that enables them to live into a deeper self.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Medium-size bowl filled with sand or gravel
- Lighting sticks (thin sticks of wood similar to long matchsticks)
- A lighter or matches
- Votive candles and a candle holder for each participant
- Recorded music for pre-session
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- A pencil for each participant
- “Discovery”/“Dream” cards from Session 2
- Notepads or scratch paper
- Community Covenant, basket of stones from Session 2
- Empty bowl

#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the pillar candle in the center of the table.
- Place the bowl of sand on the table and the lighting sticks in the sand.
- Place the votive candles and the “Discovery”/“Dream” cards from Session 2 in a circle around the pillar candle.
- Display the Community Covenant.
- Place the basket of stones and empty bowl near the Community Covenant.

## Session Details

### Pre-session

Play some music as people arrive, to assist in the transition to this Intentional Community session. Greet people as they enter, and model a friendly but calm engagement style, to help all prepare for the centering ritual. Encourage them to review the Community Covenant. Invite them to take a stone from the basket and place it into the empty bowl as a way to acknowledge their place in the community and to remind them of the practices that help keep this community healthy and whole.



### Centering Ritual

Spend a few moments describing the Dream step in the AI process (refer to the “Basics of Appreciative Inquiry,” from Session 1, for information on this process). Remind the participants that to paint a future picture of themselves, they will be using the insights gained from the story they shared in the previous session. This future picture will be the guide they use to design practices that will help them live into a renewed sense of themselves and to live in ways that are intentionally connected to their deepest selves.

Guide them through a short meditation:

- Invite the participants to place their “Discovery”/“Dream” card from last week in front of them, “Discovery” side up, along with a votive candle.
- Start by ringing the bell or striking the meditation bell.
- Ask them to sit up in their chair with their feet flat on the floor in a comfortable posture.
- Ask them to close their eyes or to focus on their own candle or the centering candle.
- Ask them to take three slow breaths: In (count to 3) and Out (count to 3) for each of the three breaths.
- Ask the participants to focus only on their breathing: the feeling of each breath coming into and out of their nose and the feeling of their diaphragm rising and falling. Remind them that as other thoughts come up, they can just let them go and come back to noticing their breathing.
- Once you sense that the group has settled in, use the following statement to guide them into lighting their own candles from the center candle.



*“Each of us has a unique story that holds the shape and character of who we long to be in our deepest selves. Within the folds of this story are clues that give shape to a path forward into wholeness. This story gives birth to a dream, a dream we begin to describe this day. I invite you to light your individual candle from the center candle when you are ready, as a way to confirm your intent to explore and give energy to this dream.”*

- After a total of three to five minutes, signal the end of the ritual with the bell or singing bowl, and ask the participants to take three more deep breaths and come back to the group.
- Ask the participants to return their candles to the table, and move on to the individual reflection.

### *Individual Reflection*

Invite the participants to withdraw from the group and spend some time reflecting on the story they described in the Discovery phase of Session 2. As they look over the details again, they can begin drawing some initial conclusions or insights from the story. Invite them to jot down some initial notes in the form of statements that describe their future self. These statements include positive characteristics that describe the kind of person who emerges when they are living fully into the deep moments experienced in their story. Invite the participants to create statements as if those positive characteristics were already happening. They should think of them as statements that describe the dream of a future self in full flower. Give them the option of taking notes on a notepad or piece of scratch paper.

These dreams of a future self should feel like a stretch and will require some creativity. A dream should reflect a wider sense of self that stimulates the imagination and gives shape to the landscape that will be used to design practices in future sessions.

Here are some examples:

- I regularly take time alone in nature and find my center there.
- I spend time being creative and allow this spark to nourish me and others.
- I make time for daily in-depth work on a spiritual topic, and I am always growing.
- I take on calm in the face of a storm.
- I commit to disengaging from busyness and entering quiet reflection.
- I am at peace with and can appreciate a state of uncertainty.
- I commit myself to mindful practices that may make me vulnerable.
- I jump into experiences that foster a high degree of openness and push my growing edges.
- I connect with others on a more intimate level, to foster deeper awareness of others.

