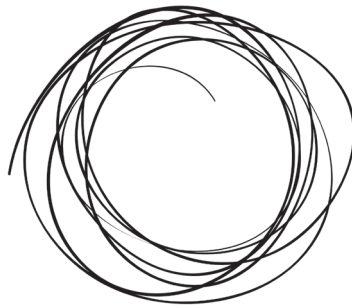


THE ART OF SOULMAKING FOR THE INCARCERATED



A PATH TO UNCONDITIONAL FREEDOM

Nicole Daedone
with Beth Wareham

soulmakerpress.com



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A priest stepped inside a dark cell. An incarcerated resident stepped forward to meet him. Nothing about this place or this person bothered the priest; in fact, he felt peaceful and at home. He extended his hands and said simply, “I am like you, and I live in a place like this. Each day, I have a rigid schedule. I am completely isolated from others and without the distractions of the world. Our experience has only one real difference: choice. I chose the monastic life to transform myself, and you were placed apart for punishment. Why not take my experience and make it your own?”

The priest then proposed to the incarcerated resident that life inside could be viewed in a new way. This prison, he suggested, is the monastery, a place of change and growth. Everyone is here for a reason, he went on, and it’s not the reason most believe it to be.

“You, your friends, the correctional officers, the staff,” he said, “were all brought together to transform. This is no accident. You were called here, and it has nothing to do with guilt or innocence, crime or punishment. This is the monastery; this is the gift.”

The incarcerated resident laughed, and the priest smiled a knowing smile. Though concrete and fencing restricted space to feet and inches, nothing prevented traveling inside and exploring a vast new world with no beginning and no end.

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LETTERS TO THE NEWCOMER

There's simply no better introduction to this program than these letters from those who've been through it. In the following pages, you will find two letters from individuals who've studied and followed The Art of Soulmaking (AoS) program. One is from a man who spent thirty-three years on death row before being executed in February of 2023. The other, from a woman who spent twenty-five years in and out of jail and, after completing *The Art of Soulmaking*, has remained out of jail. Today, she volunteers with Unconditional Freedom, supporting the Prison Monastery program. Both were eager to share their advice for the newcomer who encounters this path. You'll also find two more letters at the end of the book—additional voices offering guidance and encouragement for your own journey.

Letter to The Art of Soulmaking Newcomer:

We all want to be free. Whether we dwell in a prison cell block or live in a luxurious home, there is a longing for freedom from our innermost fears. Freedom from the internal voice that says "I'm unworthy" and fills us with unhealthy guilt and shame. It's also the source of our self-destructive patterns, whether they be self-doubts or the feeling of hopelessness. The prisons we build inside us are way more restrictive than any prison made of concrete, bars, and barbed wire could ever be. I know this because like you, I, too, have dwelled in both.

This program offers us a way of breaking out of our inner prisons and finding self-liberation. Many of the ideas may seem a little bizarre,

but if you take the time to study and put what's written into practice, you might be surprised with the outcome. What is there to lose for giving it a go?

Some of the things you will learn are self-compassion and how to view your past in a better light. You will learn how to embrace all aspects of your personal makeup, which will give you more strength and a sense of completeness.

This is not a program that's going to judge you, nor is it going to tell you what you should or are supposed to do. Instead, it offers simple yet effective ways for you to discover the inner freedom that's possible regardless of what your circumstance or situation might be. It doesn't matter who you are or what you may have done, unconditional freedom is yours for the having. So, are you willing to take this opportunity and discover new possibilities you never thought possible before? Inner freedom is yours.

BRIGHTEST BLESSINGS

Donald Dillbeck

Donald was incarcerated at the age of fifteen and was executed in 2023, after thirty-three years imprisoned in the State of Florida. Donald was an active participant, mentor, and advocate for *The Art of Soulmaking* program.

Letter to The Art of Soulmaking Newcomer:

From Struggle to Strength: Turning Pain into Power

To everyone reading this behind concrete walls, wire fences, and heavy doors, this is for you.

Struggles are real. They hit hard, and sometimes they come out of nowhere. Some of us grew up just trying to survive, dealing with trauma, addiction, loss, betrayal, or just trying to make it in a world that didn't give us much to begin with. Life hasn't always been fair. And when you're locked up, it's easy to feel like the story ends here.

But it doesn't.

Another chapter of my life just ended, and honestly, I don't know if

I should be happy to move on or sad to let it go. I'm 50 years old, and I just graduated from junior college. That sentence alone still feels surreal. I'm halfway through my education now, and staring at a future that feels both wide open and totally unknown.

I keep asking myself: Am I good enough? Am I smart enough to go on to a four-year college?

And then I remind myself, I've come this far. When I started this journey, I was locked up in a jail cell. I was broken, beaten down, lost, and lonely. The only reason I signed up for college back then was for a paycheck. But over time, something shifted. I waited long enough for the miracle to happen. I discovered I was more than what I believed. I realized I was smart, and that I was worthy of a life outside of crime and drugs.

And all it took was one person believing in me.

She wasn't my mother or my father, but she was a light in the darkness, someone I admired then, and still strive to be like today. That's all it takes sometimes: just one person to believe in you. I've been exactly where you are right now, and if I can get through it, you can too.

I truly believe that every single one of you can do something great.

Today, I volunteer with the Unconditional Freedom Project, specifically in The Art of Soulmaking program. Every day, I read your letters, your stories, and I see the incredible art you create. Some of your pieces give me goosebumps. You're putting your feelings on paper through powerful images and words. That's not just talent, that's transformation. That's healing. That's art with soul.

Take that gift and run with it. Do something you love, something that makes you feel alive, and it will never feel like a job. My life plans have changed so many times. But for the longest time, they always ended the same: jails, institutions, destruction. Until now.

Did I mention I just graduated from college? I still can't believe I walked across that stage and was handed a diploma. All the hard work, the long nights, the self-doubt, the tears, it was all worth it. And let me tell you, the feeling of seeing my family and friends in the crowd, watching me in my cap and gown? I don't think I've ever been that high on life.

For years, people called me names, druggie, loser, trash, and I believed them. I spent so much time trying to prove them right. But now? I proved them wrong, and it felt so damn good.

When I handed the announcer my name card on graduation day, she looked up and smiled like she saw something in me. Something I had forgotten was even there. I held my head high. My tears dried up. Everyone was looking at me, and for once, I wasn't afraid.

That was my moment.

And now, as I sit with this next chapter wide open on my lap, I find myself wondering how it'll end. But the truth is, you can't sit around wondering how the story ends. Because if you do, you'll miss the miracle that's happening while it's being written.

That's where the magic is.

Don't overthink it. Just keep moving. Even when it's hard. Especially when it's hard. Even when everything in you says "give up," keep going. You are worthy of a good life. You are worthy of healing, of love, of redemption.

For years, I let the absence of my children, all of whom were removed from my care and adopted by other families, convince me that I didn't deserve anything good. That I wasn't a real mother. That I wasn't enough. But today, everything I do, I do in their memory. I live in hope, not just memories.

And I truly believe that if I stay on this path, if I keep doing what I'm doing, everything will fall into place the way it's meant to. One day, I believe I'll get to be a mom again.

So wherever you are in your story, just know this: your next chapter is still unwritten. And it can be beautiful.

Keep going.

Debra Bailey spent nearly twenty-five years behind bars. Today, she is a dedicated college student transforming her past into a force for good as she pursues a career in social work. She now volunteers with The Art of Soulmaking Prison Monastery Program.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

Here are a few tips on how to make the most of this program.

Before you begin, take the time to read the next two sections: *Free the Artist*, and *The Art of Soulmaking Milestones*. *Free the Artist* illustrates how you can make use of your creativity throughout the program. The *Milestones* section is your personal roadmap to journey through the workbook in stages. There are eight milestones with practices, reading, and other assignments that will help you integrate the content.

Your first assignment is to fill out both the Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment and Pre-Program Questionnaire and submit them to us by mail. One of your final assignments upon completing the program is to fill out both the Human Flourishing Post-Assessment and Post-Program Questionnaire and do the same. This will help us measure how effective the program was for you, and in doing so, will help us bring the coursework to more incarcerated people.

As you make your way through this book, feel free to write to us if anything comes up. We want to hear about your experiences, what you are learning, how your life is changing, and what you may be struggling with. And we will share ours with you.

We encourage you, wherever possible, to share this course with a friend. Read the book together. Ask each other the integration exercises at the end of each chapter. Meditate or practice yoga together. Share your Soul Writing. Get to know one another in this way. Even better, if you can, do this course with a partner or in a group.

Our aim is not only to heal pain but to alchemize it. We want you to learn how to put that pain to use, converting it into meaning and purpose. It is often at our lowest that we are given the opportunity for this conversion. We take everything that is stuck deep inside of ourselves—every emotion, every memory, every heartbreak, every choice we regret—and we use it. The point is not to fix what's down there; it's to use what's down there to change the world.

At the end of your book, we'll offer additional opportunities for ways you can extend your Soulmaking journey. You can participate in the Free the Artist program, contribute to our newsletter, or start an in-person Soulmaking Group at your facility.

Finally, it is okay to take your time. We understand that some of this material is difficult. We broke the program down into milestones. You can complete them at your own pace, taking enough time to sink into your daily practices and thoughtfully complete the integration exercises.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Send all mail here:
Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

If you have an email platform, let us know which platform you are on and we will send you an invitation to communicate with us electronically.

FREE THE ARTIST: CREATIVITY WITHOUT LIMITS

Art of Soulmaking Online Artist Gallery

Liberation can be found through creativity—not by fixing what is broken, but by unleashing the expression that has been waiting inside you all along. Where did this most powerful part of your soul go? It may be buried in pain from something that hurt you, hidden beneath choices that led your life in a direction that now feels impossible to unwind. But pain is not the end of the story. It can be composted into the richest soil for your expression. This is the invitation: to turn pain into creativity, to let what is inside rise up and take shape.

Even in the most confined spaces, creativity remains boundless. The Free the Artist program is not just about making art—it is about uncovering the force within you that refuses to be silenced. There is something in you that longs to be seen, felt, and given form. It is not decoration; it is truth. Art is not about talent—it is about bringing forward what is real, about turning what moves you into something others can be touched by.

To be creative is to allow, to let the energy that rises in frustration, longing, or hope become something more than words in your head. It is about turning pain into creativity—taking what disturbs, what agitates, what pulses inside, and giving it a place to live outside of you. It is about contact, real contact, with what is

present and allowing it to move through you rather than be locked away. This is how change happens.

Your work—writing, poetry, drawings—can be shared on the **Free the Artist Online Gallery** where others can witness and connect with your art.

How to Participate:

1. **Share Your Work** – Submit your art, poetry, writing, or drawings to our mailing address below. This is your chance to bring your truth to life, to let it be seen and felt by others.
2. **Include a Note** – Mark your submission “Free for public” so we know it’s for publishing. Your voice has an impact—let it travel beyond these walls.
3. **Get Published** – Your artwork will be uploaded to your personal page on our online gallery.
4. **Access Your Page** – Once uploaded, you’ll receive a message with your page’s URL. Share this with family and friends, who can visit anytime to see your entire collection.

**Mail submissions to: Unconditional Freedom Project PO
Box 305, Newark, CA 94560**

****Your art matters. Your story matters. The world is listening.****

THE ART OF SOULMAKING

MILESTONES

Think of this as your personal roadmap through *The Art of Soulmaking*—designed to deepen your experience, spark insight, and guide you toward completion step by step. Instead of rigid deadlines, we use **milestones**—natural checkpoints that help you track your progress.

Each milestone marks an important stage in your journey, guiding you through the lessons, assignments, and practices that build toward your certificate of completion. You'll find them at the end of each section. You can use them as a checklist to make sure you have completed all components.

MILESTONE ONE

This milestone signifies completing your introduction to the program and orientating to the Soulmaker Movement and our mission.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 1-39 of your workbook
- ii. Complete the Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment and Pre-Program Questionnaire
- iii. Write a letter introducing yourself and what called you to this program
- iv. Submit your assessment, questionnaire, and introduction letter

MILESTONE TWO

We suggest daily practices because that's the best way to build a habit, but don't be discouraged if you miss a day or two. As with any new skill, it's hardest at the beginning, and the days you may not want to show up for your practices are likely the ones you need them most. Have compassion and kindness toward yourself as you embark on this journey of daily practices.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 41-61 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 10 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Submit a letter about how practices are going and what you're noticing

MILESTONE THREE

Milestone Three signifies your completion of Lesson One.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 62-71 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 10 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 1 Integration Exercises

MILESTONE FOUR

Milestone Four signifies your completion of Lesson Two.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 73-83 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 15 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 2 Integration Exercises

MILESTONE FIVE

Milestone Five signifies your completion of Lesson Three.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 84-95 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 15 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 3 Integration Exercises

MILESTONE SIX

Milestone Six signifies your completion of Lesson 4.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 96-103 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 4 Integration Exercises

MILESTONE SEVEN

Milestone Seven signifies you have made your commitments and completed your post-program assessments and questionnaires.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 105-117 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Commitments and How to Support You exercises
- vi. Complete the Human Flourishing Post-Assessment and Post-Program Questionnaire and mail them to us

MILESTONE EIGHT

Milestone Eight is where you see What's Next. You can share about your experience, become a part of the Soulmaking Community, and learn about group facilitation.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 119-136 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write to us and send us:
 - a testimonial about the program
 - an article submission for our newsletter
 - any artwork for Free the Artist that you created during or after completing the program

***Make sure to submit the release form and mark all submissions "free for public"

- vi. Stay connected post release. Send us your address or you can email us at letters@unconditionalfreedom.org

WELCOME TO THE ART OF SOULMAKING

The aim of this program is to repurpose the experience of incarceration from mere punishment to something truly restorative—something that uncovers each person’s unique purpose and contribution to society. The goal is to benefit both the individual and society as a whole by transforming the prison experience from something painful and harmful into something beneficial. Welcome to The Art of Soulmaking.

We have all heard “the meek shall inherit the earth,” and we all have ideas of what the “meek” look like: weak, forgotten, taken advantage of.

However, this phrase originally had a different meaning when it was written over 2,000 years ago. The Ancient Greek word for meek, *praus* (πραεῖς), referred to a horse trained for battle. Wild stallions were captured for riding, pulling, and general labor. For these horses, it was essential that their wild nature be broken so that they could work efficiently and not threaten the required monotony of their work. Yet some horses, despite the best training, always retained a part of that wild nature—they were trained, disciplined, and obedient, but never broken. They had been “meeked,” or taught to channel energy into purposeful action.

Soon, the people realized that these horses were underutilized as domesticated horses and they found a far more productive use for them, one that made them the most valuable horses in the land. These became the horses used for battle. They kept the best qualities of their wild nature—their fierceness, their raw

Your incarceration is not an end but an initiation—an opportunity to transform pain into purpose. This is your guide to reclaiming your wild nature while cultivating the discipline needed to wield it with wisdom.

power—while also developing a willingness to be disciplined and responsive, to turn on a dime.

They'd fearlessly gallop directly into battle, but they'd come to a sliding stop at the nudge of their rider's leg. Their power was their willingness to be disciplined, despite not having to be. They chose it.

