MINERVAS CIRCLES OF DIALOGUE
Planting seeds of Peace

Guide to facilitating sessions of Creativity and Dialogue
MINERVAS CIRCLES OF DIALOGUE

Guide to facilitating sessions of creativity and dialogue

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With the collaboration of Cibele Salviatto
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We express our gratitude to the teachers who enlighten us and to all who have inspired and supported us since the beginning, in this fulfilling yet “crazy” initiative that gave birth to the Minervas movement.

We dedicate this handbook

to our Mothers
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We are thrilled to introduce the Handbook Circles of Dialogue the first in a series of Minervas Handbooks. We have, inspired by the Minervas movement, created the Handbooks which address the need for written guides that help the groups self-organize, have dialogues, create, and make an impact in the community and in the world. However, the tools and processes we are sharing here can be used by both men and women, since there is no limitation in their application. We have written the Handbooks alternating the use of “she/he” and “her/him”. Traditionally, the masculine gender has been used as a generic to connote all humankind, and while this has been socially accepted it become to be seen by many as a symbol of cultural hierarchy. For us to use only the female pronouns would be to suggest a limitation in the use of these handbooks, and would perpetuate a new cultural hierarchy, based on gender. Therefore we alternate the use of pronouns from both genders.

This Handbook Circles of Dialogue was developed to facilitate a different conversation, one that combines individual reflection, through a creative exercise, with a group dialogue.

The Circles of Dialogue are a central piece of the Minervas movement, because they foster self-discovery and personal development within the group; they explore issues and topics that help in creating awareness and the awakening of our consciousness, and they also create habits of communication that become seeds of peace.

They are also the first step in developing initiatives and projects that can make a difference in the community.

We believe in the multiplying power of our actions. This is why we created this series of Handbooks with tools and inspiration, so that we, each person alone, and everyone together, can be the agents of change.

Las Minervas, August 2011, Aventura, Florida.
Stand up now.
Let your voice be heard.
Wait no more.

- Isabel Rimanoczy 2008 -
We live in a world designed and managed by a patriarchal imperative. This point of view includes fast actions, conquest, power, domination of nature, competition, success and growth, and acquisitions that symbolize status and strength. This perspective is based on the Taoist “yang” principle, and has been associated with functions of our left-brain hemisphere. It is centered on analytical thinking, rationality, and it comes naturally to most men, although it has been also adopted and maintained by many women, who accept it as “how things are done”.

This imperative has brought great inventions and progress in many dimensions and areas, but now our planet is in trouble. From the environment to society, humankind is collectively experiencing deep problems, and the challenges that we are face are no longer threatening our standard of living, but our survival.

This planetary crisis is telling us that there is something that we haven't done well.

What we have failed to do is to integrate the “yin” perspective. To face the problems we are encountering now, we need collaboration more than competition. We need compassion and empathy more than rivalry and conquest. We have to think of the long term, rather than seeking mere short-term gains. We need affective relationships that are not based purely on “what is in for me?” We have to stop focusing only on “doing”, and concentrate on “being”. We need to rebuild the spiritual connections between peoples, and to replenish our impoverished souls.

The good news is that we have all we need to do this; it’s already available since this perspective is present in the genes and souls of women. Women are givers of life, they know intuitively how to think of the long term; they are naturally in sync with the earth, with the senses, the emotions, and with the other. We only have to let those voices out.

MINERVAS is a movement that talks to and with women, and invites them to stand up and let their voices be heard. It is a movement for women, one that brings us together, like threads of a colorful fabric, and so our valuable message, the feminine perspective, can be heard. Minervas is an urgent message, an alert that proclaims that the moment has come to speak up, we can wait no more.

Minervas is an invitation for women. But the message and the actions of Minervas touch both men and women, because we all long to regain our lost balance, to get back in touch with our soul. As Teilhard de Chardin put it: “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience”.

**PART 1**

**Introduction**
**Circles of Dialogue / Concept**

The Minervas Circle of Dialogue (MCD) is a two-faceted process that deepens understanding between members of a group. The first facet, an activity we call Individual Reflection, leads us to connect with one’s self through reflection on a specific question. After that, we build on the reflection and enter into dialogue with the group, where the participants are invited to share their thoughts, feelings and assumptions on the selected theme.

The MCD creates a protected and safe atmosphere, where participants can connect with each other at a deeper level. They feel free to be candid, knowing that nothing they say will be judged or questioned: they simply are heard, accepted as they are. During the Dialogue section of the meeting, the participants don’t talk “to” each other; they talk to the whole group.

The methodology of the Minervas Circle of Dialogue enables us to have a deeper focus, which helps in our personal development, improves our listening skills, empowers, expands our consciousness, creates feelings of peace, deepens our self-awareness and modifies the energetic fields within the group.

All this happens in a calm atmosphere, in an appreciative setting where judgment is suspended. There is no need to solve problems, create consensus, advocate, convince, defend a point of view, or arrive at any conclusions. As a result, the participants learn to listen to each other and a deep, collectively built meaning emerges.

Each MCD is facilitated by a participant, who plays the role of Master of Ceremonies.
When we meet with friends we normally don’t assign specific roles to aid the conversation!. But the MCD meetings are different meetings: they might include friends, but they have an accepted intent and this does require structure.

The MC has an important role in clarifying both the intent and the structure. She invites people to the first session of a Circle of Dialogue; she sets the tone for the meeting; she ensures that the atmosphere is warm, and that it inspires trust and mutual support. She also pays attention to the little formalities that provide helpful structure to the meeting. For example, if someone arrives late, the MC will pause, welcome the person, and update her briefly on what they have been doing.

