



Men As Learners and Elders

Inner Work Guidebook for the Journey of Illumination



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Questions about the content of this guidebook can be directed to:

- Joe Hebert (Louisiana) - joebear@attglobal.net
- Bill McElroy (Illinois) - wmmcelroy@mcelroydds.com
- Jim Clarke (California) - jclarke@stjohnsem.edu

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SILENT RETREAT

Description and Detail of Activity

What is a silent retreat?

Typically, it is a time (usually more than one day) away from normal surroundings in which a person spends the time in quiet. If others are present, the individual refrains from conversation. A silent retreat works best when standard routine is set aside.

Why do it?

There may be a variety of reasons for going on silent retreats – rest, sleep, time in nature, spiritual insight, guidance, journaling, etc; but the underlying idea is to take time away from the hectic, noisy, and distracting activities of life to recollect oneself and seek quiet and peace.

How to do it?

There are many ways to take a silent retreat, but one of the best is to schedule time at one of the many retreat centers that specialize in this area. A person can attend an individual or a group silent retreat, depending on how much structure is desired/required. If you choose to set up your own retreat, it is good to make the meals simple, so that you are not spending a lot of time with food preparation or clean up. The solo retreatant can also schedule time at a retreat house. Often this type of retreat allows one to participate in spiritual direction once or twice a day, during which silence will be broken.

You may also use “wandering in nature” as silent time, and can incorporate this in a “Death Lodge” ritual, in which silence is maintained throughout the day and into the evening hours when the ritual action would take place.

Materials needed

Mainly what is needed is your presence, and the intention to let go of distractions and to focus on the matters at hand. Materials might include your journal, bible, spiritual reading or poetry, a meaningful ritual object, symbol or icon which might be needed for self designed rituals. The locale and facility will dictate others items. For example, if outside, or camping, all appropriate equipment would be needed. In a retreat house many, if not all, of your needs will be met except for the personal items mentioned.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

<http://itotd.com/articles/235/silent-retreats>

<http://www.silentinsight.com/consider-a-silent-retreat>



VISION QUEST

Description and Detail of Activity

What is “Vision Quest?”

“Vision Quest,” sometimes called a “Vision Fast,” is a rite of passage experience which originated in some Native American cultures and developed over thousands of years in diverse cultures. Through this evolutionary process, a common framework emerged for the rites. The “Vision Quest,” in modern culture, is frequently led by facilitators trained in the process who can provide a safe container for the experience to unfold. The core portion of the quest is undertaken outdoors, frequently in a harsh, desert environment. Vision Quests vary in length, but generally require 9 or 10 days in the outdoors. This rite of passage symbolizes the passing from one life stage to the next.

Why do it?

The vision-quester is “**called**” to this experience from the depth of his or her soul, usually during a time of a life transition. A Vision Quest can be a powerful and deeply spiritual life-changing experience.

The Vision Quest experience is separated into three distinct stages. The first stage is “Separation.” This is a period of time in which the quester will prepare to sever from the former world and leave behind the life he/she has known.

The second stage is “the Threshold.” This is sometimes referred to as a journey to the “Sacred Mountain.” During this stage, the quester will be challenged to die to this old life and embrace the new. The Threshold stage experience is “solo” in nature. This usually includes fasting lasting for 3 to 4 days.

The third stage is “Incorporation.” During this stage which generally extends over the next year or so, the quester returns to society, and assumes the task of bringing this new vision into the world for the benefit of the larger community.

How to do it?

Below is a short list of organizations which offer vision quest experiences. These are counted as having long, reliable histories. For a more complex search, you can research “vision quest” on the internet. It is important to trust the guide leading you and to have confidence that he is skilled in providing a safe experience; and in facilitating and mirroring your vision quest story in a deep and mythic way. It is very important to research these organizations carefully to find the best fit for your.

Soulcraft by Bill Plotkin

Rites of Passage Vision Quest – <http://www.RitesofPassageVisionQuest.org>

Animas Valley Institute – <http://www.animas.org>

The School of Lost Borders – <http://www.schooloflostborders.org>

The Seventh Quest – <http://www.theseventhquest.com>



LECTIO DIVINA

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

- A form of “spiritual reading” that represents a method of prayer to promote communion with God
- A time set apart to be quiet and reflect on the word of God and how it affects your life
- A form of prayer dating back to A.D. 220 practiced by Catholic monks, and widely used today among Christians. The roots of Lectio Divina probably reach back into “Old Testament” days. After 1960, it experienced a resurgence across Christian denominations. This growth continues in our own present time. Lectio Divina is comprised of four prayerful movements: lectio, meditatio, oratio, and contemplatio.

Why to do it?

- Deepen your spiritual life
- Learn to listen to the voice of God
- Affectively connect with the scriptures

How do it?