On the “Dream” side of their “Discovery”/“Dream” card from Session 2, have the participants write out as many future statements about themselves as

possible. In this activity, the participants connect their discovery work with an articulated description of their dream life. When they have completed this process, invite them to return to the group.

### *Intentional Conversation*

Ask the participants to choose a partner, or assign partners.

Note: It may be useful to spend some time thinking about compatible pairs at this point in the process, as this will be the beginning of the accountability partnerships that the participants will initiate in Session 4.

Using some of the guiding questions below, have the pairs of partners share with each other what it feels like to write down those dreams and to imagine what it might be like to accord the dreaming they have done a central place in their life. This is a good time to review the “Participatory Listening” handout from Session 2.

Guiding questions:

- What are the feelings that come up when you think about living more fully into this dream of your future self?
- What can you see as some obstacles that might get in the way?
- What are some of the benefits of living in such a way?
- Who or what will be positively affected as the dream takes shape?
- Which of the dreams you’ve crafted seems to have the greatest potential at this point in your journey?

Ask each pair to spend the first 20 minutes in the following way, letting them know you’ll ring a bell at each five-minute interval to allow them to shift to the next step:

- Participants choose a location to talk where they will feel comfortable. This may be in the main room or in another part of the meeting space.
- First 10 minutes: Participant 1 shares his or her

- thoughts while Participant 2 actively listens.
- The members switch roles and repeat the process for another 10 minutes.
  - When they are done, invite them to come back into the common space.

### *Sending Ritual*

Have the participants place the “Discovery”/“Dream” card in front of them, “Dream” side up. Invite them to spend a moment reflecting on the dreams/statements they’ve crafted and to write down any further insights gained during the intentional conversations with their partner. When this process is completed, have them circle two or three of the key words or phrases that capture the essence of this step for them.

Next, pass the large candle to one of the participants. Invite that person to share one of the circled phrases. If there is enough time, have this participant continue to share some of the insights or reflections gained during exploration of this

dream during Intentional Conversation, using one or more of the questions above in this large-group setting. Because sharing dreams can feel uncomfortable to some, always remind the participants that they are invited to share at their comfort level and that declining to answer a question is always appropriate.

After a participant has shared, invite that person to pass the large candle to the next person. Take time to let the shared insights sink in, and continue to move the candle around the table to all participants. When this step is completed, return the large candle to the center of the table.

Close with a prayer or by sitting for a moment in silence.

Ask the participants to leave their “Discovery”/“Dream” cards in the meeting space for use at the next session. This material will be used in the centerpiece as participants arrive.

## **Between Sessions**

Although participants will be leaving their “Discovery”/“Dream” cards with you, encourage them to spend a little time each day contemplating the dreaming they have done. Some ways for them to take their dreams with them are taking photos of the “Dream” side of the “Discovery”/“Dream” card or jotting down some notes to take with them. Many participants will appreciate a reminder to turn toward this work during the week. Ask them to set an alarm or make an appointment with themselves. Alternatively, you can send a message (email, text, etc.) to the participants to remind them to reflect on their dreams.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 3 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 3 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 4 - Shape a Spiritual Practice

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### *Session 4 - Outline (Design)*

1. Centering ritual: Explore ways to practice your spirit's intent.
2. Intentional conversation: Discover a practice that is right for you, and create a level of accountability
3. Individual reflection: Shape a practice.
4. Sending ritual: Name your emerging self.
5. Weekly practice: Live into accountability.