We suggest that the role of MC is rotated in each meeting. This will give everyone the opportunity to lead and also to get feedback on her role; it also has the effect of empowering everyone and of making the success of the meetings a co-creation.
The role of the MC

- Organizes, and invites people to, the first Circle
- Receives the responses to the invitation
- Decides where the meeting will be held, when and how long it will be, and informs everyone
- Ensures everyone knows and understands the purpose of the meeting, and answers doubts, questions or concerns
- Prepares table why and chairs or adequate seating for the creative reflection section, and a circle with no table for the dialogue
- Uses a little gong, bell or musical instrument to gently call for attention when needed
- Suggests an agenda for the meeting, a theme and an inspiring question, and selects an exercise for the creative reflection part
- Pays attention to the atmosphere of the meeting, ensuring it is warm, welcoming, that it inspires trust and mutual respect, and that it is supportive and accepting
- Gives a formal welcome, and includes late-comers
- Introduces the guiding norms of the meeting
- Addresses the meeting length: the group decides. Suggested: minimum 2 hours

Attitudes of the MC

- Fully present
- Warm and candid
- Connected with her own intuition
- Empathic
- Spiritually connected, and mindful of serving others
- Flexible
- Attentive to the group’s needs
- Respectful of differences
- Appreciative
- Observant and ‘self-observant’
- Calm
- Sensitive to feelings in the group
- Attentive to the body language and the energy level of the group
The MCD has 4 sections:

1) Opening
2) Creative Reflection
3) Dialogue
4) Closing

1) Opening

The Opening is the appropriate time to introduce some Rituals.

Rituals are important. They create a spirit, a special atmosphere, a certain disposition. They create boundaries and intimacy, help form an identity and demarcate a space. Create your own rituals for your group, something that will make being together fun, and at the same provide everyone with a shared behavioral code.

Selecting the right place to meet for example is key. You can meet in a home, or in a quiet place, but avoid restaurants, bars or noisy places, where other people will intrude.

Create an intimate setting and be creative in doing so by using candles, music, food etc, which can help the group to come together. Be playful in finding ways to help the group to coalesce. Is there, for example, a symbol or name that might represent the
spirit of your group and bring it together?

Develop rituals for different purposes: to welcome new members; to show appreciation for each other; to celebrate an accomplishment; to acknowledge and reward that you have overcome your own limitations.

For the Opening we suggest the following rituals.

**Check In**

When there is a new member in the group, make time for introductions. We suggest that the introductions go beyond just giving a name, and recommend that every one shares something personal, for example in response to the question

“What brought you here?”

The Check In is a procedure where everyone expresses how they feel in that moment, and if they have anything important to share. To help this, you can use certain questions.

For the first meeting, you might ask the group to ponder these questions:

*What makes this meeting special for me?*

*What expectations do I have for today?*

For subsequent meetings:

*Since last time we met, what significant events of my life do I want to share with the group?*

*Since the last meeting what are some insights I have had about Minervas? Myself?*

We suggest allowing 2 - 3 minutes per person for the Check In.

After the Check In, the MC introduces the theme of the day, describes the exercise selected for the inspiring question, indicates how long the meeting will last, and seeks the group’s agreement.

It may happen that a participant has
something special to share, such as an object, or a topic that is important for her, or a poem she has as a gift for the group. This is the moment for the MC to review the “agenda” and make space for these special contributions.

For the first Circle of Dialogue the MC invites participants, selects the location, time and theme of the meeting, and proposes an activity for the first section (creative reflection). In the following Circles the participants themselves will suggest themes and activities, agreeing jointly how frequently they will meet, where, at what time and for how long.

The Check In is not a typical way you would begin a meeting with friends, but you will soon notice that thanks to these little formal details, the “Minervas meetings” will be more focused than informal meetings. This light structure will help to develop new levels of consciousness and increase the self-esteem, because everyone will notice how they have achieved what they planned to do.

The Minervas Circle of Dialogue fosters personal development and also inspires us to do something for others, which is what distinguishes Minervas meetings from other meetings where the purpose is to just be together, chat and perhaps eat.

The Norms

The norms are simple guidelines that the group agrees on so as to facilitate the running of an effective meeting.
For example:

• Turn off the cell phone
• Start at the agreed time, with whoever is there
• Keep a positive and appreciative tone
• Respect silences
• Avoid ‘side-bar’ conversations

It is normal for a group to have certain tacit expectations about how they should function together. The norms are a process that helps make those expectations explicit, and when they are agreed upon they become the “rules of the game”. This avoids many frustrations, impatience or uncomfortable moments.

The MC of the first meeting explains the importance of having shared norms, and invites everyone to suggest a norm that can become part of the accepted list. It is important to make sure everyone understands each norm proposed, and that they are collectively adopted by everyone.

The norms are a wonderful tool for keeping harmony in a group. And the list is a ‘living document’ that can be

New habits

One of the characteristics of the MCD is that people communicate in a different way. This is due partly to one particular norm

“Do not interrupt each other”

Different cultures communicate in different ways. For example, some people interrupt each other constantly; sometimes those who speak the loudest are the only ones heard; sometimes several people talk at the same time, competing for the attention of the others; some try to guess what the other is about to say, and rush in to “complete” the idea. Also in some cultures people wait until the person talking lowers the tone of voice, and that is interpreted as a sign that s/he will soon end, so interrupting is permitted.