The same can be true of people. A *praus* person aims their massive strength into purpose and contribution. They are fierce, courageous, and responsive—never reckless. You, like us, have been invited to enter a new life much like the wild horse. The calling of this path is not to break your spirit, but rather to be “meeked.” To retain your wild nature and strength, while building the necessary discipline that allows that nature to be put toward good use.

Spirit is light, stillness,
and eternity—soul is wild,
creative, and full of longing.
One reaches upward, the
other plunges deep, and
together they form a whole
human being. Moving
between them brings
balance, allowing both the
clarity of spirit and the raw,
generative power of soul to
fully express.

Spirit Versus Soul

John Tarrant's seminal, *The Light Inside the Dark* (1998), divides our consciousness into “spirit” and “soul,” opposing poles that work in tandem to make a whole human being.

“Spirit” is transparent, and it is given. It cannot be produced by focusing on it; one must grow quiet and uncover it. It is our tie to a vast eternity, an empty stillness. Connecting to it *requires practice*: meditation, prayer, and the long, slow process of dropping into a place where the still center comes into view. When we make contact with it, we understand there is no beginning and no end.

Spirit is the purview of religions, where the rules are clear and ordered. On its own, spirit is weak: too clear about its goals, reckless and headlong in its pursuit of them, and too full of absolutes. It cannot engage with the unpredictable, delicious, heartbreaking joy known as life.

The counterpole is “soul,” a dirty-faced, beaming actor full of sound and fury, gasping and laughter. Soul bubbles up from below where the wildness lives, inhabiting the brokenness of the world. Soul is creative: It produces something out of matter. It's how we connect with others and feel less lonely in tangible, human ways.

Soul loves to live and learn. It is always aiming to embrace all aspects of life, including things that seem dirty or broken. It brings meaning to experience, including the thoughtful aspects of our being. Soul is the realm of hidden passions and insomnia; helpless, almost indestructible longings, obsession, ruminations, and secrets; and the continuing undercurrent of knowledge that some losses are irretrievable. Soul is the gift that makes us less perfect so that we can be more whole.

Having one without the other throws us off inside. Without the positive and negative charges of soul and spirit, consciousness falls to pieces. Moving between the two—a cycling between the white light of spirit and the darker, earthier depths of soul—brings us into balance. Spirit without soul can make our natural hungers build up until they burst in destructive ways. Soul without spirit is like driving a powerful car with no brakes.

Employed together, a pleasing tension arises between spirit and soul. Rational thought and wild creativity flourish inside of us quite peacefully.

Spirit lives in the mind; soul emanates from the body. Spirit is light, orderly, clear, and rational. Soul is dark, wild, creative, alive, and nonrational. If we have one without the other, we are half realized, imbalanced. Ideally, we stay down in the soul, and spirit floods in. Spirit and soul merge in union in the body.

Letting Go

Letting go is something desperately feared by this light world. Control and presenting well are the highest currency. This light world can get fixated on achievement and status—material or spiritual. If you are incarcerated, you exist as a warning about what happens if one does “let go.” If they were to honor any bit of that wild nature that exists inside every one of us, they may wind up where you are. Those who are incarcerated bear the greatest punishment that exists, which is isolation, because they carry the scary shadow of those who want to let go.

A bit more about what we mean by shadow: Shadow is a psychological term, which means a repressed or unacknowledged characteristic. The light is easy to see; the shadow is more elusive. Take, for example, two women who are longtime friends. One arrives at the other's house with a new handbag and necklace.

Her friend immediately notices and says, "Who gave you *that*?" An argument takes place between the friends that is nothing more than one woman projecting her feelings of envy and lack of worth on the other. Why isn't one friend happy for the other's new things? Why does it matter to her? She won't admit that she's envious; she can't. She can only express her situation as superiority and ridicule. She can't express envy because she literally can't "see it," she can't acknowledge it. At least, not yet. It's in her shadow, the part of herself unknown to herself. This woman with the new handbag and necklace represents her own repressed desire to have something nice for herself.

People experiencing incarceration, who exist at the fringes of society, who have experienced breaking the rules, their wild nature expressed even in the face of undesired consequences, represent the shadow of every human being. We all want to let go, we just want to let go safely. Many in society don't believe they can do it safely, so they never let go. They look at your situation in prison as the picture of what it would mean to let go, and they don't like what they see.

In this way, your position as the holder of the shadow of society is one of nobility. You, at the "bottom," are free to look up and see the exposed underbelly of society. You can see its judgments, its contradictions, its hypocrisy, its pain, in ways others on top cannot. You can see its shadow in ways it cannot. This is the privilege of your position.

Your Initiation

PART ONE of your initiation is to choose to accept your position—to receive the hatred, the projections of inferiority, the accusations,

and disdain. Your initiation is to take it and to not take it personally. You stop saying, “I am not supposed to be here.” This is the first step to unconditional freedom. Soul gives the toughest battles to the strongest soldiers.

PART TWO is to forgive, to release your claim to repayment for what has happened to you and the resentment for any hurt caused to you during this journey to where you are now. You clear your heart of hatred and blame and send this poison you have taken in back out as love.

We understand what you go through is a process, much like wailing over the dead is a part of grief. This is to be expected. What matters to us is not your guilt or innocence, but rather: *What are you going to do with this experience right now?* It is the same question wherever you are: Can you see a higher power in the center of the experience? If you are not guilty, take every legal step to get out. But for present purposes, you are here now. What will you make of this life?

When you stop saying, “I am not supposed to be here,” and instead say, “I am here,” you communicate profound acceptance. In initiation, the answer to every prayer is acceptance; acceptance is freedom rather than giving in.

One of our pen pals wrote to us a story of how, in the prison he was in, everyone suggested he become a Christian because Christians were more likely to get time off their sentences and enjoyed liberties that other residents didn’t. It was a well-known scam. “I may be incarcerated,” he wrote, “but I cannot pretend to be something I am not. I have never heard or felt God. It would be a lie to say I have.”

Then, one night, as he was lying in his bunk in his cell, he felt a presence. He did hear a voice. And clear as day, the voice told him that he could be free right where he was if he would help others right where he was. He feared that he had nothing to offer but was “told” that if he just said yes, he would be given the power. He said yes. He could not say if it was Jesus or any particular form of God, only that he knew in his bones that what he heard was real. That he could trust it.

He simply started looking for where others were in need. He'd listen to the guy whose wife decided she couldn't take his being in prison and was filing for divorce. He listened to the guy who got a cancer diagnosis and was going to die in prison. He showed up for the guy who got the crap kicked out of him. He was no expert, he just showed up. He released his blame toward the correctional officers and slowly, very slowly, built a rapport of civility. He understood they, too, were answering their call and executing it at times with grace, at times with cruelty, but that his work was to answer to the judge within his heart.

The next thing he knew, guys were lining up to talk to him. He didn't know how, but he knew the right thing to say. Something inside him woke up, a kind of knowing that went beyond him. He realized he was totally free, right where he was. He felt freer than he ever was on the outside and freer than anyone he'd ever met. He was granted a peace beyond human understanding. He realized that wherever he was, if his body were to be set free tomorrow, he would simply continue to do the same thing. So he stopped fighting.

He realized he was posted to this station because he "could" be. He had what it took, a conviction about who he was, an unwillingness to pretend, an honesty. And that this made him the perfect candidate to be the master of this particular location (although he might not have called himself such).

This man taught us much about the workings of life that cannot be learned from the great texts or in protected "safe" environments. He had in-the-field training and an experiential compassion that felt otherworldly. Corresponding with him, one had the intuitive sense that he would flinch at nothing we could share with him. There was no aspect of our lives, our beliefs, that he would reject. Not because he was so high, so distanced from it, but because of the profound depth of acceptance that he carved out in his own life and extended to everyone he met.

Because he was so "low," and had lived through worse than most people around him had, he had room to receive them. His was a most intimate compassion. This is what the realization of the

soul looks like—where you go from theoretical ideas of what being “good” means, to actual experiences of it.

You face the horrors of your own mind: Can you remain conscious here? Can you hold true to the values in your heart here? Under the most heinous duress? When everything in you is reduced to survival, to self-preservation, when you are being dehumanized—can you offer yourself there? In these dark environments we find the last test and proof of one’s conviction, where there is no room for lofty ideas.

He realized that wherever he was, if his body were to be set free tomorrow, he would still be the same man he was right then, in his cell.

Like our pen-pal friend, you came in as wild as the ancient Greek *praus*. You can deny your situation, fight it, and make it wrong. You have free will. But resisting will not do what this initiation is here to do: free your soul so that you may be free in any condition whatsoever. And in the process, become someone, who by your very existence, frees others. From here, I cannot describe the beauty of the world that emerges.

You will be moved by nothing but truth. You will be granted the ability to see through new eyes. You will be able to love as much as the human heart desires, even the correctional officers and the wardens of the world. You will welcome them all.

This course is about the journey into the inner workings of your soul; *soulmaking*. Unconditional freedom is the poet Rumi’s field. There is no right and wrong here, no political conservatives against Black activists, no Left, no Right, no camps, no correctional officers. Here, you are free.

We recognize that the very things you believe are wrong with you—your history, your failings, your mental health issues, your obsessions, your fanaticism, your mania, your fear, your loneliness—actually prequalify you.

A word we’ll use throughout this course to describe this process is alchemy. We’ve all heard of this before in our culture: “turning lemons to lemonade” and “turning lead into gold.” The alchemist avoids

*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and rightdoing there is a field. I’ll
meet you there. When the soul lies
down in that grass the world is too
full to talk about.”*

~RUMI

nothing, knowing that the lemons, the lead, anything that may seem undesirable, that others would discard, is needed to create the gold.

A person in prison meditates in a cell that becomes an inner monastery for transformation; a musician hiding from soldiers reimagines the sound of gunshots into a guitar solo; a painter paints her own horrific accident again and again; a mother writes in her kitchen, alone, long into the night; an architect builds a cathedral over a slave pit; a composer turns weeping into a song. Alchemists all, they seek their truth no matter the constraints of society's boundaries and laws. Their craft of taking the very pain in front of them and transforming this pain into an offering to society transforms them in the process.

Your obstacles, setbacks, heartbreaks, and loss can become pure gold. Through alchemy, pain transforms into something beautiful, something that connects us to one another, something of use to society. You become crazy-wise, converting all that has touched you into a rigorous yet non-rational approach of soul and applying it to the practical, rational world. This can lead to social change.

Our Mission

Our mission is to transform hearts and open minds. In doing so, we seek to convert a judgmental, closed society into a community of open, conscious individuals who place the ultimate value on creativity, truth, connection, and love. We seek unconditional freedom where the self is never chained, no matter the outward circumstances.

Our method uses the examined interior life to effect change on the exterior. Heal thyself and heal the world; connect to thyself and connect to the world; free thyself, free the world; serve thyself by serving the world.

Why We Do What We Do

Our experience is that life is purposeful. Purposeful in that we are all here to make our unique contribution to society. There is

living “in your life,” and there is living “out of your life.” Either can happen anywhere and at any time.

“Living in your life” is living with a purpose. You are emotionally available, and you exist in an interchange with the people around you, where you are enriched by your environment, just as your environment enriches you. Life is deepening over time. “Living out of your life” looks like denial, self-consciousness, distraction, and refusing to digest the emotional content of your life. “In” is heaven; “out” is hell. “In” can happen in a prison cell just as easily as “out” can happen in a cathedral. Your environment does not dictate your life. True healing in the world will arise not from the completion of a battle of ideas, but rather from a group of people who agree to live *in* their life.

Genius Is Your Calling

We tend to think of a genius as a person who solves the world’s most complex math problems or writes beautiful songs. But genius is a force, not a person. One person can demonstrate the force of genius in one moment and not in the other. Albert Einstein had non-genius moments. It’s a force that passes through us, just as love or compassion. We prepare our bodies and soften our minds, opening them to access genius.

And then we wait. We do not own it; it does not belong to us, and it is our birthright. A poet described the experience well. She was in the fields of her family farm working one day when she felt an almost imperceptible shift in the air. Her mind and body prepared for what was coming. She knew the feeling well; a poem was barreling toward her over the rolling green. All she had to do was run inside, write it down, and begin refining it.

Genius is the mediating energy that takes the raw materials—in this case, words whispered over the soybeans to a poet-farmer—and transforms the energy into an object of beauty or something of use. Genius directs the purpose and aim of our existence. It’s the energy that drives us to create, express, move, beget, forgive, and invent.

Genius is not a person but a force, an energy that moves through us when we are open and receptive. By tuning into this force, we access our ability to create, transform, and bring beauty from the raw material of our lives.

"I think everything in life is art. What you do. How you dress. The way you love someone, and how you talk. Your smile and your personality. What you believe in, and all your dreams. The way you drink your tea. How you decorate your home. Or party. Your grocery list. The food you make. How your writing looks. And the way you feel. Life is art."

~HELENA BONHAM CARTER

When you work with the mediating energy of genius to create something beautiful or useful or true, you become crazy-wise, drawing upon everything inside your interior castle. Rational thought does not have the upper hand here; crazy-wise draws upon impulse, whispers, seemingly random memory, and emotions flaring like spots on the sun. Your genius uses crazy-wise as its fuel as you create. In your creation, you break the rules instead of letting the rules break your body and your life.

For centuries, human beings have used a retreat experience for self-reflection in order to contribute to a larger society. Removed from worldly pursuits and problems, the experience of incarceration becomes an opportunity for self-reflection, meditation, and transformation.

This is fertile ground for the force of genius to enter and instill this sense of purpose, to heal themselves and society. Imagine a younger you, 12 or 13 years old, growing up in the neighborhood you grew up in, attending the school you attended. Exposed to the same temptations you grew up around. Then imagine you have the option. A sober, transformed community member, who has done the work of clearing their heart of hatred, who is a contributing member of society, offers to mentor you. Or, there is a professionally trained therapist, fresh out of school, loaded with grand theories of psychology and the mechanics of how the human mind works. They offer unlimited theory to explain the pains and anxieties the younger you feels. Who do you want as your mentor?

Consider Caravaggio, a violent, easily offended man who lived more than 500 years ago and heard the call to paint. He was in and out of jail constantly for various troubles and, fleeing his home after an attempted murder charge, he continued to paint on the run. He painted Bible scenes, but his genius spoke differently than other painters of the day. His holy subjects were depicted with gritty realism, not unlike the inside of a prison or a dark alleyway; light rakes across the figures as if streaming in through a small, high opening. His models were people he met on the street. *Death of the*

Virgin used a drowned prostitute as the figure of Mary, and when the painting arrived at the Vatican, a scandalized Pope returned it.

Caravaggio's genius was the ability to draw in all his experience, all the darkness he'd seen and felt, and transform it with paint, no matter his circumstance. His life was often chaos, full of poverty and rage, but his canvases were carefully planned out. Why was this seemingly "crazy man" driven to such expression? His scenes were not "pretty"; they were powerful, heartbreaking, and heartfelt. His genius gave dignity to the silent lives of millions; in Caravaggio's eyes, a saint could resemble a common man. He converted anger, pain, isolation, and impulse into visions that now hang in the great churches and museums of the world. And no matter where he was or how fast he was running, he painted. He accepted what he was and where he was and he fully engaged with his calling. Caravaggio instinctively used alchemy, changing pain into beauty. He connected deeply with his genius and changed the course of Western art.