In this session, the participants explore and craft practices they will use to chart pathways into the dreams described in statements they completed in the previous session. Reflecting on these statements, they design practices through which they can live with more intentionality and focus on the themes in their lives that matter most. In addition, the participants begin learning how to hold each other accountable for the practices they have explored, in a positive and affirming way.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Medium-size bowl filled with sand or gravel
- Lighting sticks (thin sticks of wood similar to long matchsticks)
- A lighter or matches
- Votive candles and votive candle holders, one for each participant
- Recorded music to play as participants arrive
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- Card stock (approximately 5½ x 8½ inches) for each participant
- Card stock (approximately 3 x 5 inches) with "A/P" written on one side for each participant
- A pencil for each participant

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#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the pillar candle in the center of the table.
- Set up the bowl of stones from Session 1.
- Place the bowl of sand on the table and the lighting sticks in the sand.
- Place the votive candles and the "Discovery"/"Dream" cards from Session 3 in a circle around the pillar candle.
- Display the Community Covenant from previous sessions.

- Scissors for each participant
- Bowl of stones from Session 1
- “Discovery”/“Dream” cards from Sessions 2 and 3
- Notepads or scratch paper
- Community Covenant display from previous sessions



## Session Details

### *Pre-session*

Play some music as participants arrive, to assist in the transition to this intentional community session. Greet people as they enter, and model a friendly but calm style to help all prepare for the centering ritual. Invite the participants to review and reflect on the Community Covenant statements developed in Session 1.

### *Centering Ritual*

Pass out blank pieces of 5½ x 8½-inch card stock, and have each participant write the word *Design* on the top of one side. Spend some time talking about intentionality, using the “Setting an Intention” handout.

Light the candle in the center of the table, and lay out the “Discovery”/“Dream” cards from the previous sessions, “Dream” side up, with votive candles in a circle around the center candle. Invite the participants to find their card and shift a votive candle so that it is front of them. Ask them to reflect on the language and wisdom they crafted last week.

*“Each of us brings intention to the way our lives reflect the dreams that have emerged from our discovered stories. Such intent allows us to move toward wholeness. Could these insights provide a path toward holiness? Could they help guide you toward greater meaning? Toward life? When you are ready, I invite you to light your individual candle from the center candle as a way to confirm your intent to explore and give energy to your dream. On the “Design” card, write a short phrase that captures an aspect of the intention you bring to this work.”*



- After a total of three to five minutes, signal the end of the ritual with the bell or singing bowl.
- Ask if anyone has initial insights they want to share.
- Provide help to those who are still struggling to articulate clear dream statements for themselves. Use active listening to support them in identifying themes and articulating their story and dreams.

### *Individual Reflection*

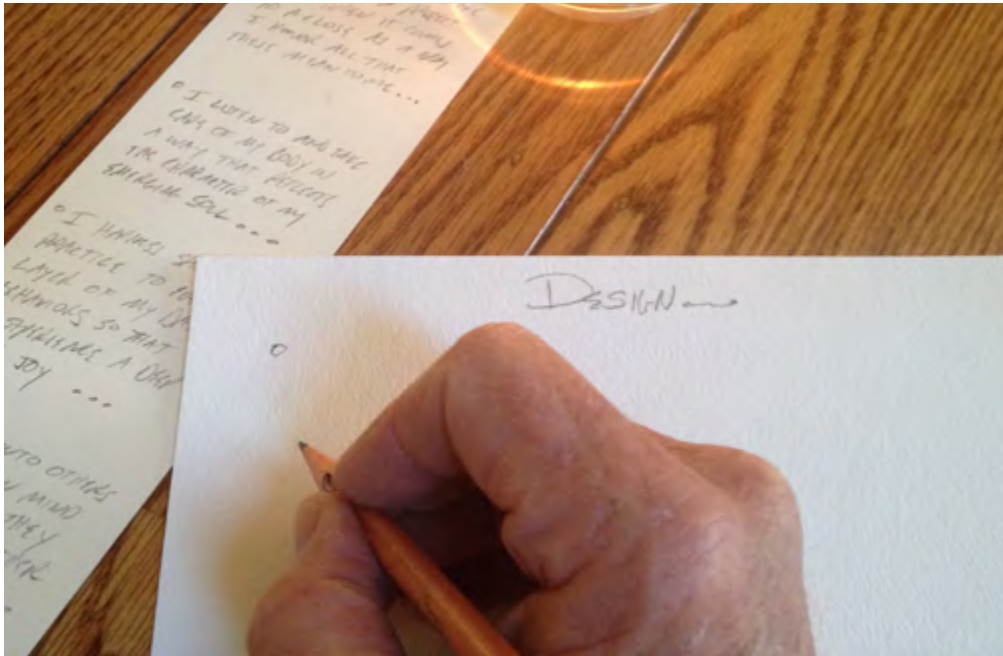
Have the participants gather their “Discovery”/“Dream” cards from last week and their “Design” cards from this week. Ask them to withdraw from the group and spend some time looking over the discovery and dreaming reflection notes completed in the last sessions.