Minervas suggests developing a new habit: that everyone waits until the person talking has completely finished, before starting to say what is on their mind.

In our experience we have noticed that participants adopting this norm enjoy and value the different type of communication that results. Some even take it back to their own family life, which reinforces these new habits.
added to if the need arises. Also when a new member joins the group, it’s important to share the norms, explain them and ask if she agrees with them.

The Theme of Today’s Circle

We suggest that the MC proposes the theme of the MCD phrased as a question, which we call the Inspiring Question. This provides the group with focus and shapes the reflection process.

Example:
If the theme is: “The challenge and opportunities of being a woman” Convert it into an Inspiring Question:

“What are the challenges and opportunities of being a woman?”

The Inspiring Question becomes the anchor of the Circle of Dialogue. In Part 2 you will find examples of inspiring questions.

2) Creative Reflection

Creative Reflection represents the second section of the MCD. In this part we will do a creative exercise that engages our emotions, and sensations, and develops our intuition through a playful activity, at the same time that we practice individual reflection.

Why is Creative Reflection important?

It is important because artistic expression is liberating for individuals. It allows us to express feelings and to acknowledge sensations; we can explore our environment and objects, connect with self and others, develop our self-esteem, and identify and experience positive thoughts. Furthermore, it develops consciousness and helps us reflect on our priorities and our own values. Artistic expression helps us discover ourselves in new
ways – perhaps even reinvent ourselves.

While the left-brain hemisphere provides us the functions of reasoning, analysis and logic, the right brain opens the doors to intuition, sensitivity, imagination and creativity.

In this section of the meeting we will give ourselves a time for deep reflection, we will explore questions and our own answers, we will create ideas. In this way, we will approach the inspiring question from another perspective.

**How does it work?**

We begin preparing our body and mind with a breathing exercise (See Breathing Exercises in Part 2 of this book).

“Art is liberating, creativity allows us to express feelings and sensations, exploring the environment and objects, connecting with others. It develops our self-esteem, helps us know and experience positive values. Art develops consciousness and helps us reflect on our priorities and values. And through art we can discover ourselves and even reinvent ourselves.”

Mariam Tamborenea

*Hermano Sol hermana Luna / 2008 / Watercolor*
After that, the MC repeats the Inspiring Question of the day and invites personal reflection on that question, through a variety of exercises such as creating a collage, working with clay, listening to a story etc. In Part 2 of this Handbook you will find 12 creative exercises you can use, and a guide to select the exercises according to the theme of the day. We encourage you to create your own exercises, using the imagination and personal skills of the group members!

3) Dialogue

Introduction

The word “dialogue” is a usual part of our vocabulary. However, recently there has been a keen interest in introducing a deeper meaning of Dialogue. This was prompted by Peter Senge at MIT, who in turn took it from David Bohm’s work on the nature of thought. However, it was first Martin Buber who used the term “dialogue” in 1914 “to describe a mode of exchange among human beings in which there is a true turning to one another, and a full appreciation of another, not as an object in a social function, but as a genuine being”. David Bohm suggested using this form of conversation to create a space where the minds meet and unite, where the oneness is made tangible.

When people talk to each other, their conversation becomes a discussion. Which resembles a verbal “ping-pong” game with each party waiting for their turn to hit the ball back. Neither party takes the time to pause, to listen carefully, and to understand the meaning behind the other’s words. The climate is often hurried, and the person who speak louder can
appear “stronger” or to have “better” reasoning. Those who are more extroverted take more “airspace” and those with strong opinions try to advocate for, and persuade the audience of, their point. Assumptions are seldom expressed as such, but come to be presented as certainties and facts. People interrupt each other, often reacting to fragments of what is said -- many times to a single word, or even to a gesture. Judging is common, because people reduce the discussion to being about “right or wrong”. Real values and feelings often do not get raised because the atmosphere is more judgmental than safe and supportive. As a result, people try to protect themselves from attacks or criticism. Sometimes discussions can be singularly unhelpful!

In the third section of the MDC, we introduce you to Dialogue, which is not a discussion, but is the time to open a collective reflection and to practice mutual active listening.

**How does it work?**

A Circle of Dialogue is a Mandala… The circle is another ritual of this process.

Sitting in a circle to talk, share and connect is a valuable custom in many cultures. When we are in a MDC, and are seated in that circle, the energy flows differently; it circulates and it allows us to make eye contact with everyone.

For the Dialogue we put the chairs in a circle, remove empty seats and also tables or other objects in the center. Make sure to close the circle before the Dialogue begins, and also that everyone is able to see the face of each person.

The Dialogue requires a small introduction, indicating what we will do, why and how. In a group that is meeting regularly with the same members you can skip the introduction, unless there is a new member joining the group.

The MC also introduces the Rules of the Dialogue.
Mandalas

This is a word of Sanskrit origin, meaning “sacred circle”. It is used to meditate, focus the energy, balance disorder, harmonize, and raise the level of consciousness. Different cultures agree in that it leads to the unity of being. Mandalas represent the macro and microcosms. The circle suggests perfection; it is concentric and evokes the perpetual return of Nature’s cycles.

Psychologist Carl Gustav Jung observed that mandalas are an expression of the collective unconscious. For Jung, the center of the mandala is the image of the self that the individual tries to perfect.

The mandala is a spiritual image of the order in the world and inside our being. It helps us remember that we have a common universal origin, cosmic, and it connects us with the beauty we carry inside, with our creative spirit, because above all we are creating our own life.
The Rules of Dialogue

The rules of Dialogue are simple. We suggest using a print out of the drawings (see end of this Handbook “Rules of Dialogue handout”) leaving it in a place for all to see.