What Is Your Genius?

When we listen for the genius that lives inside us, we also bring out the wisdom of our community, of the people around us. When we look after what is beautiful inside of us, we bring out the beauty in others. Have you ever noticed that when you take a little more care of your appearance, suddenly everything around you seems to brighten in your presence? This same beautification works for your interior world, too. Heal yourself within and watch those around you transform. Soften your heart, soften your mind, allow yourself to see love around you, even in the midst of great injustice and harm, and you will notice the people around you begin to soften, too.

Reception is like a cellphone picking up a signal. The stronger the signal, the more clearly we hear the caller on the other end. Suddenly, where it was just a vague buzz with the indistinct words, you can hear the voice. Is it angry, is it sad, are they proud of

themselves, are they happier than usual? But this clarity starts from within. We get to determine how many bars of reception we have.

As we increase our reception, we find more resources. Resources can be fifty bucks in your pocket, but it can also be that day when you have a little more patience, where you don't get upset with the person who usually annoys you even though they are doing the same dumb thing they do every day. This is how we wake up the genius within. We answer the call inside of us. We pick up the phone call from our soul. Then we don't need to yell at anyone else. Our beaming, bright signal will draw them back home to themselves.

A Caution as You Enter This Path

Please be aware that what we are offering is a difficult path. You can continue in old ways, disavowing yourself by claiming superior spiritual ideals and praying desperately that wild forces inside of you do not reappear. This path asks you to name your pain and grief and rage, examine them, and become friends. On those terms, these feelings become your power—fierce, loyal, meeked.

In *Spirituality and Psychological Health*, Dr. Stephen Diamond writes:

Spirituality, secular or religious, is a serious enterprise with potentially perilous consequences. For all who dare venture into the true 'spiritual' realm—the passionate, shadowy domain of the daimons—must be psychologically and emotionally prepared to meet the metaphorical dark deities, forces, powers or spirits, abandoning all hope, as Dante forewarned, of finding only friendly, benign or benevolent ones. Many seekers, alas, are not. Herein lies a common recipe for spiritual disaster...

In the final analysis, the fundamental task of a secular spiritual psychology is to redeem (rather than cast out or exorcise) our devils and demons. It is inevitably both a psychological and spiritual venture. Psychotherapy such as this is one way of coming to terms with the daemonic. By bravely voicing our inner “demons”—symbolizing those unconscious tendencies we most fear, flee from, and hence, are obsessed or haunted by—we transmute them into helpful spiritual allies, in the form of newly liberated, life-giving psychic energy, for use in constructive activity. During this process, the strange paradox that many artists and spiritual savants embrace is discovered: that same devil so righteously run from and rejected turns out to be the redemptive source of vitality, creativity and authentic spirituality (Stephen Diamond, “Psychotherapy, Evil, and the Daimonic: Toward a Secular Spiritual Psychology,” in *Spirituality and Psychological Health*).

THE SOULMAKER MOVEMENT:

PRINCIPLES

1. Reunion: Wholeness Requires the Individual

You are not separate from life. There's a blueprint inside you that's yours alone, and your job is to live it fully. The more you live who you *actually* are, the more you'll feel connected—to nature, to others, to everything. Knowing yourself helps you know the world. And knowing the world helps you remember yourself. You're not here to escape the world. You're here to reunite it, by being fully you.

2. Alchemy: Convert the Smog of the World Into Oxygen

The world has pain. So do we. But if you stop seeing that pain as something outside you, and instead let it in, feel it, and love it—you start to change it. That's what alchemy is: taking something toxic and turning it into fuel. We do this by lighting up *within*. That's how we turn lead into gold. That's how we breathe clean air in a dirty world—by becoming the purifier.

3. Circulation: Fill What Is Empty and Empty What Is Full

A healthy system keeps energy moving. Just like the heart pumps blood, we're meant to give and receive, let go and take in, over and over. When something is stuck, we move it. When something's overflowing, we release it. That's how love moves—through circulation. This principle is simple: Keep the energy flowing. Stagnation is death. Circulation is life.

4. Cocreation: The Bee and the Flower Are Equally Benefitting

Everything in life is connected. The bee brings pollen and gets nectar. The flower gives nectar and gets to reproduce. They're both giving. Both receiving. That's cocreation. None of us exist on our own—we grow when we build together. I can't fully become who I'm meant to be unless you do, too. That's the deal. It's not charity. It's ecology.

5. Meeked-ness: The Meeked Shall Inherit the Earth

Meeked doesn't mean passive. It means powerful and trained. In ancient Greek, "meek" described a war horse—strong, disciplined, and unstoppable, but never broken. A meeked being still has their wildness, but now they serve something higher. They obey truth, not fear. When the strong are meeked, they can carry the weight of real love. They can stay open. They don't flinch from compassion. And that's why they inherit the earth.

6. Remembrance: Remember to Remember

You already know who you are. The work isn't to learn something new—it's to remember what's already inside. And when life gets hard, remember again. And again. We leave reminders for ourselves to come back—to our bodies, our breath, our knowing. To "remember to remember" means coming home to what's always been true.

7. Incarnation: Build the New That Makes the Old Obsolete

You weren't born to escape this world. You were born to bring something sacred down *into* it. Not to float off, but to build something real. You're here to bring spirit into form, to grow something wild and wise and alive. That's how the old world gets replaced—not by fighting it, but by creating something so true, it makes the old unnecessary.

8. Cultivation: Bring Forth What Is Within You

There's something in you that can save your life. But it has to be brought forward. If you bury it, it turns against you. If you bring it out, it heals you—and helps others. The Gospel of Thomas says it

straight: “If you bring forth what is within you, it will save you. If you do not, it will destroy you.” What’s inside you matters. Bring it.

9. Play: Potential Is Discovered in Play

Play isn’t a luxury—it’s how you find your gifts. We’re not here just to suffer and survive. We’re here to *move*, to experiment, to create. When you shift the stakes, when you let yourself play, you unlock something hidden. That’s how genius shows up. Not through pressure, but through curiosity, surprise, and joy, even in hard places.

10. Purposefulness: Your Pain Is Your Purpose

Pain isn’t a dead end—it’s a signal. It points to what matters. It shapes the path. You don’t just “heal” from it—you *use* it. What hurts most might be the doorway to your greatness. Pain turns to purpose when you let it speak. When you work with it. When you walk it all the way through.

11. Rehumanizing: We Are Inestimably Powerful

You already have what you need. No wizard behind the curtain. No outside savior. Just you—heart, mind, and courage already inside. The people cast out by society—the locked up, the written off—often hold the strongest medicine. When we rehumanize the ones who were dehumanized, we find power the world forgot it had.

12. Unconditionality: Freedom in All Conditions

Freedom isn’t about things being easy. It’s about how you show up *no matter what*. Can you find love, truth, and meaning even here? Even now? That’s unconditional. When you stop waiting for perfect conditions, you become unshakeable. Obstacles don’t block the path—they *are* the path.

13. Eudaimonia: Unique Blueprint Leads to Human Flourishing

You weren’t made to be a copy. You have a one-of-a-kind design. When you live it fully, you flourish—and the world gets something it’s missing. Like Einstein said: *A fish isn’t dumb because it can’t climb a tree*. We all need to be measured by *our* blueprint, not someone else’s. That’s how real value is found.

14. Synthesis: Genius Is Found in Synthesis

Genius isn't just one side—it's the union of opposites. Light and dark. Order and chaos. Law and spirit. When you can hold two truths that seem to clash, and let something *new* arise between them—that's synthesis. It's not compromise. It's alchemy. That's where breakthrough lives.

15. Pacify: Emanate a Spirit of Peace to a Turbulent World

When the world is shaking, peace starts from within. To pacify doesn't mean to avoid conflict. It means to radiate calm, to restore flow. To send in the energy that reconnects what's been torn. When your insides hold steady, others can feel it. That's what shifts the field.

16. Collective: The Next Leader Will Be the Collective

Leadership isn't about one hero at the top. The next leader is *us*. A group in right relationship—centered, awake, connected. When we act from that place, the collective itself becomes wise. Becomes trustworthy. That's how real change comes: from the field, not the figurehead.

17. Reception: True Power Is That of Reception

Real power isn't in the push. It's in the *taking in*. To receive fully, without flinching, without agenda—that's strength. The question isn't "will the world accept me?" It's "can I receive the world?" Pain, beauty, desire, truth—all of it. That's the power of reception. That's what changes everything.

ASSESSMENTS AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Now that you've read more about the program, our mission, and the Soulmaker principles, and before you dive into your journey, we'll pause to take a simple snapshot of where you are today. You will complete the **Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment** and the **Pre-Program Questionnaire**. You'll take these both now at the start of the program and again at the end of the program as the **Human Flourishing Post-Assessment** and the **Post-Program Questionnaire**. These aren't tests, they aren't about right or wrong. These assessment are to see how you changed after taking this program

The questions invite you to notice how you feel, think, and move through your days.

How to Complete These

- **At the start of the program:**
Fill out the **Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment** and **Pre-Program Questionnaire** and mail them back to us with your Week One assignment.
- **At the end of the program:**
Fill out the **Human Flourishing Post-Assessment** and **Post-Program Questionnaire** and mail them back to us with your Week Seven assignment.

Take your time. Breathe. Answer honestly.

The purpose of this reflection is to help you witness your own growth—how your inner landscape changes as you move through *The Art of Soulmaking*.

HUMAN FLOURISHING PRE-ASSESSMENT

Name:

Select your level of agreement with each statement
(only choose one answer)

1. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

3. Many days I wake up feeling discouraged about how I have lived my life.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

5. I believe I have discovered who I really am.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

- 6. My life is centered around a set of core beliefs that give meaning to my life.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

- 7. I can say that I have found my purpose in life.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

- 8. I believe I know what I was meant to do in life.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

- 9. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

- 10. I usually know what I should do because some actions just feel right to me.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

- 11. I find I get intensely involved in many of the things I do each day.**

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

12. I feel best when I'm doing something worth investing a great deal of effort in.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

13. When I engage in activities that involve my best potentials, I have this sense of really being alive.

STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNDECIDED
DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	

PRE-PROGRAM QUESTIONNAIRE

Name:

Select your level of agreement with each statement

(only choose one answer)

1. **On a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how much stress you feel on a day-to-day basis?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. **On a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how angry you feel on a day-to-day basis?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. **On a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how optimistic you are about your life?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. **On a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) how significant a role do drugs, alcohol, or other substances play in your life?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. **How frequently do you get into physical fights?**
(Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER

INFREQUENTLY

SOMETIMES

SOMEWHAT OFTEN

OFTEN

6. **How frequently do you get into verbal fights?**

(Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER	INFREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN	OFTEN	

7. **Do you ever feel depressed?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER	INFREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN	OFTEN	

8. **Do you ever have suicidal thoughts?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER	INFREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN	OFTEN	

9. **How often do you feel grateful for your life?**

(Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER	INFREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN	OFTEN	

MILESTONE ONE

This milestone signifies completing your introduction to the program and orientating to the Soulmaker Movement and our mission.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 1-39 of your workbook
- ii. Complete the Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment and Pre-Program Questionnaire
- iii. Write a letter introducing yourself and what called you to this program
- iv. Submit your assessment, questionnaire, and introduction letter

Mail To:

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

ONE ACRE OF LAND

To paraphrase writer Anne Lamott, imagine that every newborn is given an acre of land. That acre represents what they will grow and nurture in this life; except this acre is your soul. You can grow what you love—tomatoes, watermelon, spinach, and apples—or you can allow weeds to choke out the body-building foods, leaving you nothing but bitter leaves and poisonous berries.

There's a gate on one side of your acre. You get to choose who gets inside and who must stay out; that is a huge part of life. Who are you letting inside? Once in, what do they do? Are they creators or destroyers? This choice is as important as the plants you put in your dirt.

Tend your acre with great care. Touch the soil with your hands. Is it hydrated and well tilled? Does it feel dry, deserted? Either way, this is your plot. You only have one. Value, self-satisfaction, and purpose all grow from this acre. Ultimately, that's what you cultivate.

How to Work Your Acre: Soulmaking Daily Practice

Soulmaking Daily Practice is your daily tending to your soil. This is your base; everything grows from here. The care and attention you put inside determines what comes out of you. Soulmaking Daily Practice can be enjoyable at times, something you look forward to. Other days, it may seem like a drag. This is no different than any other kind of mastery; they all involve dedication.

Monks sit in meditation daily, no matter their mood. NBA players practice countless layups and pivots before they take it

Soulmaking Daily Practice is the daily tending of your inner world, a ritual that strengthens your foundation and reveals deeper truths. Some days it flows with ease, other days it's a challenge—but mastery comes through consistency, whether in meditation, yoga, or writing.

outside. Both will tell you, the less you want to do it, the more you need to. They practice their genius relentlessly. They bring to practice their problems, frustrations, pain. Their practice becomes a sacred space that is only theirs, where slowly they begin to trust.

Practice is about disrupting autopilot. This precious time opens you to receive the deeper truths often masked by your own negative thought loops, intense emotions, and/or other people's comments. You will come to look forward to the repetitive nature, the ritual of your morning, and receiving its fresh energy and new insights into you and your life.

In this section, you will find instructions for yoga, your Daily Soul Writing, and seated meditation. The yoga postures, or asanas, help invigorate your body and provide energy for the day. Daily Soul Writing helps you get to know yourself on a deeper level, as you will often discover things you did not expect. Life is a practice. To gain skill at anything, you must do it and then do it again, over and over, to gain confidence and mastery. The more skillful you become, the more life you live. Commit to this practice just as you would a fitness regime because that's what it is, a workout to strengthen your soul. Meditation reduces stress, develops concentration, and opens you to connect with your own deeper wisdom and creativity.

Each practice can stand alone, but we strongly recommend that you commit to at least one hour per day. Here is a possible structure:

1. 20 minutes of yoga
2. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing
3. 20 minutes of seated meditation

Yoga

The main thing about yoga is to remember to listen to your body above all else. If something is painful, ease up. If something feels great and you want to go deeper, feel free. The body often opens when we relax, and constricts when we push.

One round of Sun Salutations is a series of twelve yoga poses that flow together in coordination with the breath. Their purpose is

"The nature of yoga is to shine the light of awareness into the darkest corners of the body."

~JASON CRANDELL

Yoga is about listening to your body, moving with breath, and finding your own rhythm. Sun Salutations warm the body, build awareness, and prepare the mind for stillness—each movement an invitation to presence, each breath a connection to something deeper.

to warm up the body at the beginning of yoga class before practicing individual poses. Beginning students typically take 10 minutes to do three rounds of Sun Salutations, which leaves 10 minutes for relaxation at the end. The final relaxation is as important as the Sun Salutations. After you have learned this basic series, we'll offer more variations in later courses. Most importantly, have fun!

