

# PEACE by PIECE

Series 3: Spirituality

## **Creative Meditations for humanitarian workers**

*"For better or worse, it may be impossible to go into humanitarian work and walk away unchanged on a core spiritual level."*

How are your beliefs and your work interacting and shaping each other?

What concepts and tools can help you thrive in the face of spiritual challenges?



Lisa McKay



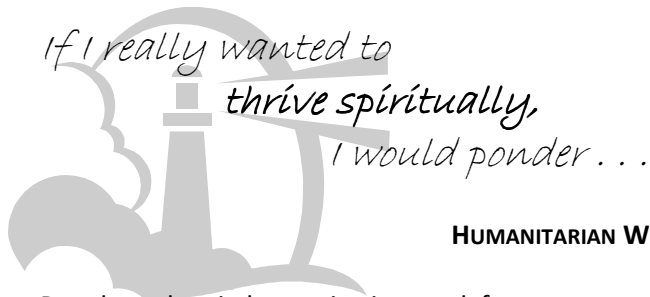
**HEADINGTON INSTITUTE**  
*Care for Caregivers Worldwide*

Headington Institute  
200 East Del Mar Blvd  
Suite 119  
Pasadena, CA 91105  
USA  
Phone: 626 229 9336  
[www.headington-institute.org](http://www.headington-institute.org)

This information is provided solely for educational purposes. The exercises are not intended to be used as diagnostic or treatment tools. Any concerns you might have about mental health issues should be discussed with a qualified mental health professional.

# Table of contents

1. Humanitarian work as soul work .....	4
2. What is spirituality? .....	6
3. My assumptions and beliefs .....	8
4. Curves in the road .....	10
5. Navigating curves in the road .....	12
6. Active spirituality .....	14
7. Drawing near to the divine .....	16
8. What I really value .....	18
9. Soul food .....	20
10. Cultivating quiet .....	22
11. Breathing in and breathing out .....	24
12. Checking the rearview mirror .....	26



## HUMANITARIAN WORK AS SOUL WORK

People end up in humanitarian work for many reasons. Some seek adventure, or intensity. Some, because it's a job and they need the money. Most humanitarian workers, however, are at least partly motivated by spiritual qualities or ideals such as beliefs about meaning, purpose, altruism, what it means to love and serve others, and compassion for those in need. For many, personal spirituality is an integral part of deciding to become a humanitarian worker. But what most people don't fully anticipate is that, over time, humanitarian work will also impact and change their spirituality.

When you respond to great human need, you are always going to be pushed and changed yourself. No matter what your core beliefs and values, it is virtually impossible to be exposed to disaster and suffering, the impact of violence, or stories of pain and need without your worldview being profoundly challenged. This process can be both extraordinarily painful and extraordinarily rewarding.

As a humanitarian worker, you will be confronted with troubling questions and spiritual paradoxes. John Fawcett, a colleague who has spent decades supporting humanitarian workers, says, "There will come a time, if you pursue this career for long, when a profound lack of understanding will threaten to sweep away your actions, beliefs, achievements, and even reason for being. Knowing this challenge will come, and ensuring that there are close friends who can hear your questions without harming you, is an essential component to preventative stress management."

My experiences as a stress management trainer with humanitarian workers suggest that John is right. During a recent workshop in Kenya with humanitarian workers from many different organizations, I asked participants what one question – any question – they would have answered if such a thing were possible. Almost all of the questions people raised during this exercise were linked to issues of spirituality: Why do innocent children suffer? How does the concept of God go together with the injustice in this world? What goes on in people's minds that make them turn against and kill each other? Faith and belief give people strength, but I feel that I've lost my own faith – how can I reconnect with my spiritual self? What is the essence of love?

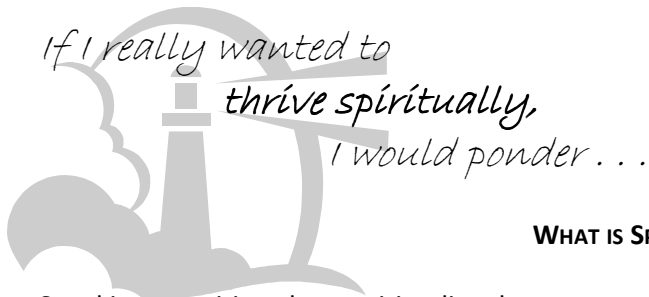
Humanitarian work is soul work. For better or for worse, it may be impossible to go into humanitarian work and walk away unchanged on a core spiritual level. If that's the case, it's worth spending time exploring how your beliefs and your work are interacting and shaping each other by identifying spiritual challenges and concepts and tools that can help *you* thrive in the face of those challenges. This weekly series is designed to help you do that.



*Today:* What one question – any question – would you have answered if such a thing were possible? Write your answer down in a new journal that you can use to capture your thoughts as you go through this entire series.

*This week:* Pay attention. What do you wonder and worry about, or get angry over? Conversely, what stirs gratitude, joy, and hope? Make notes.