Make sure to remind the group of these rules every meeting, and explain them to new members.

Listen actively: This means, look for the meaning behind the words.

Pause: Don’t jump in with your comments right after the last words of another speaker. Wait a moment, pause, and let the meaning float in the air, and inside yourself. When you are more concerned with what you have to say, you have probably missed some part of someone else’s comment.

Suspend judgments: Have an open attitude to what you hear. It’s all about acknowledging other people’s assumptions, feelings and opinions. You are not there to decide what is right and wrong.

Relax. If you disagree, simply offer another perspective. Suspending judgment is like suspending cloth on a line: it gives your the chance to see them in front of you, notice your judgments, keep them in front of you without throwing them into the group.

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1 Agradecemos a LIM LLC por esta herramienta.
**Speak openly:** Speak honestly, from both your heart and your head.

**No ping-pong:** Don’t engage in one-on-one conversations, and don’t debate. However if you don’t understand what the other person said, you should ask. Don’t address your comments to the MC, she is just one more participant, not the traffic director or facilitator.

**Build upon what others have said:** Connect your thoughts to the evolving themes. However, if you have a strong thought turning in your head, express it even if it doesn’t particularly match into the sequence. It may begin to make sense later.

**Feel free:** Feel free to talk or to remain silent. To listen actively in silence is also a way to participate. Naturally all will benefit if you share your thoughts or emotions, but a silent participation can also be heard. Your body communicates through your posture and gestures, and the eyes can provide support and encouragement to the group.
Opening the Dialogue

At this point, the MC repeats the inspiring question of the day and suggests everyone has three of four minutes of silent reflection, writing down the thoughts or feelings, so every one can connect with their thinking and emotions that came up during the creative reflection part of the meeting.

After one minute, the MC declares the dialogue open, and whoever wants can start talking. It sometimes happens that no one speaks, and as MC, you may become tense. Try to relax and just trust the process: someone will say something. You are not responsible for the ‘success’ of the Dialogue, so try to control your anxiety and wait. You can make a comment, but if you can refrain, it’s better, because a group’s silence can, in fact, be information. It may mean that something is happening in the group, and the group is unclear how to handle it.

Developing your skills to provide silent support, to allow silence in a group is a strengthening practice and also very freeing.

There are no rules about participation, and no order in which a person speaks. You don’t have to raise a hand, and those who want to say something simply do so.

Managing time

It is important for the MC to get agreement from the participants about how long the Dialogue will be, and give the group a reminder when there are five minutes left before the end of the Dialogue.

In a Dialogue an interesting phenomenon often occurs. At the beginning of the dialogue, members are open to participating, and they share feelings and thoughts. This phase lasts around 10-20 minutes, depending on the size of the group. However, after this phase, when most people have said what they wanted to say, there can be a silence, and the group seems to be considering “So, what’s next?”. This doesn’t last long, and a new phase begins, in an organic way, and people re-engage by referring to what others have said and building on it. This is the true essence of dialogue, when everyone contributes spontaneously, and collectively we build a new and deeper understanding. Based on this reason, we suggest that the session last at least 45 minutes, so that the true dialogue can take place.

To close the Dialogue, the MC just announces the ending, or makes a soft sound, as with a bell or gong. This marks the end of the Dialogue.
part, and you may sense the energy in the group, a positive and vibrant atmosphere, that has to be processed individually.

4) Closing

There are several aspects to closing the meeting, and we offer these options;

The MC leads group members to engage in a couple of breathing exercises to center themselves before moving to a general discussion about the dialogue. Another option is to invite everyone to state the one word (literally) that expresses their present feeling. This last step helps to close the experience by capturing the energy and by characterizing what it has meant to the group.
Recommendation

Before ending the meeting, we suggest that the MC invite the group to take a moment and give her some brief, written feedback. Suggested questions include: What did the MC do well?, What could she do differently next time?, What should she do more of, less of?

Also the MC asks for an evaluation of the whole meeting:
• What worked well?
• What should we do differently next time?

This is also the time to collect suggestions for new themes (inspiring questions) for future meetings.

Make sure the day, time and location of the next meeting is set, and also who will be the MC.
In this section you will find twelve exercises that can be used in the first part of the MCD. Each exercise has suggested applications, and we have prepared a table to help you select the exercise that is more appropriate for the theme of the meeting.

It is important and helpful that you, the MC, explain why you selected a certain exercise.