To start, come to a comfortable, cross-legged seated position. Place a pillow or a rolled-up blanket or sweatshirt underneath your hips. This way the hips are higher than the ankles and you can sit more comfortably. Roll your pelvis slightly forward so you can ground down through the front of your sitz bones—the ones you sit on at the base of your pelvis. Hands can rest comfortably on the knees, shoulders relaxed, chin parallel to the floor. Close the eyes and take a couple of deep breaths here. Typical yoga breathing is in through the nose and out through the nose. As you breathe deeply into the abdomen, let the belly expand. Then as you exhale, draw the belly button in toward your spine. Many of us breathe the opposite of this pattern, so don't worry if it takes some practice to get it.



Begin standing with feet parallel, hip-width's distance apart. Knees above ankles. Hips above knees. Shoulders above hips. Rock back and forth until you find your center from front to back. Shift your weight side to side until you find your weight equally

distributed between right and left. Roll your shoulders back and down. Hands by your sides. Palms can be facing forward. Chin parallel to the ground. Imagine someone is pulling a string out of the crown of your head, lengthening your spine.

1. Inhale. Then as you exhale, bring your palms together in front of your chest.



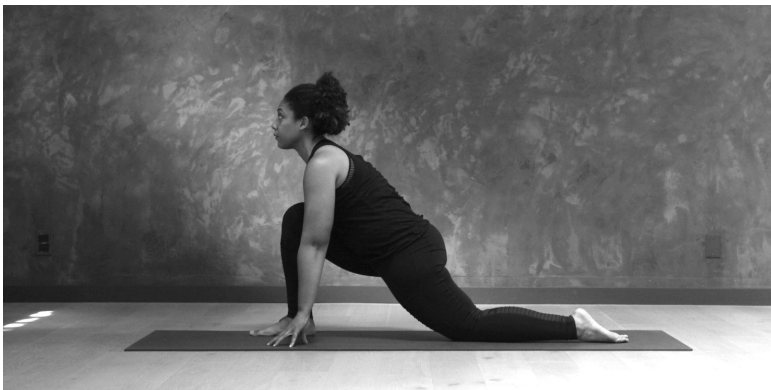
2. Inhale extend your arms out front and move them up alongside the ears, palms facing each other. Take a gentle backward bend from just beneath the shoulders.



3. Exhale hinging forward into the **Standing Forward Fold** with a flat back releasing and relaxing over the legs. Let the spine lengthen and the head hang. You can nod the head yes, shake the head no, relaxing and releasing all the muscles in the back of the neck. Place your hands on either side of the feet, fingertips in line with the toe tips. Bend your knees, if you need to, to get the palms flat on the floor.



4. Inhale. Stretch the left leg far back and come into **Low Lunge**. Left knee comes down to the floor. Release the top of the left foot on the floor. Make sure the right knee stays directly above the right ankle. Your front shin is perpendicular to the floor. If the knee goes past the front ankle, it can put too much stress on the knee joint. You can come up onto the fingertips. Lengthen out the back of the neck. Drop the pelvis down and stretch. (If you have any knee pain, place a blanket or pillow underneath that back knee.)



5. Exhale to move into **Downward Facing Dog** (**Down Dog** for short). If you have a four-legged friend, you've probably seen them do this! Weight is distributed evenly between hands and feet. If you want to, take a few breaths here. You can alternate bending one knee and stretching the arch of that foot and then straightening it when you bend the other knee and stretch the opposite arch. Do this a few times. Bring your chest closer to the floor. Keep ears in between upper arms. Bend your knees and tilt the sitz bones — those are the ones you sit on at the base of your pelvis — up toward the sky. If at any point Down Dog becomes too intense, you can: 1) put your forearms and elbows down on the ground instead of just your hands, or 2) come down and rest in **Child's Pose** (not pictured). To rest in Child's Pose, drop your knees, shins and tops of the feet down to the floor and sit back on your heels with your arms stretching out in front of you. Your forehead rests on the ground. (Come back to Down Dog to transition into the next pose.)



6. Bring knees down to the floor, then chest down, then chin down. Keep the pelvis slightly raised and toes tucked under. Elbows are in close to the sides of the body.



7. Press through the toes and slide the torso along the floor until the legs are straight. Inhale to come into **Baby Cobra**. Release the tops of the feet onto the floor. There is no weight in the palms. The head, neck and chest are slightly lifting off the ground. Bring your awareness to your upper back. Imagine the shoulder blades are sliding down your back toward the base of your spine. Elbows stay in close to the body. Back of the neck is long. Look up with the eyes.



8. Tuck the toes, press into the palms, lift the hips, and exhale into **Down Dog**.



9. Inhale. Bring left foot forward in between the hands to come into **Low Lunge** on the left side. Let the right knee rest on the floor. (Again, if you have any knee pain, place a blanket or pillow underneath that back knee.) Make sure the left knee stays directly above the left ankle. Drop your pelvis down while you lengthen your spine.



10. Exhale. Bring the right foot forward to meet the left and come into the **Standing Forward Fold**. Release and relax the head and the neck. Imagine that your head is heavy like a bowling ball and completely let it go.



11. Inhale. Bring your arms up alongside your head. Hinge up with a flat back. Bend your knees, if you need to, to protect your lower back. Take a gentle backward bend at the top of the inhalation from just beneath the shoulders.



- 12.** Exhale. Palms together in front of the heart. Congratulations! You just completed your first round of Sun Salutations!



Now release the hands to the sides. Feet remain hip distance apart. Close the eyes and observe the effects of your first round of Sun Salutations. Your heart might be beating slightly faster than before, your breath might have changed in some way, or you may feel a bit warmer. You may not notice anything at all. And that's okay, too!

Repeat the Sun Salutation series (poses 1-12) two more times. With practice, you will get the movement and breath pattern down and start to feel your own flow.

Yoga is different from exercise. It is consciously moving with your breath and becoming aware of how you feel in each moment. Three rounds of Sun Salutations take about ten minutes and are a great way to start the day.

Most importantly, after you finish all three rounds of Sun Salutations, lie down on your back for Final Relaxation. Feet are about 2-3 feet apart. Palms are facing up and about a foot away from the sides of the body. Set a timer for ten minutes, close the

eyes, and relax here. This lets the body integrate the benefits from the Sun Salutations.

Modification: If you have any lower back pain, bend your knees up and place your feet flat on the floor. Separate your feet wider than your hips and let your knees rest against each other. Close the eyes. You can do the Final Relaxation Pose with your knees bent.

Daily Soul Writing

Once your body is open and warm from the yoga, take out a pad of paper and spend twenty minutes writing. Nothing is off-limits; this letter is for you and you alone.

Daily Soul Writing is your soul's canon; you are writing a doctrine on the way your soul wants to express. This is the place where you begin to meet yourself, and it's a conversation, one which will continue your entire life. This is you speaking to your soul, and your soul speaking back to you.

This is not about receiving guidance from High Above; this is about sinking in, speaking to the small, still animal inside of you. Guide the writing and let the writing guide you. This is what your soul wants to express. Like prayer, soulmaking is a conversation and, as one Rabbi put it, "In prayer, God is a verb." Like all communication, if one speaks and no one is listening, it's not communication; it's noise. The connection between two or more, the golden thread that connects us all, of speaking and listening, listening and speaking, cannot be broken.

Other verbs such as loving, sharing, dancing, and hugging are the same. Without the golden thread connecting two humans, the action—as well as the verb that describes it—no longer exists. There is no hug, no love, no God without the verb.

All of life is a verb because of the need to connect our thread to another soul. In this way, prayer becomes God-ing. In human relationships, one person may be wife-ing while the other is husband-ing. We are all verbs, Joan-ing and Mark-ing our way through the world, connected and in need of one another. As you

Daily Soul Writing is an ongoing conversation between you and your soul, a place to listen deeply and speak freely. Through writing, you turn over your inner "soil," uncovering desires, releasing what no longer serves you, and discovering the thread that connects you to yourself and others.

"If it'll keep my heart soft, break my heart every day."

~WARSAN SHIRE

"God speaks in the silence of the heart, and we listen. And then we speak to God from the fullness of our heart and God listens. And this listening and this speaking is what prayer is meant to be."

~MOTHER TERESA

There's a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn't change.

~WILLIAM STAFFORD, *THE WAY IT IS*

"The whole purpose of automatic writing is to access guidance from your Soul, especially if you struggle to hear it in daily life."

~ALETHEIA LUNA

Joan and Mark, you learn through the connection that we are all the same thing.

When Mother Teresa prayed, she spoke and she listened. As you develop in your soulmaking, you'll sit down to write and ideas, emotions, and memories will come to you, seemingly from nowhere.

Write it all down, and as your inner castle forms, shapes become clearer. Each morning, when you take up your writing, you meet your soul again in a neverending conversation. As your journey goes deeper, you can revisit your younger "soulmaking self" and feel how far you've come...as well as how far you'd like to go.

Your one acre of land, your soul, the very dirt that makes you who you are, is turned over and aerated each day as you write. In this way, you see, and more importantly, feel yourself, your energy, your desires, your dreams. You can care for the abandoned spaces within yourself and release what no longer serves you. In this way, day by day, we make the soul and move toward unconditional freedom, no matter the circumstances in which we may find ourselves.

Below are different exercises that will help you mine the gold inside: your genius, your soul. Use some and not others; once again, this is about choice and what is most effective for you. Sit down and start with this simple question: What wants to be heard and what wants to be said?

Dreams

A dream can be tricky, but the key is to pay attention to the different types of dreams you have. Some have messages, lessons, memories, premonitions, themes, or abstractions, and others may be a random expression of your subconscious. The more you pay attention, the more interesting you will find them. If you relive a certain memory, note it and how it may change in your mind as you dream it. Repetitive dreams of falling often represent fear; dreams of forgetting to wear clothes can represent insecurity. If you have a feeling upon waking, note that as well.

When you wake up, write about your dream. You can answer the following questions: What part of me could this dream be speaking for?

- What emotion lingers after I wake?
- Is there an image or symbol that feels alive?

WRITING EXERCISE

The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. He has spent his life teaching about peace, kindness, and how to live with a good heart. Many people around the world look to his words for guidance when life feels hard or confusing. He teaches that happiness doesn't come from money or power but from compassion—caring for yourself and others.

Below are some of his short sayings, or teachings, from the book *The Art of Happiness, Dalai Lama Quotes*, by Vo Trong Nghia. Each one can show us something about how to live, how to let go of anger, or how to find peace inside.

1. "Anger is the ultimate destroyer of your own peace of mind."
2. "Don't ever mistake my silence for ignorance, my calmness for acceptance or my kindness for weakness. Compassion and tolerance are not a sign of weakness, but a sign of strength."
3. "As you breathe in, cherish yourself. As you breathe out, cherish all Beings."
4. "Too much self-centered attitude, you see, brings, you see, isolation. Result: loneliness, fear, anger. The extreme self-centered attitude is the source of suffering."
5. "Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."
6. "There is a saying in Tibetan, 'Tragedy should be utilised as a source of strength.' No matter what sort of difficulties, how painful the experience is, if we lose our hope, that's our real disaster."

Choose one of the above quotes and answer the following questions.

What do you see about your own life in one of these quotes?

Do you feel inspired?

Does it show you a habit you have that you could break?

Does one of these quotes give you insight into something you have wrestled with and you now see an answer?

Community Reflection (Loving Tree)

Sometimes it's hard to see ourselves clearly, so it helps to surround ourselves with people we trust who can remind us of who we really are or help translate/interpret our experiences when we are bogged down and can't see the way.

The Himba tribe of southern Africa has a unique method of reminding tribe members of who they are: They sing the person's song back to them.

The Himba are one of the few people who count the birthdate of a child not from the day they are born or conceived but the day the mother decides to have the child. When she decides, she goes off and sits under a tree, by herself, and listens until she can hear the song of the child who wants to come. And after she's heard the song of this child, she comes back to the man who will be the child's father and teaches him the song. When they make love to physically conceive the child, they sing the song of the child as a way of inviting him/her into the world.

When she becomes pregnant, the mother teaches that child's song to the midwives and the old women of the village, so that when the child is born, the old women and the family gather around the child and sing their song to welcome them. As the child grows up, other villagers are taught the child's song. If the child falls, or gets hurt, someone picks them up and sings them their song. When the child does something wonderful or passes through the rites of puberty, the people of the village honor the child by singing their song.

One other occasion calls for the "child's song" to be sung. If a tribesman or tribeswoman commits a crime or something that is against the Himba social norms, the villagers call them into the

"Stress is the gift that alerts you to your asleepness. Feelings like anger or sadness exist only to alert you to the fact that you're believing your own stories."

~BYRON KATIE

center of the village, and the community forms a circle around them. Then they sing their birth song to them.

The Himba view this moment as a correction, not as a punishment, but as love and remembrance of identity. For when you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another. In marriage, the songs of the man and the woman are sung together. And finally, when the Himba tribesman/tribeswoman is lying in their bed, ready to die, all the villagers who know their song come and sing—for the last time, that person's song.

Do you have a song? What is it? How does it tell us who you are? Does your friend have a song? What is it? Have you ever sung each other's song by way of greeting? Try it.

Stress

"Feeling stressed" is a catch-all term that means nothing except you cannot express how and what you feel; it's all a wall of anger and exhaustion. Your soul is on lockdown and you feel almost nothing but a free-floating unsourced anger.

Your physical being is screaming at you and if you don't listen, injury to your body, mind, and spirit will result. One of the reasons for Soulmaking Daily Practice is it creates a sense of relaxation and peace to start your day; it is like money in the bank for when stress comes.

If you feel "stressed," what exactly are the feelings? What do you believe to be the underlying reason? Write about it.

Writing and Drawing

Writing and drawing are essential tools in exploring your own soul. You dive down and let what comes come, then you'll rise refreshed, rejuvenated, and renewed. Renowned psychiatrist Carl Jung asked his patients to make their own books, drawing and journaling and scribbling down ideas and random thoughts. He encouraged them to make their own archetypes; one's mother could be The Destroyer or The Rescuer while a father can be The Punisher or The Protector.

"I should advise you to put it all down as beautifully as you can. It will seem as if you were making the visions banal—but then you need to do that—then you are freed from the power of them... Then when these things are in some precious book you can go to the book and turn over the pages and for you it will be your church—your cathedral—the silent places of your spirit where you will find renewal. If anyone tells you that it is morbid or neurotic and you listen to them—then you will lose your soul—for in that book is your soul."

~ANALYSIS NOTEBOOKS,
C. G. JUNG QUOTED IN
THE RED BOOK, LIBER NOVUS

"Which we call libido, and whose nature it is to bring forth the useful and the harmful, the good and the bad."

~CARL JUNG; CW 5;
SYMBOLS OF TRANSFORMATION

In this way, they told of their soul's passage, or *nekyia*, through the psychic underworld, in a therapeutic practice that neutralized negative thoughts and traumatic memories.

Visions During Meditation

Meditating is a powerful way to experience what has been referred to as the mystical experience. One common mystical experience involves tuning into visions or spontaneous names while you're meditating. During meditation, an entire scene drops into your mind, seemingly out of nowhere, or you might hear words or names. These visions or names might be of your current spirit guide or messages from your soul.

Mystical experiences are so powerful, they have changed the course of human history. They unleash creative energies and often provide solutions effortlessly to some of life's greatest challenges. They are without end. The more you meditate, the more you have. A master of meditation says, "Let me sit with it." And he or she means just that. By simply being still and clearing the mind, you invite a miraculous world in. When you "sit with it," what do you hear and see?

