A large, abstract circular graphic composed of thick, overlapping brushstrokes in shades of green, purple, and blue, framing the central text.

HEALING JOURNEY PROGRAM

LEVEL 2: WORKBOOK

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The logo for the Northpine Foundation, featuring a stylized green triangle icon followed by the text 'Northpine' in a green sans-serif font and 'Foundation' in a smaller, green, all-caps sans-serif font below it.

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the second level of the Healing Journey Program. We trust you found the first level of this multi-level program helpful. In Level Two, over eight sessions, our goal is to deepen your self-help practice, expand your skills to include journaling, meditation, letting go of resentments and introduce the spiritual aspects of healing.

Working with a group, whether in person or online, will help give you a sense of community and shared experience, as well as an opportunity to learn from one another. In this level, we will continue to explore thoughts and feelings and learn more about our emotional terrain and ways to release our burdens.

Remember the allostatic knapsack from Level One? We will do some unpacking and releasing so that you can travel a little lighter and that your body is freed from old Fight/Flight/Freeze patterns, opening it up to manage cancer and its treatment better.

We also extend our appreciation to all caregivers embarking on the Healing Journey. Your needs are equally important to the patient's needs, and we hope these skills will serve you well. Research has shown us that patients and caregivers benefit from practicing these skills, and surely learning them together increases the benefits!

A key concept in the Healing Journey is awareness. Throughout Level One, you were encouraged to notice, record, and talk about what you were experiencing physically and emotionally and even what you were thinking. Awareness allows us to notice and then choose how we want to feel. For example, in Level One, we encouraged you to experience what tension feels like in your body and then learn techniques to create relaxation. You were asked to observe your thoughts, write them down and then change them to more realistic or healing thoughts.

You have been asked to become more aware of your breath, something most of us take for granted. Yet, being aware of the breath and learning strategies to focus on the breath helps us make choices about how we want to feel in the moment: calm, grounded and centered, not distracted, tense and hijacked by runaway thoughts.

Level Two continues this theme, creating awareness of thoughts and feelings and clarifying the things most important to you. Continuing to write and journal will enhance your awareness of body, heart, mind, and spirit. Awareness ultimately allows for choices about how we want to feel and how we want to live.





A Word from Alastair Cunningham

Ultimately our answers or solutions come not from other people but from within ourselves. It takes work and courage to change ourselves; nobody can claim it is easy. Disease and the threat of death can be great motivators. However, if you persist with this self-help work, you will find, as many before you have done, that the search for health becomes part of a more significant endeavour: the quest for meaning and purpose in life. As this meaning - this deep relationship to all things—becomes clearer within you, physical healing may occur, but even if it does not, you will achieve greater peace of mind and find that your efforts are amply rewarded.

The Healing Journey is a stepwise and progressive course. Each of the five levels offered at Wellspring teaches coping skills that build on each other. For example, each session in Level Two will guide you in building on the skills you learned in Level One, add new skills, including journaling, meditation, and goal setting, and introduce the spiritual aspects of healing.

This workbook will help deepen your practice, and we hope you fill it with your thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Coping with cancer can feel like a full-time job, but this work is all about you. The more you practice the skills, the easier they become.

We hope you can attend all the Healing Journey Level Two sessions first because we move quickly through the material with a new topic each week, and regular attendance will help you build your skills. Second, group members rely on each other for support and to hear about each other's experiences. Third, we learn a lot from each other. It's understandable to miss one or two, but the more you attend, the more you benefit. We will cover the material in the workbook each week and do an exercise in class, which should be practised at home throughout the following week.

The workbook will guide you through the exercises, which are MP3 files on the Wellspring website under Self-Paced Learnings and Resources.



All Healing Journey resources are available on Well on the Web, under
SELF-PACED LEARNINGS AND RESOURCES



A Brief Recap from Alastair Cunningham

Many Levels of a Person

In Level One, we introduced the idea that we all have many “levels,” with five of the most essential being body, conscious mind, unconscious or deeper mind, social, and existential or spiritual (see figure 1 below).

The body, while the most obvious to us, is only the most basic of our levels (and is, in turn, made up of molecules, cells, and organs). Out of the workings of the body, particularly the brain, comes the “mind,” which we may regard as a higher level. We are conscious of a small fraction of what goes on in our minds but unaware of much more; therefore, we have shown the “deeper mind,” in the figure, as a higher or more extensive level than the “conscious mind.” Some theorists (such as Carl Jung) have argued that we are all connected at the level of our unconscious or deeper minds. Moving to a broader level, we all contribute to, and in a sense contain, a part of the social order in which we live. And beyond that, many would claim that we are embedded in an existential or spiritual matrix, which we can discover through meditation.

Each level acts on all the others—they tend to regulate one another. For example, research shows that a happy, supportive social life promotes health, while feeling marginalized, isolated socially or unsupported leaves people vulnerable to illness. A peaceful mind favours health. Anxiety and depression leave us open to illness. There is nothing magical about this: it can be shown that different mental states lead to physical and biochemical differences in the body. If we are anxious, our muscles are tense, there is more lactic acid in the blood, we may sweat more, our hearts beat faster, and our breathing is shallower.

Cancer cells probably arise all the time but are usually controlled or prevented from multiplying by our immune system and other regulating mechanisms, such as hormones, in the body. We now know, beyond doubt, that these regulating systems are affected by mental state: anxiety and stress may impair the immune system, for example, thus allowing cancers to grow. Our mental state is, in turn, influenced by our connections with others (on the social level) and our sense of belonging to a larger whole (on the spiritual/existential level). So, it is not surprising that mental and social events should affect cancer through their influence on the general functioning of our bodies.

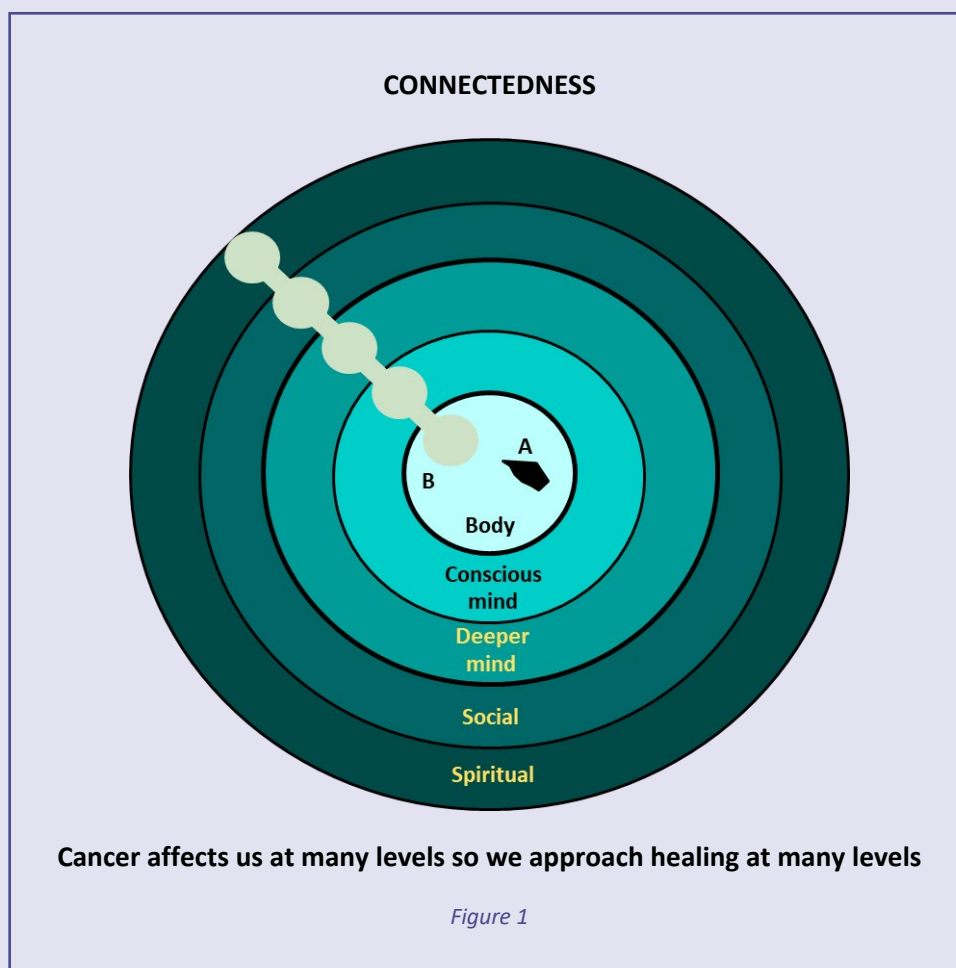
Disease As a Distortion at All Levels

Now let us take this view of health and disease a bit further. The diagram (Figure 1) below shows how our society has commonly viewed cancer as an abnormality affecting only cells; this is represented by a spot, A, in the diagram. By contrast, the extended structure, like a balloon, B, shows a more useful and realistic way of picturing the disease: a distortion or imbalance of the whole person, extending right out to the highest levels, influenced by and affecting one’s entire life and being. To continue the balloon analogy, we affect it at every other point by squeezing the balloon at any spot; social or psychological stress or pressure may promote more rapid tumour growth. On the other hand, by letting air out of it at any level, we may eventually diminish and even remove it all, allowing the whole person to return to normal. According to this view, working at all levels against a disease improves our chances of changing its impact on the body.

A positive implication of this connectedness is that we can conduct therapy at all levels of the person. Western medicine is “bottom-up” in orientation: it concentrates on the body, attempting to make the whole individual healthy by changing the parts. Self-help work is “top-down”: we emphasize the power of higher levels to regulate the lower. We see this power in dramatic form in faith healing, in the placebo effect (where belief in an inert medication can sometimes promote cure), and in physical changes induced by biofeedback or clinical hypnosis.

We are all capable of working on ourselves to promote health at all of the higher levels. These higher-level changes will then affect the state of the lower levels. For example, learning relaxation to diminish anxiety lowers the amount of stress hormones circulating in the blood, allowing more lymphocytes to circulate and attack tumours.

Connectedness is a word for maximum healthy interactions between the levels of ourselves. When we live in harmony with our world, our fellows, our own aspirations and self-image, and our bodies, we have the best chance of enjoying good health. Cancer affects us at many levels, so we approach healing at many levels (figure 1).



SESSION ONE

THOUGHT WATCHING

Learning Exercise: Reliving a Recent Experience

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

We introduced the idea of thought-watching in the second session of Level One, when you were asked to close your eyes and watch your thoughts for a few minutes. For some of you, it was a torrent of thoughts and feelings; for others, it was quieter, and still others, it was quiet. Sometimes our thoughts play 'hide and seek.' However, they tend to arise when there are no distractions, often at night when others are asleep, and there is nothing to do.

Why would we want to become aware of these thoughts, some of which are distressing? Thoughts lead to feelings, and feelings lead to thoughts. They can cycle around and around without an outlet. By becoming aware of our thoughts and feelings, we can learn strategies to understand, process and release cycling thoughts and reactions.



Cancer as Grief

One way to understand the experience of cancer is to think of it as grief. It is a loss, in fact, many losses of health, certainty, and predictability. Part of the shock of receiving the diagnosis is that it changes so much of what we are hoping for in life. Health is foundational to everything we do, and cancer threatens everything we often take for granted.

One way to understand grief is that it is work and entails four specific tasks that require our attention and energy. These are not stages or steps but tasks. We do not necessarily move from task one to task two and three. Instead, it is a process of having some days that are hard and other days when we are coping well. Awareness of thoughts and feelings is a critical task in processing this grief. There are at least four tasks that help us in processing the experience of cancer:

1. Accepting a difficult reality
2. Acknowledging the thoughts and feelings
3. Adaptation
4. Reinvention

Let's look at these tasks and what they require from us.

Task One: Accepting a Difficulty Reality

Most difficult realities travel in herds. There is rarely just one; there are usually many. Cancer is a difficult reality to accept. People report feeling numb or disconnected or that this experience is happening to someone else, not them. As a cancer patient or a caregiver, you have had to absorb many difficult, unwanted realities:

- Hoping it's not cancer and then receive the diagnosis. Some people suspect that they may have cancer, and for others, when found on a routine screening test, it comes as a shock.
- Accepting the treatment can include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, ongoing medication, or even watchful waiting.
- Accepting the changes that occur in your body, loss of parts of your body or perhaps, changes in your physical well-being, loss of energy, loss of hair, and it can be a long list.
- Caregivers, too, have a list of difficult realities to accept, like changes in their role in the family.

What hard realities have you had to accept, or are you working on accepting?

Task Two: Acknowledging the Thoughts and Feelings

To absorb and understand this hard new reality, you will have many thoughts and feelings—fear, anxiety, anger, frustration, grief, and confusion. Although your thoughts may become focused on cancer, you may have difficulty thinking about anything else. You may loop around and around, reliving the diagnosis or the treatment in your mind. Your feelings may be extreme, going up and down, one moment depressed and sad, the next moment almost feeling normal or even empowered, and then crashing down again. Remember the roller coaster metaphor we used in Level One? Both the patient and the caregiver may find themselves going up and down unpredictably, adding to the stress of the whole experience. Added to this is our resistance to sharing these feelings with our loved ones. We may want to be reassuring and strong by not expressing our feelings. Some families end up with a conspiracy of silence when the conversation becomes reduced to reassurances that everything is “okay.” This adds to the sense of isolation and sadness that many people feel.

These thoughts and feelings need to be acknowledged. They need to be honoured, respected and expressed. To acknowledge our thoughts and feelings, we need a safe place to explore them. Many people fear that acknowledging these difficult feelings will only make them worse. Most of us find that acknowledging them reduces their intensity and decreases the sense of feeling overwhelmed.

There are several ways to acknowledge thoughts and feelings. Being in a support group or a Healing Journey group gives you a place to express how you are feeling and hear how others are feeling too. Knowing that you are not the only one with these feelings can be very reassuring and bonding. Seeing a psychotherapist who is a professional listener can also be very valuable. It helps if the therapist is experienced with cancer patients and caregivers because cancer care is a specialty. Hospitals that treat cancer patients will likely have a psychosocial oncology department with a range of mental health professionals, including psychotherapists, social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. In most places, patients and caregivers can self-refer, or you can ask a member of your healthcare team to give you a referral.

Another way to process feelings and thoughts is to write about them. We will talk about journaling and focus on it in today’s session. Much more about this to come.