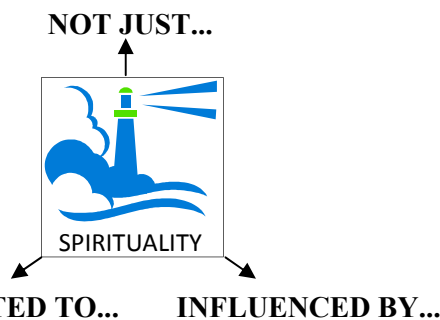




### WHAT IS SPIRITUALITY?

Speaking or writing about spirituality always scares me a little, and excites me at the same time. It scares me because this topic, especially in the context of work, is a minefield. The issue of spirituality is closely tied to one’s core identity, and the risk of being misunderstood or inadvertently causing offense is very high. At the same time, addressing spirituality excites me because it’s on most people’s minds in some way or another but is rarely discussed openly because it’s so complicated and personal. Yet humanitarian work is a profession that carries with it huge potential for spiritual disruption on the one hand, and spiritual growth on the other. And many research studies suggest that spirituality and religious practice protect people from physical and mental illness. This is a topic that deserves some attention.

A necessary place to start is by defining what we mean by the term “spirituality” – a word loaded with invisible baggage and meaning many different things to different people. When I run workshops on this topic, I usually start the day by asking participants to help me construct a “concept map.” Using the diagram on the right, participants help me and each other understand what *they* mean by the word *spirituality*. Then, and only then, can we move on to discussing how our personal spirituality influences, and is impacted by, our work.



There’s no quicker way to feel humbled than to try and define spirituality – just as mental health is a dynamic and evolving concept that varies across people and cultures. But the definition I often use is: *Spirituality is a core component of human nature. It includes a sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith. Whether due to an explicit belief in God, a more diffuse sense of connectedness with nature or a life force, or a belief in human nature and solidarity, most people believe that to be fully human involves more than just the physical dimensions of existence.*

This definition sets spirituality apart from religion. Spirituality is personal, related to a deeply held set of values and to meaning that extends beyond ourselves. Religion is often described as collective and institutional – a set of practices related to shared spiritual beliefs. For some people the two overlap. Many others, however, might describe themselves as spiritual, but not at all religious.



*Today:* In your notebook, sketch out your thoughts in relation to the diagram above. What is your spirituality connected to and influenced by? Is it related to religion or religious practice? If so, how?

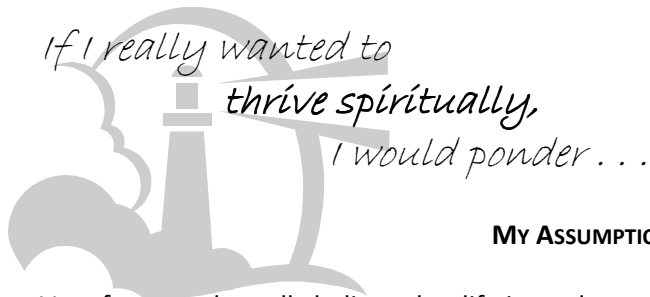
*This week:* Think more deeply about where your deepest sense of meaning and purpose, hope and faith, are anchored. How would you explain your spirituality to someone else? Make notes.



# NOTES

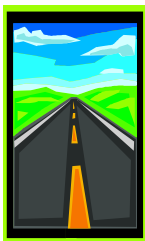
A series of horizontal lines for taking notes, consisting of 20 evenly spaced lines.





## MY ASSUMPTIONS AND BELIEFS

Very few people really believe that life is random and that what happens to us and to others is entirely a product of chance. Believing life is random leads people toward the conclusion that life is ultimately meaningless, and that what happens to us doesn't really matter to anyone but ourselves. There seems to be something within almost everybody that instinctively rebels against these notions. Human beings are a meaning-making species. We seem to be hardwired to search for meaning that extends beyond ourselves, to believe that it exists, and to yearn to understand it.



Along those lines, we all have a personal and internal “map” of assumptions and beliefs that we find helpful in guiding us through life and interpreting the landscape we see along the way. For example, here are some assumptions we can hold – consciously or unconsciously – until we are forced to examine whether they “work”:

- Life is comprehensible, predictable, and fair – what goes around, comes around.
- We are invulnerable to real tragedy – it won't happen to us.
- We are basically good individuals – at our core we are not selfish or cowardly.

We all have also made certain decisions about how we conceptualize a supreme force or being (or decided not to decide). What we believe on this front has implications for how we view the landscape of life and respond to traumatic events and other challenges along the way. For example, here are some areas where beliefs are particularly influential when it comes to how we react to witnessing or experiencing disaster, cruelty, and suffering:

- *The existence and attributes of God or a Life Force:* Is it (or are they) good? All-powerful? All-knowing? Trustworthy? Accessible, or remote?
- *The role of suffering:* Is it inevitable? Does it all have meaning and purpose? Can it be explained? Is it sometimes “caused” or just something that happens?
- *The existence of evil:* Does it exist? If so, how do you think about it (e.g., as an impersonal “anti-life” force, or more personally, as “the devil” or something else)?