Desire

Desires are your soul speaking to you, telling you what it wants. You may crave intimacy or chocolate cake. Desires in and of themselves are beyond "good" and "bad": They just are. Accepting you have them is not the same as acting upon them, and only you know what is "good" or "bad" for your soul.

It's your acre of land, remember?

Do you feel a specific desire(s)? Write about it/them.

Meditation

As far as we know, meditation has been practiced for at least 2,500 years. Why? As great a gift as it is to be able to think as human beings do, thinking alone cannot make a person whole. In truth, thinking often gets in the way of knowing our whole selves. And at worst, thinking can feel like sheer torture.

Sometimes, we need a break. This is the simplest reason to meditate. But thinking is a natural process. No matter how hard you try, you can't just stop thinking. It can't be willed away any more than you can will away breathing.

So we find another way. We learn to watch our thoughts rather than getting ourselves tangled up in them. As someone chooses to develop a practice of sitting quietly, breathing and watching her own thinking, when she is ready, a change will begin to occur.

It may start slowly as her river of thoughts begins to slow. And then it may become clearer, that while you have been watching the mud and the rocks and debris wash by, you have been missing something else in the stream of thoughts, something that can only be seen as the waters still, and it is glittering like gold at the bottom.

Ultimately, meditation is for that, to help you see clearly and come to realize that the gold in the river is You.

Find a quiet place. If you can't find a quiet place, find the quietest place you can. If you have a way to track the time, that will be helpful.

There are two options for sitting.

One is on a chair with your feet flat on the floor.

The other is to get a pillow (or zafu) and find a place on the floor or a bed where you can sit cross-legged.

You will want to sit on the edge of the pillow, which may need folding in half for more height to allow for the slight natural curve at the base of your spine. This is what's called a "straight back." But everyone's body is different, so everyone has different needs for creating the right position to sit.

It takes a little experimenting.

Meditation gives the thinking mind a rest, allowing you to witness yourself without judgment or interference. As thoughts settle like snow in a globe, you begin to see what has always been there—your own quiet, steady brilliance.

"Meditation does not itself accomplish the tasks of life but provides spaciousness, bringing the great background near, so that whatever we do, rising in the quiet, has force and beauty. In meditation, we take time, sit down, watch, while the silence accumulates—which is how the spirit gathers to a vessel the soul has prepared."

~JOHN TARRANT

You sit down all the time; what's the difference with this? To start with, instead of sitting down, you might try sitting up. But instead of making a command of yourself, try making a request. Can I grow taller inside myself? (What does that feel like?) Can I draw air into my body more easily when I sit up this way? Or that? Does my spine feel more supportive when it's in alignment with my head and my hips?

If you're sitting on a chair, you may find that you need to sit forward a bit to get your feet flat on the ground and keep your back fairly straight. When seated either on a chair or the floor, tilt the top of your pelvis forward slightly. This allows you to ground down through the front of the sitz bones—named for the bones you actually sit on when you sit in proper alignment.

If you're sitting cross-legged on a blanket, you might need to put some extra cushioning like a sweatshirt or towel under each knee. Sitting cross-legged, you may think of your knees and pelvis as creating a triangular base above which the spine can balance. But you'll find out for yourself what gives you the greatest stability and ease as a position.

So now you're sitting.

These are some questions you might want to ask yourself. You're looking for what's really happening with your body, not what you think should be happening. And if you can't maintain the sitting-up posture for long, don't worry about it. Move to a more comfortable position and come back to sitting more upright when you're ready.

Once you're sitting, you probably want to close your eyes so you won't be distracted by what's outside you. Now turn your attention to your breathing. You don't have to do anything about it, just watch what it's doing. Is it fast? Slow? Ragged? Smooth? Can you watch your breath without trying to change it in any way at all? It may change itself but see if you can watch for that to happen. Or not.

This is the soft wild animal of yourself you're watching, and she's doing what she does all the time quite well, without your attention. But pay attention now. Keep watching your breath.

Thinking often stands in the way of quieting the mind, criticizing or judging how and what you're doing. And it's okay. Thinking is okay. But in this practice, thinking is not the boss.

So to keep the thinking part of yourself occupied, you might want to try counting your breaths—from one to ten. That's all. You reach ten and start over at one. Sometimes this is enough to satisfy your thinking mind. Sometimes you'll find it wanders

off somewhere else and you lose track of the breaths you were counting. That's fine. Just start over at one. You can always go back to one. All you want to do is to keep sitting.

You may find it relaxing. You may find it dull as dirt. However you find it now, just know that it will change. And try not to forget that thinking itself doesn't want to be quieted. Thinking will want to get back to its usual chatter and position of calling all the shots. (It really doesn't always know what's good for it.) But if you make a firm decision to keep sitting, no matter what your thoughts seem to say, you may find at some point that you've learned to grow taller and quieter inside. And just that is a relief.

Start with ten minutes. Eyes closed. Watching your breath. Ten minutes is often enough time to start with. Within ten minutes, you may begin to sense that your mind is like one of those little snow globes, and as you sit, it will be like watching the snow settle to the floor. That's great.

When the ten minutes becomes easier, you can increase your sitting to fifteen minutes. Notice the difference in your mind and body doing that. And when that becomes comfortable, try sitting for twenty minutes. Don't skip straight to fifteen or twenty minutes to start. Take your time. You want to notice the differences along the way.

Practice is key, but the opportunities for finding authentic freedom inside increase as you come to rest in more and more moments of deepening quiet. There is more to this, but this is where it begins.

Try to sit for ten minutes at first. This is a good place to begin meditating.

The gold is inside—here, inside *you*.

MILESTONE TWO

We suggest daily practices because that's the best way to build a habit, but don't be discouraged if you miss a day or two. As with any new skill, it's hardest at the beginning, and the days you may not want to show up for your practices are likely the ones you need them most. Have compassion and kindness toward yourself as you embark on this journey of daily practices.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 41-61 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 10 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Submit a letter about how practices are going and what you're noticing

Mail To:

Unconditional Freedom Project
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THE HIDDEN MASTER

LESSON 1:

Basic Goodness

The mind is a powerful warden. The body, our soul, our refuge and salvation, can often seem difficult to enter. Some have left themselves so long ago, they forgot that home is within. Looking for your own self-worth from the outside world, energy and talents are aimed at continuing to elicit someone, or something, to say *yes, you are good*. You live in a state of sinking, hopping from inflated life raft to life raft as people affirm to you your value. You have grown accustomed to hanging onto these rafts, to hearing the air slowly escape and the dark water slowly pulling you down. This is what we consider hell: living locked out of ourselves.

This pattern continues. If it is not a good deed, it is the right job. You will be happy when you find the right job. It is the perfect partner, the perfect family. Everything; anything but you.

A woman sits in her prison cell. She looks at her clothes; she did not choose these clothes. She looks at her room; small, shared, with a heavy steel door. The door reminds her that it opens not on her command, but on others'. The door reminds her that her family, her friends, may never walk into this room she is in now. This is hers alone to navigate. She walks to the cafeteria to eat; she did not pick this meal. Everywhere she looks, she sees messages that she is not to be trusted with choice because of what she did.

When you've lost track of your innate goodness, everything you experience gets measured up against, "Does this make me good or does this make me bad?" This is why we grasp at success and drown in failure. We strive for that brief "pleasing" and "winning"

Start with the challenging idea that you are perfect and were perfectly created for love. This lesson flows through every other lesson in the soulmaker's progress. You may feel uncomfortable at first because of other programming you've received. Let's melt through that and get to love.

"The first guy I met in prison told me I could sit in my cell and slowly stagnate and go insane like the vast majority of the people in solitary, OR I could turn my cell into a monastery and continue to grow, evolve, and learn."

~DAMIEN ECHOLS, ACTOR,
PRODUCER AND FORMER
DEATH ROW INMATE

"The Shamans say that being a medicine man begins by falling into the power of the demons; The one who pulls out of the dark place becomes the medicine man, and the one who stays in it is the sick person."

~JOAN HALIFAX, AMERICAN ZEN
BUDDHIST TEACHER

feeling at the cost of inner peace and a clean conscience. Who are you pleasing? What do you win?

In the hardest of times, how do you remember that what is inside of you is made of Good? When everywhere you look you are reminded of hurt, and the reminder of hurt instills a sense of shame. The shame that hurt pierces through, the "I did something wrong," that turns to "I am something wrong."

Facing what seems like insurmountable challenges, you may have already given up the idea of your life having value or even being able to enjoy it. You might even feel you live beyond redemption; you feel the cause of "you" is lost.

We weren't born with self-hatred. Recount a time when you felt value. It probably involved other people; it probably involved you feeling in some way connected to something greater than yourself—a family, a community of friends, a school, co-workers, a sense of purpose. The feeling of self-worth was tied to your sense of being connected and of belonging to something other than yourself. At once you felt both fulfilled personally and that you had a place. This is not an idea, or something you gain. It's a human experience to which we all have a claim.

There is this place. Beyond, there is a field, where right and wrong do not exist. This is where we ask you to meet us. There is a beauty indescribable when you break through the belief that you must earn your way. There is such a thing as real wealth, and that is wealth of the soul. It is a wealth that says you do not live paycheck to paycheck of your last good deed, or of the last person who smiled at you and acknowledged you as human. This wealth is something you were endowed with when you came onto this earth. It is not a wealth you earn; it is a wealth you remember. And we are here to walk you home.

This is all to say, value is not a man-made concept. An innocent place lives inside you and it never changes no matter what; it's a quality that no one can take away, not even you. Receiving and giving love exists in every heart beating beneath every ribcage; there's nothing you could do or say to change that.

After you accept your basic goodness, you will still feel pain. Life continues to go on, on life's terms. But you do approach the pain differently. You'll shift away from running from it and come to see it as the sign that more awakening is near. The sting doesn't lessen, but the experience of the sting changes with this new sense of purpose to it. Your experience of pain becomes a part of your path toward your genius, your higher purpose.

Whatever your injuries, this course is about shifting your mind so you begin to see problems and difficult emotions in your life as opportunities to deepen your experience of your life, to carve out more of the emotional scar tissue. Stop performing for others and work on building a relationship with yourself and your Higher Power, your Creator, your God.

God as You Understand God

You decide what God is for you. You decide what word you use, too. God, Spirit, Higher Power, Universe, Divine Order, Great Mystery. This course is secular; we use the term God, for simplicity. You get to define God for yourself just as you get to write the story of your own life.

Soulmaking requires you to believe that something greater than you decides your worth, your value; that you're here because you're supposed to be here. In soulmaking, the moment you decide you don't have worth or do have worth is a Godless moment; you do not have the power to make that call. God decides, and God believes in you.

It's not about solving the problems that the world, or your mind, present. That's just another version of you *doing* better, you twisting yourself in knots and jumping for the approval of others. Your sense of self-worth is about shifting your consciousness entirely, to one rooted in your basic goodness. Then you offer yourself to the situations you experience instead of needing "to get something" from them.

Once you've touched this freedom and flexibility in your mind, nothing else will do. There's an old saying that: "Once you've had

one taste of the divine, nothing else will do and you will do anything to get it.” You’ve exited the enslavement of proving yourself to others. You can inhale deep into your belly, long, slow breaths. You can savor air, you can savor your body nourishing from your breath. The simple becomes profound.

We believe that, for reasons only God understands, prison is a part of your spiritual path. We are here to teach you how to get “into” your life, how to get you rooted so deeply into the reality of your present experience, you are able to sink below or rise above the daily “fight” of life and tap into a new way of living centered in the heart. In this new way, your focus remains to find the presence of love everywhere, even while incarcerated. We believe this is what God intends for all of us.

The first step is to choose to suspend disbelief, in the name of discovering and experiencing this new way. The choice is to suspend fighting your current circumstances in order to settle into your present life, and yourself, to find out why you are here. We assert that by looking within yourself, you will always only see good because that’s what’s there.

Lesson 1 Integration Exercises

Each day, after you've finished your Soulmaking Daily Practice, take a question below and write your answer. Take as much time and space as you desire.

Your Beliefs

- ▣ What do I have faith in and how does my faith guide my decisions about my life now?

- ▣ How can my faith guide me in my prison experience?

- ▣ What's something of value I can offer to the people around me?

- ▣ Who do I love? When I think about who I love, how does that love strengthen me?

Seeking Approval from Others

- ▣ What are three limiting beliefs I still have?

- ▣ In what ways do I look to others for approval, rather than believing in myself as my own authority?

- ▣ When have I allowed others to speak negatively about me and not stood up? What was I afraid would happen if I did?

- ▣ Where was I unwilling to speak up and pretend that I could or would change when a limiting cultural norm was projected on me?

- ▣ Where did I betray myself—my beliefs or my purpose—by acting out of reactivity? What was the cost?

Giving in to Shame-Based Fear

- ▣ Why did I doubt what I knew to be true for me?
- ▣ Why did I hold myself to a lower standard than I deserved?
- ▣ Where could I have contributed something of value but held back because I wouldn't take a stand?

MILESTONE THREE

Milestone Three signifies your completion of Lesson One.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 62-71 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 10 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 1 Integration Exercises

TURN PAIN INTO MEDICINE

LESSON 2:

Defining the Challenge

Most people, whether in prison or on the outside, live inside a “cell.” Theirs may not be made of metal, but they have locked their thoughts and emotions and very lives up, living as was once described, “in quiet desperation.”

It is the woman with the perfect house, the perfect husband, and the perfect kids. She smiles as she walks through the grocery store, smiles as she passes her neighbors’ home. She gets home and she is exhausted. She woke up not knowing if she could make it through the day smiling, but she did. She doesn’t know if she can tomorrow. Each day gets harder.

Sometimes she notices how hard it is; other times, she’s forgotten. Her husband, growing slightly distant, wants to reach her, but can’t. He doesn’t know how. He makes more money to remodel their house; he spends more time with the kids. She can’t shake the unhappiness, the haunted feeling of another life she was meant to live. This is a prison, too.

We don’t mean to minimize your experience in prison, but we want you to understand the mechanics of what we call suffering. Suffering exists regardless of your circumstances. The physical place doesn’t matter. Suffering is most characterized by the belief, “If I get ____, then I will be happy.” It is the lack of presence in today’s reality. More specifically, it is the refusal to accept today, until your demands are met. “I will be happy when I get out.”

Learn to convert pain’s poison into the antidote: creativity. By staying with uncomfortable or hurtful feelings, you burn out the negative energy, the charge. We’ll show you how to do it so that you may let go of what does not serve you.

“What is required of us is that we love the difficult and learn to deal with it. In the difficult are the friendly forces, the hands that work on us. Right in the difficult we must have our joys, our happiness, our dreams: there against the depth of this background, they stand out, there for the first time we see how beautiful they are.”

~RAINER MARIA RILKE,
GERMAN POET AND NOVELIST

“I will be happy when my husband comes back.” “I will be happy when my health improves.” This is suffering. In order to hide from pain and not face feelings, people go to great lengths to avoid confronting this suffering. At its worst, they go dead inside, refusing to experience the dynamism and pleasure of being human. The only way to experience unconditional freedom—and we mean unconditional—is to look into the depth of your emotions and voices of your soul and to feel them. Acceptance is what sets you free.