Invite them to spend time brainstorming a set of practices: actions, repeated intentionally, that will allow them to move more fully into this dream. Ask them to be innovative and provocative, daring and pushy. Ideally, this will feel like an exciting start of a great adventure that leads into a new frontier. There is no practice that is off the table. Simply write without limits on what is possible.

### *Intentional Conversation*

Hand out the “A/P” cards.

In this section, the participants will meet with a partner and craft what it looks like to be held accountable for the practices they have constructed. Ultimately, each person will have an accountability partner who will have a clear method for holding their partner accountable for the practices designed.



Have the members break off from the group with their partner from the last session, or assign partners who can function well in this way. Invite them to take some time in pairs to share and flesh out practices that might be a good starting place. Think of this as a design session that helps each member think through the steps needed in order to enter into a practice. Have the members come up with

As the participants explore possible practices, they need to attend to those intentional actions or practices that resonate with the powerful experiences that were a part of their original story and the Dream phase. They should be able to draw a line to the practice created from the language of the dream. Finding practices that reflect the style of experience that had a powerful effect in the past helps ensure that any new practice will resonate and have some effect.

Have the members write out as many practice ideas as possible on their “Design” card. After about 15 minutes, have them come back to the central meeting area.

Go around the circle, and have the members share an insight or one of the practices they’ve explored, as a way to stimulate wider thinking about this topic.

a simple first step to begin the practice, and ask them to share it with their partner.

After each partner has shared, shift to a conversation about what would help hold each member accountable for this practice. Deadlines, phone conversations, e-mails, meeting for coffee.... Come up with a strategy that reflects a strong degree of accountability that can help launch this practice. Have the accountability partners use the “A/P” card to take notes on the strategy that will best help their partner and review this information with each other so that each partner has a clear idea how to be supportive of the other.

When the “A/P” card is complete, it should have:

- The first step(s) they intend to take toward their practice
- What they would like their partner to do to hold them accountable



The “A/P” card is retained by the accountability partner to use as a helpful guide prior to the next session.

### *Sending Ritual*

Invite each member to cut two slots in the bottom of the “Design” card stock (unless they were prepared ahead of time) for connecting it to the “Discovery”/“Dream” cards (see photo), showing them a sample to use as a model. When the two pieces are connected, the participants should be able to see the dreams they wrote as well as the practices they designed.

Have participants place their structures behind or around the votive candles (see photo). These small shrines are meant to hold the wisdom and insights that have occurred within the Intentional Community so far.

Have the participants look over the material generated in this experience and find a word that captures the leading edge of the work they are engaged in. They might choose one word that reflects the practice or that taps into the energy of the dreaming/design work they did. This word will be used as a mantra during the closing reflective time. Once everyone has a word, use the following breathe-in/breathe-out meditation format, with these instructions:

“Silently breathe in with the phrase ‘I am.’

Silently breathe the word you chose to describe your future self: ‘\_\_\_\_\_.’”

Repeat continuously with each breath.

After a few minutes, the leader can wrap up with some reflective words.

## **Between Sessions**

Have all the members leave with the shrine they crafted so they can set up a personal shrine at home with their own votive candle. They can use their shrine during the week to remind themselves of the process they have created for themselves. Invite them to keep the “A/P” card next to their shrine so they can also be mindful and supportive of their partner during the week. Encourage all members to take some steps into the practice they’ve created, before the next session. The next session will be a time to share some of the early experiences with that practice and some of the early insights gained as the members live into the intent of their practice.