What are some of the thoughts and feelings that you are becoming aware of?

Task Three: Adaptation

You are already engaged in adapting to these new hard realities because you have accessed Wellspring and all its resources. Adaptation is the process of learning strategies that help you manage this new hard reality. In this task, we are asking ourselves, given this reality, now what? Adaptation takes different forms for different people. Some people are researchers; they want to access and read as much cancer information as possible. Being informed gives them a sense of being in control. Accessing information online is where many people start but remember that it is important to access responsible and professional websites like major hospitals, cancer organizations and universities. For others, information is overwhelming, and they may not want to be immersed in the research. These people can nominate a person in their support circle to research specific questions for them.

The Healing Journey is all about coping skills. As we work through the Healing Journey, you will learn a wide range of ways to help yourself. Some may suit you more than others, but it is always good to experiment with new ideas and give yourself a chance to benefit from them. You can expand your coping base by exploring all the programs that Wellspring offers, perhaps trying something new.

Remember that this grief model is not a stage or stepped process. You can learn coping skills and adaptations while working on accepting a difficult reality and acknowledging thoughts and feelings. Every day is different.

What are the adaptations that you have found most helpful so far?

Task Four: Reinvention

Reinvention is captured in the following question: knowing what I know now, having been diagnosed with cancer, how do I wish to live my life? That is a big question we will address in Level Two and the following levels.

Cancer changes our priorities and sharpens our focus. Time becomes more precious, and we may choose to spend it differently. Work may become less of a priority, or we may shift gears entirely. We may want to spend more time with the people we care about and less time with those who do not share our values. Our Wellspring volunteers are prime examples of reinvention. Having experienced cancer as a patient or a caregiver, they feel strong and resourceful enough to help others. They may be paying it forward, giving others the care and support they received, or perhaps they feel a deeper connection with those who are now in a similar boat.

Reinvention may not be happening for you right now, but there will be sessions in the Healing Journey that explore the essential questions about how you want to live your life and what you value now.

What are some of the reinventions that you can imagine for yourself?

Journaling

Journaling is a powerful way to explore thoughts and feelings. It is a private process where you write in a notebook or on your computer what you are thinking and feeling. Remember the allostatic load knapsack? Journaling is an excellent way to do some unpacking. There are no rules to journaling except that you are writing for yourself, not for anyone else. There is no right, no wrong. You can write in sentences or point form or draw pictures. You can use a pen, crayons, and colours. Perhaps a fancy journal can be a bit off-putting as we are not journaling to create something pretty or inspiring. Just a dollar-store notebook will do. Think of your journal as the compost box in your kitchen, full of raw and messy debris. The journal is where you can rant, grieve, explore, and acknowledge the thoughts and feelings that help you accept the complex realities you face.

Here are some common questions about journaling.



What about confidentiality? What if someone reads my journal?

This is a common concern; privacy is important because you do not want to censor yourself or hold back. Here are some suggestions:

Hide it in plain sight. Let others know that you are journaling to help yourself cope and that it is private. Like the compost, it is smelly, raw, and unfit for public consumption. But like compost, good things can grow out of it, like clarity and acceptance of those hard realities. Tell the people around you that you will share some of your insights and new awareness as you feel ready. You can also give each family member a journal so they can understand the value of journaling and the private nature of the process.

I have tried to journal before. I do it for a few days and then drop it. I can't seem to be consistent.

The great thing about your journal is that it doesn't take anything personally. It doesn't matter if you leave it to gather dust or take it up daily. It is an open, unjudgmental container for your experience. On that note, it also doesn't care about your spelling or grammar. Many of us have received criticism for our writing skills at school or work. Your journal doesn't care. Some people like to write it out in long hand because it is expressive, while others want to pour it out on a computer because it is fast. Remember that this is just for you. In terms of consistency, perhaps setting a time each day to write for a few minutes can help. Julia Cameron suggests this in her foundational book on journaling, *The Artist's Way*. She suggests having a time in the morning, which she calls the "morning pages." Some people prefer to write when the feelings are strong, like waiting in the doctor's office. You can carry a journal with you and write in it whenever your feelings arise. Notice how journaling makes you feel. If you feel lighter, less stressed and calmer, then journaling is working for you, and that will reinforce your journaling habit. Noticing is important. And you can even write what you notice in your journal to keep track!

I don't want a book full of misery that I have read over again.

Some people keep their journals, and some write and then toss them. There is no right way. The value is in writing and releasing, and acknowledging feelings and thoughts. Will writing your thoughts and feelings amplify your discomfort? Pushing down thoughts and feelings, what we call suppression, takes energy. Pushing down uncomfortable feelings may numb us to distress, but it also inhibits our ability to feel joy, love, and happiness. It's impossible to inhibit the hard feelings without affecting all our experiences. Remember from Level One that the only 'bad feeling' is the stuck feeling. Suppose you are getting stuck in a cycle of sadness and depression. In that case, it is essential to notice that and seek professional support to explore your feelings in a safe and confidential setting. Some people may need the additional support of medication such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety medication. The trauma of the diagnosis, the stress of treatments, and the effects of cancer medications such as anesthetics, chemotherapies, and anti-hormonal medicines can impact the brain and how it functions. Medication can act as a scaffold to help you as you learn coping skills to help yourself. It does not indicate that you are failing at self-help, but rather that you are taking care of your biochemistry to give your Healing Journey skills a chance to help you.

What if something happens to me, and my family is left with these journals?

This goes back to the first question about confidentiality. If your family understands that your journal is your "emotional compost," they may be less inclined to read or misunderstand it. If this is a big concern, you can 'journal and dump,' that is, journal, but dispose of the journals as you fill them up. On the other hand, if you prefer to keep them to help you understand where you have been along the journey and the insights you have gained, then you can ask a friend to dispose of them for you. Let them know where you keep them and ask your friend to dispose of them if you cannot.

Journaling Exercises

Thought Watching

Sit for about 10 minutes with the eyes closed and in quiet surroundings. Observe your mind, and your pattern of thoughts, without trying to exert control over them. Then open your eyes and write down the main themes (it doesn't matter whether or not you remember them all). Experience shows that writing down what we discover for ourselves in all aspects of this healing work is much more productive than simply musing about it. The process clarifies and concretizes our insights and makes them available for future reference.

Reliving a Recent Event

The thought-watching process can be extended to cover all the events of your day. We will do an exercise together in the group to get you started.



Participate in journaling exercise: [RELIVING A RECENT EXPERIENCE](#)

After a brief relaxation, bring to mind an event from the last day or days that generated an emotional reaction in you. Try to relive it in your imagination: it will be like rerunning a movie or video, which you can stop and start at will.

- What thoughts were going through your mind?
- What feelings did you experience?
- Did the situation or people involved remind you of any previous events?

After these explorations, write down what you have learned. Were you able to “observe” yourself, from the outside, as it were, interacting with others in your daily activities? Could you capture thoughts and feelings associated with the events you remembered? This detached observation of yourself becomes easier with practice—you'll soon find yourself doing it during the events themselves—and it is an indispensable preliminary step to changing habits. Without self-observation and self-awareness, we are like sleepwalkers, caught up in our habits without realizing what we are doing.



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

The process of keeping a journal is quite simple, and your record of mind-watching exercises is one step towards it. In addition, at the end of the day, or at any other time, review recent events and write a brief account of the main things that impacted you, which will often be interactions with others. In particular, record events that aroused your emotions—anger, joy, fear, sadness, irritation, and so on. Try to recreate the scene in your mind and discover what you were telling yourself that induced the emotional reaction. Can you think of alternative ways of thinking and behaving that, in retrospect, would have been healthier?

As noting your reactions to events becomes more familiar, you will become more aware of habits you would like to change. You can extend this exercise of watching yourself to all aspects of your life, whether stressful or not—and be pleasantly surprised at what you will learn. Try to identify feelings associated with events: they are much more important than intellectual ideas. For example, you might be interested in watching yourself as you meet and talk to people. Ask yourself, Do I feel nervous? Is my body reacting? Can I remember names, and if not, why not? Am I worrying about what they think of me? After a while, this watching is like having a benevolent inner observer or witness of your thoughts and actions.

Hopefully, you will continue to work on your journal, analyzing your reaction to daily events. A central area for investigation is, obviously, our relationship with other people. We tend to separate ourselves from true intimacy with others and the world around us because of fear and the attempts it provokes to protect our egos. This separation promotes illness; reintegration and connectedness favour health. Some other topics on the “relationships” theme that you might like to examine in your daily life and your journal are listed at the end of this session in Additional Material and Exercises.



Today's Exercise at Home

Every week there will be several set exercises for you to try and write about. In addition, a more general question will explore some of the broader aspects of healing change.

Exercise 1

Do the thought-watching exercise daily over the next week.

Exercise 2

Relive a recent event, then write an account in your journal. Do this at least twice.

Exercise 3

Read the Additional Material and Exercises section to learn more about expressing your feelings. Then complete the diagram of the [Social Map](#) on pg. 111 in the Appendix, write about what you have learned from it.

Exercise 4 (General)

Write about the following:

- What changes do you feel you need to make in your life?
- What would be helpful to fight the cancer?

These writings should be collected and filed in your personal journal. In addition, you can get more ideas for aspects of your life that warrant investigation by closely reading this workbook and various self-help books.

Additional Material and Exercises

Here are several additional exercises or projects and a bit more background information.

Expressing Feelings and Active Listening

Some of us are emotionally expressive; for others, it is harder to express the thoughts and feelings that arise, especially with the stress of coping with cancer. We all received messages about expressing feelings when we were growing up. Perhaps your family had an approach to maintaining a “stiff upper lip,” not expressing feelings, especially those judged difficult or uncomfortable. Men can have received the message that “big boys don’t cry.” Others may have had families that were very expressive and perhaps uncomfortably so. We can set up for ourselves an all-or-nothing approach to feelings.



Learning to express feelings is a skill that can be learned and practiced. We can get better at it.

- Timing can be significant. Finding a quiet moment with someone you trust is the first step in sharing your feelings. You do not want to feel rushed or pressured.
- The person you share your feelings with needs to listen; just listen. They do not need to fix or change it, nor do they even need to reassure you. Instead, let them know you want them to hear your feelings.
- It doesn’t need to be perfect. In fact, for many of us, it’s hard to know how we feel without starting to talk about it. The process of expressing it helps to make it clearer.

Active listening is an effortful process of giving the other person your full attention without any distractions. We listen not just with our ears, but with our whole bodies, with all our awareness. When actively listening, we are communicating to the speaker that there is nothing more important at this moment than what is being said.

When we listen to others in this active way, we do not judge or correct or challenge. We take what they are saying at face value. If they are feeling scared, we acknowledge what we hear them saying. For example; *I can hear how scared you are about your surgery. I can hear how overwhelming it feels to you right now.*

We may be tempted to say, it is going to be okay, the doctors are good, and you’ll be fine, but that is not acknowledging the person’s feelings. Just letting them say it changes how it feels for them. When we can acknowledge our feelings of fear and have them acknowledged by others, the fear diminishes, perhaps a little, maybe a lot. Of course, the fear may return, but the shared burden has been lessened.

Some people around you may have difficulty hearing your feelings. Peer support volunteers are specially trained to be active listeners, and they understand the cancer experience. Mental health practitioners are also good listeners who can support you in identifying and expressing your experience.

Expressing Difficult Feelings

Sometimes we need people to hear what we are feeling and to respond. For example, you may feel angry when your needs are not considered, ignored, or taken for granted. One way to help others hear your needs is to use “I messages.” An “I message” uses the personal pronoun and indicates that you speak for yourself. It does not blame or judge. It is an honest expression of your own experience.

Here are some examples:

I feel angry and frustrated when I see the kitchen a mess after I tidied up after dinner.

Compare this to:

Who made a mess in here? Why do you always come in to make snacks and leave the plates? What am I? Your maid?

The “I message” expresses your deeper and more truthful experience when you find the mess. You are not blaming but pointing out the problem and its effect on you. Others are better able to hear you and may be more inclined to be helpful. The second approach creates defensiveness and anger and often adds to the cycle of blame. When people become defensive, they are less able to be responsive in a helpful way.

We will work with communication skills in Level Three of the Healing Journey Program.

Planning Lifestyle Changes

This exercise looks at various life activities, including diet, exercise, work, leisure, and communication with others. All play a role in health, and while it can be difficult to change our habit patterns, it is encouraging to realize that there are many important areas where we can do a great deal to help our general health and combat cancer. Making changes in lifestyle also counteracts the lack of control many people feel they have over medical treatment. As with learning to minimize stress or use time more effectively, the first step in changing aspects of our lifestyle is to find out what we currently do. You will find a [Lifestyle Checklist](#) in the Appendix, on pgs. 112-113, to help you with this assessment.

Two of the most important ways to look after our bodies are to ensure adequate exercise and nutrition. The steps in making changes towards healthier habits are to define what I do at present, what I want to do, and how I can begin to move towards this goal. So, the suggested additional exercise for this week is to keep a daily record of what you eat and what exercise you get using the log found below. Then compare the results with what seems ideal and feasible for you. Then plan the first steps toward achieving your goals. Finally, refer to Level One if you are interested in more discussion on healthy sleep and nutrition.



Healing Light

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

Log of Daily Healing Activities

Day	Activity	Amount of Time	Comments/Reflections
One Date:			
Two Date:			
Three Date:			
Four Date:			
Five Date:			
Six Date:			
Seven Date:			

Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION TWO

MEDITATION

Learning Exercise: Meditation

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

When the Healing Journey Program started 30 years ago, meditation was a new skill for many participants. It has since become mainstream thanks to authors such as John Kabat Zinn, Jack Kornfield and many others. Many medical and meditation centres offer mindfulness programs, and there are now meditation apps. Most of us know someone who enjoys meditation, and many have tried it. Much research has been performed on meditation with very encouraging results.

Meditation, in various forms, has been shown to ^{1 2 3 4} :

- Reduce stress
- Reduce feelings of anxiety
- Promotes emotional health
- Enhances self-awareness
- Improves attention span
- May reduce age-related memory loss
- Can generate kindness
- Improves sleep
- Can help with pain management
- Decrease blood pressure
- Enhance immune function



With all these benefits, meditation may become a helpful coping strategy for you. So let's unpack these ideas and start with a discussion on meditation.

What is Meditation?