Our internal road map, which is influenced by our values, assumptions, and beliefs, helps us to make sense of the journey. It can influence all aspects of life – from our rules for living to our expectations and decisions about the future.



*Today:* Makes some notes on which assumptions and beliefs you have found challenged or strengthened since you started working in the humanitarian field.

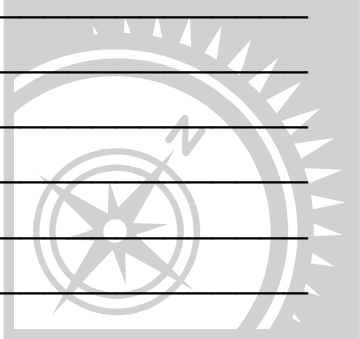
*This week:* Look back at your notes from the first week on what you wonder, worry, or get angry about. Emotional responses are barometers of assumptions and beliefs. What assumptions and beliefs are those reactions related to? Make notes.



# NOTES



Lined area for taking notes, consisting of horizontal lines across the page.



*If I really wanted to  
thrive spiritually,  
I would ponder . . .*

## CURVES IN THE ROAD

Last week we looked at our internal road maps – the assumptions and beliefs we hold that help us figure out how to move forward and make sense of the journey of life. This week we'll start to consider what happens when we end up in situations where we can't help but be aware that our internal road map doesn't match the terrain around us.

More than most careers, humanitarian work puts people in "challenging terrain." It forces people into close quarters with disasters, violence and other traumatic events, extreme poverty and deprivation, other people's suffering, and the moral dilemmas that are inherent in situations where tough choices must be made. In turn, these experiences can force us to examine our own assumptions and beliefs, and highlight existential vulnerabilities and dilemmas such as:



- Death and suffering are inevitable – happiness is not always possible;
- Life is not always comprehensible, predictable, or fair – bad things *do* happen to good people; and
- We are not always good, and we can't always view ourselves in a positive light – right alongside acts of heroism and dignity there can be desperation, selfishness, and cruelty.

When our internal road map doesn't match the terrain we see, it can be very challenging and troubling. It forces us to go back to our map, compare it to our experience, and try to reconcile the two. Many humanitarian workers, even the nonreligious, experience at least one "crisis of faith" during their careers, because their experiences can raise spiritual issues and questions related to:

- Personal identity and purpose in life;
- The existence and identity of a transcendent force or power; and
- The existence and nature of broader meaning and purpose in relation to disasters and traumatic events.

This process can have both benefits and costs. Many humanitarian workers I've met over the years speak thoughtfully and positively of how the things they've seen and experienced during their careers has matured and stretched them, broadened and enhanced their perspective on life, and made them profoundly grateful for their many blessings.

On the other hand, being stretched implies being pushed past your existing comfort limits. Many humanitarian workers – often the same ones who can identify the positives in their experiences – also speak of times when they have wrestled with existential angst, felt completely overwhelmed, hopeless, and despairing, or felt they had lost their sense of meaning, purpose, and faith.



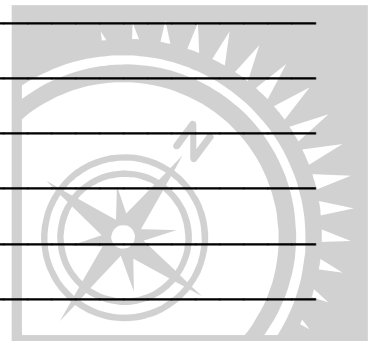
*Today:* Have you experienced a "crisis of faith" during your career? If so, what people or events were related to this? Which assumptions and beliefs were challenged or changed? How did you react and change? Make notes.

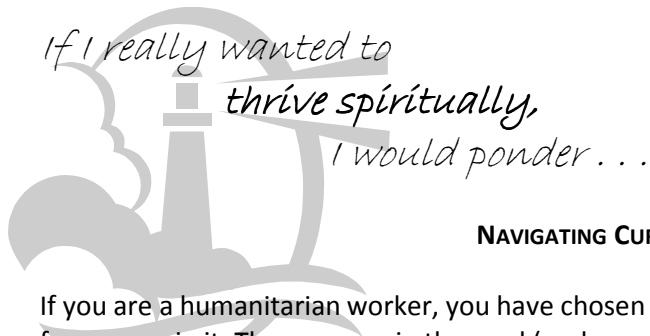
*This week:* Start a list of the spiritual benefits and costs of your career. What has your work "given" you? What has it "cost" you?

# NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, spanning most of the page width.





## NAVIGATING CURVES IN THE ROAD

If you are a humanitarian worker, you have chosen a path through life that will likely have more than a few curves in it. These curves in the road (such as witnessing or experiencing traumatic events, not being able to live up to your own ideals, facing moral dilemmas with life and death consequences) can spark strong emotions and cause you to question your deepest assumptions and beliefs about the way the world works and your identity and place in it. In that sense they are spiritual challenges.