Ask all the participants to bring their “Discovery”/“Dream,” “Design,” and “A/P” cards back to the next session.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 4 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 4 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 4 - Setting an Intention

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Setting a strong level of intention is an important way for participants to feel actively engaged by this an Intentional Community process. All participants in an Intentional Community develop and strengthen their intention to live with a deeper sense of self. Likewise, they set an intention to spend time encouraging the journey of others.

### *The Language of Intention*

Based on what participants have discovered as they explored their story and created a dream, the practices crafted in this session can take on different shapes. It may be more about letting go, it may be more about embracing, it may be about relationships, it may be about alone time. No matter the shape of the practice, all members should work to embrace the language of intentionality in their vocabulary and talk about themselves accordingly. They should be able to frame the practices they create within the phrase “I am living with intentionality to....”

### *Acting with Intention*

How is this helpful? The goal of these sessions is to help participants approach each moment grounded in a mindful connection with the person they are becoming. Such awareness can transform the most mundane of moments into a sacred or enriching experience. Intentionality creates a heightened awareness that begins to seek out signs and indications of one’s emerging self in every moment.

Rather than feeling like a project, it becomes more like a natural unfolding.

### *Intention Embedded in Life*

If you ask people involved in an Intentional Community, they will tell you that this process helps them integrate their core values into their daily life patterns and important relationships. The following quotes capture some of the results of this process.

- “Work issues seem to generate less stress.”
- “Relationships find deeper connection.”
- “The stranger seems less daunting.”
- “Openness and attentiveness are heightened.”
- “It helps create time I never thought I had and enables me to stay centered in the midst of life’s crazy moments.”

A heightened degree of intentionality becomes like a seed that loses itself, only to sprout into something new and generative. Here, the everyday moments invite you into a stronger self.





# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 5 - Reflect on Practices in Community

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### *Session 5 - Outline (Destiny)*

1. Centering ritual: Reflect on the first steps in your practice.
2. Intentional conversation: Share and reflect on the diversity of practices and methods of accountability.
3. Sending ritual: Celebrate new frontiers.
4. Weekly practice: Experience the support of others.

In this session, participants share their initial experiences with the practices created during the last session and the impact of having an accountability partner. In the closing ritual, participants celebrate the process and reflect on the value of the work they have done.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Medium-size bowl filled with sand or gravel
- Lighting sticks (thin sticks of wood similar to long matchsticks)
- A lighter or matches
- Votive candles and votive candle holders, one for each participant
- Recorded music to play as participants arrive
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- Card stock for each participant:  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$  inches (a quarter sheet) multiplied by the number of other people in the group (if there are eight people in the group, you will need  $8 \times 7 = 56$  quarter sheets)
- A pencil for each participant
- Notepads or scratch paper
- Community Covenant display from previous sessions

#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the pillar candle in the center of the table.
- Place the bowl of sand on the table and the lighting sticks in the sand.
- Place the votive candles in a circle around the pillar candle.
- Display the Community Covenant from previous sessions.