Some advice: Feel free, be playful, improvise, create your own exercises!
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<tr>
<th>Identify your personal gifts</th>
<th>Mystery</th>
<th>Collage</th>
<th>The Tree of Wishes</th>
<th>Self-Portrait of Gifts</th>
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<td>Develop your self-esteem</td>
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<td>Individual reflection</td>
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<td>To identify dreams, goals, objectives</td>
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<td>To visualize the desire future</td>
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<td>To focus on possibilities</td>
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<td>To create positive energy</td>
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<td>To lead to action</td>
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<td>To develop consciousness</td>
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<td>For spiritual growth</td>
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<td>To focus on the present</td>
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<td>To develop empathy</td>
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<td>To check our assumptions about disabilities</td>
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<td>To develop our perceptive skills</td>
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<td>To generate positive energy in self and the group</td>
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<td>To develop empowerment and trust in yourself</td>
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<td>To become aware of our personal values</td>
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<td>To create intimacy in a new group, get to know each other</td>
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<td>To modify first impressions</td>
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<td>To review our past and identify key events that shaped us</td>
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<td>To identify and review values and assumptions, beliefs and myths related to the body</td>
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<td>To review our personal relationship with our body</td>
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<td>To practice active listening</td>
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<td>To reflect on profound issues</td>
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<td>To expand our tolerance</td>
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Identify your personal gifts
Develop your self-esteem
Individual reflection
Self-awareness
to identify dreams, goals, objectives
To visualize the desire future
To focus on possibilities
To create positive energy
To lead to action
To develop consciousness
For spiritual growth
To focus on the present
To train the attention to details
To develop empathy
To check our assumptions about disabilities
To develop our perceptive skills
To generate positive energy in self and the group
To develop empowerment and trust in yourself
To become aware of our personal values
To create intimacy in a new group, get to know each other
To modify first impressions
To review our past and identify key events that shaped us
To identify and review values and assumptions, beliefs and myths related to the body
To review our personal relationship with our body
To practice active listening
To reflect on profound issues
To expand our tolerance
To identify our personal ambiguities
**Materials:**
- Flip chart paper
- Markers or crayons
- Magazines, or disposable printed materials
- Scissors, glue, tape
- Music (see Tools in this Handbook)

**What is it?**

MyStory is related to mystery.

*What is the mysterious story of our life?*

This exercise combines creative expression with reflective contemplation.

**What is it for?**

To pause and reflect, to identify the key events in our life, the meaningful encounters that shaped our destiny, and to become aware of the complexity of factors that make us who we are today. It also helps us to review our life, re-examine assumptions, values and beliefs that may no longer be valid for us, and we hadn’t even noticed the change. It deepens our self-awareness.

**Why is it important?**

In our every interaction, with every decision we make, we are expressing the result of previous experiences, lessons learned, and feelings related with them.

*How aware are we of what shaped us?*

**How does it work?**

You start with an inspiring question, such as:

*What events and encounters in my life have made a special impact on me or have influenced who I am today?*

Then you invite the participants to create an answer to this question through drawings, words, symbols, or images cut out of a magazine or a newspaper, and made into a collage.

After that each person shares with the group the personal story expressed on the paper.

**Instructions**

The person leading this exercise uses these thoughts to present the exercise.

Today we will do an exercise called MyStory. This is a combination of my story with the mystery that our life is.

In every interaction, with every decision, we are expressing the result of previous experiences, lessons learned, and feelings related with them.

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*Special thanks to LIM LLC for contributing this process, which we adapted creatively*
How aware are we of what shaped us? This is an opportunity to pause and reflect, to identify the key events in our life, and the meaningful encounters that have shaped our destiny. The aim is to help us to become aware of the complexity of factors that make who we are today. It also helps us to review our life, re-examine assumptions, values and beliefs that may no longer be valid for us—changes which we may not have even noticed—and to deepen our self-awareness.

With the soft music in the background, I invite you to consider this question:

What events and encounters in my life made a special impact on me, or have influenced who I am today?

Here are some other questions you can use as a guide for your personal reflection.

Where was I born, in what setting?

Childhood:
Preferred games, talents?
Meaningful memories and experiences

Teenager:
Studies, courses that were important?
Activities that benefited the common good?

Who is my family?
What milestone and events changed the direction of my life?
Who are the people who played a major role in fashioning who I am today?
What places have nurtured my soul?

Adulthood:
Activities, work?
Do I enjoy what I do?
Do I have other passions?
What achievements do I feel proud of?
What do I love to do?
When I’m super happy, what am I doing?

Take flip chart paper, markers, glue and scissors, magazines and make a collage that will represent your personal story in images and words. Take 30 minutes for this. After this time we will share our stories with the group.
Examples of Inspiring Questions

1. To create intimacy in a new group, to get to know each other

Who am I? What events and encounters shaped me, and led me to be here today?

2. To develop empathy

What thoughts do I have about how different we all are and yet how we are all here today?

The other, a mirror of myself: What do I see of myself when I look at other people?

3. To modify first impressions

In what way do first impressions generate assumptions that condition my interaction with others?

4. For self-awareness:

What encounters and events have shaped me? In what ways do they influence me in determining what I want in my future? What am I doing to evolve personally?

Tips for the MC:

» Ensure there is enough time to listen to all the stories.

» You can invite them to post the flip charts on the wall like a gallery, and each author can present her story from there.
Collage

Materials:

- Magazines, newsprint or other printed material
- Scissors, crayons or markers, glue
- Flip chart or white paper
- Music (See Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise using images or words and phrases cut out of printed materials so as to form a collage, in a response to an inspiring question.

What is it for?

It helps to inspire and foster individual reflection on a given topic.

Why is it important?

It is important because we will take time for a personal, profound reflection, and by doing this we will generate new questions and answers; we will develop ideas, connect with our concerns, and through this, expand our thinking on the topic.

How does it work?

With the inspiring question in mind, we reflect and prepare a collage, cutting out images and/or words from magazines or newspapers. After that, we share our stories in pairs, and go to the Dialogue session.

Instructions

We will do an exercise to connect with our feelings, emotions, ideas, by creating a “Collage”. With the inspiring question in mind, we reflect and prepare a collage, cutting out images and/or words from printed materials.

With the soft music in the background, we connect with our thoughts in silence and we start browsing through the magazines for appropriate images or words that “speak to us”. When we feel connected or attracted to certain images or words, we cut them out for our collage.

You can work on a table or on the floor, whatever is more comfortable for you.