So what happens when we hit curves in the road of life? Every person and situation is different, and our specific reaction will depend on many things (including what happened, what it meant to us, our history, and what else is going on in life). There are, however, some fairly common types of emotional and spiritual reactions to curves in the road, and it's important to understand these. Becoming more conscious of our own reactions to challenging situations or events can, over time and if we want to, enable us to choose to respond differently.

Here are three common types of reaction to curves in the road of life:



**Resist:** Resistance might include denial, a refusal to accept the situation, avoidance, and feelings of disbelief, betrayal, anger, and energy.



**Surrender:** This can include a yielding of control and outcome, fatalism, total acceptance that can look like passivity to outsiders, and feelings of apathy, fatigue, disengagement, helplessness, or freedom.



**Transform:** This can include grappling to understand and identify purpose and meaning, to “redeem” or positively transform the event or situation, and a variety of feelings – from confusion to peace – along the way.

There is no single right reaction to a curve in the road; each of them can bring both benefits and pitfalls. For example, the anger that can come with resistance may help you mobilize energy to change things. Denial or avoidance can temporarily protect you from feeling overwhelmed or paralyzed. In general, however, while resistance and surrender can be effective short-term coping strategies, they often prove less helpful and effective over time.

These three types of reactions are also not discrete categories. When confronted with a curve in the road, most people have an initial tendency toward either resistance or surrender. Transformation comes later, if at all. But many people also cycle in and out of all of these reactions at various times – sometimes in relation to the same event. In the months after being assaulted, for example, someone may initially experience resistance-type reactions, then surrender, before transformation, and then the entire cycle may repeat itself slightly differently.



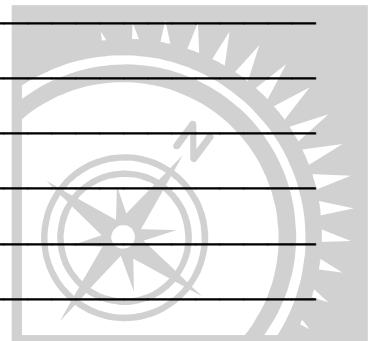
**Today:** Think of a curve in the road that you have experienced. What was your initial reaction? How did that reaction help or hurt you? Did your reactions change over time? If so, how?

**This week:** Think about this example, and how you generally confront curves in the road. Can you see any patterns in your reactions and responses? How are these related to underlying assumptions and beliefs that are being challenged?

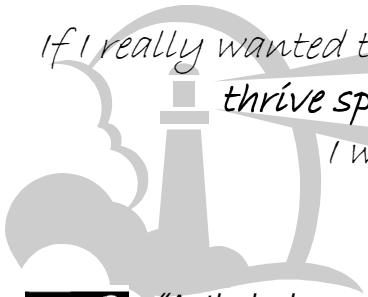
# NOTES



A series of horizontal lines for writing notes, spanning the width of the page.



*If I really wanted to  
thrive spiritually,  
I would ponder . . .*



## ACTIVE SPIRITUALITY



*“As the body count multiplied, I tried to ignore the physical, emotional and mental toll such work had begun to extract from me. . . . I woke up one morning to discover I had lost my religious faith, as if it was a suitcase left behind in a distant airport.” (Tucker, in Zimbabwe)*



*“My understanding of God has changed so much in the past ten years. Everything was so black and white when I was younger. Evil versus good and all that stuff. It’s a whole lot different for me now. For me, God is all about life, and life is good. It’s possible to see God almost everywhere, even in the camps. Sure they are miserable places, but if you look carefully you can see life and love, people genuinely trying to help each other.” (Grace, in Kenya)*

Humanitarian work is soul work. Few other occupations carry such a high risk of spiritual disruption on the one hand, and potential for spiritual growth on the other. If you stick at this work for long, the way you see the divine, the world, and yourself will change. Your spirituality is central to your own sense of identity and where you find your deepest sense of purpose, meaning, and hope. Given this, paying attention to changes in spirituality and how you are caring for yourself spiritually is at least as important as paying attention to how you care for yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Research suggests that active spirituality – the exercise and nourishing of your soul – can help you better deal with the stress of the present and strengthen your capacity to deal with future stress. Many people are familiar with the concept of exercising their bodies, but not their souls. *What, you might wonder, does being actively spiritual mean? And how can I exercise my soul?*

There are at least two important facets to an active spirituality. One is grappling with questions of meaning and purpose, and (in an ongoing manner) seeking a clearer understanding of how your spirituality provides the central basis for your important values – the values that inform your ideas and actions regarding morality, personal growth, and service to others. A second important part of active spirituality is being open to beauty and other things that stir and inspire you – seeking out things that make you feel whole, alive, joyful, and connected with something beyond yourself.

If you are a humanitarian worker spending three months on an earthquake site in Turkey, how you exercise your soul may look quite different than if you were a housewife caring for small children in Missouri. In the weeks ahead we will look at a number of different ways you can exercise your soul.



*Today:* What would the phrase “active spirituality” have meant to you when you were eighteen? What about twenty-five? Make some notes.