Every human being experiences pain. It could be physical pain from accidents, injuries, or abuse. Emotional pain from moments of being hurt or feeling rejected, abandoned, or betrayed. Perhaps a sense of emotional guilt and shame snake through you, dark persistent feelings that you failed at life or let people down.

Few have the tools to actually deal with it. You can act out against it; reject it and live in exhausting denial; avoid and numb it with drugs or alcohol or junk food; or, worst of all, try to fix it, which is definitely above your pay grade in life. Only God “fixes” the world. You must stay in your body, closer to home.

This pain is moving as a ghost would move through your own life. At its worst, things feel empty, pointless, lacking; you cannot find meaning. You feel resigned to live this way; no hope of enjoyment, just an endless sense of going through the motions.

In Far Eastern cultures like China, Vietnam, and India, a Hungry Ghost is depicted as a spirit with a bloated stomach and a throat so narrow that eating is incredibly painful or impossible. It represents a hunger that cannot be fed, the lingering ghost of a tangible, satiable hunger. The Ghost can never be gratified by any amount of consumption. Think of the “Ghost” as the poor kid who could never be rich enough as an adult; a first-generation American who never feels American enough; or an ex-lover wandering the world looking to recreate an old childhood dynamic; never able to meet someone as they are. Their stomachs will never fill.

People spend their entire lives hiding from pain. Then they find others who also hide, and they go on hiding from pain together. False personas meet false personas, but no real intimacy

is ever created. They form common bonds as victims to other people or institutions. Think of the group of men who sit in a bar grumbling about their jobs, sharing with certainty their great complaints, but each individually never improving his life. They live with chronic complaints.

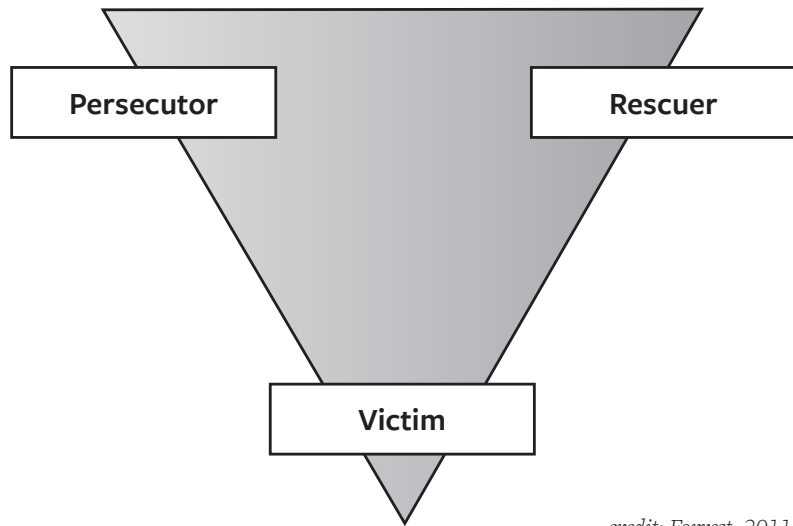
Or instead, they bond around a common enemy, creating connection through complaint and counteraggression. Or perhaps, they are the “nice ones,” the ones there for support, shaking their heads at the carelessness of others. The group of the “nice ones” may feel commonality, but no one ever feels truly reached. No person gets to be truly known. Whole lives, families, and organizations are built in this way.

Harvesting is a term used for gathering food, from plants to fish and meat. You “harvest” vegetables from plants or shoot a deer in order to harvest its meat. In a larger sense, you can gather anything to add to your life, but if you cannot harvest your own pain, you will be buried by it. It will grow to define you. Pain and discomfort give you impulse to take action, but taking action distracts you from the real work of identifying and knowing the pain enough that it will reveal its secrets to you. Essentially our “doing,” our endless busy-ness, chatter, and diversions, keep us from our “being.”

Drama Triangle

Our thoughts determine the quality of our life experience. Some of our thoughts have been with us since the beginning—many were inherited from our family members. These are our core beliefs, which could easily be called our unquestioned assumptions. “Unquestioned,” yet we let them define us and our world. We let these beliefs create our story about who we are and what we can expect from the world.

Victimhood snakes through the consciousness of many, squeezing and squeezing the life out of them; victimhood feels more like the snake than anything Adam and Eve encountered. Its shape might surprise you. The head of this snake is fear, the fear



credit: Forrest, 2011

you will not survive either physically or mentally. The good news, and there is a little, is that being a victim implies that within you is a victor.

Being a victim also means you feel entitled—“I worked hard and that is my promotion”; “I was a great girlfriend and he left me”; “I do everything for my kids and they don’t care one bit.” You felt entitled to the job, the man, and the love of your family and as soon as you embrace your role in the victimhood—the weight of your expectations set up the Victim Triangle—you begin to release yourself and move on.

As a victim, you can simmer with anger and plot revenge, but remember, there is no villain without you, the victim.

The original diagram (pictured above), called the Drama Triangle, was created by Dr. Stephen Karpman. Author Lynne Forrest describes the three roles on the triangle as being primary defense strategies (victim/collapse, persecutor/attack, and rescuer/fix) that we use to interact with one another and play out our own unhappy stories. Forrest refers to the Drama Triangle as the Victim Triangle, because we actually perpetuate victimhood using these three defense strategies. By feeling and reacting out of the unhappy

thoughts and stories we blindly believe, we hold ourselves captive in victim consciousness, and continue to go round and round on the Triangle.

Each position has its own particular way of seeing and reacting to the world. To help you better understand the three roles, we have included a story from each perspective: rescuer, persecutor, and victim.

Rescuer

Jackie's mother was physically disabled and addicted to prescription drugs. From Jackie's earliest memory, she reported feeling ultimately responsible for her mother. Instead of getting appropriate care from a parent who was concerned for her well-being, she became the "little parent" of a mother who played the part of a helpless child.

This childhood scenario set Jackie up with a "life script" that predisposed her toward becoming a rescuer. Caretaking others became her primary way of relating to people.

Rescuers, like Jackie, have an unconscious core belief that might go something like this, "My needs are not important... I am only valued for what I can do for others." Of course, believing these ideas requires her to have someone in her life who she can rescue (a victim). How else will someone like Jackie feel valuable and worthwhile?

Jackie would never admit to being a victim because in her mind, she is the one who must have the answers. Nonetheless, she does, in fact, rotate through the victim position on the triangle on a regular basis. A rescuer in the victim role becomes a martyr, complaining loudly, "After all I've done for you...this is the thanks I get!" (Forrest, 2011)

Persecutor

Bob is a doctor who often justified hurting others. Attack was his primary way of dealing with inconvenience, frustration, or pain.

Once, for instance, he mentioned running into a patient of his on the golf course. “Can you believe that patient had the nerve to ask me to treat his bad knee, right then and there, on my only day off?” Bob handled it by taking his patient to his office and “giving him a steroid shot he’ll never forget!”

In other words, Bob rescued his inconsiderate patient, but in a way that “punished” him for daring to be so bold. To Bob, his action seemed rational, even justified. His patient had infringed on his free time, therefore, he believed, his patient deserved the rough treatment he got. This is a prime example of persecutor thinking. Bob didn’t realize that he could have just said no to his patient’s request for treatment. He did not have to feel victimized by it, nor did he need to rescue his patient. Setting boundaries never occurred to Bob as an option. In his mind he had been treated unjustly and therefore he had the right, even the obligation, to get even (Forrest, 2011).

Victim

Janetta sees herself as consistently unable to handle life. She considers simple things like doing her laundry, cleaning the bathroom, and preparing meals as overwhelming tasks. Constantly complaining of exhaustion, Janetta says to her partner, “You’re the only one who can help me.” She feels bad about herself and her inner dialogue is just plain mean. She thinks her own harsh critical voice just might be right about how incapable and incompetent she is after all.

You can enter the Victim Triangle from any point, but the movement and resolution you seek will never come as you drain your energy on this merry-go-round.

The Hardest Work Is to Stay with Yourself

Why do we hop onto the Victim Triangle? Because it is uncomfortable to sit in the sensation of our pain. We want to do something—drop it like it's hot, expel it from our bodies. It's fundamentally about not taking responsibility. Not in the way society chastises us for not taking responsibility, throwing out meaningless phrases like “you're lazy,” or “you're lying.” Remember, responsibility is not about what you do or don't do. It is about not taking responsibility for remembering your “beingness.”

The temptation that follows this knee-jerk reaction, this desire to chatter, busy yourself and bolt from the challenge, is never about shiny objects outside of yourself. These restless feelings are about running from your own insides. Any place is more comfortable than there.

The avoidance patterns are endless. From victimhood, to perpetration, to denial, to compensation through achievement, drugs, food, our list of addictions go on. All of these methods end in the same result: continually diminishing results because the more you use them, the less they work. The more you use anger to cover up fear, the angrier you get. The more you use happiness to cover up pain, the happier you have to pretend to be.

The Antidote Is Made from the Venom

The very thing that there is so much of—pain—turns out to be the exact ingredient needed to transform your mind and your interior world from an unpredictable, tumultuous roller coaster to something more like your own inner temple.

Pain is a lot like soil. Soil is made up of dirt and nutrients that enter it through decay—everything in life that has died or been released to the ground somehow carries the nutrients that grow all plants, flowers, vegetables, and fruits; everything that life is. Pain is to creativity as soil is to plants. Pain is the ground where creativity grows.

Say an addict gets sober and helps others get sober. She uses her very dark descent and terrible experiences to relate with and have other addicts know it's possible to have a new life. The pain, and the clear-eyed examination of it, resets and regenerates them all; their lives have meaning. Addiction has thus become a spiritual pathway. Its pain and passion are redirected toward strength, healing, and higher purpose.

When we have a solid footing of freedom within, it doesn't matter if you are being treated unfairly. Is your life really a mistake? Is this situation too much for you? In what way is it too much? You can spend a life avoiding pain and at the end of it, you will look back and find you have the same resentments you always did. They ran your life and now that life is ending.

We spend our lives avoiding the discomfort of pain, but facing it turns out to be the medicine that eases the discomfort. The antidote is made from the venom.

All that matters is, can you love even this? God sends us places and asks us to do the work. You happen to have received one of God's hardest assignments, but God reserves His hardest assignments for His toughest soldiers.

Lesson 2 Integration Exercises

Each day, after you've finished your Soulmaking Daily Practice, take a question below and write your answer. Take as much time and space as you desire.

- ▣ Where did I allow my victim archetype to take control? What could I have done differently that would have changed my experience?

- ▣ Where have I demanded other people's time and attention rather than taking full responsibility for myself and being of service to the community?

- ▣ Where have I avoided rocking the boat and then regretted it later?

- ▣ With whom have I been dishonest for my own benefit, unwilling to be direct and tell the truth?

- ▣ Where did I rush past an uncomfortable situation because I didn't want to listen to my inner voice?

- ▣ Where did I not take a stand for what I knew was the truth and instead expressed resentment?

- ▣ Where have I been unwilling to follow what I know to be true and still to this day have not done?

- ▣ What gifts have I received being in prison that I have refused to acknowledge? To whom can I express gratitude for helping me see these gifts?

- ▣ When did I settle for less than I knew I deserved in order to please someone and then wound up paying a price for that behavior?

- ▣ Have I done the work that it would take to be able to fortify my backbone, to be able to take a stand in the face of standing for the truth?

MILESTONE FOUR

Milestone Four signifies your completion of Lesson 2.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 72-83 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 15 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 2 Integration Exercises

EVERY VOICE INSIDE OF YOU IS TRYING TO HELP YOU

LESSON 3:

This lesson is more pain conversion work, as you learn to use alchemy to transmute difficult experiences into positive ones. In this way, you come to see that even what you perceive as “bad” is good.

How to Harvest Pain

Everything we experience carries a secret for us—a clue that could point us to an answer, a deeper truth, a key to a pattern—and it is our work in this world to find out what that secret is through inquiry. Until we do, that experience will have the power to distort our view of present time and will recur, over and over, until we put our attention on it and untie the internal knot.

Some of these are situations where we couldn't fully let the love in—when we ignored someone's kindness or took it for granted. You might meet someone who reminds you of a loving friend you didn't treat well. This new person gives you the chance to do better than you did before.

Other times, the pattern shows up in painful ways. A loved one dies, followed shortly after by another. Or you are in a relationship where you are treated badly, just like you were in a past relationship. Maybe you have had a tendency to lose your temper and you swore that you would keep it under control this time. Then, you explode in anger, get in a fight, and end up arrested. You might get turned down from two job interviews, two days in a row. Or you make up with your daughter after years of not speaking, and she visits you a few weeks in a row—then you're moved to a prison far away and she can't come anymore. After enough setbacks like this, it can feel

like life is repeating the same hard lessons. You might even give up and break your sobriety, again, thinking nothing will change.

These experiences carry with them their own emotional heaviness. But it is possible to untangle the internal knots from these past experiences. We do this by “harvesting” the pain—facing the memory, admitting how it has affected us, and finding the lesson it holds. When we do this, we can live without the resentment, reactivity, or blame.

Each experience stirs up feelings—joy, disgust, shame, grief—and each is like its own doorway to a deeper truth. It’s a turning point for our soul. Your soul will keep trying, again and again, to bring you to that doorway. It is like a bell ringing in the distance over and over, calling you back to yourself.

Each experience is a chance to confront all the limitations of our mind, the places where we believe joy and freedom aren’t possible. This process is like a polishing stone, slowly rubbing out the rough spots to reveal our natural brightness.

At all times, the soul’s calling is to receive. The soul does not choose what is good or bad. It does not say, “I will feel this, but not that.” Just as our souls are durable, remaining alive and thriving wherever we are, they are also entirely permeable. These qualities come part and parcel. The more we let down our guard, the more we begin to see how deeply sensitive we are to everyone and everything. Where some people in the world may say that this sensitivity is weakness and our job is to become untouchable, the soul says that our sensitivity is our strength and our window into the interconnected reality of nature. The soul simply cannot fake it. It will feel everything. You will experience this everywhere. You will walk into a room, and have an intuition of how your friends are feeling.

You are sensitive. And your pain carries your greatest secrets. The greater the pain, the greater the secret—and the greater the gift that waits on the other side of it.

“It’s how you see it. What really for me was a changing point was looking for the good that could come out of my bad situation. I purposely looked for it, and I molded that thing until I could see it—pitbull focus. And now, you know what? I’m living it.”

~JAMILA DAVIS, AMERICAN AUTHOR,
ACTIVIST, AND FORMER FEDERAL
PRISONER #59253-0538182

Alchemy

An alchemist's job is to turn one material into another. We've all heard of the example, "turning lemons into lemonade." The other one is, "turning lead into gold." The alchemist doesn't avoid lemons, nor do they complain of having too much lead.

The alchemist relies on both—the undesirable, often dismissed materials—because this is its base material for creating gold.

Base materials are where they do their life's work. We, too, can stop avoiding pain and actively seek it. When it's present, we seek to feel it. We reorient ourselves to sink further into relationship with it because we know the pain was brought to us to be converted to love.