Our world is full of distractions demanding our attention. Personal devices have brought this to a greater height than ever before. Every cell call, ping, alarm, email, tweet, and Instagram posting calls for our immediate attention. Each time we look at our devices and receive new information, even if it is trivial, it gives our brains a little burst of dopamine, the pleasure chemical of the body. So we have distracted driving, distracted conversations, and even distracted eating. We can find ourselves absorbed into our cell phone apps, mindlessly scrolling with time passing by aimlessly. And that perhaps is the point; mindless. We are escaping our own felt experiences through distractions. Meditation and mindfulness are the opposite of distraction. In meditation, we are focusing the mind, bringing our attention to rest on a focal point. The target of our attention is usually something as simple and available to us as our breath. Each Healing Journey Program

¹ Zhang, Q., Zhao, H., & Zheng, Y. (2019). Effectiveness of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on symptom variables and health-related quality of life in breast cancer patients—a systematic review and meta-analysis. *Supportive Care in Cancer* (2019) 27:771–781.

² Rush, S.E., & Sharma, M., (2017). Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction as a Stress Management Intervention for Cancer Care: A Systematic Review. *J Evidence-Based Complementary & Alternative Medicine*, Vol. 22(2) 347-359.

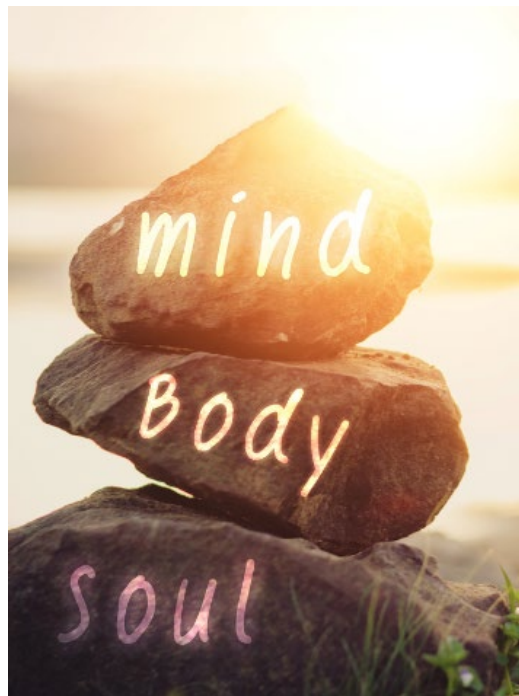
³ Luberto, C.M., Shinday, N., Song, R., et.al. (2018). A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of the Effects of Meditation on Empathy, Compassion, and Prosocial Behaviors. *Mindfulness* 9:708–724

⁴ Davidson, R.J., Kabat-Zinn, J., Schumacher, J., et.al. (2003). Alterations in Brain and Immune Function Produced by Mindfulness Meditation. *Psychosomatic Medicine* 65(4): 564-570.

session begins with a centring experience of the breath, focusing on sensations with the body, and noticing what is going on in the mind. In essence, this is meditation.

Meditation is the process of resting your mind on a single point. It is observing the mind, the body, and the sensations you are experiencing. It is single-mindedness, and focus, which is the opposite of distraction. It is also a practice, which means it is not something we perfect. Meditation is something we work on.

Meditation is a group of practices, but they have one thing in common: bringing awareness into the present moment. We are not ruminating about the past, planning the future, or worrying about what may happen. Instead, it is a process of being in the moment, of allowing the breath you are taking now to be the most important thing you are doing. Some meditation practices involve movements, such as yoga, Tai Chi, or Qi Gong, in which the body is moved into specific postures, and you are directed to focus on the sensations you are experiencing. There is even a form of walking meditation where the focus of our attention is the sensations on the soles of the feet, the touch of air on the skin, and the sense of motion in the body.



Walking outside in nature can be meditative if we allow our attention to rest on the sensations around us, the quiet, the breeze, the scent of the air and the sights around us.

Mindfulness meditation is a common practice that is often taught at hospitals and stress clinics. It is often called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR). In this process, one develops the capacity to observe the physical sensations of the body and breath and to learn how to observe the thoughts, letting them flow through the mind without getting pulled into them. This “observer” quality is so important when we begin to explore the inner terrain of thoughts and feelings. We can also learn to quieten the mind and turn down the intensity of thoughts by focusing on the breath, a repeated phrase or word, or using a peaceful image.

Practicing meditation can give us sovereignty over our experience. It can slow down the connection between experience and reaction so that we can choose how we want to respond to stress. It can allow us to be with ourselves in a spacious compassionate way, appreciating our inner experience without being pushed around by it. We can learn to identify hijacking and anxious thoughts and give ourselves something calming to focus on. While all of this sounds simple, it can be quite a challenge to practice, but it is a skill that gets easier with time.

Stress Reduction

Meditation can lower the heart rate, decrease the rate of respiration, and bring down blood pressure. Does this sound familiar? Of course, we discussed the relaxation response in Level One. You have already had the opportunity to use techniques such as breathing, progressive relaxation, imagery, journaling and thought-watching, which are all useful in developing the relaxation response. Meditation is an extension of these skills that can deepen your awareness of your physical and emotional experience. It can help you distance yourself from the ongoing chatter of the mind and help give you perspective on events happening around you. It is a practice that realigns our relationship to our thoughts. We can see that not all thoughts are accurate or worthy of attention. We learn that just because we think it does not mean it is true and that decreases the power of our thoughts to create misery and suffering.

How to do it

We will introduce you to three different focal points that you can use to focus your mind.

1. The first focal point is counting. Some people like to count their breaths. Some just like to count. On the audio file, Alastair will suggest counting to 10 silently in your mind and then going back to 1. It is not about seeing how high you can count before your mind starts thinking. Instead, it has something your mind can hold on to instead of thinking. When you have started thinking again, notice that and don't let the thoughts run away with you, but gently and firmly come back to the counting. Do not chastise yourself when your mind slips off the counting because that's more thinking! It is a compassionate process of returning over and over again to the focal point. When you *notice* that you have started thinking and the gentle but firm *return* to the focal point, that is the work. Each time you do that, you are strengthening your ability to concentrate and manage the activity of the mind. You are creating a clearer and calmer internal world for yourself, and for that moment, however brief, you are free from the ongoing commentary, criticism, judgements, and narrative in your mind almost all the time. The cycle of *noticing* and *returning* is like lifting weights. Each time you do it, the muscle of attention is strengthened.
2. The second technique offered on the audio file is the mantra technique, repeating silently to yourself a word or phrase on which you focus your attention. Alastair will demonstrate the technique using the word "Rama," a Hindu mantra that Gandhi used. You can use any word or phrase from your religious background or soothing sound. Using a word that triggers thoughts would not be helpful, like "food" or "oncologist"!
3. The third technique is using visualization. The audio file suggests that image of sitting beneath a calm lake, where you can breathe. Each thought you have is a bubble. A bunch of thoughts is like a string of bubbles. The goal is to keep the water as clear of bubbles as possible. If this image is uncomfortable, you can change it. An alternative might be sitting on a grassy hill watching the sky. Thoughts are like clouds floating past. Small thoughts are small clouds and big heavy thoughts are like large darker clouds. You can imagine that your breath is like the breeze that moves the clouds along, so the sky is clear.

I've tried meditating, but I can't do it very well.

Some of you may have already tried some form of meditation and found it helpful. Others may have found it difficult. Many may have thought they are doing it wrong.

We often view activities as productive or things in which we are good. Sports would be a good example. We think in terms of how long or fast someone can run, or the score of the game or the skill someone has. Meditation requires a different perspective. It is not a product or something we are “good at,” although it does become much easier with practice. Instead, it is the process that is important. That means that even an experienced meditator will have times when the mind is very busy and active, and the thoughts won't settle down. The meditator must keep noticing and returning gently and compassionately but persistently.

I find it hard to sit there and do nothing

Meditation may look like we are not doing anything but sitting and, perhaps, wasting time. However, meditation is not a passive process. Instead, it is highly active and engaged. We interact with the mind, work with our attention, and discipline the “monkey mind.” We are rewiring the brain and re-ordering our relationship with the mind ⁵.

At the beginning of a meditation session, the brain's ventromedial prefrontal cortex is active. This part of the brain is sometimes referred to as the “me” department. It is self-referential. This part of the brain produces thoughts about yourself and your experience and triggers your feelings. It is also thought of as the “monkey mind,” the busy, thinking, emotion-triggering part of the mind that can create distress. As attention is corralled and brought to focus on the focal point you are using, there is a shift from the “me” part of the brain to a calmer, rational, less arousing, and more neutral position.

After about eight weeks of meditation practice, the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex becomes more active. This is the seat of empathy and compassion. As this part of the brain becomes more active, we can develop more equanimity, less judgement, a greater appreciation of different perspectives and a kinder approach to ourselves and others.

Chemicals in the brain also change with meditation practice. There are increases in:

- Serotonin, the “feel good” chemical that can regulate mood
- Endorphins, the “natural high” chemical in the brain
- DHEA and Growth Hormones that decrease with age and are related to longevity
- GABA (Gamma-aminobutyric acid) which calms the central nervous system
- Melatonin, a “sleep hormone” that also helps with mood regulation

There is also a decrease in cortisol, an important stress hormone. Meditation also increases Alpha wave activity in the brain, which is associated with a relaxed, calm, alert state that can enhance creativity. There are also increases in gray matter (brain tissue) in the regions of the brain associated with learning and memory processes, emotion regulation, self-referential processing, and perspective-taking.

⁵ <https://askthescientists.com/brain-meditation/#toggle-id-1> 2022

So, while meditation looks passive, a lot is going on!

I'm on chemotherapy, and I find it very hard to concentrate

Chemotherapy is a class of powerful medications that influence the whole body. Some have known effects on the nervous system (side effects such as neuropathy and cognitive changes such as brain fog). Drugs used to manage chemotherapy's side effects, such as steroids, also affect our ability to concentrate. Sitting meditation might not be available to you during active treatment, but there are other ways to calm the mind and have meditational experiences. Quiet, intentional time in nature, such as a walk in the park or sitting in a garden, drinking in the fresh air, and the sensation of nature, is a form of meditation. In fact, we are beginning to recognize the power of nature to take ourselves out of the ongoing stressful experience of thinking into a calmer, more spacious state of mind; it has been referred to as "nature bathing." Some meditation apps can also offer nature sounds, such as waves on a beach or soft wind through a tree, which can take us into a calmer state of mind. Be gentle with yourself, discuss the challenges with your Healing Journey group to discover what other people are doing to calm their minds.

My mind doesn't stop!

You are not alone in that impression. Many people are surprised at how the mind is like a perpetual motion machine. It can be helpful to bring in some of your other self-help skills to support your meditation practice. Journaling is especially helpful before you meditate. Before meditating, write down your thoughts and feelings for a few minutes. It can be a way to clear your mental desk and give you more space between thoughts. Then after you meditate, jot down a few impressions of the experience or thoughts you would like to remember.

Don't create big expectations for yourself. Set a timer for three minutes first, then increase it to five minutes when that feels comfortable. Some people work their way up to 10 or 15 minutes, but that may not be necessary to reap the benefits of the experience. Take some mindful breaths during the day, set your cell phone to remind you every hour to take some deep breaths, close your eyes and check in with yourself. Are there other ways to calm your mind during the day?

Many free-of-charge apps can guide and support you in developing a meditation practice. Experiment to find what suits you best.





A Word from Alastair Cunningham

Most of us find we can't simply quieten the mind by an act of will, so we use a focus, allowing one simple thing to take the place of many scattered thoughts. This focus can be an image, breathing (as in our exercises at the start of each session), a prayer, a series of movements, or a simple word or sound, chanted aloud or repeatedly silently. The work of meditation—and it is work—consists of repeatedly returning to this focus and pushing other thoughts aside. It has been described as a passive effort to prevent the usual random thinking. It is interesting to compare notes with others on your experiences. When we begin to meditate, almost all of us—even after doing it for years—come up against our mind's tendency to wander.

Meditation as an Active Process

In the West, we frown upon apparent idleness and habitually pursue various goals with an obsessive, even frantic, busyness. For this reason, many people are initially uncomfortable with meditation, which seems like “doing nothing.” Yet most of us spend many unproductive hours each week, for example, watching television. Meditation, despite outward appearances, is an intensely active process, which has been likened to the exploration of “inner space”; it is a route to expand awareness of oneself and one's relationship to the world. Moreover, regular withdrawal from others for a time is often rewarded by greatly improving relationships with them during the rest of the day.

Another “hang-up” of our culture is the need to be assured that we are doing things right. The value of meditation lies in the process itself; if you do this, bringing the mind back constantly to a quiet focus, there is no right or wrong result, and indeed there should be no particular expectations of the outcome. It's worthwhile even if it doesn't seem to go well. Having said this, it must be admitted that there are days when quietening the mind is impossible, often, unfortunately, when we are most distressed. Regular practice will diminish the frequency of these occasions.

Selecting a Mantra

The mantra has been called “protector of the mind,” a focus providing respite from the constant unproductive and often harmful rumination in which we all indulge. Different cultures and traditions have favoured different mantras, for example:

- *Christian “Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on me” (or just “Lord Jesus”)*
- *“Be still and know that I am God” (or “Be still”)*
- *Jewish “Shalom” (peace), “Echad” (one)*
- *Moslem “Allah”*
- *Buddhist “Buddha,” “Om mani padme hum”*
- *Hindu “Rama,” “Siva,” “Krishna,” “Om”*
- *Without religious affiliation, “One,” “Peaceful abiding”*

They are often names for the deity and may be a form of prayer. This approach appeals to some people, but if you are a determined agnostic, use a neutral sound.



Today's Exercise at Home



Participate in today's exercise: MEDITATION

Exercise 1

Use the Meditation MP3 audio file for the first three days of the week, then pick one of the methods and try it without the audio recording. Set a time for three or five minutes and explore how this feels. Increase the time as you feel ready.

Write about your experience.

What did you notice about your thoughts?

What did you notice in your body?

Which technique worked best for you? What did you like about it?

What did you notice after meditation? What felt different?

Are there any books or resources you have looked at to support your practice?

Do you have questions for your group for the next session?

Exercise 2

It is helpful to monitor our experience to become aware of any discomfort or stress that we may be experiencing. For many of us, stress can become habitual, and it is important to identify it for ourselves to address it. In the Appendix on pgs. 114-116, you will find a [Stress Checklist](#) that you can complete. It can help you assess your experience at the five levels: body, conscious mind, deeper mind, social, and spiritual. You can fill this out several times throughout the course to note changes—improvements as well as areas that need more attention.