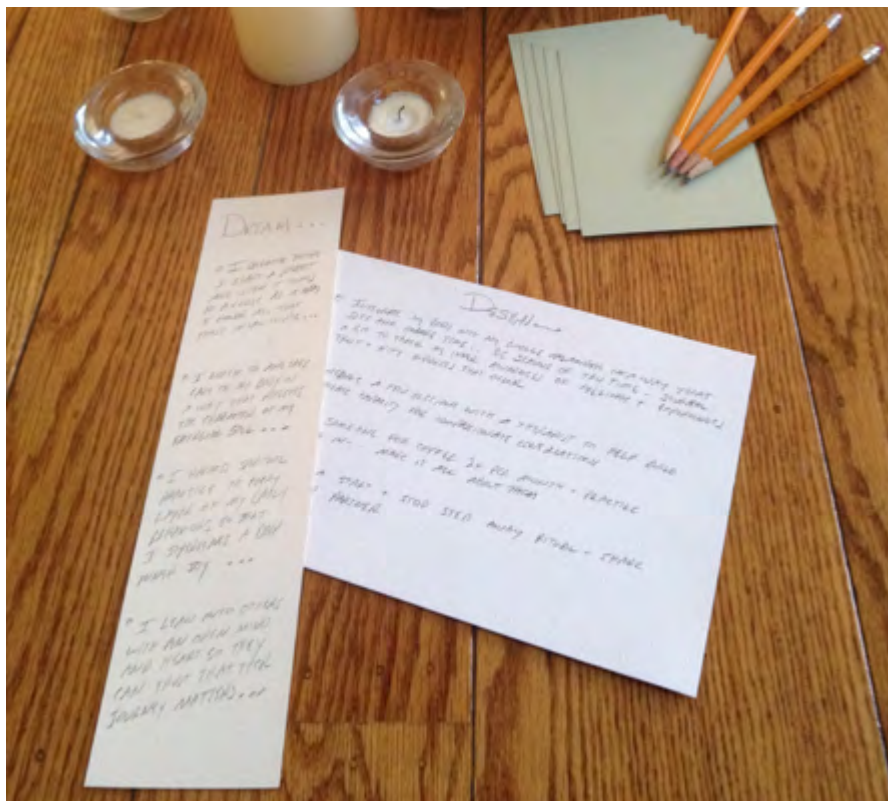
## Session Details

### Pre-session

Play some music as participants arrive, to assist in the transition to this intentional community session. Greet people as they enter, and model a friendly but calm style to help all prepare for the centering ritual. Invite the participants to review and reflect on the Community Covenant statements developed in Session 1.

### Centering Ritual

Invite each of the participants to lay out the “Discover”/“Dream” and “Design” cards they created in the previous sessions and review what they have crafted up to this point.



Tell them that during this opening ritual, they will have a chance to focus on the important components and add more insights as they occur.

Light the candle in the center of the table.

Guide the participants through a short meditation:

- Start by ringing the bell or striking the singing bell.
  - Ask the participants to sit up in their chairs with their feet flat on the floor, in a comfortable posture.
  - Ask them to close their eyes or to focus on the centering candle in the room.
  - Ask them to take three slow breaths: In (count to 3) and Out (count to 3) for each of the three breaths.
- Ask them to focus only on their breathing, the feeling of the breath coming into and out of their nose and their diaphragm rising and falling. Invite the participants to calmly let go of any other thoughts that might intrude and come back to noticing their breathing.
  - Once you sense that the group has settled in, use the following statement to guide them into lighting their own candles from the center candle.

*“Each of us brings heartfelt intention to the practices we have crafted that draw us into wholeness. Take a moment, and let the insights and reflections that have given shape to this journey fill you again during our time together. I invite you—when you are ready—to light a candle as a reminder that these are the dreams and practices that will serve as a light to guide you along the way.”*

- After a total of three to five minutes, signal the end of the ritual with the bell or singing bowl.

### Intentional Conversation

Pass out enough of the quarter sheets so that each member has one for every other member of the group—if there are 10 members, each member will have 9 quarter-sheet cards. Pass out pencils to the participants. Explain that during this time, all the participants will have a chance to share about their process so far. As each one shares, the other participants will use a card to write the name of the person sharing and a positive reflection, attribute, or thoughtful insight as a way to support that person's journey.

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Have all the participants share some reflections on their work with the practices created in the last

session. Some questions to consider in the conversation include the following. You may choose to display several for the group to consider.

- What went well? What were the stumbling blocks?
- Did you explore or try any of the practices?
- Did you feel like you might want to modify the dreaming or the design of your practice after engaging with it?
- Did you have any dreams or experiences resulting from the energy you have given to this process?
  - What emerged from the commitments you made last week?
  - How did your accountability design work for you?

Remind the participants of the “Participatory Listening” guidelines from Session 2, and encourage them to keep their written comments and feedback positive. After each person's sharing, provide a moment for the cards to be completed. Once the writing is done, move on to the next person. Once everyone has shared, invite all the participants to distribute their cards to each other member of the group.