Alone or in small groups.

1ST Movement – Lectio...Select some scripture to read. Get settled, assume a comfortable position and set your intention to be with God during this time of prayer. Begin to read the scripture slowly and hear it as if you were hearing it for the first time; imagine that it is God speaking to you. Do not think about the words...just simply allow the words to be heard. Read until you reach a word or verse that strikes you in any way...challenge, new understanding, insight, etc. If you are in a place where it is possible, read aloud.

2nd Movement – Meditatio...Continue to repeat the words/verse over and over to yourself or aloud, if possible. Do not evaluate or analyze the verse...simply repeat it and pay close attention to what “movements” are occurring within...feelings or emotions that are evoked. Remember...it is as if God were speaking to you. Be with the words until you feel that responding would be appropriate.

3rd Movement – Oratio...In this movement, give response to God from your heart...simply speak your response as you would speak with a close friend or loved one. You may even converse... “hearing” God speaking further with you, and you giving further response.



4th Movement – Contemplatio... Having finished with your response to God, you now move to “resting in God.” In this movement, God is still “communicating” or “working on you”...it is just beneath the level of your awareness. You renew your intention to simply be present with God at this level, beyond words.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Christianity/Catholic/2000/08/How-To-Practice-Lectio-Divina.aspx

www.osb.org/lectio/about.html

www.gotquestions.org/lectio-divina.html

www.sacredspace.ie

www.contemplativeoutreach.org Click on Lectio Divina tab on the left
Covey, Michael; Sacred Readings

Hall R.C., Thelma; Too Deep For Words



FAITH-SHARING GROUPS

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

- A group of Christian or like-minded men who meet regularly to review their faith lives over the previous week/month etc.
- A group of brothers who hold each other accountable.

Why do it?

- To strengthen my commitment to my inner/spiritual life
- To strengthen the bonds with my brothers in the group
- Bond with men who will help and support each other
- Time to share joys and struggles

How to do it?

- Sharing of scriptures...including some form of ritual...adhering to the Rules for Small Groups as presented at your MROP.
- Reading books on faith, spiritual life, community building, or other books which will deepen the inner life. Commenting on the books and the ways in which the chapter touches your life.
- For MALE Planning groups use the 30-30-30 format. The first 30 minutes are for checking in and keeping the edges hot. The second 30 minutes are for growth or soul work as mentioned above. The third 30 minutes are for planning MALE activities or future activities for the group.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

www.malespirituality.org

Click on Suggested Format for Small Men's Group Meetings

www.parishlife.com/faithshare1.htm (this is Renew Catholic site)

www.gbod.org/evangelism/fsparticipants.pdf (Methodist - can't find groups)

www.catholicfaithsharing.com/lpirc/cfs/ViewCfsIndex.do

MensFSGUsresGuide_Rev 4-28-08.doc (358 K)

[View as HTML](#) [Open as a Google document](#) [Download](#)

SuggestedMensFSGMeetingFormat_Rev 4-28-08.doc (30 K)

[View as HTML](#) [Open as a Google document](#) [Download](#)

First Faith Sharing Group Agenda.doc (28K)

[View as HTML](#) [Open as a Google document](#) [Download](#)

Faith Sharing Commitment.doc (27K)

[View as HTML](#) [Open as a Google document](#) [Download](#)



DEATH LODGE

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

The concept of the Death Lodge can be traced back to approximately 1500 BCE when rubber was first discovered by the Olmecs...the mother civilization of Mesoamerica. The Death Lodge is part of an ancient teaching about the experience of dying. This teaching was found throughout the Americas as far north as the Midwestern plains.

According to the Cheyenne version, consciously preparing for death involves four psycho-spiritual stages. The first step consists of stepping onto the decision road, which indicates that you have recognized that death is approaching and you have accepted this fact. The next stage is the Death Lodge.

The Death Lodge is the place where a dying person receives final visitors. If old wounds still exist between the dying person and the visitor, this is the opportunity for forgiveness to take place between them. It is also a chance for final goodbyes.

The last two stages, the Purpose Circle and the Great Ballcourt follow the Death Lodge, and are an accounting of one's life and "playing ball with the Lords of Death" in the transition between this world and the next. The "soul" is thought to pass back and forth during this time, immediately before the final physical death.

Why do it?

For our purposes, we will discuss the Death Lodge in and of itself. We have heard the admonition that in order for one to live fully...one has to first learn to die. There can be many occasions to die little deaths well before dying our final death. Many times we can live more fully by attending to these little deaths. Ask yourself: "Why wait until the absolute end to face some of these issues, when I can confront them, name them and let go of them now (i.e. die to them), thus freeing myself to live more freely?"

How to do it?