Complete the Stress Checklist. What thoughts or actions contribute to these symptoms? What steps can you take to minimize them?

Where are you experiencing stress? Body? Mind? Deeper mind? Social? Spiritual?

What makes these experiences of stress worse? What exacerbates the stress?

What helps to alleviate the stress you are experiencing? What strategies have you tried?

Exercise 3

What plans do you have for your future healing work?

To what extent can people's self-help efforts make a difference in their quality of life and cancer progression?

How confident are you that you can make the necessary changes?

**Healing Light**

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

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Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION THREE

IMAGERY FOR HEALING

Learning Exercise: Healing Imagery

Confidentiality

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Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

In the subsequent two sessions, we will revisit the value of guided imagery in healing. In Session 3 of Level One, we explored the imagery of cancer and the immune system. We imagined the cancer in the body (or where the cancer was) and how the immune system works to protect the body. We discussed how we could work with our imagery and how it can change over time.

It will be helpful to review a few key points about imagery. First, it is something that we use every day. For example, when trying to remember something on a shopping list, we may attempt to see it in our mind's eye. We use it to describe maps or how many windows we have in our homes. We use it to remember where we left something. Second, we have experienced how imagery can affect the body by imagining biting into a lemon. We also discussed how imagery is not necessarily visual but can involve any of the senses; touch (imagine the feeling of velvet), smell (freshly cooked bread), sound (a dog barking), or taste (hot coffee). Third, we learned that imagery is rarely straightforward, bright images like a movie but more often a sense of the object. Finally, we discovered that imagining a safe, healing place can create feelings of calm and relaxation in the body and the mind.



Imagery can also give us information. Dreams are a good example. Dreams are created by our deeper unconscious mind and “float up” into our awareness during sleep. Some dreams seem non-sensical, with random images or stories that may make little sense. However, sometimes dreams are very salient and powerful, expressing fears or conflicts that we may harbour. During times of stress, dreams can be particularly active. Paying attention to our dreams and writing them down can give us insight into what we feel; and another piece of information for our journal.

We can interact with our imagery as well. We can develop an image we can “talk” to or ask questions. It's somewhat like imagining a conversation or rehearsing a discussion. We often re-imagine an interaction or imagine what we might say to someone and what the other person might say in return. In this case, we shall be returning to the images of cancer and conversing with it. To deepen our experience, we shall also ask you to draw the images. Drawing! Most of us balk at the idea of drawing our imagery. “I’m not an artist. I can’t even draw a stick figure!” All the better, the simple naïve drawings we make give us information and record the images so we can watch how they change over time. Professional artists may get caught up in the technicalities of drawing (perspective, colour, shading etc.), but we want a raw, simple capture of the images you are experiencing. It is like another form of journaling; it allows you to observe your image from a distance. Stick figures are just fine. One way to think of it is that your drawings are like hieroglyphics, pictograms of your experience. Some people find this very helpful and draw imagery regularly. There are even art therapy programs offered at Wellspring that can help deepen your use of this technique.

In exploring imagery, it is very helpful to be deeply relaxed. You are now more experienced with the relaxation process and are developing a stronger relaxation response. Deep relaxation enables us to communicate, or listen to the non-verbal part of the brain, often characterized as the “right side” of the brain (compared to the left hemisphere, which tends to be the seat of language and analytical thought). The right hemisphere tends to be the creative, intuitive part of the mind and works in terms of sensory stimuli and images. When deeply relaxed, the critical, analytic voice is turned down, allowing you to be more creative and playful with your imagery. It can also let you interact with these images and explore your deeper, less conscious thoughts and feelings.

In the exercise for this session, we will use a deep relaxation script and travel into the body where the cancer is or where it has been. We will take time to explore how this part of the body appears to you:

- What does it look and how does it feel?
- What is its size, colour, and consistency (soft, hard, resilient, spongy, slippery, and so on)?
- What feelings come up as you explore?
- What do your defence systems look like, and what are they doing?
- If you are currently receiving treatment, how does it appear?
- How do the defences and treatment act against the cancer?
- What other things are you doing to support your health?
- How do they appear in your imagery? How do they interact with the cancer?

Have a set of coloured crayons or pencils beside you, as well as blank paper, so you can record the images you experience. Remember, this is not about being artistic. It is a representation of what you experienced. Write a few words to capture essential features, like how you felt and the feelings that arose for you.



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

Images may be realistic and anatomical or much more abstract in the form of symbols. Trust your intuition. Some people want to mount a violent attack on the cancer cells; others prefer a gentler approach, imagining the tumours as parts of themselves that have gone astray, which they can now restrain and dissolve in some way. Some like “natural” images: we had a patient who imagined her tumour cells as jellyfish washing up on the shore where seagulls (the immune defences) could quickly eat them. Another man saw the tumours as mushrooms that could grow only under certain conditions; using his mind, he felt he could change those conditions. If you are getting treatment, try to see it as killing only the tumour cells without harming the rest of the body.

Mental Imagery

Mental imagery is not something new and strange but a tool you have used for a long time in your daily life. For example, if you are planning to perform a task around the home, you will almost certainly imagine in some way what it will be like to do the job, what equipment you may need, and so on. You may use imagery much more deliberately to help yourself in various situations. For instance, if you are nervous or nauseated when visiting a doctor’s clinic, rehearse the visit in your imagination some days before, going over all the details while in a deeply relaxed state. If you do this several times, you may find that when the actual visit takes place, it has been connected firmly in your mind with relaxation and comfort rather than with tension and fear. This technique has been successfully used to control anticipatory nausea in some chemotherapy patients.

Imagery can also be very helpful in coping with medical procedures and tests, allowing you to withdraw to a safe and soothing image in your mind while the procedure is going on. Similar techniques—rehearsing desired performances—are widely employed by athletes, actors, and people preparing for possible frightening events like giving a speech.

Some people who use imagery regularly find a robust and satisfying image and persist with it for a long time. Others may find their images changing, particularly if the state of the disease changes. For example, it makes sense to have aggressive imagery if the disease progresses. On the other hand, if it is static or in remission, different kinds of pictures may begin to appeal more, such as more abstract symbols like healing light, religious figures, or beautiful scenes involving a feeling of harmony, balance, and connection with all things. Although some of our patients request it, we are very reluctant to be specific about what images a person “should” use, mainly because it is important to develop your own. However, I can offer some guidelines:

- *The imagery needs to feel right and not just be an intellectual production*
- *It should suit the circumstances of your disease.*
- *It must seem meaningful and reasonable to you; for instance, the “defences” should be seen as agents effective against the “invader,” such as seagulls eating shellfish, T-lymphocytes destroying cancer cells, a powerful river washing away loose debris*
- *It should be strong, filling you with hope and with a sense of ultimate peace and connection to all things*

“Dialogue” with the Cancer

After relaxing deeply and perhaps going to your “special place,” allow your mind to focus on where your cancer or other symptom is or has been. Attempt to contact it or dialogue with it in some way: it may help to allow an image that represents the cancer to come up. Let it respond. If it helps and is not too scary, let yourself become the image of the cancer and look back at the rest of you.

- Can you find out what the cancer wants or needs?
- Can you supply these needs, or if not, what stops you?

Once you have done the Inner Healer exercise (Session 4), you may wish to bring this figure into your imagery. What does it have to say? Is it meaningful to consider making a pact or bargain with the symptoms?

I don’t get a clear image. I feel like I am making it up. Am I doing it right?

This is a common question that many participants have. Imagery can feel like it is forced, particularly in the beginning. You want to have an image to work with, so you push for it or feel like you are making it up. That’s okay. It’s a good place to start! You are experimenting with the technique, and it may take some time to feel comfortable with your developing images. Sometimes it helps to relax more and let it flow, let things just come up. If nothing does come up this time, you have still worked on developing your Relaxation Response. In time, and as your comfort with the technique grows, images or ideas will start to flow, even if you give them a nudge by “making them up.” After all, it comes from the same place, your mind!

What if my imagery is scary?

This is a genuine concern that comes up for many people. Cancer is a scary experience, and you may resist imagining it in your body. And you may find that your mood or recent experiences influence the images that come up for you. If you are already anxious, such as waiting for the results of a scan, it may be too intense to imagine the cancer. However, remember you are also identifying what your body is doing to protect you and all the other things you are doing to look after yourself. Feelings are information, and if the feelings are fear and anxiety, we use some coping skills to help us identify and acknowledge the thoughts and feelings arising. Finding a safe place to express these feelings is the next step; journaling, speaking with your Healing Journey group, a Wellspring Peer Support Volunteer or a psychotherapist.

Deeper Exploration

Searching for meaning in cancer

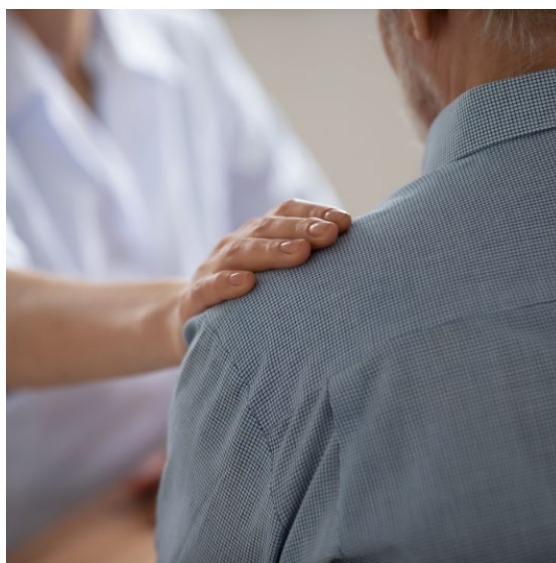
There are many levels at which we can consider cancer. First, we can think of it in strictly biological terms; a genetic change that results in malfunctioning cells. Then, we can broaden this perspective by considering what environmental factors might have instigated the genetic mutations causing the cancer. Finally, this perspective can keep widening through all the concentric circles we use in the Healing Journey (body, mind, deeper mind, social and spiritual). Sometimes cancer feels like a random event, with no deeper meaning, just bad luck. Sometimes it feels like an inevitability. Other people get it, so why not me? It can have social meaning regarding who is supportive and who is not. And it can have spiritual meaning, a challenge from God or some greater power. Our understanding of “meaning” can shift daily for many people coping with cancer. Some days it is a challenge, but we feel we can meet. On other days it feels unfair and overwhelming.

You might not feel ready to explore whether your cancer has meaning beyond “bad luck.” But perhaps you sense there is something to learn or understand about your life. This harkens back to the first session of Level One, the idea of reinvention. The following program sessions will come at this question of meaning in various ways, looking at letting go of resentments, clarifying goals and beginning to entertain spiritual coping skills in Level Three. In no way are we suggesting that “cancer is a gift,” and if gifts are to be had, they are wrapped in barbed wire. Perhaps though, cancer offers the opportunity for self-awareness, authenticity, and self-care that we may not have considered before.

Coping with “Scanxiety”

Anxiety related to testing, often routine testing, is very normal. Tests are triggering. After all, it was through tests that the original diagnosis was made. Every cancer patient undergoes some form of monitoring, and most everyone experiences the fear of “what if”; what if it has come back, become worse or spread? If the testing is not routine, but in response to some symptom or other, the fear may be greater. The anxiety can start weeks before the test and heighten while waiting for the results to be reported.

How can you help yourself cope with scanxiety? All the techniques you are learning in the Healing Journey will help you cope with this period of heightened stress. But, it helps to acknowledge it and express it to people who can support you. Many people will respond with reassurance that everything will be okay.



That may be helpful to you, or you may feel like it minimizes your experience. Speaking with others who understand how scanxiety feels will be able to acknowledge your feelings and support you (your Healing Journey group, a Peer Support Volunteer). Journaling is also helpful for expressing the thoughts and feelings you are having. If meditation is a skill that is developing for you, this is a good practice. If the anxiety is too

difficult to manage during meditation, go to Deep Inner Relaxation from Level One. Walking in nature, spending time with supportive friends and family, and being very gentle with yourself during this time will be helpful. Try not to judge yourself; scan anxiety is a real phenomenon, and most cancer patients and caregivers experience it.

A final note about testing and test results. It is helpful to have a plan for getting your test results. Plan for when and how you will receive your results. Now with electronic medical records, scan results can be posted automatically on your electronic medical portal, sometimes even before your medical team has reviewed them. Seeing these results without context and without the ability to ask questions or have a plan for the next steps can lead to increased worry and anxiety. Ask your care team when to expect the results, who will deliver them to you, and how they will be provided, such as by phone, during a face-to-face appointment, or on a patient portal. That way, you are not wondering and worrying for days about when you will hear back. This knowledge is empowering and can help you manage uncertainty while anticipating the results.



Today's Exercise at Home



Participate in today's exercise: HEALING IMAGERY

Exercise 1

Do one or both exercises on interacting, in the imagination, with your cancer (or with other physical problems if you do not have cancer). Before you do the exercise, gather coloured pencils or crayons. Then, directly after the imagery, draw what you see below, and bring a copy of your drawings to the next class for discussion. Write about your experience as well.

How does it feel to imagine my cancer and my immune system? Empowering, anxiety-provoking etc.

Is there anything that surprised you about your imagery?

Has it changed at all since first trying this in Level One?

Write a narrative of what is happening in your imagery.

How might you wish to see your imagery change over time?

Other reflections?

Draw your imagery on this page.

Exercise 2

What do you think and feel about the idea that cancer may have some meaning in your life? Is this an idea worth pursuing?

What we think of ourselves is of central importance to our healing efforts. If we have a deep fear of personal unworthiness, it may undermine our will to live and our drive to find what is meaningful for us to do in life.

Below are three brief exercises to help you better understand how you view yourself.

List your ten best and ten worst characteristics. It is important to note if you have trouble finding ten good points.

What ideas do you have now about the meaning of your cancer?

Exercise 3

Consider the following questions about self-exploration.

Do you find this healing journey work of interest in itself, or is it more a matter of having to consider it because of the cancer? For example, if your cancer suddenly disappeared, would you continue?

Describe any experiences you may have had in the Healing Journey that have encouraged you to continue with psychological self-help.