Feeling pain is knowing there is more humility to be gained and more of our made-up stories and false beliefs to strip away for a greater connection with God. It's said God will never give you more than you can handle.

You will experience a fundamental shift in your life where you no longer run from uncomfortable emotions or situations. You will grow the capacity to let go and relax in a world addicted to both material and spiritual achievement. You will allow yourself to sink in and feel rather than have knee-jerk reactions.

You will never again have to leave yourself. We could call it healing, except we feel healing is too low of a goal. This process leaves you stronger. We believe alchemy is a primary process in our lives and leads to the fullest expression of our power. Everything we do is in service to this one single process, repeated over and over for the rest of our lives. We face what is in front of us, whether it be a backlog of emotion in our hearts or the accumulation of what feels like daily injustice in our lives. Instead of fighting it or making it wrong or denying it, we admit it, we let it in, and let it change us.

How we get where we're going determines what we get when we arrive. How you spend your time in prison determines who you are at the end of your time.

Like building a house, if you take care and use quality materials, the chances are better it will weather storms. If you take shortcuts

or the foundation is shoddy, it's likely you will pay for it in the end, with interest. This house—your house—is your soul rearranging itself and reaching out beyond ideas of “good” and “bad” and into a world filled with richness of meaning.

An Alchemist's Greatest Tool

The answer to every prayer is approval; you are supposed to be here. Approval is synonymous with freedom, not giving in. “Accepting” life as it happens is the capacity to understand that this moment is right because you were presented with it. This moment and you were destined to meet. This moment is right; there is a natural intelligence at work.

When you accept the moment, the intelligence goes to work for you. It is why we pray before we encounter difficulty: “God help me.” You can replace this prayer with any prayer that works for you. We do this to help shoulder and face challenges we otherwise could not. We do not pray for the right circumstances to enter our lives, we pray for the power to face the circumstances we are in now. When Jamila Davis found herself facing 12 years for real estate fraud while working at Lehman Brothers, acceptance was the key to her freedom. She could no longer endlessly be bitter about the fact that she had landed in prison for doing the same thing many others got away with doing. Her high-flying career brokering real estate deals for hip-hop artists and other celebrities was over, and in facing her new reality, she became a stronger and more powerful person than she ever was making deals in designer outfits in New York and New Jersey. This is the power of approval. How can I approve of what's happening right now? Can I love even this? Approval is neutral; you are simply acknowledging what is and are willing to be with it because you know that being with something, without trying to change it, is how you harvest the benefit it is trying to offer you.

Whatever life throws your way—pain, hurt, betrayal, regret, remorse—you can acknowledge it while staying firmly seated inside the house of your value. Understand, approval is not

endorsement. Approval is not saying difficult experiences are deserved or another person's poor behavior is acceptable. It's easy to confuse approval with endorsement, which is why people often disapprove of individuals, or even entire groups of people. It is as if we are so doggedly determined that something is wrong, we trick ourselves into refusing to see that it is happening. But of course, this is a strategy of a mind that remains stubbornly rooted in only acknowledging the reality it wants to see. The more mature mind sees that you can have approval for something without saying it's okay that it happened, and without liking it. You can approve of it, while not endorsing it. This isn't simply a choice of words, this is a choice that determines the story of your life. When you refuse to acknowledge something has happened, it rules you. When you acknowledge what has happened, you can then choose how you want to be with it.

Consider the story of Daryl Davis, a Black author in the 1980s who interviewed the leader of a local KKK chapter, seeking to better understand his views. They continued correspondence and eventually a friendship grew. Daryl even attended KKK rallies led by the leader. After the events, they would embrace, even call each other friends. They did this for more than 10 years, though all the while the KKK leader stood firmly in his position that Blacks were inferior.

Fifteen years into their friendship, the KKK leader came to his own natural conclusion: He'd been wrong. He denounced his position, retired his KKK robes, and began talking to others about the limitations of racism. Two hundred members of his KKK chapter left with him.

To simply disapprove of the KKK leader entirely, this friendship and ultimate transformation of the heart would never have occurred. It wasn't that Daryl endorsed racism, or endorsed the KKK. He never conceded to the KKK leader's points that he was inferior. Instead, he sought to understand the human being behind the undesirable actions. In doing so, he was able to turn hate into love, and ignorance into consciousness. No one was cast

out, ostracized, or shamed, and future generations of these families will be forever changed.

What we hope you learn is a way to enact change by doing something other than being victimized or attacking or dominating or threatening a perpetrator into submission. That simply results in the same old loop: “victim” to “perpetrator” and back again. We hope you’ll learn a deeper reconciliation with anyone or anything that had you locked out of your heart. By making friends with this pain, in this case racism, you begin to change the racist’s mind. You begin their healing, and most importantly, yours.

Lesson 3 Integration Exercises

- ▣ What was a painful experience in my life that I can't seem to let go of?

- ▣ What did I decide about myself and the direction of my life as a result of this experience?

- ▣ If I look back on the experience, what action did I want to take and what did I want to say that I was unable to at that time?

- ▣ Looking back on it now, what did I learn from that experience? What did I gain from being in that experience? Write two paragraphs about what good came of the experience.

- ▣ What does forgiveness mean to me?

- ▣ When I remember that forgiveness is an action to set myself free, why has it been hard to forgive certain people or situations?

- ▣ Imagine having forgiven everyone and everything that you believe has harmed you. From this location, what do you want to create in your life?

- ▣ Write a story about your life. Imagine for this story that you have forgiven every person, situation, and idea that has been limiting you and prevented you from feeling unconditionally free and joyful.

- ▣ In The Art of Soulmaking, we believe that no matter someone's behavior or beliefs, everyone is love. What would I have to let go of to love an enemy or someone who harmed me?

- ▣ What would the benefit be to me of admitting that I could be free from suffering if I were able to let go of my resentment?

- ▣ How can I use my time of incarceration as a practice to free myself from suffering and the causes of suffering so that I can help others?

- ▣ What is a truth about myself in my heart that feels vulnerable to admit because others might view me as weak, yet I know it's a strength?

- ▣ Am I willing to take a stand for being loving, compassionate, and heartfelt, showing that these qualities are my power?

- ▣ Am I willing to live my life as I really am?

"If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you."

~GOSPEL OF THOMAS

MILESTONE FIVE

Milestone Five signifies your completion of Lesson Three.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 84-95 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 15 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 3 Integration Exercises

YOU WERE CHOSEN FOR FORGIVENESS

LESSON 4:

Forgiveness is essential for a whole human life. It can come like a bolt from heaven or take decades of difficult work. Learning to forgive is an imperative for external as well as internal peace.

“The Choice”

In Iran, Samereh Alinejad suffered a mother’s worst fear: Her teenage son was stabbed to death by his friend Balal when the boys were just 18. From that day forward, rage and thoughts of revenge consumed her; little else was in her mind. Balal was caught, tried, and sentenced to death. That country’s penal code gives the victim’s family a final say in capital punishment and she awaited the day she could take this man’s life just as he had taken her son’s. She longed for it, in fact.

In the months leading up to the execution, Samereh’s dead son came to her in dreams asking that she spare his friend Balal. The dreams did nothing to soften her desire to see Balal dead.

In the last dream before the scheduled hanging, she dreamt her son would not speak to her. She didn’t care. “An eye for an eye,” as the saying goes, is a fundamental part of Islamic justice, known as Sharia law, and on the day of the execution, her family dressed carefully and went to the prison. Balal’s family did as well. As Balal was brought out to the gallows, something happened to Samereh.

In a flash of extreme genius, she forgave him. She had never given any indication she would, or even could, do so. Yet, as the noose went around his neck, perhaps she saw in his face the face of her son, a frightened young man doing the best he could in the face of chaos and violence. Perhaps a question ran through her mind,

“We must develop and maintain the capacity to forgive. He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love. There is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us.”

~ MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

a terrible, terrible question. If she agreed to kill this man, what did that make her? Her extreme genius rose in this extreme situation in the most powerful way possible. She intuitively knew circles of violence and hatred don't stop until one side or the other steps up and forgives.

As Balal was released from the gallows, his mother reached through the fence to embrace Samereh in an emotional moment that transcended time and space. A photograph of them went around the world, offering hope to millions.

Samereh forgave herself that day, too; she was free of her own hatred and thoughts of violence against this young man who had killed her son. Those thoughts disappeared in that moment of forgiveness. Samereh electrified the world, becoming a hero and symbol of the transformative nature of forgiveness. All of her beliefs about justifiable punishment fell away when she refused to murder another soul, refused to take another child from another mother. She would not spend life searching for revenge; she chose love instead.

Your Calling Begins with Forgiveness

No one in power has ever been moved by coercion, shame, or force, but rather they are moved naturally. People may change their actions based on being attacked, but real lasting change only occurs when their best efforts have been dignified, even when those best efforts fall short. Someone has to offer this acknowledgment first and model a new way. Your initiation into a world of profound inner peace is to become this person.

What Is Forgiveness?

Forgiveness is as simple as being willing to see the other person or yourself as human and allowing yourself to love them in the face of their mistake. Forgiveness is connecting to what someone's deeper, innocent motivations in acting a certain way are, even if acting this

way caused you harm. It is opening to understanding that everyone is doing the best they can with the (often faulty) maps they were given. It is seeing that systems and institutions are made up of people who are all doing the best they can with their maps as well. It is not condoning terrible behavior or saying terrible harm is okay. It is connecting to the humanity of someone who caused harm, including you, and seeing, touching their innocence underneath it all.

What Happens When You Forgive

What you'll notice is people start to respond to you differently. All of us, yourself included, are looking for warm loving eyes to look back at us. God is as well. You can offer your warm gaze at a family picnic or inside a prison; that light is inside you no matter where you are.

Forgiveness changes everyone, beginning with you. Releasing the venom of hatred or resentment from your being fundamentally changes your capacity. What you previously forbade admission, you now have allowed in. You have followed the calling of your soul, which is to drop the judge's gavel of right and wrong, and instead to receive and to love.

There is no way to resent someone, or a group of people, as nasty or cruel, without seeing some part of that in you. Forgiveness grants mercy to the humanity of that other person or group of people, and in doing so grants mercy to yourself. You can now forgive yourself, too. There is no part of you, however deplorable, you ever have to dismiss again.

There is nothing the world needs more than people who rise to this challenge, who find the capability within themselves to answer this sacred call. It can seem like nothing you do from prison could have an impact, but it can, and it does. When someone rises to forgive—society, their enemies, their friends, the system, themselves—they become a person who has freed themselves, regardless of all external conditions. A person like that has untold power, an immense positive impact on whoever they come into contact with.

The energy ripples outward in ways you will never see. There's a purpose to why you're here; it's the simple reason why anyone is anywhere. Your purpose happens to involve you being physically incarcerated inside of a prison, and the call on you is to ingest the darkness being bestowed upon you, and learn to transmute that darkness into love. People on the outside face their own set of unique hardships; they see the same faces of humanity that you do. The calling on their life is the same as yours. There is a purpose to everything.

Lesson 4 Integration Exercises: Soulmaking – Your Genius

Our genius represents our deepest calling. It is the gifts we were endowed with to create in the world, and in doing so, be created ourselves. Experienced as “flow” or “effortlessness,” it is that which emerges from us naturally. It is our essential selves.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CULTIVATE IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF YOUR LIFE?

- ▣ Relationships & Connection with Others

Example: I want to be a leader in my community, in my family, with the people I love no matter the conditions of where I am currently. I see my life with all possibilities knowing that my insights and daily practices have opened me to see a deeper truth about myself.

- ▣ Family

Example: I want to express myself more honestly with my family. Make amends when needed and also show my love in ways that will show my level of care for them. I write often and share what I’m learning and acknowledge mistakes that have turned into important lessons.

- ▣ Personal Practices

Example: Each day I commit to writing an inventory of things I did well and things I could improve. I exercise to keep my body balanced. I show genuine kindness if someone is in pain.

- ▣ Health

Example: I am conscious of the internal stress I've been carrying and choose to relax and let go as much as possible.

- ▣ Faith & Spirit

Example: I acknowledge that there is a force greater than myself that I can open to so I can feel a part of the greater completeness of life.

- ▣ Community Contribution

Example: I choose to be someone in my daily life who people respect and feel they can open up to rather than causing separation and fear.

MILESTONE SIX

Milestone Six signifies your completion of Lesson 4.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 96-103 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Lesson 4 Integration Exercises

COMMITMENT AND INTEGRATION

This is where everything takes root—knowledge is road-tested and insight is shaped in the fire of daily life. The soulmaker does not seek fleeting inspiration; she builds something enduring. Commitment is the bridge between what has been discovered and what is lived.

This is not the commitment of striving or discipline for its own sake. It is the quiet, unwavering agreement to return—to yourself, to the work, to the practices that tether you to what is real. Integration is the recognition that soulmaking does not happen in retreat from life but in the thick of it, in the friction of relationships, in the ache of longing, in the mundane rhythms of the everyday. The soulmaker learns to stay, to listen, to trust that even in the repetition, something deeper is being forged.

Commitments

This is where you commit. This agreement ultimately is with yourself. You have likely sensed or felt a new part of you emerging from this program and all of the hard work you have done. What do you commit to doing in order to continue this growth?

Example: I commit to doing Soulmaking Daily Practice every day for 60 days. I commit to sharing with a friend one secret I have daily. I commit to letting my family know about this journey I am on. I commit to doing one helpful act for a staff member each day.

Commitment is the bridge between insight and lasting change. Here, you name what you will continue beyond this program and create a guide for those who support you, ensuring your growth stays alive in the world.

How to Support You

The final piece of this exercise lays out your “user’s guide,” the instruction manual to you. Consider the three most difficult-to-navigate behaviors you have, then write out how your friends and us can best handle them.

Example:

I will start my Soulmaking Daily Practice every day and eventually grow “bored” and stop. When you notice me not doing practice, give me some attention and ask me if something is upsetting me. Usually I act “bored” when I am actually angry.

When you ask me how I am doing, I will say “I’m fine” even when I am not. This is me hiding. When you notice me hiding in this way, tell me a joke. Make me laugh. You can even make fun of me like saying, “Oh, ‘fine’ huh? ‘Fed up, Insecure, Neurotic, and Emotional?’”

POST-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Now that you have completed your journey, you will fill out the Human Flourishing Post-Assessment and the Post-Program Questionnaire.

You filled out the Human Flourishing Pre-Assessment at the beginning of the program to help measure your overall fulfillment level. Now that you have completed the program, you will complete the Human Flourishing Post-Assessment.

You filled out the Pre-Program Questionnaire at the start of your program. Now that you have completed the program, you will fill out the Post-Program Questionnaire, again looking at your emotions, thoughts, and actions.

The Human Flourishing Post-Program Assessment and the Post-Program Questionnaire are part of what you will mail to us with your Milestone Seven assignment.