Preparation

Prior to the entering into the experience of the Death Lodge, use reflection, discernment and contemplation to determine what aspect of you has to die. Perhaps you might consider over-identification with an attitude or person, an unhealthy relationship, some aspects of your false self you have identified, self absorption. Also consider your Loyal Soldier and "his" strategies and behaviors. It is personal and specific to you and the current situation attending your life field. Be specific and narrow this down to one or two issues.

In selecting the focus of your Death Lodge experience, and using other inner work practices/disciplines, begin to collect some symbols that will work for you, in focusing on the aspects of your life which need to die. As the Death Lodge is an intentional period of time in nature (generally 24 hours), assemble equipment necessary for being outdoors



overnight: correct clothing based on the local environment, a hat, rain gear, insect repellent, sunscreen, a tarp for shelter, rope, sleeping bag, matches, fire-starters if allowed, a compass and a map if needed, other necessary implements (pocket knife etc.). This is not complete and you will have to consult with those in your locale for the necessary equipment.

The Death Lodge Day

Once you have chosen your issues and symbolic ritual items, you are ready to go. The idea of the Death Lodge, through fasting and wandering in nature, is to become present to yourself and be in the movement. As the day progresses and you are wondering, try to avoid letting your thoughts drift to everyday concerns. It is advisable to begin your day with a time of sitting contemplation. As the day of wandering turns into night, prepare yourself for your personal ritual of letting go, and setting up your camp for the night.

If a campfire is allowed and advisable, begin your evening with starting the fire and settling in. Again, a contemplative sit to mark the time of completing your wandering and to prepare yourself for the evening would be a good way to center yourself. You may want to journal, read some reflections of the period leading up to your Death Lodge or other readings/poetry, or pray. You structure your night and your ritual of letting go in whichever way you choose. You might want to include forgiveness in the letting go and hold yourself accountable for the part you played in your relationship to it. Also express gratitude and love...all major issues for Jesus as well. Another suggestion at the close of your ritual of letting go or dying, is to offer up this death by burying your ritual symbol, or having it consumed in fire as a sign of total release.

The Death Lodge in our inner work has the following associated with it over a period of 24 hours:

- Fasting from food, while respecting the needs of your own body. Be sure to drink at least 2-3 quarts of water during the day
- Lodging should be no more than a simple tarp cover and ground sheet
- Letting-go Ritual

During your wandering and later at the camp, be alert to what presents itself through nature. It may be a visit from an animal, or an encounter with a tree or a beautiful scene or sunset. You might dialogue with whatever presents itself to you. It may seem unusual to consider speaking with/to an animal, especially for those of us who are products of Western Civilization. We should keep in mind that indigenous peoples for millennia recognized the sacred in animals.

In your dialogue with nature you may simply express yourself as in a normal conversation. Also consider asking a question. This may include asking what your soul “calling” is...what your “soul name” is. Then sit in silence and continue to be aware of your surroundings, and what presents itself to you.

The Morning After

The morning following your Death Lodge, be sure to honor your sacred space and the local natural environment by packing out any refuse, being sure your fire is out, and that nothing is left behind. It is a good practice to take the position of “zero impact”



camping. Thank the Spirit for your time there and for any gifts or insights that came to you during this time. Depart in silence.

The Death Lodge is not necessarily a one time event in your life. Periodically there will be passage times...times of liminality in which your movement out of particular challenges can be marked. The Death Lodge would be an appropriate way to mark these times of dying to a part of yourself.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

Soulcraft by Bill Plotkin

The Final Crossing by Scott Eberle



GUIDED RETREAT

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

A Guided Retreat is undertaken with the assistance of a retreat director. It can last for anything from 2 days to 30 days (e.g. Ignatian Spiritual Exercises).

Why do it?

The retreatant benefits from the wisdom and experiences of his director, in his discernment and growth process.

How to do it?

It may be done individually or in a group; with input provided by the director. The conferences or talks provide direction and opportunity for further reflection.

Suggested Resources for this Activity:

Local retreat centers



YOGA

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

Yoga could possibly come under the category of “Body Work” as it entails the physicality of strength, stretching and balance. In addition to the body aspect, it would be more accurate to say: Yoga is a universal art based on a harmonizing system of integration for the body, soul, and spirit.

Why do it?

The continued practice of yoga might lead you to a sense of peace and well-being, and feeling of being at one with your environment. The practice of yoga can help to make the body strong and flexible; it can also improve the functioning of the respiratory, circulatory, digestive, and hormonal systems. Yoga often brings about inner harmony, emotional stability and clarity of mind.

How to do it?

Yoga is best studied under a qualified instructor. As with other spiritual practices, it should be done regularly, and over a long period of time. You may attend a class weekly as well as practicing regularly, at home, in order to improve concentration and to enhance the physical, mental and spiritual benefits.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

Essentials of Yoga Practice and Philosophy by the Sivananda Ashram Yoga Farm, Print Media Books.