Healing Light

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

Log of Daily Healing Activities

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Three Date:			
Four Date:			
Five Date:			
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Seven Date:			

Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION FOUR

INNER HEALER

Learning Exercise: The Inner Healer

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is key at Wellspring. It is essential to have a place where you can express yourself, your feelings and your situation without worrying that people will be talking about you to others. It is a gift that we offer each other, a place to share our stories, knowing that after the program session, we take our stories away with us. This is because your story belongs to you. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please share them with your facilitator.

Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.

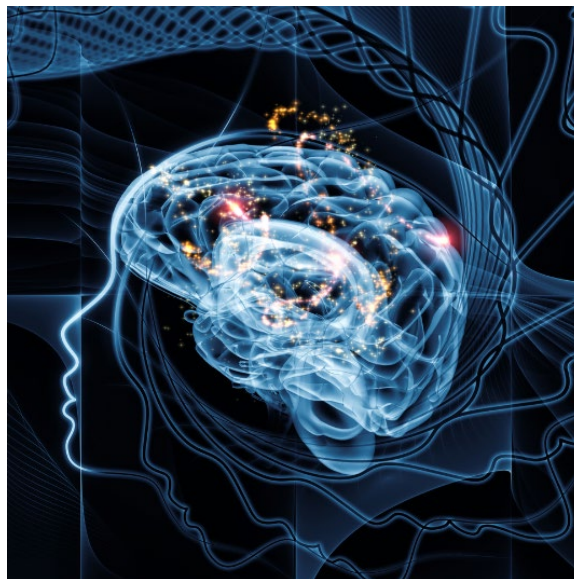


CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

This session uses imagery to connect with a deeper source of internal wisdom. This idea will appeal to some people and may seem very strange to others; however, we know that intuition is a form of knowing that people describe in their experiences. It is also something that has been given serious scientific attention ⁶. Intuition is the ability to know something without using rational cognition. It has been described as having a “hunch” or a gut feeling, a sense of something. It may be why we find an answer to a conundrum while sleeping on it.

Intuition arises out of the non-verbal part of the brain (remember, in the last session, we discussed the right hemisphere, which is generally characterized as the non-verbal part of the brain that works in images). It may also involve the hippocampus and the gut, which are known to have many of the same neurochemicals the brain uses to regulate mood and cognition, such as GABA, serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, acetylcholine and melatonin (hence the gut feeling!). The hippocampus is part of a larger brain structure called the limbic system, where the Fight/Flight/Freeze response originates. The hippocampus is vital in regulating learning, memory encoding, memory consolidation, and spatial navigation. This means that intuition is a felt experience that emerges from a deep non-verbal part of the brain, where information is processed and interpreted⁷.



Intuition may be more accessible to women because their corpus callosum, the part of the brain that connects the left and right hemispheres, is thicker, with more neuronal capacity for communication! However, there is evidence that intuition can be developed and encouraged through meditation and imagery. Even businesspeople consider the role of intuition in their working life⁸.

How might your intuition help you cope with cancer?

Cancer patients are now expected to be active participants in their cancer care rather than passive recipients of medical directives. Patients are asked what treatments they prefer, and they are more likely to seek second and third opinions and do their research. While this is an important step in empowerment, it can also be overwhelming; how do I know what I need? I’m not a doctor! Would it be helpful to connect with an inner sense, a gut feeling, for what might be helpful to you? We are not suggesting that you throw out rational thinking, but when it comes to decisions without much guidance, an inner sense of what might be right for you may be helpful.

⁶ Shirley D.A. & Langan J. (1996) Intuition: A review of the literature. *Psychological Reports*, 79, 563-584.

⁷ <https://drjudithorloff.com/how-to-develop-intuition/>

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alexandramysoor/2017/02/02/the-science-behind-intuition-and-how-you-can-use-it-to-get-ahead-at-work/?sh=13bb6963239f>

How do we connect with intuition?

You are already engaged in practices that encourage the awareness of non-verbal information coming from the non-verbal part of the brain, relaxation, guided imagery, and meditation. In this exercise, we relax deeply (remembering that this facilitates quietening the rational, verbal mind) and imagine a source of inner wisdom deep inside us. It can be helpful to symbolize this source of wisdom as a character; it might be a wise person you have known in your life, a teacher or a grandparent, or a character from a book such as Gandolf from Lord of the Rings or Dumbledore from Harry Potter. It can be a spiritual figure such as a shaman, Jesus or Moses, or it can take a form that is not human, like an animal or the Light, as we use at the end of each Healing Journey session.

We imagine ourselves entering a forest and walking to a clearing where we meet an animal guide who takes us deeper into the woods to a second clearing. This animal can take any form that you wish, perhaps a wild animal or a beloved pet from your childhood. Think of this animal guide as a “warm-up” for the Inner Healer. When you arrive at the second clearing, there will be a place for you to sit, and there will also be a dwelling, perhaps a cabin or a cave, where your Inner Healer lives. As you rest in the clearing, you can call out to your Inner Healer and ask them to meet. Then, when you are together, you can ask specific questions or something more open-ended such as what is the most important thing I can do to take care of myself? We waited respectfully for a response.

This exercise can be challenging for those with difficulty relaxing or being playful with these ideas. We may feel we are making it up or pushing to get the answer we want. Again, feeling comfortable with a technique can take time and practice. Be gentle with yourself and open to experimentation.

After the exercise, again, use your coloured pencils or crayons to draw what you experienced in the imagery. Remember, this is not about being an artist. You may feel frustrated about the gap between your imagery experience and your ability to capture it on paper, so think of your drawing as point form or hieroglyphics sketching out the idea. Finally, augment with written work describing the interaction.



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

There is a great deal of evidence that the deeper or unconscious mind has detailed “knowledge” or record of events in the body and a tremendous potential ability to control them. For example, with biofeedback apparatus, people can learn to control blood pressure, heart rate, brainwave patterns, smooth-muscle contractions, and even the firing of specific single nerve cells. Placebo (inert) medications, or suggestions under hypnosis, can lead to cures or healing changes in various conditions, such as peptic ulcer, pain, skin diseases, asthma, and arthritis. We attempt to use some of this potential control in our exercises with imagery. One way of contacting this inner wisdom is to imagine a figure or “healer” within who may not only embody the potential of our deeper minds but also serve as a route to contact our spiritual dimension.

Some people immediately get powerful images and “messages” from an Inner Healer; others experience very little at first. You may get a sense of “presence” without images; that’s fine. If not much is happening for you, you are likely blocking the experience with skepticism or prejudgment about what should happen. We know that there is a great deal of unconscious wisdom in everyone, expressed, for example, in dreams: we all dream, although not all of us usually remember dreams. So don’t despair if nothing happens on the first few attempts, but continue to work away at the process patiently.



Today's Exercise at Home



Participate in today's exercise: THE INNER HEALER

Exercise 1

You will first be asked to relax and find yourself on a path leading into the woods. As you wait in a clearing, imagine yourself being approached by an animal “guide.” Talk to this animal, noticing your feelings toward it. The guide can then lead you deeper into the forest to a second clearing, where there is a dwelling of some kind inhabited by the Inner Healer. This may be a wise older person, a religious figure, somebody from your past, another animal, a ball of light, a voice without a body, or one of many other symbols. The aim is to summon this figure respectfully and have a dialogue with it, asking for information and help and responding with gratitude. At the end of the conversation, have the original guide take you back to the first clearing, from which you can return to your usual “reality.”

The Inner Healer is a potentially powerful technique that does not, however, “work” for everyone—so don’t feel inadequate if it doesn’t work for you. Try it again during the week, at least three times. If it is not helpful for you, you may be the kind of person who prefers an analytical or intellectual approach. Try relaxing deeply and bringing into your mind a picture or impression of a wise person you have known, a religious figure, like Jesus or the Buddha or Divine Mother, and having a conversation with this figure.

Have you ever had experiences with intuition? How do you feel about trying this technique?

What was your animal guide? How did it feel to be taken into the forest by this guide?

Who was your Inner Healer? What was it like to speak with it? What did you ask? What was the response?

Can you imagine using this technique again? What other questions might you explore with the Inner Healer?

Draw your Inner Healer experience here:

Exercise 2

Let's check in with the Relaxation Response. We are moving quickly through new techniques in Level Two; however, we do not want to forget the essential basics.

How are you managing practicing the Relaxation Response? Has your experience changed since it was introduced in Level One?

What techniques are you using for relaxation? What works best for you?

What are the challenges for you in achieving the Relaxation Response?

Exercise 3

A deeper exploration of your developing skills.

Do you generally try out new things and ideas in your life, or are you satisfied with how things are? What would be an example of trying out something new, and what is your reaction?

How often do you talk to others about what you think and feel, such as expressing anger, fear, and despair? For example, have you spoken to the family about the possibility of dying?

Do you feel you have important things still to do in life? Examples?



Healing Light

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Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

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Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION FIVE

GOAL SETTING: FINDING OUT WHAT I REALLY WANT

Learning Exercise: A Perfect Week

Confidentiality

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Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

Each facilitator will likely have a slightly different take on this grounding; some will use the same one for each session, and others may change it up.



CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

Introduction



The last eight sessions of the Healing Journey (Level One and half of Level Two) have focused on helping you develop skills to manage the fearful thoughts and anxiety of coping with cancer. In today's session, we want to look at what the risk of dying can offer us in terms of making choices about what we do and pursuing what we value. Many people report that the cancer diagnosis is a game changer, meaning they want to look at their lives and evaluate whether they are living the life they want. Terms like the "bucket list," meaning the things we want to do before we die, are popular ways of acknowledging this idea. A bucket list reflects

how we put off the things we value because everyday living takes precedence. Perhaps a cancer diagnosis invites us to choose what matters to us and how we want to spend our time. It is interesting how we all know we will die. Yet, just a few of us believe it!

Today's session takes us into this realm of intentional living. Intentional living is the idea that we are aware of our actions and make the right choices. Perhaps we can permit ourselves to make changes that reflect our values after a cancer diagnosis. The "feeling right" quality is an important part of healing^{9 10}. Sometimes people choose to:

- retire earlier
- change jobs
- take up new interests
- repair relationships
- spend more time with the people they love

A book by Stephen Levine invites us to imagine we have one year to live¹¹, and he invites us to examine our priorities. He quotes Socrates, who, on his deathbed, urged his followers to practice dying as the highest form of wisdom. Through mindfulness, Levine shows us where joy can be found in the awareness that life is finite. We live in a remarkable death-denying society where aging is not valued, and death is sequestered away. Cancer invites us to turn toward this reality and reimagine our priorities and goals. Perhaps by appreciating that life is limited, we can embrace it with more vigour and awareness. Maybe we can begin to value the practices that feed our spirit, give us deep joy and pleasure, and give meaning to our lives.

⁹ Phillips, C. (2013). *Calm Your Mind, Warm Your Heart: Real Voices and Techniques to Support You Through the Ups and Downs of Cancer*.

¹⁰ Leshan, L. (1994). *Cancer As A Turning Point: A Handbook For People With Cancer, Their Families, And Health Professionals*.

¹¹ Levine, S. (1998). *A Year To Live: How To Live This Year As If It Were Your Last*.

I don't want to think about death!

Of course, this is a difficult conversation to have with ourselves. Looking at this possibility is very real for many cancer patients and caregivers. But perhaps it is already on your mind. Maybe it is something that you think about anyway. In this session, we can use this to make decisions reflecting our understanding of what matters to us. Maybe some things don't matter to you like they used to. Perhaps there are things you can let go of. Going back to the concept of allostatic load from Level One, maybe this is another way to lighten the load you carry.

The exercise for this session is to imagine that you have one week left to live. "One week!" you say, "that's not nearly enough!" But, of course, that's true. It's just one week, so we focus on the core of what matters to you. With one week, it is less about the bucket list items, like climbing Kilimanjaro, and more about spending time with the people you love. We will imagine a perfect week where we have all the energy and health we need and complete freedom to do whatever we choose to do, where we want to do it. We will imagine what we want to do and, perhaps even more importantly, what we do not want to do.

If this feels too intense for you right now, if it engenders too much grief and distress, you can change it up to being the perfect week, with all the resources you need to do whatever you want, without the sting of it being your last week. Whatever you choose to do, you will be guaranteed success. Interestingly, members who have done both exercises sometimes come up with different scenarios.

You need to take care of yourself as you approach this session. Choose a perfect week if you are undergoing testing or feel too vulnerable to tackle these big questions. There is no pressure to do this "right." It is just an opportunity to explore the possibilities for yourself.

It's a nice fantasy, but it's not very practical

We understand that there are practical considerations that cannot be overlooked, like needing to work. However, when we let go of practicalities, can we discover, in this fantasy, something new about ourselves? For example, it might not be feasible to run away and live on a tropical island, but is there something about the quality of that fantasy that you can bring to life in your world now? Like spending more time in nature, near water, eating fresh fruit, or taking the time to breathe. Being playful with these ideas can be helpful. Look under the activities themselves to find out the core of those activities, what you value or desire, and what feeds your spirit.

What Healing Journey participants have said

The Healing Journey focused on interviewing people who have taken the program. Specifically, people who managed to help themselves cope with cancer and improve their quality of life. We interviewed them to explore how they live their lives, what they believe has helped them, and what might help others.

The common themes that have arisen in the interviews are that these individuals have made choices about how they want to live their lives. Of course, this has taken many forms — there are many ways people have decided to do this. Some became deeply involved in their spiritual quest, travelling to workshops, meeting healers, and practicing spirituality. Many let go of obligations or patterns that don't work for them anymore. Perhaps they let go of work or rethought how they want work to fit into their lives. One woman who remained working takes time every day to shut her office door to meditate. Most described how they allowed themselves the time to enjoy more deeply the activities that had the most meaning in their lives: simple activities, often with the people they love.

To our surprise, few of the people made life-shattering changes. They didn't leave home or travel vast distances. Instead, we got a sense from them that healing activities became an important part of their lives. Once they had identified what was healing, they held it close to their hearts and invested in it.