*This week:* What does being actively spiritual mean to you at this point in your life? Is it generally more connected with thinking (e.g., understanding what you value and why) or feeling (e.g., being moved by beauty)? Make notes.

# NOTES



---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

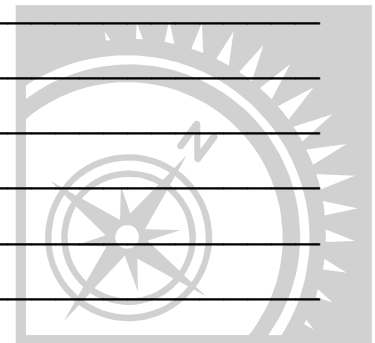
---

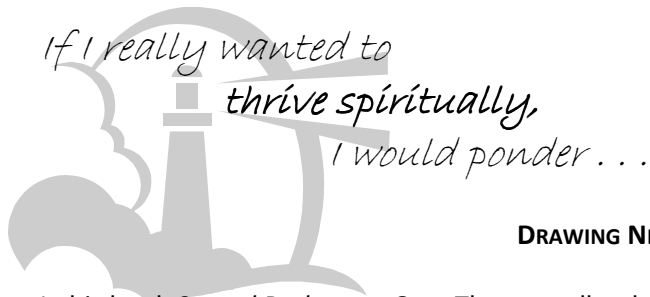
---

---

---

---





## DRAWING NEAR TO THE DIVINE

In his book *Sacred Pathways*, Gary Thomas talks about nine ways that people tend to connect with the sacred. Thomas believes that just as people have different personalities, they have different spiritual temperaments – different ways of connecting with the divine that come most naturally to them. He believes that every person has at least one spiritual temperament, most have several, and that a person's spiritual temperament can gradually change over time.

In a previous installment in this series we looked at how you define spirituality. This week we are looking at connecting spiritually – how do you tend to approach and relate to the divine in your life? As you think about this, take a look at the nine pathways that Thomas talks about:

1. **Naturalists:** Love the sacred out of doors. Most inspired to experience the presence of the divine outside, in a natural setting.
2. **Sensates:** Love the sacred with the senses. Inspired to experience the awe and splendor of the divine by the sights, sounds, and smells associated with the ceremonial, the majestic, the grand, and the beautiful.
3. **Traditionalists:** Love the sacred through ritual and symbol. They connect with and are moved by rituals and structure, symbols and sacraments. For the religious these are often associated with liturgies, and important celebrations such as Easter or Idul Fitri.
4. **Ascetics:** Love the sacred in solitude and simplicity. They can find too much sensation (e.g., pictures, music) distracting. They are frequently drawn to the rhythm of spiritual disciplines associated with silence, prayer, and meditation, and often desire to simplify their lives.
5. **Activists:** Love the sacred through confrontation. They tend to adopt and fight for causes they strongly believe in (e.g., church reform, battling poverty, or confronting injustice). More energized by interaction with others, even in conflict, than by being alone or in small groups.
6. **Caregivers:** Love the sacred by loving others. They feel close to the sacred – most spiritually fed – when serving others by loving them and meeting their needs.
7. **Enthusiasts:** Love the sacred with mystery and celebration. They are inspired by joyful celebration and open to supernatural workings and mystery in their lives through things like dreams, visions, and seeming coincidences. They don't want to just know concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by excitement and awe.
8. **Contemplatives:** Love the sacred through adoration. They value privacy and time alone, and seek a pure, deep, vibrant, connection with the divine. They often describe their relationship with the divine as an intimate connection, a heartfelt friendship, or a love relationship.
9. **Intellectuals:** Connect with the sacred through the mind. These thinkers live in the world of concepts and love to study and debate scriptural texts, to understand and learn new things about the divine, religious doctrine, apologetics, etc.

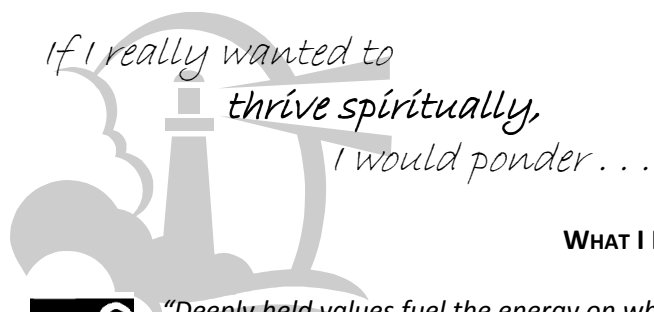


*Today:* What are the three main ways you naturally connect to the sacred and rejuvenate that part of you that's hopeful, energized, and compassionate?

*This week:* Stay alert to where and how you encounter the sacred in your life this week. Make notes. How would you explain your spiritual temperament?