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### Sending Ritual

Have the participants read through the comments written for them on their cards and stack them next to their “Discovery”/“Dream” and “Design” cards and candle.

Close with the following reflection:

*“Each of us has begun to explore the language and practices that might enhance our journey into the heart of life. And yet we do not journey alone. We have committed to stand by one another, to encourage one another, to hope for the best for one another. As we close this session, simply imagine the wave of kindness that flows from all the comments gathered before you. Feel the heart of this group embrace you as you continue to find your way toward wholeness.”*

Close the session with a short prayer, bell-ringing, or a closing phrase.

## **Between Sessions**

Invite the participants to take home the work they have done. Have them integrate the cards of encouragement into the home altar they have created. Invite them to stack the cards so that one participant's thoughtful insights about the work they are doing is visible. Let that card remain to display the encouragement of another. When ready, the participants can shift the cards so that another participant's reflections are visible. In this way, the participants simply use these encouraging words as a way to support them in the work they are doing during the next days and weeks.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 5 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 5 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 6 - Celebrate and Create a Path Forward

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### *Session 6 - Outline (Destiny)*

1. Centering ritual: Project my practice into daily life.
2. Individual reflection: Identify places of resistance.
3. Intentional conversation: Explore barriers and assumptions.
4. Future sessions discussion: Collaborate to craft a pattern for ongoing group sessions.
5. Sending ritual: Create a more open path.

In this session, the participants attend to the outcomes of the Intentional Community process and explore barriers or personal assumptions that may get in the way of doing this work. This session can be done as a closing session or as a wrap-up session after participants have had a chance to work on their practice over a period of time. In addition, the group will have a chance to discuss options for going forward. The session closes with a ritual in which participants reflect on how this work might help make the world a better place.

#### **Materials:**

- Small table, large enough to hold the materials
- A chair for each participant
- Pillar candle, approximately 3 inches in diameter
- Bowl with stones from Session 1
- A lighter or matches
- Recorded music to play as participants arrive
- Bell or singing bowl to mark the beginning and end of rituals
- Watch or clock for timing segments
- A half sheet of blank paper for each participant
- A pencil for each participant
- Community Covenant display from previous sessions

#### **Setup:**

Before the session begins, take care of the following:

- Arrange the chairs in a circle.
- Place the table in the center of the circle, and place the pillar candle in the center of the table.
- Place the bowl of stones on the table
- Have paper and pencils set aside.
- Display the Community Covenant from previous sessions.

## Session Details

### Presession

Play some music as participants arrive, to assist in the transition to this intentional community session. Greet people as they enter, and model a friendly but calm style to help all prepare for the centering ritual. Invite the participants to review and reflect on the Community Covenant statements developed in Session 1.

### Centering Ritual

Light the candle in the center of the table.

Guide the participants through a short meditation:

- Start by ringing the bell.
- Ask the participants to each take a stone from the display and cradle it in their hands as they prepare for this centering time.
- Ask them to close their eyes and feel the shape, texture, and weight of the stone.
- Ask them to take three slow breaths: In (count to 3) and Out (count to 3) for each of the three breaths.
- Ask them to focus only on their breathing, the feeling of the breath coming into and out of their nose and their diaphragm rising and falling. Invite the participants to calmly let go of any other thoughts that might intrude and come back to noticing their breathing.
- Once you see that the group has settled in, use the following statement:



*“Picture the stone you are holding as the self you have imagined as you have journeyed through this process. Imagine that it holds all of the attributes, values, and wisdom you hope to discover along the way. Let the joy of this experience fill the stone and fill you with gratitude. (pause) Imagine how the vibrancy of this work will have a positive effect on others and on the world. (pause) I invite you—when you are ready—to return the stone to the table so that the candlelight rests on it and to fix your gaze on the stone.*”

*“Imagine the end of your life and that you have the capacity to look back over what you have become along the way. (pause) Imagine this stone becoming a part of eternity, having captured all the fullness of your life. Trust that your stone rests within an eternal embrace.”*

- After a total of three to five minutes, signal the end of the ritual with the bell or singing bowl.
- Place the stones back on the table in a circle around the center candle.