We will take 30 min for this process. After that, we will get together with one other person, to share the experience in pairs. What ideas did we get? What message did we want to create? The verbal exchange will be
for about 10 minutes, 5 minutes for each partner.
The last 5 minutes we will walk around and see all the other works, like in an art gallery.
Then, with that inspiration, we end the Creative Reflection section and move to the second part of the meeting, the Dialogue.
The tree of wishes

Materials:

- Magazines, newsprint, scissors, crayons or markers, glue.
- Flip chart or white paper
- You can use other materials such as branches, leaves, or disposable materials
- Music (See in Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise to create a personal Tree of Wishes.

What is it for?

It helps us to reflect, to focus on what we wish for ourselves, to create goals, or projects that make a difference in our community.

Why is it important?

It is important because we can take time for introspection, to go inside ourselves and perhaps identify how we really would like to make a positive impact.

When we identify what our wishes are, we become more focused and able to create a path to achieve those dreams.

Instructions

This exercise is about creating the Tree of Wishes, to help us reflect on the impact we want to make, what are our dreams.

With the soft music in the background, take some time to reflect on and connect to your thoughts, wishes, dreams, and goals.

You can work on the table or on the floor, as you prefer.

We will take 45 min for the collage of the Tree. After that we get together in duos and share the experience, the process, the ideas generated. We will have 10 minutes for this, 5 for each partner.

The final 5 minutes we will walk around to look at the other works, as in an Art Gallery.

After that, inspired by the experience, we end the section of Creative Reflection and go into the second part of our meeting, the Dialogue.
Examples of Inspiring Questions

1. To identify dreams, goals, objectives
What are my dreams, my goals for this year, the next 5 years? How am I developing my goals in life?

2. To envision the desired future
Which are my more beloved dreams and what could I do to make them come true?

3. To focus on possibilities
What skills and unique talents do I have that could help in a project for making a difference? What am I doing and how can I work on an initiative to make a difference?

4. To create positive energy
How do I feel when I’m creating something and sharing ideas in a project that can make a difference?

5. To lead to action
What am I doing to make a positive footprint in the world?
Self portrait of gifts

Materials:

- Magazines, newsprint
- Scissors, glue
- Markers, colors
- Flip chart, big paper
- Music (see Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise that uses artistic expression to connect with our unique gifts and talents.

Why is it important?

It helps us to look at ourselves in a new way, from a new perspective, empowering us as we discover our unique gifts, talents and resources.

How does it work?

With the inspiring question in mind, we will each reflect and prepare an individual collage by cutting out images and or words from the magazines. It’s important to stay fully present, so we will begin with a brief breathing exercise to relax (See Tools).

We will use the images as triggers for ideas, as symbols of abstract thoughts. The purpose is to give new meaning to the images by capturing our own thoughts and ideas. Sometimes an image jumps out at us and catches our attention, and so we invite you to stay alert, and connecting with your intuition. It is very important to take time to connect the images with our thoughts. The silence in the room reflects our internal processing, so we ask everyone to respect the silence.

When done with the collage, we share the stories in pairs and then go to the verbal dialogue.

Instructions

We are going to do an exercise to connect with our unique gifts. Using magazines and printed material we will ponder and find images to respond the following questions:

What are my talents, my unique gifts?
What is it that I’m very good at?
Reflect on what you do, but also on how you are, since it’s a self-portrait about doing and about being.

With the soft music in the background take your time to browse through the materials. Let your soul find answers in the images you see.
When you find an image that speaks to you, cut it out and use it for your Self-Portrait. You can also do drawings or write some words, but enrich your work with images. We will do this for 50 minutes. After that we take 5 minutes to walk around and look at everyone’s work. This will end the Creative Reflection part and we go to the Dialogue.

**Examples of Inspiring Questions**

1. **To identify our talents, before selecting a cause of project to make a difference in the community**

   What am I doing when I’m feeling totally happy?

   What do I have that could be valuable to others?

2. **To develop self-esteem**

   **What is my mission, my purpose in life?**

   **Self esteem:** What experiences do I want to share here and what is my contribution to this group?

   **We are more than we think:** What or who defines my value, what I have to give?
**The walk with the six senses**

**Materials:**

- Personal learning journal or paper to write
- Something to write with
- Music (see Tools)

**What is it?**

This is an exercise that engages the six senses, in a conscious way, by becoming really aware of the environment, the physical space where the meeting takes place.

**What is it for?**

Spiritual growth is connected with being fully present. Eckart Tolle provides a simple technique to learn how to be present: by paying attention to our five senses. We suggest adding our sixth sense, our intuitive perception, our inner voice which is wise, which is something we all have, and which we so desperately need to learn how to listen to.

This exercise allows us to focus on our senses and discover what they tell us about where we are and about the moment in which we are living.

**Why is it important?**

Very often we don’t fully appreciate the present, because our mind is constantly engaged in thoughts about what happened in the past, or what might happen in the future. We focus on thinking of what could happen, or we remember a past that no longer belongs to us… no more than a passing cloud. In the meantime, the only thing we really have access to, slips through our fingers, and that is the intense, profound experience of our being in this moment, in the present.

To be fully present is a way to make sense of how we are living. Interestingly we are used to think of “making sense” as a mental process. However, in this walk we invite you to make sense by connecting with your senses. Because sensing is living!

**How does it work?**

Relaxing and getting into the right mood, we perceive the present connecting with the place where we are, through our six senses.
Instructions

We are going to share an experience called “The Walk with the Six Senses”.

But first, let’s take a few deep breaths to relax.