HUMAN FLOURISHING POST-ASSESSMENT

Name:

Select your level of agreement with each statement
(only choose one answer)

1. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

2. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

3. Many days I wake up feeling discouraged about how I have lived my life.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

4. My relationships are as satisfying as I would want them to be.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

5. I believe I have discovered who I really am.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

6. My life is centered around a set of core beliefs that give meaning to my life.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

7. I can say that I have found my purpose in life.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

8. I believe I know what I was meant to do in life.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

9. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

10. I usually know what I should do because some actions just feel right to me.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

11. I find I get intensely involved in many of the things I do each day.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED
DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

12. I feel best when I'm doing something worth investing a great deal of effort in.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED

DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

13. When I engage in activities that involve my best potentials, I have this sense of really being alive.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE UNDECIDED

DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

Post-Program Questionnaire

Name:

Select your level of agreement with each statement

(only choose one answer)

1. **Since starting this course, on a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how much stress you feel on a day-to-day basis?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. **Since starting this course, on a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how angry you feel on a day-to-day basis?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. **Since starting this course, on a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) please circle below how optimistic you are about your life?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. **Since starting this course, on a scale of 1-10, (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest) how significant a role do drugs, alcohol, or other substances play in your life?**

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. **Since starting this course, how frequently did you get into physical fights?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER

INFREQUENTLY

SOMETIMES

SOMEWHAT OFTEN

OFTEN

6. **Since starting this course, how frequently did you get into verbal fights?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER INFREQUENTLY SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN OFTEN

7. **Since starting this course, have you felt depressed?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER INFREQUENTLY SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN OFTEN

8. **Since starting this course, have you had suicidal thoughts?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER INFREQUENTLY SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN OFTEN

9. **Since starting this course, how often did you feel grateful for your life?** (Please circle your answer below.)

NEVER INFREQUENTLY SOMETIMES
SOMEWHAT OFTEN OFTEN

10. **Describe your experience of the course. What did you like? What didn't you like? What did you learn?**

11. Have you noticed any changes in your life? Please share anything you'd like us to know.
12. Are there limiting beliefs you used to carry about your life which you no longer believe are true? If yes, what were those beliefs and how have they changed?
13. Have you noticed any changes in your relationships? If yes, please describe them.

14. Do you feel more forgiving of yourself as a result of this course?
15. How has the daily routine (yoga, Daily Soul Letters, meditation) impacted you? Please be specific.
16. Do you feel any differently about the purpose of your time spent incarcerated?

17. What do you believe about the statement “you can live free inside of prison”?

18. What could we do to improve this course?

19. We would love to hear anything else you would like us to know about your experience of the course! Please share your thoughts below.

MILESTONE SEVEN

Milestone Seven signifies you have made your commitments and completed your post-program assessments and questionnaires.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 105-117 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write out your responses to Commitments and How to Support You exercises
- vi. Complete the Human Flourishing Post-Assessment and Post-Program Questionnaire and mail them to us

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Restoring basic dignity means recognizing that every single human being—no matter what happened in their life—has a purpose. We each carry the capacity to convert life’s pain into a meaningful contribution. You have an impact greater than you may know.

Monastic living inside of a prison is the ultimate form of converting poison into medicine. This process of alchemy can continue for you by sharing what you experienced. We want to offer you the ability to use your experiences with The Art of Soulmaking to create a narrative about the power of this process. Your experience can encourage others to pick up the tools you chose to pick up, support others, and help others make sense of the experiences they are having as they journey forward.

You can share your experience through any form of art—what you have written in your letters, Daily Soul Writing, additional pieces of writing, other pieces of art you have made: drawing, painting, sculpture. Your work will change the world outside the walls, too. Many people in the free world, outside the walls, attempt to make this journey and fail. The distractions are endless. If you made it, you have something to offer anyone, regardless of whether they are incarcerated or not.

To participate in cocreating this narrative, please read and sign the Release Form. If you are taking this program on a tablet and would like to share your work with us, write us a letter and let us know and we can mail you a release form. Or write “Free for Public” on any material you would like to release to us.

Your story is more powerful than you may realize. By sharing your experience, you not only deepen your own transformation but offer a lifeline to others on the path. Your words carry the potential to inspire, connect, and change lives—inside and outside the walls.

Share your experience with us electronically, or by sending to the mailing address below:

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

RELEASE FORM

The Unconditional Freedom Project (UFP) at times uses writings from participants like you to promote the program to current and potential participants and supporters. If you'd like to share anything, send us the following statement which indicates that you understand and release rights to your writing.

I, _____ hereby grant Unconditional Freedom Project (an initiative of Unconditional Freedom, a California non-profit) (UFP) and their partners, who help publicize their programming, permission to copy, exhibit, publish, or distribute my writing and/or artwork. I verify that what I have written or created is my original work. I understand that at no time shall I be paid, compensated, or given royalties, now or at any point in the future by UFP. I hereby irrevocably authorize UFP and its partners who help publicize the program to copy, exhibit, publish, or distribute my content. I also give the right for UFP to make any edits they deem necessary to publish my content. I understand that UFP does not guarantee publication of my released materials.

I understand that if I don't indicate how I wish to be referred to on the line below, I authorize UFP to use my first name and last initial in association with my written work.

Name to publish with my art and/or writings (please print):

Signature:

Date:

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

SOULMAKING COMMUNITY

Even though you've now completed The Art of Soulmaking program, this path to living a monastic life continues on. You start to see daily life through a different lens, and engage with your interior world in new ways. Many people who have completed this program have been working with this material for years and still find new insights each day. Over time we deepen the experience of our lives. Soulmaking is a lifelong journey.

We created the Soulmaking Community because we recognize that there is more power when we are connected. The desire to feel seen and felt by another is what makes us human. Not only is it natural, it is medicine. Soulmaking Groups offer an opportunity to deepen your journey and foster connections along the way.

For those who feel called to lead these group meetings, your ability to alchemize difficult experiences and emotions, your wrestling with a higher power of your understanding, and your struggles with forgiveness all become a rallying point around which others can make their way on this path. You organize, you encourage, you live as an example—not of perfection but of what's possible when you embrace being human.

For those attending these group meetings, your willingness to share your thoughts, insights from your practices, your emotions, your pain, your victories—this is how you become more you.

You integrate everything you find within yourself on this path, and this inspires others to do the same. There is also something essential about seeing others. Seeing their humanity allows us to see our own. Sometimes our own humanity is too difficult to look at directly, but if we can see it in another, we can see it in ourselves.

We discover ourselves in our own eyes and in the eyes of others; we discover that we are both unique, and in many ways the same as others. We realize that what we think makes us difficult, wrong, or bad is what makes us human and relatable. We can only come to find these truths through connection and sharing, and that is what lies at the heart of our Soulmaking Groups.

ART OF SOULMAKING GROUP FACILITATOR:

Group facilitators will be provided meeting scripts that encourage interactive discussion on the following topics:

- Soul Writing
- Meditation
- Yoga
- Basic Goodness
- Victim Consciousness
- Alchemy
- Forgiveness
- Soulmaker Movement Principles

If you're interested in becoming a Soulmaking Group Facilitator, answer the questions on the next page and send them to us at the mailing address below or email us.

We look forward to working with you!

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

SOULMAKING GROUP FACILITATOR APPLICATION

1. What called me to become a Soulmaking Community leader?

2. What are the gifts I would offer to another in the program?

3. What are the gifts I would receive by stepping into this position?
4. What words of encouragement would I have wanted to hear going into this program, that I can now pass on to another?
5. What do I envision for this community I'm helping create?

STAYING CONNECTED

Post-release, your journey with *Art of Soulmaking* doesn't end. You are all a part of the Soulmaking Community. In many ways, your Soulmaking journey begins anew daily. The world needs your voice, your wisdom, and the unique truth you carry wherever you are. You are not alone. You are part of something greater—a collective of Soulmakers who believe we belong; we don't need an invitation. Creativity, leadership, and making a difference happen when we can see past our pain and recognize that someone could benefit from our love and attention—we are on a shared path.

Here, we lead together.

In the Soulmaker Movement, the next leader is not the loudest, the most experienced, or the most celebrated. The next leader is the Collective—the community that sees others' basic goodness. Each of us takes turns carrying the torch. Each of us watches for who's falling behind and reaches back. That's what leadership looks like here: claiming our belonging. The ongoing commitment is to get out of suffering, the causes of suffering, and help others get out of suffering.

After release, we want you to stay connected. Before release, send us your forwarding address if you know it. You will have opportunities to participate in the Unconditional Freedom Project's **Free the Artist Gallery** and continue taking courses on the Edovo App.

You can write to us at letters@unconditionalfreedom.org.

In Courage and Love,
Unconditional Freedom Project Team

MILESTONE EIGHT

Milestone Eight is where you see What's Next. You can share about your experience, become a part of the Soulmaking Community, and learn about group facilitation.

Assignments

- i. Read pages 119-136 of your workbook
- ii. 20 minutes of yoga daily
- iii. 20 minutes of Daily Soul Writing, whichever prompt speaks to you each day
- iv. 20 minutes of meditation daily
- v. Write to us and send us:
a testimonial about the program
an article submission for our newsletter
any artwork for Free the Artist that you created during or after completing the program

***Make sure to submit the release form and mark all submissions "free for public"

- vi. Stay connected post release. Send us your address or you can email us at letters@unconditionalfreedom.org

Mail To:

Unconditional Freedom Project
PO Box 305
Newark, CA 94560

ADDITIONAL LETTERS TO THE NEWCOMER

Participants of The Art of Soulmaking program have life-changing experiences that they wanted to share about the program—things they learned, challenges they overcame, and insights.

To those considering The Art of Soulmaking:

Last year, I unexpectedly received The Art of Soulmaking in the mail. I read the introduction and was hooked. I got right to work that evening. Since that night, the program has greatly improved my life in prison and has provided me with tools that will continue to benefit me long after my release.

One of the first benefits I noticed was the structure and purpose the daily practices added to my mornings, when prison life feels especially slow and listless for me. Instead, I wake up, get a glass of water, work through my daily practices, and go about my day.

Each practice has become a fulfilling part of my days. My days feel incomplete without them now. The yoga is refreshing and relaxing. The meditation declutters the mind and helps me work through problems. The Soul Writing is cathartic, therapeutic, and insightful. I've found I now fixate on the negative less and my days pass more quickly.

Perhaps the most rewarding part of the workbook has been how it's encouraged and helped me to reimagine and reflect on how I can transform my time and suffering into something greater and beneficial to me and those around me. I've learned that my environment doesn't

dictate my life or define who I am in this world. The program has helped me to actively practice contemplation and self-examination.

When I first began The Art of Soulmaking program, I encountered puzzled looks and questions as I did my daily practices. At first, I was a little self-conscious but this quickly passed. People got used to my routine and some even grew interested in completing the program themselves.

Many of us in prison are seeking meaningful ways to improve our lives and form healthy routines, so sharing these ideas and tools has been another rewarding aspect of the experience. As you work through this program, I encourage you to share your experiences and workbook with your peers.

It's been said the hardest part of a journey is taking the first step. Now that The Art of Soulmaking is in your hands, I hope you'll do what I did and commit to following through with this course to its completion and giving its message and practices an honest try. I'm writing this nearly a year after beginning my journey and I'm incredibly thankful I happened across this program and gave it a shot. It's my hope that anyone who may read this, chooses to utilize The Art of Soulmaking, and use their time to better themselves in ways that will persist far beyond the prison's walls and razor wire.

Best Wishes,

Thom

Thomas discovered The Art of Soulmaking while incarcerated in Virginia when he was twenty-nine years old.

The Impossible: My New Reality

I woke up in the darkest, loneliest place in my life—both figuratively and literally. I was 30 years old, addicted to drugs, had burned all my bridges, lost everything, and found myself on Death Row. I was at a breaking point, or what some people call the “dark night of the soul.”

But, ironically, that's where I stumbled across The Art of Soulmaking (AoS).

Now, AoS isn't magic. It doesn't have any power in and of itself. It didn't even change my life. Instead, The Art of Soulmaking guided me on an inward journey. It led me to an infinite source of

Power—or genius—within me and taught me how to tap into that Power. It introduced me to tools I didn't know I had and ultimately taught me how to create, recreate, and co-create my life and myself.

I'm currently 35 years old. Although I'm still on Death Row, so much has changed. I've been sober for three years, my relationship with friends, family, and myself has improved, my health has improved, and most importantly, I've managed to find meaning and purpose for my life at a time and place that I never thought possible.

But, with the help and guidance from The Art of Soulmaking, the impossible has become my new reality.

If you are considering embarking on this inner journey with The Art of Soulmaking or have just begun, I believe you should know that you'll only get out of it what you put in. I've seen men who put their all into this personal work, and their lives and personalities have completely transformed, and I've seen men who didn't put anything into it and their lives are the same or worse.

*But, no matter what stage of your life you are in, and despite what you may think, **you are not alone.***

Nicholas Smith is currently on death row at Alabama Dept. of Corrections, William C. Holman Correctional Facility. He facilitates an Art of Soulmaking Group at his facility and has had two corrections officers join his class.

FROM THE AUTHORS

Beth Wareham: I am a longtime writer and editor with an extensive list of books behind me. I have written three of my own—two nonfiction and one novel—and have ghostwritten countless others.

I pride myself on being a generalist, allowing for maximum learning as I go through life. I spent the majority of my career as a publisher at Simon and Schuster. An adventuress, I have tracked elephants on foot in Zimbabwe, kayaked with right whales in the Bay of Fundy, and ridden across the Pampas of Chile. After I lost half of my family in a six-week period, my travels turned more inward. I stepped back from life for a year of what I can only call mourning, the first step in a long process of rebuilding my internal world after that trauma. I live in New York City with my husband and three cats, Carmelo, Emily, and Charlotte.

Nicole Daedone: I want to know life biblically, the way a man knows a woman, the way a lover knows a beloved. I want to know the water by getting wet. Theory, commandments, concepts leave me hollow. My driving questions when I come across dicta and dogma are, Is that true? Is it wholly true? Where and how is it true? For whom is it true and why? Can it withstand the test of time? Is it true for me as a woman? The last one has taken me off many a beaten path. Givens are often no longer givens when I ask this question. The world turns upside down. As a free woman, I want all things to be free, liberated from any ideas I would impose on them.

We are constructed of the divine. I believe everything—and I mean everything—when properly tended to, reveals an untold beauty. But my work is not as activist, reformer, saint, teacher, guru, or

shaman—it is as artist. The art I do is akin to found-object art: art made from what has been thrown away. It's an art that turns something back into itself. Like turning prisons into monasteries; the degradation of addiction into the art of addiction that isolates the addiction drive for purposes of realization; the life sentence of trauma into human flourishing; the feminism of subjugated women into the feminine collective of inestimable power; those who have been canceled, exiled, and banished into the leaders of the next era; desertified soil into not only carbon-absorbing but nutrient-producing; hunger and food deserts into farm-to-table, free, pop-up restaurants; Black culture into the black box for society that holds the secrets. These programs exist, and you can find them here: www.unconditionalfreedom.org.

My work remains as it always was: to turn poison into medicine and make it available to those who want it. But for those who need it, here is the conventional side of things: I graduated from San Francisco State University with a degree in semantics and gender communication. I cofounded the popular avant-garde art gallery, 111 Minna Gallery, in San Francisco's SoMa. I have appeared on *ABC News Nightline*, and my work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *New York Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *7x7 MAGAZINE*, among others. I've written for *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*.