### Individual Reflection

Pass out a half sheet of paper to each participant. Have the participants spend some time reflecting on places where they are experiencing resistance to the practice or the initial behaviors they are engaged in. What are some long-held assumptions they may hold too strongly that could be getting in the way? Have them pay attention to issues of logistics as well as their own frame of reference or worldview that might be threatened or altered by spending time on this work.

Invite the participants to use the paper to write their ideas. Be sure to remind them that they have a



choice about what to share with the group and what to hold private. Recall and renew the group's commitment to confidentiality. This individual reflection work can be done at the table, or the participants can be dismissed and asked to return in 15 minutes.

### *Intentional Conversation*

Once the group has gathered back at the table, break up into pairs, preferably accountability partners. Have everyone share some of their reflections and explore the themes together with their partner. Encourage the participants to use the "Participatory Listening" guidelines, with questions that invite deeper exploration of issues and challenges, such as "Why do you think that is?" "Tell me more about that," "What feelings come up for you when you face these barriers?" and "Why do you think that is?"

When everyone has returned to the group, take a moment to allow the participants to share highlights. Afterward, have them tuck the paper they have created under their stone, and shift to the closing ritual or engage in a discussion about future session design.

### *Creating Future Sessions*

Facilitate a discussion about what might be the further steps this group would like to take. The goal is to decide together on the shape and purpose of

future sessions or to agree to have this be the last group session. Some options:

1. Set a date for a one-time future gathering where all the participants can return and share how their practice has gone. Decide how best to utilize accountability partners and/or what form of accountability the group would find helpful. Reflect with accountability partners on effective accountability feedback and connections.
2. Continue meeting periodically, allowing each of the participants to take responsibility for leading the group experience, based on the work that person is doing. This allows exposure to a wide set of perspectives that can influence and shape each member of the group, providing an atmosphere that promotes diversity, appreciation, and capacity for broader insights.
3. Continue to meet periodically and make use of some of the other Intentional Community sessions located on the altSpirit website or search out other resources to help facilitate the process.
4. Have members team up to start another round of Intentional Community with a new circle of friends or members within your community, using the same format.
5. Disband the group, and start the process again at a future date, expecting that those who participated in this session may want to have a chance to reflect on their individual work by participating in another session cycle.

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### *Sending Ritual*

Invite the members to take the paper from under their stone and read over the notes and comments they have generated in this session. They should feel free to note any subsequent thoughts or insights at this time. After a few moments, have them crumple up their paper as if they were going to throw it away. Once the paper is crumpled, have them hold it in the same manner they held the stone during the opening ritual. Have them reflect on what it might feel like to begin letting go of whatever interferes with their work and the practices they want to explore. When they are ready, invite them to exchange the paper for the stone they held earlier. Leave the crumpled papers in a ring around the center candle, and close the session with the following blessing or another blessing appropriate to your community.



*In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.*

*Awaken your spirit to adventure  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.<sup>1</sup>*

Ring the bell or singing bowl, or sit for a few moments in silence.

Thank everyone for being a part of this process, and, if appropriate, have people share what it has meant to them.

### **After the Session**

Invite the participants to take home all the material generated in all the sessions. They can take their stone and place it somewhere in their world as a reminder that the work they have done, and will do, is meant to have an effect on the wider human experience. Some might take the stone to their workplace, others to their home or somewhere else. They should take some time to be intentional about where they will leave the stone. Encourage the participants to take a camera-phone picture of the stone once it is in place to help remind them of this experience and/or to share the photo with the group as a way to continue the conversation.

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<sup>1</sup> Selections from “For a New Beginning” by John O’Donohue in *To Bless the Space Between Us*, Doubleday, 2008.

# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 6 - Notes

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# Exploring My Growing Edge

## Session 6 - Notes

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