GUIDED MEDITATION/DEEP IMAGERY

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

Guided Meditation/Deep imagery is a practice of directed thoughts and images that guide the imagination toward a relaxed, focused state. Some people use an instructor, tapes/CD's, or scripts to assist in the process.

Why do it?

The purpose of guided meditation is to encounter God through the intellect, imagination and/or affections and will. God works with all components of our humanity to draw us closer to Himself.

How to do it

We refer you to the following books as a starting point:

Meditations for a New Earth; Kim Eng & Eckhart Tolle
Eyes on Jesus, The Jesus Meditations; Michael Kennedy
The Contemplative Heart; James Finley
Praying Body & Soul; Gabriel Galache

Suggested Resources for this Activity

www.mindfulworship.com
www.thechristianmeditation.com
www.beliefnet.com



LABYRINTH

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

The labyrinth is an ancient cross-cultural expression of the human journey. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a purposeful path. The Labyrinth represents a journey to our own soul-center and back again out into the world. Labyrinths have been used (since the 8th century A.D. in Christian history) as a tool for prayer and meditation.

Why do it?

The labyrinth is an archetype that offers the practitioner the possibility of an embodied experience of the soul. It needs to be acknowledged that this will be a more powerful experience for the intuitive person than for the sensate.

How to do it

The traditional approach is to walk meditatively...very slowly...following the path toward the center. You may focus on a question, a concern or a sacred symbol, or set the intention for discerning a life situation. Often, the walker quiets the mind during the walking in. Once in the center, either continue the silence and remain there for a time, or consider one of the above options. When ready, leave the center and silently return the way you came. Some people find it useful to journal after the labyrinth experience.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice by
Lauren Artress

Labyrinths From the Outside In. Walking to Spiritual Insight: A beginners Guide
by Donna Schaper



FASTING

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

Fasting is a form of prayer which helps connect our soul and our body. It is a form of centering and grounding in our humanity. It is a traditional and transformative means of focusing on what is essential or real.

Why do it?

Fasting is a form of discipline which helps create healthy boundaries in all areas of our lives. Any type of fasting should flow from these questions:

- What am I really focusing on?
- What is out of balance in my life
- Where am I unnecessarily indulging myself?
- What are my limitations?

How to do it?

Healthy fasting clarifies and humanizes our instinctual energies.

Look at the context of your life. Where are some new and healthy boundaries needed? Some possibilities:

- Fasting from gossip/malicious speech
- Fasting from compulsions (e.g. pornography)
- Fasting from food/drink
- Fasting from television, computer or other electronic distractions
- Fasting from overwork or mindless/excessive activity
- Fasting from bitterness and negativity

Fasting can be practiced for an hour, a day, 3 days, a week, or a season. This is about awakening deeper meaning in our life and creating new patterns of thought and feeling.

It is important to remember that it is the end, not the means, that really matters. Therefore, focus should be not on the minutiae of the fasting, but the goal of a more disciplined and gospel-center life.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

Elmer Towns; [Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough](#)

Ron Lagerquist; [Fasting to Freedom](#)



CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER/CENTERING PRAYER

Description and Detail of Activity

What is it?

There are two general categories when speaking of prayer. The two traditions are: Kataphatic and Apophatic. Kataphatic prayer is prayer that involves our various faculties such as the intellect, imagination and verbal expression. Apophatic prayer is the prayer “too deep for words.” It is the prayer of silence...of pure faith and Presence.

There are many terms used to attempt to describe this prayer form. It has been said to be “resting” in God, or “rapt attention” to God. All attempts at verbalizing this experience fall short of the reality. Contemplation transcends the thinking and reasoning mind as well as the emotions and feelings of the affective faculties. It is the prayer and direct experience of faith.

Why do it?

- It allows us to STOP and be present to God
- It helps us to EXPERIENCE self and God in a different way
- It is very uncomfortable, and yet deeply COMFORTING at the same time

How to do it?

This practice is fairly simply and usually involves a 20-30 minute session once or twice per day. The following guidelines might be helpful:

- Establish a regular sacred space where you can enjoy silence and solitude
- Sit comfortably and in a relaxed manner, but with attention
- Close your eyes and still your body
- Breathe slowly and gently, remaining aware of your breathing
- Choose a sacred word or image as a touchstone to return to when distractions creep in
- Use a timer or one of the many CD’s available to remove any anxiety about time elapsed
- Conclude with a prayer of thanksgiving, Our Father, etc.

Suggested Resources for this Activity

Hall, R.C.; Too Deep for Words

Merton, Thomas; Contemplative Prayer

Finley, James; Christian Meditation

Keating, Thomas; Centering Prayer

www.contemplativeoutreach.org