### WHAT I REALLY VALUE



*“Deeply held values fuel the energy on which purpose is built. They define an enduring code of conduct – the rules of engagement in the journey to bring our vision for ourselves to life.” (Loehr and Schwartz)*

Whether we are conscious of them or not, all of us have a set of core values. These values are things that really matter to us; they inform our ideas about what is “best” and “right.” Values can range from the relatively concrete (such as the belief in hard work) to the more abstract (such as responsibility or independence). Here is a list of some commonly held values.

Which values are most motivating to you personally? It is important to know your *core* and *supporting* values – the handful of values that are core and central to who you are, and those that augment those core values. However, being able to identify these values is just the first step, because a value is just a road map for action. Values we fail to reflect in our choices and behavior about where we are going in life and how to act along the way are ultimately empty.

Accuracy	Creativity	Gratitude	Loyalty	Responsibility
Adventure	Diversity	Happiness	Love	Security
Authenticity	Efficiency	Hard work	Openness	Service to others
Beauty	Excellence	Health	Peace	Stability
Challenge	Fairness	Humility	Perseverance	Status
Collaboration	Faith	Humor	Pleasure	Tolerance
Compassion	Freedom	Independence	Power	Truth
Community	Friendship	Integrity	Privacy	Tradition
Competence	Fun	Justice	Prosperity	
Connection	Generosity	Kindness	Reliability	
Courage	Goodness	Knowledge	Respect	

To be meaningful, a value must influence the choices that you make in your everyday life. Once you have spent time thinking about what you most value, dig one level deeper and ask yourself questions like:

- Jump ahead to the end of your life. What are the three most important lessons you have learned and why are they so critical?
- What are your goals in life? Are they in line with what you say you value? If not, what do they say about what you are actually valuing?
- Where do you most often feel your values are in conflict? (Some classic conflicts include love versus religious faith, work versus leisure, or freedom versus responsibility.)
- How are you making decisions that line up your actions up with your core values?

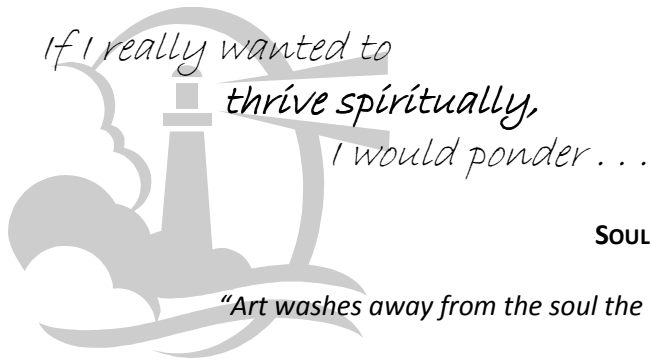
Taking the time to reconnect regularly with your deepest values and holding yourself accountable to them can be difficult and taxing. But when you clearly understand your values and live as best you can in accordance with them, that can help create a stable spiritual center in your life and unlock the powerful energy of inspiration that comes with purposefulness.



*Today:* Look at the list of values above. Add to it any other values you consider important. Which three to five values are your most important *core* values? Which five additional values *support* your core values?

*This week:* Answer the questions listed above. Do your answers shed any additional light on your core or supporting values?





## SOUL FOOD

*“Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life.” (Pablo Picasso)*

Knowing what we truly value in life, and why, is one important piece of the puzzle of active spirituality. But being actively spiritual is not just all about *thinking*. We can intellectualize our spirituality by focusing exclusively on how we interpret and understand issues of meaning and purpose, but the richest experience of spirituality is more than that; it is also *feeling* whole, alive, joyful, and connected with something beyond ourselves. It is not necessarily feeling like this all the time – that’s probably impossible – but it is having some heart in your experience of spirituality, not just all head.

What do I mean by “having some heart in your spirituality”? I mean *experiencing* soul food by feeling and sensing it. I mean being nourished and moved – being refreshed, renewed, or reoriented. This sort of soul food can be especially important for humanitarian workers who have jobs that simultaneously feel meaningful and satisfyingly purposeful, but also overwhelming, emotionally exhausting, and spiritually challenging.

It’s hard to define exactly what activities or experiences constitute soul food, because it varies from person to person. We all think, react, and respond somewhat differently, and will be fed and refreshed by different disciplines and experiences. But, in general: *soul food is in line with our deepest sense of meaning and purpose, and tends to connect with us in ways that inspire or move us beyond simple appreciation of the action or the object.*

So what do *you* generally experience as soul food, and how do you experience it? Some soul food can nourish without demanding too much. Along these lines people commonly cite spending time outdoors, reading inspirational books or poetry, listening to music, viewing a piece of art that resonates, or hearing a great speaker. Some soul food or spiritual practices, however, can be experienced as renewing and demanding at the same time. Common examples might be meditation, prayer, reflecting on your values, being a part of a small group focused on spiritual study, discussing issues of meaning and purpose with others, and undertaking creative disciplines such as painting, composing, writing, or dancing.



*Today:* Do you generally have more “head” or “heart” in your spirituality? What is a spiritual touchstone that acts as soul food for you – something specific that makes you feel engaged, refreshed, renewed, or revitalized (e.g., a quote, a verse, a picture, or something that you think about, do, or notice)?