Here are some quotes from past Healing Journey participants:

- “My life is different now, and many differences are quite positive for me: resting more, doing the things I love, and spending time with people I love. Those are things I had difficulty making time for before.”
- “I certainly gave up things I was doing because I felt I ought to, and I think it propelled me to a new level of self-examination and self-awareness.”
- “I don't see it as a gift, but it certainly was cancer that made me step back and reflect on what I want to do, and why I want to do it and to make better choices for myself and enjoy life a little bit more.”
- “I feel I used to put a lot of demands on myself. I used to worry about being perfect in everything that I did. I'm still somewhat of a person who wants to please, and I'm being very selective in what I'm doing right now.”
- “I've decided not to go back to work. I've never allowed myself to heal because I'm noncommittal to anybody and can devote time to myself. In doing that, my direction has changed.”
- “I've realized that what works for us today is a changing thing; sometimes meditation is where I need to be, sometimes it's journaling, sometimes it's just quiet reflection, sometimes walking meditation. So I've learned to look and say, is this what I need right now?”
- “Now, when I can quiet my mind, and I meditate, and I'm still, what comes through is more direction, peacefulness, a feeling of love. So that inner space is very valuable to me. I think that's where I connect with what's beyond myself.”
- “I've experienced peacefulness and a joy that I do not have to run after the whole world and catch it by the tail. I don't have to do anymore; I must learn to be.”
- “It [cancer] truly was one of the richest things that ever happened to me. If I hadn't gotten cancer, I would still be racing through life doing everything perfectly and well organized, and life is much richer and more meaningful now.”

What really matters in your life?

Another way to approach this question is to ask, how have you changed, compared to your friends, now that you have coped with cancer? Are there important differences between you and your friends or colleagues? Often there is a renewed focus on relationships and the minor intimate aspects of our lives. So how do we begin to look at our lives and identify what really matters to us?

The exercise for this week is challenging because it evokes fear and grief. For some, this feels like peeling away a thick rind, like a grapefruit, to find the inner centre of what really matters, the sweet juice of life, the inner heart. Doing this exercise can leave you feeling a little raw and vulnerable. However, it can also be interesting to discover what emerges. It often seems to be from the simplest acts of life: reading bedtime stories, sitting in the garden, sharing a walk or a cup of tea, and watching the birds at the feeder on a winter's day. Maybe this is the real stuff of life! Perhaps these are the moments that really matter.



Our society tends to value peak experiences as extreme accomplishments such as running a marathon, climbing Mount Everest, or getting promoted. But those experiences are relatively rare. So maybe we can find peak experiences every day — the simple moments that are truest to our hearts.



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

One of the benefits of a life-threatening illness, if we really face up to it, is that we, at last, realize that our lifespan is limited. From here, we can say to ourselves, well, I might as well do now what seems satisfying and worthwhile to me; there's nothing much to lose. This attitude can lead to radical change. Perhaps we can find a goal that has lain dormant in our imagination for years but now can be brought to centre stage as we realize that many of the old goals are somewhat hollow. It might be an occupation or skill we've always wanted to learn or a relationship we want to change. It might be an internal change, in connection to the world, without much external upheaval: for example, learning to be more spiritually connected or understanding ourselves better through psychotherapy. Sometimes we feel locked into an unsatisfying lifestyle because of family or work commitments. Still, it is incredible what can be done even within such constraints if we are truly determined. The first and most important step is to understand what we want.

Developing Goals That Include the Spiritual Level

We have raised the possibility that getting cancer might be viewed in a much broader context than is usual in our culture. While there are undoubtedly physical causes for the disease, there may also be factors operating at the higher "levels" of ourselves, as discussed in the Introduction to this course, in Level One. First, it is possible that the disease, in some distorted way, may be trying to fulfill some unmet need in us; this need might even be, in some cases, an unrecognized wish to die. Secondly, getting cancer might have some significance in a spiritual sense. If we think of ourselves as spiritual beings, living here to learn and evolve towards a much deeper understanding of our place in the universe, illness may become a learning experience that propels us into self-examination. Expanding our goals to include increasing awareness and connectedness with the spiritual level may allow healing power from the spiritual level to operate in us. Other therapists have put this more poetically. LeShan writes of the need for every person to learn to "sing his or her song." These ideas are sometimes difficult for people in our materialistic culture to understand. However, we have found that they help many patients sense what they mean, and that is why I offer them here.



Today's Exercise at Home



Participate in today's exercise: [A PERFECT WEEK](#)

Exercise 1

What I Really Want

First, relax deeply and go to your special place. Now try the following imagination exercise:

Imagine that you have just learned you have one week to live in good health and without pain, after which you will die. How will you spend that time? (Assume that anything you want to do is possible).

Additional (or Alternative) Exercise

Relax deeply, then imagine that whatever you decide to do, you will be guaranteed success and long life. What would you do?

Before the exercise, consider the following:

How do you feel about this doing this exercise? Can you imagine that it might be helpful?

After the exercise, consider the following:

What were some of the most important things to you in the last (or perfect) week?

What were the things that you didn't want to do? Why didn't you want to do them?

Were there things you could just let go of because they no longer mattered in the big picture of life?

Are there any steps you can take to bring some of the important things you discovered into your life now?

Exercise 2

Shifting priorities and making changes in our lives often requires giving something up. What might you need to give up? Here's where it hurts! Ask yourself what you want to change and why you find it hard. Some possibilities to be analyzed in a group and your journal:

- I'm too lazy
- I'm afraid to risk losing the comfort of my present ways
- I'm afraid that if I don't act sick, I'll get less attention
- I'm afraid to work less because . . .
- I don't want to disappoint others
- I don't want to say no to others
- If I try to help myself and the disease gets worse, I will feel like I failed
- Other ideas?

Exercise 3

Write about the following:

Can you give a brief example of conflict or difficulty with others? How did you handle it?

How do you feel about getting help from others? Give some examples.

What feelings do you have of a need or desire to help others? Give some examples.

Additional Material and Exercises

Using Time Efficiently

For anyone who cares what they do with their life, efficient use of time is important. For someone with cancer who is determined to do whatever possible to combat it, using time well is particularly important in cutting down stress and conserving precious energy for other things, like relaxation and using mental imagery. As with stress management, the first and most crucial step is to become aware of how we spend our time. The list below includes many ways of spending time. You can probably add to it. You might like to guess how much time each activity occupies per day, on average, and record that estimate in the [Time-Monitoring Chart](#) in the Appendix, on pgs. 117-118.

If you want to learn more about yourself, monitoring and recording activities for three days or more is worthwhile. Pick days that are reasonably normal and when you feel quite well. Carry a small booklet or card with you, and at the end of each half hour or hour, write down each kind of activity you engaged in and approximately the time it occupied; it takes only a few seconds to make the note. At the end of your monitoring period, add and record the total time, and calculate the average daily time spent on each activity on your checklist. Compare your initial estimate with the actual daily measurements.

(Note: If you are currently receiving treatment or feeling unwell for other reasons, this list may not be relevant and could be left for when you feel better.)



Healing Light

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Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

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Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION SIX

LETTING GO OF RESENTMENTS

Learning Exercise: The Forgiveness Exercise

Confidentiality

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Breathing Exercise

Breathing is something we take for granted, and yet it is the stuff of life. We will learn why breath is a powerful tool in helping us relax. Each session will begin with a grounding breathing exercise to help you focus, drop some of the stress and draw your attention to your internal experience.

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CENTERING MEDITATION

Use this technique at home, in hospital or awaiting an appointment. It's best to practice at home when things are calm; it's harder to master in the doctor's waiting room, like pushing a rock uphill! It is good to invest in the practice of breathing.

We will continue exploring what we can let go of, what no longer matters as much, in the context of coping with cancer. One of the significant parts of the allostatic load is our resentments. Some of these are trivial, such as traffic jams, trying to contact a helpline, and computer glitches, while others can be more substantial, like the hurts accumulated through life. We will spend much more time exploring this aspect of allostatic load in Level Three. What we want to do in this session is explore the concept of forgiveness, what it is and isn't, and why it might be healing to let go of old resentments and hurts.



As a brief review, the allostatic load is the accumulated stress that occurs over our lives. Allostatic load refers to socio-economic stress, marginality, and disenfranchisement. But it can also be of a more personal nature; the stress absorbed from early childhood, our beliefs about ourselves in terms of our worthiness and value, and the interactions with others that have been painful and hurtful. When these feelings are triggered, they resonate through the levels of our experience (recall the concentric circles model of human experience)—the body tenses, heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure increase: the stress response. We ruminate on the event and replay it in our minds, imagining various reactions we want to make. We dig the hurt more deeply into us as we let ourselves relive the hurt over and over again. It can even influence our dreams (deeper mind). And, of course, it

affects our social relationships, such that we might avoid people, make assumptions about others, and replay the trauma in our present relationships as we try to fix what happened in the past in the present. Finally, spiritually, heavy burdens of resentment leave little room for the spacious, compassionate, peaceful feelings associated with a spiritual connection (more about this in our next session). Ongoing anger and resentment are expensive in terms of bodily and psychic energy. That energy can be put to better use in terms of healing.

We shall use the word forgiveness, meaning letting go of resentments in the broadest sense. Forgiveness is a skill, and we want to start with the small things. It gets easier with time as we learn more about what drives hurt and hurtful behaviour, which will be one of the main topics for Level Three. In this session, we will start with developing an understanding of what forgiveness is and is not. We will then do a visualization designed to assist in letting go of resentments. It's good to start with something small and manageable; the inconsiderate neighbour, the secretary who is unpleasant, the friend who has been unskillful. Save the bigger hurts until your skills have developed in Level Three.



With the group, you will develop a chart that lists what forgiveness is and is not. Having a shared understanding of the concept is important. Our resistance to forgiveness may be that it appears weak to us, it may seem like it is just encouraging more abuse, or we are talking about reconciliation. (An essential discussion in the group will be whether forgiveness requires reconciliation, especially in the case of an abusive relationship.) Does forgiveness just give the other person a “free pass”? Sometimes our anger is protective; after all, who is the most dangerous animal in the forest, the bear or the wounded bear? Of course, the fury and anger are attempts to appear strong and protect the wounded part of us, but remember the expense that exacts from us, the stress response.

In Level Three, we will spend more time examining the idea that there is a wounded place in all human beings, from which hurt and hurtful behaviours arise.

Before your Session Six group meeting, take some time to consider what forgiveness is and what it is not:

Forgiveness is...	Forgiveness is not...

The Garden Gate Exercise

In this exercise, we will imagine a healing garden deep inside ourselves. It is walled and protected, but a gate is at the bottom of the garden. Beyond that gate is a path upon which many people are walking. Someone for whom you feel some resentment will come along that path. If several candidates arise, choose the one that you find less triggering. You have a choice; you can ask this person to come into your garden and sit on your garden bench for a conversation. You can speak to them over the garden gate if that feels too overwhelming.

This is a healing garden, and when people are in it, they can listen, even if that is not how they characteristically behave. Take the time to tell this person how you feel about what has happened between you. Explain your feelings and what you found hurtful. The other person, under the spell of the healing garden, will listen intently. Then it is their turn to tell you what it was like for them, perhaps the story behind their behaviour. See if you can feel your way into their story. Empathizing with them does not mean you are saying their behaviour is okay. Instead, you are trying to understand what was underneath their behaviour, using your humanity and life experience to guide you. Notice whether some of your anger or hurt dissipates after feeling heard and listening to their side. Perhaps you can let some of the resentment go, and maybe you can begin to forgive them. You might even see yourself saying, “I forgive you.” You might even imagine Healing Light filling the both of you. Finally, let the person go back onto the path outside your garden, and let them return to their own lives.



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

A major obstacle to open communication and emotional expression with others is that we tend to resent them: other people almost always fail to be or to do what we want. Also, we fear that they will judge us. As a result, sometimes there is a very considerable gap between our wishes and their actions, and that can lead to rage (usually repressed), which “eats away” at our insides, so to speak, often for years. The result is extremely harmful to our health. The way to overcome it and reach a peaceful state of acceptance of others is not to try to change them (an approach that seldom works) but to change our attitudes. It is not easy, but the Garden Gate exercise will give you a powerful tool with which to work.

When you meet the person in your garden, see this person notice the expression on their face and try to get a sense of what this person’s problems have been—why they are the way they are. Imagine the person bathed in a shower of golden light. Try to imagine them getting what they most dearly want in life! Then, imagine standing and embracing and accepting this individual, feeling your oneness with him or her, two human beings, each struggling as best you can with your problems.

After this exercise, you might like to discuss how pervasive resentment is in our minds. We resent other people, but we also resent events, situations, and even things. These feelings are usually “projections,” that is, we harbour a lot of anger and frustration dating back to childhood, and we look for people or situations to “project” it onto (much more about this in Level Three). An important part of the healing work is becoming aware of all this and trying to change toward greater acceptance of people and situations. It’s not that we become passive—on the contrary, the quest for greater acceptance is an intensely active struggle with ourselves. The immediate rewards of even slight success are greater peace of mind, understanding, and love for others and ourselves.



Today's Exercise at Home



Participate in today's exercise: THE FORGIVENESS EXERCISE

Exercise 1

Repeat (preferably several times) the “resentments” exercise you did in the class. Then, write and/or draw what you experience.

Has your understanding of forgiveness changed after exploring it with your group? How do you understand it now? How might it be helpful to you?

What was it like to meet the person you resent in your garden? Were you able to express your feelings and hurt? What was that like for you?

Were you able to understand what might have been driving the other person's hurtful behaviour? What was it like to explore that?

Were you able to begin the process of letting go of your feelings of resentment? Remember that this may be your first foray into the skill of forgiveness, and it is a process that can take time.

Exercise 2

Relationships with others

Competition

Investigate your feelings about winning and losing (games, business deals, arguments, and so on).
How do I feel if I lose? Why do I feel this way? In the case of something trivial, like a game, why does it matter?
Am I diminished in some way? Is this real or imaginary? What would be a healthier attitude?

Intimate Relationships

Considering your most intimate relationship(s) particularly, ask yourself, “What are my needs from this relationship? How can and do I express them?”

What are the needs of my partner/spouse/friend? How can I find out what they are? How can I help that person meet these needs?

Exercise 3

Beliefs and the dreaded “should.”

We have many beliefs about how we should behave, what we should do and live. Although these beliefs are often unthinking and unexamined, we live with them like old wallpaper. Now that you know your thoughts and feelings, you may become aware of some of the beliefs you harbour and how they make you feel. Any thought accompanied by a ‘should’ is like a belief. Here are a few examples:

- I must always do the best I can. Good enough isn’t good enough
- I shouldn’t say no to people I care about
- I shouldn’t say no to anyone
- I should be liked by everyone
- I should always look my best
- I should be independent and not ask others for help
- I should always work hard
- I shouldn’t be selfish (notice how some of these need to be unpacked, for example what does “selfish” mean?)