Listening to the soft music, we will start walking around the room. We will walk slowly, conscious of our six senses, using as many of them as we can.

We walk as if this was the first time we are here, even if we have been here before. We use our fingers or skin to recognize different textures. We look with different eyes, listen carefully to all kinds of noises we normally wouldn’t pay attention to. We smell objects we wouldn’t normally smell. If we want to taste something, we can do that too.

The sixth sense will guide us where to go, how to move, what to do, touch, see.

And with this serene breathing, experiencing fully the here and now, we awaken the senses in a different way.

It’s just about sensing, only that. Focusing on what is shown to us, now, here.

We will have 15 minutes for this walk. After that, take your journal and reflect and write about this experience. Ten minutes for this.

We will share in duos the experience after this (if the group is small we can share with all)

When done, we go into the Dialogue using the inspiring question for the day.

Examples of Inspiring Questions

1. To develop consciousness.

   What message do my behaviors convey?

   Living in a hurry: How do I manage my time, what is motivating me? What am I gaining, what am I losing by living in a hurry?

2. To support spiritual growth.

   What is my relationship with my senses? What am I missing?

3. To focus on the present.

   How do I feel when I’m fully present?

4. To train attention on perceiving details.

   What do I see and feel when I look around myself? What does it mean to be fully present? What am I missing?

To pay attention: What does it mean for me to pay attention?
**The walk of the Blind person and the Angel**

**Materials:**
- Blindfolds, bandanas or scarves to cover the eyes.
- Music (see Tools)

**What is it?**
This is an exercise that works with five senses of the six senses (five plus intuition) to discover new ways of experiencing the actual physical space where the meeting is held.

**What is it for?**
The walk of the Blind Person and the Angel helps to sharpen our attention and trains us in perceiving more details. It also develops empathy towards people with different abilities and invites us to review our assumptions about what ‘handicap’ means.

**Why is it important?**
Every day we go around using the information generated through our six senses, but we don’t really acknowledge them fully.

In our radio program, Las Minervas, we had the opportunity to interview and interact with blind people. We learned from them how much they see, even without using the eyes! These conversations helped us to understand that there are no disabilities, but rather different abilities.

**How does it work?**
We first relax to get into the appropriate mental mood and physical comfort (see Breathing Exercises in this Handbook).

Then we group in pairs, one person is the Angel who guides and the other is the Blind person who has a blindfold over the eyes.

**Instructions**
We will do an experience called “The Walk of the Blind Person and the Angel”.

First we will take a moment to relax with a deep breath. Then we group in pairs and take turns in being the Blind Person and the Angel.

With calming music playing, the Angel puts the bandana on the Blind Person, and they both walk around the room or meeting space. The effect is that the Blind Person is obligated to become oriented by touching, lis-
tening, smelling and using intuition too.
The Angel does not need to guide the other person: s/he just takes care that the Blind Person does not hurt himself, or stumble or inadvertently bump into objects. The Angel guides the other person gently, using hands or words if needed.
The result is that participants walk around the room as if for the first time, even though they are familiar with that place. They discover it anew by using their fingers to recognize different textures. They sharpen their perception of sounds, and can use their sense of smell to identify different items and materials they encounter. Intuition typically will guide us as where to go, how to move, what to touch. We will have a new experience of the place.
We will do this for 10 minutes, then we swap the roles.
Afterwards, taking your personal journal we will individually write down our reflections about this experience. (10 minutes). The experience can be shared in couples, or if it is a small group, the sharing can be done with everyone in a circle.
After this, we go into the Dialogue itself, using the inspiring question selected for the day.

Examples of Inspiring Questions
1. To develop empathy for others
   Do I sometimes put myself in the other’s shoes? How does it feel to be in those shoes? Is it easy to walk?
2. To develop trust in others.
   What does it mean for me to be in control, and how does it relate to how I trust others?
   When I trust, why do I trust?
   What makes me trust others?
3. To review our assumptions about handicapped people.
   What are abilities and disabilities for me?
   What feelings and thoughts do I have about people with disabilities?
4. To train our attention to details and sharpen our perception.
   To what degree am I really aware of my surroundings?
5. To reflect about our own life journey.
   Do I know where I am going?
   When I feel curious, what are the topics that I inspire me most?
The voices that live inside me

Materials:

- Personal journal or notebook
- Pen or markers
- Music (see Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise to develop self-awareness, to identify the many aspects of ourselves that live side by side within us, sometimes at odds with each other. They are the roles we play and the characteristics that constitute our personality, that shape the complexity of our being.

What is it for?

This exercise helps to identify the different voices that live inside us, and the varied characteristics of our personality.

Why is it important?

We can pretend we are a single entity, but actually we are many ‘selves’ living inside our body. Research about human behavior posits that every person has an estimated thirteen different personalities, coexisting inside our bodies. When we feel confused and don’t know how to act in a given situation, the reason is often that these different “voices” have each an opinion about what we should do – and they don’t all agree!

This exercise helps us to heighten self-awareness, and to realize that we can have several perspectives on a single issue. It also helps develop tolerance within us for different views, beliefs, and ways of behaving: as we understand ourselves better, our own ambivalences and contradictions, we become more tolerant of others and their own multiple voices.

How does it work?

In a quiet place, where we can reflect in silence, we use the personal journal to write down the different “voices” that live inside ourselves.

Each one of them has an important role, a mission, and it’s good to acknowledge them and thank them.
Instructions

We are going to do an exercise called “The voices that live inside me”. This is an individual exercise, one that connects us with our individual personality and inner being.