*This week:* What do you generally experience as soul food, and how do you experience it? Go back and look at your notes from the section on drawing near the divine. What helps make/sustain you at your best? How has that changed over time for you?



*If I really wanted to  
thrive spiritually,  
I would ponder . . .*

## CULTIVATING QUIET



*“So long as we skim across the surface of our lives at high speeds, it is impossible to dig down more deeply. People cannot move horizontally and vertically at the same time. . . . It is no coincidence that every enduring spiritual tradition has emphasized practices such as prayer, retreat, contemplation, and meditation – all a means by which to quietly connect with and regularly revisit what matters most.” (Loehr and Schwartz)*

Humanitarian work is not a profession renowned for the slow, stable, measured pace of work. Instead, in many different ways, humanitarian workers focus on meeting human need and assuaging suffering, and the immediate urgency of this mission brings with it intensity. This intensity, and the dynamic of the humanitarian industry (an industry that often favors short-term contracts and projects over much more extended investments), breeds pressure related to time and resources. Humanitarian workers often feel that no matter how hard or long they work, they will never be able to complete their ultimate mission.

This work can seem never ending, precisely because it *is* never ending. Thousands of years ago Jesus said that the poor would always be with us. Unfortunately, that statement remains true today, and for the foreseeable future, despite some inspiring decreases in the overall level of acute poverty world-wide during the last fifty years. And unless humanitarian workers are intentional about caring for themselves in the face of a need that can seem endless and overwhelming, in the long run they are likely to end up feeling rather hopeless and paralyzed, or exhausted, depleted, and burned out.

Clarifying your assumptions and beliefs, understanding your values and your purpose, prayer, meditation, creativity, and many other spiritual disciplines, all take time – quiet, uninterrupted, time. It can seem grossly self-indulgent to humanitarian workers to carve out such time in the face of an urgent global need and the demands of their fast-paced job, particularly in disaster settings. There will also be times when it’s genuinely impossible to do so. But if taking time to be quiet, to center yourself spiritually in some way, *never* seems possible or acceptable to you, then that is a choice that you are making about what to prioritize in your life, not something that life is doing to you. Take time regularly to cultivate quiet in your life. It is foundational to spiritual self-care and it will pay dividends in the long run – for you and for others.



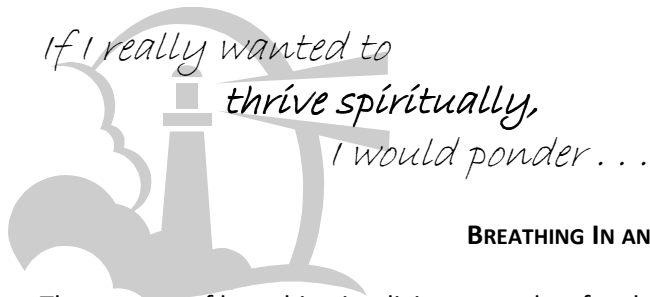
*“Only in quiet waters do things mirror themselves undistorted. Only in a quiet mind is adequate perception of the world.” (Hans Margolius)*



*Today:* How and when do you cultivate and experience quiet in your life? What sort of quiet refreshes and restores you? Is that the same or different from a quiet that helps you “dig down” into your life and ask and answer tough questions? Make notes.

*This week:* Take fifteen minutes every day to be quiet in some way.





## BREATHING IN AND BREATHING OUT

The process of breathing is a living metaphor for the importance of rhythm and balance. We don't often stop to think about it, but we all know that within our physical lives we have to both breathe in and breathe out to live. The same is true for our spiritual life. The English word "spirit" even comes from the Latin word *spiritus*, meaning "breath." Just as we must breathe in and breathe out to stay alive physically, we must engage in a similar process of taking in and giving out to stay health and vital spiritually.

This metaphor does have its limits though. It's not quite as simple as separating out what counts as breathing out spiritually versus breathing in, and then making sure you're engaging in some of both. Physically, it's impossible to breathe in and breathe out at the same time. That's not true when it comes to "spiritual breathing." Nearly all contemplative traditions talk about "spiritual work" or "practice" (which involves giving out or spending energy in some way, such as serving others) and "spiritual renewal" (which involves feeling refreshed, or inspired, or reconnected to our deepest sense of purpose and meaning). If we compare spiritual work to breathing out and spiritual renewal to breathing in, then, unlike physical breathing, these two aspects of spiritual breathing can be deeply intertwined and often occur simultaneously.

For example, many different aspects of humanitarian work can involve considerable sacrifice of your time, energy, money, wants, and even needs to help others (breathing out). But this very process can also be a rich source of emotional and spiritual renewal – providing a profound sense of meaning and deep satisfaction (breathing in).