Well, the list goes on! And we can have strong beliefs about other people:

- All parents should be caring and attentive
- All children should be respectful to their elders
- People shouldn’t wear weird clothes or dress unconventionally
- Children should behave themselves
- Everyone should be on time
- People should know how I am feeling without me telling them

Lots of beliefs! And each is a judgement made against yourself or others. And many of them are quite unreasonable, especially when we write them down and look at them objectively. So as you begin to learn about the inner terrain of your mind, look for the unchallenged beliefs that guide your feelings. Are these beliefs helpful? Relevant? Are they old messages that no longer serve any purpose except creating distress for you and others?

Learning to challenge our beliefs lets us discover more compassion for ourselves and others, a more peaceful and less judgemental perspective. We want to bring a gentle sense of curiosity to our self-exploration; “that’s interesting...I wonder if that is really true. Is it a helpful thought?”

Not all beliefs are difficult. For example, you will find many people at Wellspring, and the Healing Journey hold beliefs that are helpful to you, such as self-care is important in healing. By moving out of old unhelpful beliefs, we can make room for new, more helpful ones that fit your life right now.

Exercise 4

Checking in with yourself. Write about the following:

How much of the day do you have a peaceful state of mind? What do you do to change things when you are not feeling peaceful?

What do you notice about the relationship between your thoughts and how you feel?

Keeping a Journal

You may have discovered how helpful it is to keep a journal as we continue to work on self-discovery. Moving thoughts and feelings onto paper (or a computer screen) help you become more aware of your inner life. It can help you choose what you are thinking and what you believe. A journal can give you a place to write imaginary letters to people you have resented. You can include diagrams, plans, notes from lectures or books, press clippings, photographs of healing images, and records of dreams. Emotional reactions that occur repeatedly are particularly significant; try to gain access to the thoughts that accompany them.

- Can you recall earlier events in your life that prompted this kind of response?
- It is helpful to review the contents each month and make a summary



Healing Light

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Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION SEVEN

Learning Exercise: The Meta Meditation

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Breathing Exercise

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CENTERING MEDITATION

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We have been mentioning spirituality as part of the Healing Journey but have not addressed it yet. In this session, we explore spirituality and what it means to you.

Spirituality is a term that can come with baggage. You may fear that it is a new age sort of thing that requires beliefs that are not comfortable for you, or you may be very comfortable with the idea of spirituality, with your own understanding of what that means. Spirituality can be found in religion; this is a comfortable fit for some people. For others, this may be more problematic, especially if they feel disenfranchised or even wounded by their religion of origin (the religion they were raised with). Some people were not raised with religion, so spirituality may seem irrelevant. Perhaps the best place to start is to develop a shared understanding of spirituality with your Healing Journey group. We can use a compare and contrast technique to explore religion and spirituality. For some people, these two concepts are tightly connected. For others, they may be distinctly different. Bringing a sense of openness and exploration into these ideas may give us a fuller understanding of what spirituality might offer to the healing process.

Before the group discussion, take some time to list some of the attributes you see religion and spirituality have. (There are not two discrete columns because we do not want to infer that these two concepts are necessarily mutually exclusive.)

Religion	Spirituality

What will likely emerge through your exploration and discussion is that religious organizations are just that, organizations. And as such, they have rules and regulations. Most religions are based on rules that help people live together in groups, for example, the Ten Commandments in the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) or the Eightfold Path of Buddhism. Rules against behaviours such as murder, theft, coveting, and disrespecting others, were necessary when people began to live in larger groups. Religions became the authority within the community to uphold these teachings and rules for living together.



However, many religions developed rules controlling more aspects of life, such as who can marry, what you can eat, with whom and when you can eat, and other aspects of life. In the 21st century, there has been a tremendous social movement towards equality and respect for a wide variety of human expression. As large institutions tasked to uphold traditions, religious institutions have been challenged to keep up with and respond to these powerful social movements. Thus, many people have felt judged or rejected by their religion of origin. There is tension in organizations between maintaining tradition and moving with the times. Some move more nimbly. Others are bastions of traditional beliefs and values.

For some people, religion is a place of comfort and peace and a source of guidance. For others, secular (non-religious) ethics guide them to live well within society. Spirituality has a very different quality to it. It can be considered peace, calm, connectedness, and even love. It is the feeling that we are a part of something larger than ourselves. For some people, this might be God or some Higher Power, or it can be a profound sense of being a part of nature, connected to something greater than oneself. Spirituality can give people the sense that they matter and have a purpose. How might this facilitate healing? It is the ultimate relaxation response.

You will be asked in the group to list activities or practices you experience as spiritual. This can be a lot of fun because spiritual activities can be quite diverse, from the more traditional practices of prayer and meditation to being in nature, cooking for loved ones and singing. In addition, you may learn some new ideas for your consideration!

The important part of this discussion is describing the feelings that these activities give you. How do these activities feel for you? How do they “feed your spirit”?

What bridges these activities and these feelings? With awareness, mindfulness, and focus, the mind quiets, and we get drawn into the flow of the experience. We may feel awe and gratitude, our senses may come alive, and all of this draws us into the moment. Thich Nhat Hanh was a Buddhist monk who established a community in France called Plum Village. His teachings, in part, focused on the joy that is possible through entropic activities. Entropic means the repeated daily things we need to do regularly to maintain our lives, such as

cooking, washing the dishes, and folding laundry. He wrote poetry about the joy found in simple tasks. For example, if we surrender to the need to do the dishes and allow ourselves to focus on it, we begin to notice deeper aspects of the experience. For example, the privilege of having good food to feed ourselves and those we love. The feeling of the warm, clean water flowing over the plate, the way it glistens as we put it into the rack to dry, the sense of completeness as we gather up the dishes and put them away, knowing full well we shall be back at the sink tomorrow doing the same task. By focusing on the moment, mindfully, we can shift a mundane task into an experience that feeds the spirit. Some people find gardening or cooking has similar qualities, feelings of gratitude, joy, wonder, appreciation, and peace. How different this is from being caught up in a whirlwind of thoughts, resentment, and frustration at facing yet the same task day by day!

Listening to someone has also been referred to as a spiritual practice. When we sit with another person and listen from the heart with no distractions, thinking or judgement, no need to change them or their perspective, but hold them and their story in the moment, something arises in those moments. It is a sense of peace and connectedness, not just with each other, but with something ineffable, perhaps difficult to describe, but it feels like peace and connectedness. Eckhart Tolle describes this well in *A New Earth*, a book we shall be studying in Level 5.

What are the common feelings that these activities give us?



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

The outermost shell of the five-ring diagram in the Introduction represents the “spiritual” level. What does this mean? The word is often confused with religion. Spiritual refers to the idea that we are all part of something much greater than ourselves, that there exists a higher order, power, or level, which has been given many names: God, the Divine, the One, the Way or Tao, Cosmic Order, and so on. The spiritual journey is learning to experience our place in this order. Religion is any codified system of rituals and beliefs about this self-transcending order; we can be spiritual without adhering to a religion, and many people adopt a religion without having had any spiritual experience. Here our purpose is not to advocate any religious system but to help you work towards having your own spiritual experiences and thus allow the highest level of yourself to exert its balancing, healing effects on your body and mind.

How can we know that such a level of healing potential exists? We can read the works or descriptions of the world’s great spiritual figures—Christ, Muhammad, the Buddha, the long line of saints in Eastern traditions—and notice the essential similarity of the message across cultures and at different times. However, it is our own experience that will ultimately be most convincing. How do we get such an experience? It helps greatly to join an organization that focuses on spiritual growth. There are many, like the various branches of Buddhism such as Zen, the Sufi order of the Muslim faith, certain groups within the Christian church, and some kinds of “humanistic” psychology. Different organizations will emphasize other practices to assist spiritual connectedness. Still, the basic attitudes to be cultivated are, as far as I know, similar in all of them and might be listed as follows: A desire to:

- *find spiritual purpose, which becomes a central goal in life, rather than the usual search for pleasure (which does not mean that pleasure is decreased, but rather that it is increased several-fold!)*
- *quiet the mind to become more receptive, listening and connecting with the spiritual rather than following one’s own will and ego*
- *practise significant quieting rituals such as meditation, prayer, tai chi, yoga*
- *serve others in need*
- *practise gratitude, humility, and compassion*
- *open to and operate from the “heart” rather than from the “head.”*



Today's Exercise at Home

Main Exercise

Mindfulness meditation is a form of meditation, sometimes called “mindfulness,” used in Buddhism and other traditions. The method is straightforward: sit with a straight back, eyes closed, and without deciding on any particular focus, watch the mind, noticing thoughts as they pass through but not following them up in any way. For example, if you find that a sensation like back pain or a sound comes to your attention, focus all your concentration on that and label it; it may help to repeat to yourself, “back pain, back pain.” After 30 seconds, your mind will tire of this focus and shift to something else, such as “this isn’t working.” Repeat this new phrase to yourself over and over until another shift occurs. It’s like slowing down a film to inspect each frame for a few seconds. In this way, we become detached spectators of our mental parade. As a result, we may get a sense of a more authentic, “higher” self, watching the contortions of our ordinary lower self.



Participate in today’s exercise: [META MEDITATION](#)

The Meta Meditation is a suggested / alternative meditation you can use.

Exercise 1

Practise this mindfulness meditation for the next three days and compare it with your current method of meditating. Write about the experience. Then select one way and use it for the coming months.

Exercise 2

Journal about activities that you consider spiritual. If this is a new idea, experiment with various activities and explore what they feel like.

[illegible]

What do these spiritual practices feel like to you? What makes them spiritual for you?

Try bringing mindfulness to a simple daily routine. For example, can you brush your teeth with complete awareness, your feet planted on the bathroom floor, concentrating on the sensations of the brush on your teeth and gums, the toothpaste, and flossing? Can you fold the laundry, smell the freshness of the clothes, feel the wrinkles smooth out under your hands, the pleasure of folding them and placing them with care in the basket?

Read one or more books by a spiritual master (select a writer who has done their work, not a popularizer). If this kind of reading is new to you, I would suggest any book by one of the following authors, all of whom are easy to read: Eknath Easwaran, Thich Nhat Hanh, or Yogananda. If you want a specific suggestion: *Original Goodness*, by Easwaran.

Exercise 3

Write about the following:

Have you had—or do you often experience—any feelings you would describe as spiritual?

How do you understand the idea of a larger order, intelligence, or God?

Additional Material and Exercises

We include some ideas about how to keep your mind “still” (relatively clear of thoughts), which may be helpful.

What To Do If Your Mind Won’t Be Still

If your thoughts keep on whirling when you are trying to meditate (or to relax or do imagery), there are several things you can try:

- Spend a few minutes writing down your problems first. Then, tell yourself firmly that you can return to them later, but for now, you intend to meditate.
- Experiment with relaxation techniques or tapes before practising meditation
- Experiment with different times of day; early morning may be a better time than at night when you may be tired.
- Clear your mind. You can journal your thoughts and feelings just before practising meditation. Then after meditating, you can briefly record in your journal any changes you notice or insights you have had from your meditation session.
- Stopping thoughts is a more dramatic technique, often helpful in preventing recurrent worrying thoughts. Set a timer for three minutes. Then allow yourself to ruminate or worry about the problem whole-heartedly until the timer rings, at which time you shout, “Stop!” snap your fingers, and empty your mind for a predetermined period. This exercise can be repeated, and the details may be changed to suit you. Some find it helpful to imagine a big, red STOP sign when the worrying is to cease. Over several days or weeks, try to decrease the time spent on ruminations gradually
- Imagine you have a series of knobs and dials in your mind; one is for “noise,” another perhaps for “images,” a third for “discomfort” or “pain,” and so on. Exercise control by turning the knobs up or down.



Healing Light

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Other Ways to Practise Meditation

Designate a space for meditation

A room or corner designated for your daily meditation and other exercises is helpful. For example, you could have an altar or low table with flowers, pictures of family, friends, possibly statues of religious figures, and candles to light as a ritual marking the beginning of your inner-directed attention. These cues help focus the mind. If you have religious beliefs, integrate them with your meditative practices.

Walking meditation

Try saying a mantra or watching your breath as you walk, perhaps in time with your footsteps, or use it while doing daily chores.

Chanting meditation

Try chanting a mantra (such as “Om” or “Rama” or “Om mani padme hum,” or “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”) out loud for 20 minutes or so. Use any tone that appeals or a monotone. You can think about and “let out” any emotions that may be bothering you for some time. You may notice that your voice varies greatly in volume at different stages. In the end, sit quietly for a while.

End-of-day review of events

Just before going to bed, sit quietly and review the events of your day while in a relaxed state. Then, as you re-experience stressful moments, tell yourself to let them go now. This becomes a kind of meditation which helps us fall more quickly into a peaceful sleep.

Questions/Comments for the Next Session

SESSION EIGHT

REVIEW

Confidentiality

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CENTERING MEDITATION

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We have covered a lot over the last eight sessions! Today's session is an opportunity to review the material, ask questions and think about how you will continue to practice self-help as you wait to begin Level Three.

We will go back to the skills learned in Level One because they are foundational to all the other skills you have learned. It is helpful to review these skills both to understand where more practice might be beneficial, and to appreciate how far you have come!

Here is a list of the skills we have covered in Level One. On the following scale, rate your confidence in using each of these skills to help yourself cope:

- 1 not confident
- 2 somewhat confident
- 3 moderately confident
- 4 confident
- 5 very confident

Level One

Session One

- ___ Centring and focusing with the breath
- ___ Identifying feelings
- ___ Progressive Relaxation (tensing and releasing muscles)
- ___ Imagining a safe place

Session Two

- ___ Developing a sleep routine
- ___ Managing nutrition
- ___ Exercising while respecting your physical limits
- ___ Watching your thoughts and writing them down
- ___ Expressing feelings
- ___ Replacing uncomfortable thoughts
- ___ Deep Inner Relaxation

Session Three

- ___ A healing image of your immune system protecting you
- ___ An image (or images) of all that you are doing to help yourself
- ___ Healing Light imagery

Session Four

- ___ Asking for help and support from others
- ___ Expressing thanks and gratitude to those who do support you
- ___ Participate in peaceful, calming activities such as walks in nature

Level Two**Session One**

- ___ Reviewing life events
- ___ Thought watching
- ___ I have started journaling

Session Two

- ___ Meditation using counting
- ___ Meditation using a mantra or repeated word
- ___ Meditation using imagery

Session Three

- ___ Imagery for healing
- ___ Conversation with the cancer
- ___ Drawing my imagery
- ___ Reviewing my imagery

Session Four

- ___ Imagery for meeting an Inner Healer
- ___ Drawing the imagery of the Inner Healer

Session Five

- ___ Imagery for setting goals and priorities
- ___ Making changes in your daily life that reflect your priorities

Session Six

- ___ Identifying resentments that you would like to let go of
- ___ The Garden Gate exercise
- ___ Feeling a shift in resentment

Session Seven

- ___ Exploring spiritual activities
- ___ Bringing mindfulness into daily activities
- ___ Practicing mindfulness meditation

Below is a guide to support you in asking questions in your group and to help you focus on skills you want to work on.