One big risk that humanitarian workers run, however, is depending on this work-related sense of meaning and satisfaction as their main, or only, source of spiritual renewal. We looked last week at how the pace of the work and lifestyle can make it difficult to create the time and the quiet that is necessary to access so many other ways of breathing in spiritually. But just as it's ultimately unhealthy to depend solely on work for a sense of personal identity, it's not a good long-term strategy to depend on the sense of meaning you find in your work as your only source of spiritual renewal. Over time, humanitarian work *will* demand more from you than it will give to you if you are not also supplementing your spiritual oxygen in other ways.



*"Spiritual energy is sustained by balancing a commitment to others with adequate self-care. Put another way, the capacity to live by our deepest values depends on regularly renewing our spirit – seeking ways to rest and rejuvenate and to reconnect with the values that we find most inspiring and meaningful." (Loehr and Schwartz).*

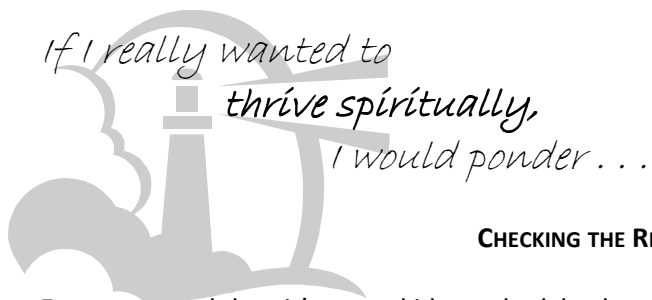


*Today:* What is spiritual work or practice for you? Where does your sense of spiritual renewal come from? Make notes.

*This week:* How do you balance breathing in and breathing out spiritually? Focus on whichever comes least naturally to you, and do something different this week.







### CHECKING THE REARVIEW MIRROR

Every now and then it's a good idea to look back and see where we've traveled. When we check the rearview mirror of life, we can often see patterns that we wouldn't otherwise notice, and it can help us remember lessons we learned along the way. Reflecting on the challenges and rewards of the past can give us insights as to where we wish to go in the future.

So, as we come to the end of this series, we're going to take a look back at some of the key points we've explored along the way. As you read this list, have a think about which issues you found most compelling, or confronting. Mark any point you want to dwell on further.

Humanitarian work is soul work. You will be changed by it.

1. Spirituality is a core component of human nature and includes our deepest sense of meaning, purpose, hope, and faith.
2. We all have an internal road map (linked to our values, assumptions, and beliefs) that helps us make sense of what we see and experience in life.
3. Whatever your personal road map, you will encounter unexpected "curves in the road" as a humanitarian worker that will challenge these values, assumptions, and beliefs.
4. Having values, assumptions, and beliefs challenged is rarely a comfortable process. Three common reactions to these spiritual challenges are resistance, surrender, and transformation.
5. Active spirituality – exercising and nourishing our souls – helps us deal better with the stress of the present, and strengthens our capacity to deal with future stress.
6. Just as people have different personalities, so they have different spiritual temperaments – ways of connecting with the sacred that come most naturally to them.
7. Values inform our ideas about what really matters, and what is best and right. Understanding our values and living in accordance with them helps create a stable spiritual center for us.
8. Active spirituality is not just all about thinking. It is also about experiencing soul food – feeling fed, nourished, moved, refreshed, and connected with something beyond ourselves.
9. Cultivating quiet is an important, and often neglected, spiritual discipline.
10. Similar to inhaling and exhaling, spiritual "work" and spiritual "renewal" can be intimately connected and both are necessary for spiritual vitality.

Thank you for giving yourself the time to go through this series. It is my sincere hope that you've found it thought-provoking, inspiring, and useful. You are humanitarian work's most valuable and irreplaceable resource. May you continue to exercise and nourish your soul as you persist in the very important work that you are doing.



*"Your past is important, but it is not nearly as important to your present as the way you see the future."* (Tony Campolo)



*Today:* Look back over all the notes you have made throughout this series. Think and write about what you have learned about yourself throughout the series.

*This week:* Make some notes and set some goals as you answer this final question:  
How do you want to use what you have learned as you move forward?



# PEACE by PEACE



## References

Fawcett, J. (2003). *Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments*. World Vision International.

Grace, quoted in Fawcett, J. (2003). *Stress and trauma handbook: Strategies for flourishing in demanding environments*. Los Angeles, CA: World Vision International.

Loehr J. & Schwartz. T. (2004). *The power of full engagement: Managing energy, not time, is the key to high performance and personal renewal*. Free Press.

Thomas, G.L. (2003). *Sacred pathways*. Zondervan.

Tucker, N. (2004). *Love in the driest season*. Crown.

**Peace by Piece is a weekly series of creative meditations for humanitarian workers published by the Headington Institute. To find more free resources on resilience, stress, and trauma, for humanitarian workers visit the Headington Institute's website at [www.headington-institute.org](http://www.headington-institute.org).**



HEADINGTON INSTITUTE

*Care for Caregivers Worldwide*

LISA MCKAY 200 EAST DEL MAR BLVD, # 119 PASADENA CA 91105 USA  
WWW.HEADINGTON-INSTITUTE.ORG PH: (+1) (626) 229 9336

© Headington Institute 2009