What questions do you have for your facilitator and group?

The key word to all these activities is *awareness*; awareness of what your body is feeling, and perhaps needs, of your thoughts and feelings and how they are connected, awareness of the resentments we carry and the effect it has on the body, heart, mind, and spirit. We are also beginning to expand our awareness from the mundane sphere of life we are usually embroiled in to ask questions about a spiritual realm; what is peace? How do I instill it in my life? Am I a part of a greater whole? Does my life have a purpose? Awareness is an opening of the mind and heart that can give us choices about how we wish to respond to the world around us. Awareness will be a big part of our work in Level Three.

Part of awareness is developing the ability to observe yourself, developing this *inner observer*. Journaling, thought-watching and meditation are all key to developing this observer quality. It is a gentle, non-judgemental part of yourself that brings curiosity and interest to your inner life. “That’s interesting. I wonder what that feeling is?” “Hmmm, what is it that I’m thinking? Is that thought true, accurate, and helpful? Is it an old message I absorbed and is no longer relevant? Is this a pattern?” It is like working your way through that allostatic knapsack and letting go of thoughts and feelings that are not serving you anymore. Level Three will deepen this skill, offering you more and more sovereignty over your experience.

In the meantime, have you developed a routine of self-care? It is quite a compendium of practices that we have been developing, and many people are challenged to find space to fit in all the things they want to do to take care of themselves. However, you may also experience feelings of resistance, frustration, anger, or avoidance, and at the end of the day, your best intentions to journal and meditate have fallen through. This is very common, and you will not be the only person in the group challenged by resistance. Take a moment to consider your resistance to these self-care strategies.

Is it hard to find the time to do the self-care you want? Is it hard to practice these skills? What gets in the way?

How might I create space and enthusiasm for my newly developing self-care skills?



Today's Exercise at Home

Exercise 1

To review and plan for your self-care practices, consider these questions when filling in the chart that follows:

- What do I currently do at each level of my experience?
- What would I like to achieve at any given level?
- What can I do as a first step toward achieving what I want?
- What currently stops me?
- How will I know when I've achieved what I want?



Healing Light

We finish each session of the program with the image of Healing Light. This image is used throughout all the Levels of the Healing Journey and can be used whenever you want to feel cared for, held and supported.

Imagine it swirling down through the top of your head. It fills you up from the tips of your toes through your body. The Light is attracted to any parts of you calling for healing, be it in your body, heart, mind or spirit. Feel the Light, warm and nurturing, holding you and all the members of the Healing Journey. Then, when you have filled yourself with Light, you can imagine sending it out to all the people you care about who would benefit from it.

Log of Daily Healing Activities

Level	What I do now	What I would like to achieve	What is the first step	What will block me	Evaluation
Body					
Thoughts					
Feelings					
Social					
Spiritual					



A Word from Alastair Cunningham

A major obstacle to open communication and emotional expression with others is that we tend to resent them: other Healing comes from the old English word haelen, “to make whole.” We become whole through connecting with all parts of ourselves. Another way of saying this is that healing is integration into a larger order. The five-ring diagram, prominent in our materials, shows five main levels of our being, from the body to the spirit. We aim to connect, really to feel our oneness, with all of our levels. This idea has been known for thousands of years in various forms; all I’ve done here is lay it out in a rational and usable form. Throughout the ages, many individuals and cultures have developed ways of working at all five levels.

Spiritual Level

A transcendent order includes everything in the universe, sometimes called “God.” It may be experienced to some degree through practices such as meditation and is the largest and potentially most powerful healing level of organization to which we can connect. Our main task is to learn to experience our part in this order—to diminish the exaggerated idea of separateness that afflicts most of us and sense our belonging to this greater whole. In the Hindu tradition, it is said that “the drop of water must return to the ocean!” This experience, if combined with appropriate reflection, leads us to an awareness of what we are meant to do with our lives, mentally and behaviourally. Various traditional disciplines are designed to further this aim: yoga (union) is probably the oldest. Meditation, in its many forms, is crucial to spiritual connecting because it requires dropping the constant mental “interference” and “listening to what is there.” Many other healing practices invoke the spiritual level: prayer, service to others, and laying on of hands (offering oneself as a channel for God’s power), for example. For some of us, being in nature can promote this mystical sense of oneness with something much bigger than ourselves through the quietness and the deeply felt sense of our insignificance.

Social Level

A great deal of traditional healing involves strengthening people’s social Connectedness. The whole tribe may gather about the sick individual or take him to sacred places, such as ancestral burial grounds. Ritual is used to connect with earlier generations (and induce altered mental states). We have lost a lot of this way of being in the West; perhaps our nearest analogue is belonging to a caring community—a church, or Wellspring, for example.

Deep Psychological Level

Using psychedelic drugs, mental imagery, meditation, and other ways of producing altered states of consciousness can expand our awareness and teach us that we are part of a larger unity. For example, we can learn that our minds are connected with other people’s minds. It becomes apparent that this “inner world” is much more extensive than we had imagined, that we usually choose to restrict our conscious attention to a very small part of our possible experience, and that the search (for understanding) lies within, not outside. The healing power of modern psychotherapy lies in helping us to become aware that most of what we do is driven by unconscious impulses from the “deeper mind.”

Conscious Mind

We think of our minds as accurately portraying what is “out there.” In fact, as philosophers East and West have shown us, we essentially create our ideas of reality. The mind is our tool for deciding what we want to do at our higher levels; for example, we may choose to change our social relationships or devote much more time to spiritual practices. It is important to become aware of the stream of conscious thinking and to assert some control over it (such as changing negative ruminations into more positive ideas). But the main task at this level is to remove the obstacles that thinking generates by asserting that things are a certain way. We obscure the larger picture. Traditional healing almost always involves getting past regular conscious perception.

Body

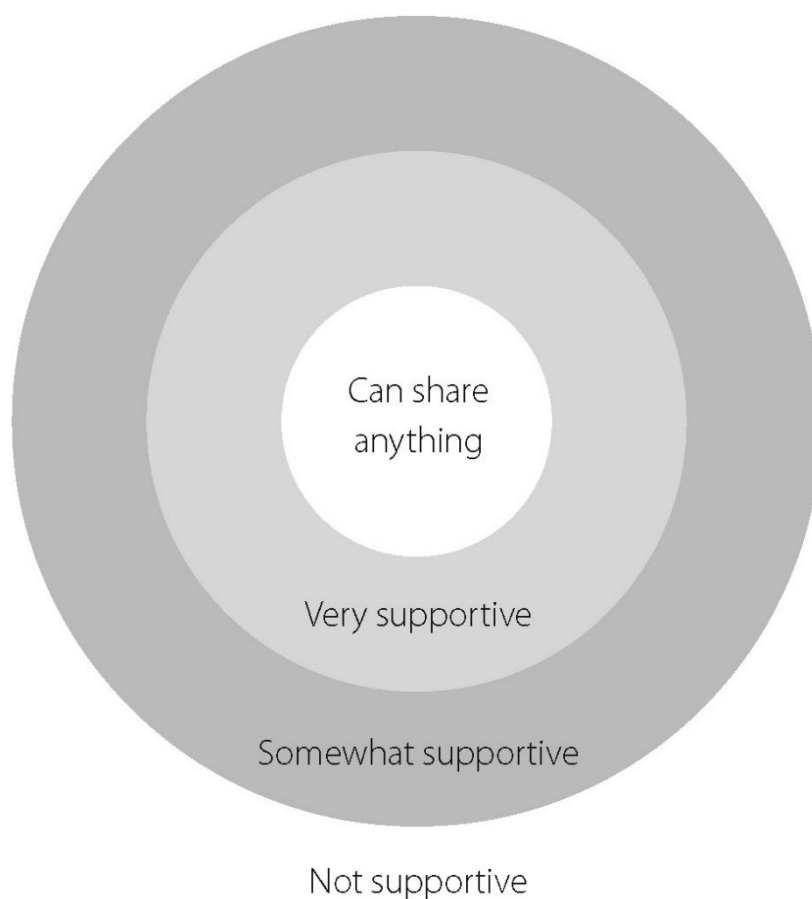
Perhaps even more than the conscious mind, the body poses an obstacle to healing because we identify completely with it. In many traditions, the body is seen as a concretization of spirit, a temporary coat we put on for a while. Yet its needs seem so compelling that they can monopolize our attention. Thus, our main healing task at this level is to bring the body's needs into harmony with our other levels. The body can also be a route to understanding the deeper mind since what happens in our bodies is greatly influenced by the mind. For example, physical symptoms correspond to specific patterns of mental activity, and we can sometimes learn to understand and change such bodily manifestations through mental introspection and imagery. In traditional healing practices, the body may be starved, used in a ritual dance, or treated with drugs or special diets to facilitate changes in mental perception. Modern medicine treats the body in isolation from other levels and makes changes to it with drugs, surgery, and other procedures.

In summary, we are trying to learn to experience, for an increasing proportion of our waking hours, a sense of oneness with an order that transcends ourselves. There is room for many variations in how we approach this state. However, the result is likely to be similar for all: man or woman, modern city-dweller or “primitive” tribesman. It is a feeling of being supported by love, surrounded and enfolded by an intensely meaningful matrix or network of connections. We know, with certainty, much stronger than thought can provide, that all will be well, even when we die. Our task is to foster and maintain this awareness in the face of the modern world's numerous distracting and fragmenting tendencies.

Notes on Session Eight

APPENDIX

SOCIAL MAP



We start here with a “map” of the people important to your life and how supportive they are.

Place the initials of the two to ten people most important in your life on this map.

Write comments on the significant figures; in particular, who is not supporting you in the way you would like, and how can you improve the situation?

LIFESTYLE CHECKLIST

Lifestyle Checklist

Level	Statement	Extent to which this applies to me				
		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Occasionally	Never
Body	I sleep well	4	3	2	1	0
	I do relaxation exercises daily	4	3	2	1	0
	I do appropriate physical exercise daily	4	3	2	1	0
	I eat mainly natural wholesome foods	4	3	2	1	0
	I avoid junk foods and stimulants (alcohol, candy, cigarettes, coffee, etc.)	4	3	2	1	0
Conscious Mind	I am generally untroubled by anxious thoughts	4	3	2	1	0
	I pursue hobbies or recreation regularly	4	3	2	1	0

	I watch only TV shows that I find truly entertaining or instructive	4	3	2	1	0
	I ask questions and express my needs freely to medical and support staff	4	3	2	1	0
	I do regular imagery practice	4	3	2	1	0
	I listen to my inner intuition/voice	4	3	2	1	0
	I chant, do the light visualization, or watch my breathing	4	3	2	1	0
Unconscious mind	I work a moderate number of hours	4	3	2	1	0
	I enjoy my work and feel secure	4	3	2	1	0
	I seek out friends and communicate freely with them	4	3	2	1	0
	I feel free to ask for love and help	4	3	2	1	0
	My family life is peaceful and fulfilling	4	3	2	1	0

This checklist can help you assess your lifestyle and help you identify any changes you might wish to make. Circle the number that indicates the extent to which each statement applies to you.

STRESS CHECKLIST

Stress Checklist

Level of self	Stress symptom	Discomfort level (low = 0, high = 10)		
		Now	A later time	End of course
Body	Muscle tension			
	Headaches			
	Neck & shoulder aches			
	Other aches (list below):			
	Fatigue			
	Pounding heart			
	Problems sleeping			
	Rapid shallow breathing			
	Digestive upsets			
	Restlessness			
	Excessive sweating			
	Frequent urination			
	Disturbed eating habits			
	Excessive consumption of alcohol, other drugs			

Conscious mind	Confusion/poor concentration			
	Forgetfulness			
	Negative ideas			
	Apathy/boredom			
	Whirling mind			
Unconscious mind/emotional	Irritability or frustration			
	Feeling helpless or hopeless			
	Anxiety			
	Depression (feeling “blue”)			
	Nightmares			
	Crying spells			
	Little joy in life			
Social	Avoiding others			
	Loneliness or isolation			
	Resentment towards others			
	Intolerance/impatience			
	Lowered sex drive			

Level of self	Stress symptom	Discomfort level (low = 0, high = 10)		
		Now	A later time	End of course
Spiritual	Loss of direction or meaning			
	Emptiness			
	Cynicism			
	Apathy			
	Martyrdom			
	Hopelessness			

The Stress Checklist can help you assess changes that you are experiencing over time. Enter a number from 0 to 10 that describes how you are feeling for each item on the left side of the chart. Lower numbers indicate little or no discomfort, and higher numbers up to 10 indicate increasing levels of discomfort.

You can add up your numerical scores in the different categories on the chart to get a total for each category (e.g., "body"), as well as a grand total. The questionnaire can be done again at intervals to observe changes, perhaps using different colours to mark it each time. You can also modify or add to this list, of course, to make it more relevant to you.

Having done this, the next step is to plan the changes you want to make. You might like to make some entries in your journal, under the following headings:

- Activity Areas (What I do now)
- Ideal Patterns (What I would like to do)
- Changes I Wish To Make Now

TIME-MONITORING CHART

Time-Monitoring Chart

Activities	Times spent (minutes daily)			
	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Average
At work				
Socializing				
Routine tasks				
Low-priority work				
Productive work				
Meetings				
Not at work				
Telephone calls				
Conversation (face to face)				
TV				
Hobbies				
Reading				
Sports				

Civic activities, clubs			
Other recreation			
Travel for errands			
Commuting			
Shopping			
Household chores and maintenance			
Child care and supervision			
Personal hygiene, grooming, dressing			
Sexual activities			
Daydreaming			
Drinking			
Cooking			
Eating			
Naps			
Night sleep			
Other			