With the background of soft music, we find a place to sit down quietly and reflect, seeking our inner voices.

- What are their characteristics?
- What name can we give to each one of them?
- In what ways is each voice helping us?
- When a voice predomminates, how does it do that?
- How does it affect us?

By identifying these voices, we can write them down, and acknowledge the valuable role they have in framing our own individuality. Seek particularly for the “voices” that are not connected to your traditional roles, such as mother, spouse, or daughter. Rather, focus on the voices that have a specific characteristic, such as: The Angry One, the Pacifier, The Rebel, The One Who Goes After Success and Money, the Sacrificial One, The Victim, The Excluded, etc.

Give each one a name of its own.

Take time to identify as many as you can. They all have a very important mission and role. They are protecting you. Thank them for it!

This will allow you to communicate with them when they emerge in any given situation. Pay attention to which one is talking at that time!. You can also illustrate the voice with a drawing or symbol if you want to.

We will have 20 minutes for this exercise.
Then we take 10 minutes to share the personal stories in pairs, taking 5 minutes each.
After this time, we will go to the Dialogue.

Examples of Inspiring Questions

1. To develop self-awareness.
What am I learning about myself in the day-to-day? When I talk to myself in silence, who replies?

2. To identify our own contradictions.
How many voices are inside me, and who are they? How do I relate to them?

3. To develop tolerance.
Patience with self: How do I feel with my own ambiguities?
Patience with others: When something upsets me about other people, how could I see the “many” that live in her/him?

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3 We thank for the contribution of Dr. Hal and Sidra Stone, and of Shakti Gawain.
My special object

Materials:

• Ahead of the meeting, we ask the participants to bring a favorite object that is valuable and meaningful for them; an object they can use as they share the meaning and the story behind it. Any object is possible: clothing, a ring, a piece of art, a book....
• Music (see Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise that generates reflection through the memories and thoughts that are triggered by a special object we select, one that that reminds us of a story where we were emotionally involved.

What is it for?

It helps in our personal development by highlighting the values we hold dear, values embodied in the meaningful objects of our life. It fosters self-awareness and develops consciousness.

Why is it important?

It is important because as we connect with our values and principles, beyond the symbolism of the selected object, we become aware of the values we hold, and we can reflect how they are expressed in other moments of our life.

How does it work?

We bring back a memory connected to a selected object and share it.

Instructions

We will share the experience called “My special object”.
Sitting in a circle, hold the object you brought in your hands.
To create an appropriate atmosphere, we start by closing our eyes, and taking a minute in silence listening to the soft music in the background. This will help us get focused and connect with the object we brought and the story it symbolizes for us.
Then, in a respectful and active listening attitude, we share our stories, feelings, memories, as we show our object to the group.
After listening to all the stories, we go to the Dialogue, with the inspiring question of the day.
Examples of Inspiring Questions

1. To become aware of our values

If my life would be an example, what message would I like to convey?

2. To review how we live our deeply held values

Our priorities: How do we live in harmony with our priorities?

What are the contradictions between what we think we value and the decisions we actually make?

Deeply held values: What are the hidden messages, behind the objects I collect, my belongings I care for? What message am I sending out with how I live my life?

3. Self-awareness, development of consciousness

What are the values that I hold in my mind? And what are the symbols that I seek in my daily life? How do they connect?

4. To develop empathy

What are the contradictions that I live with in my life and why do they make me angry when I see them in other people?
Materials:

- Magazines, newsprint, advertising materials, any printed disposable material.
- Scissors, crayons or markers, glue
- White paper
- Music (see Tools)

What is it?

This is an exercise that connects us with a message that could be important to us.

What is it for?

It helps us to face the essential questions we are currently facing in our life, and can lead to answering them.

Why is it important?

It is important to develop our intuition, to achieve an inner silence and train ourselves to listen to the voice of deep wisdom we all carry inside ourselves.

Instructions

We will do an exercise called “The Message”, which helps us face the essential questions facing us, and also to find answers to those questions. It is a real encounter with a wise person or a prophet that lives inside us, or in the Universe, and who talks to us.

With soft music in the background, I invite you to put your mind in neutral, and to not think of anything in particular, but simply skim with your eyes and fingers the magazines and printed material.

Suddenly you will notice that a word, a fragment or a phrase attracts your attention, and is talking to you. When you find those words, cut them out and glue them on your paper.

When you feel you have found the message and completed the collage, go to your personal journal and write down the reflections or messages that you are now in touch with.

We will take 25 minutes for this.

After that, we will get together in pairs with our collage and share how
the experience, the ideas, the message you found. For the exchange we will have 10 minutes, 5 minutes for each partner.

Then we will finalize the creative reflection and go to the Dialogue.

**Examples of Inspiring Questions**

**For developing self-awareness**

What is our relationship with wisdom, with experts, with knowledge?

How do I feel when I’m being authentic?

Am I living by my espoused values?
**Woman in clay**

**Materials:**

- Clay or other modeling material
- Wooden sticks
- A small container with water
- Newspaper or a tablecloth to cover the table
- A cardboard-type piece to work on it, and use it to support the sculpture
- Rag or paper towel to clean up with
- Music (see Tools)

**What is it?**

This is an activity in which we make a sculpture and reflect on the body, and the social models that are related to the female body.

**What is it for?**

This exercise helps reflecting on, and bringing awareness to, the values, assumptions, personal and cultural myths we hold about our body, and in particular about the female body, often unconsciously.

**Why is it important?**

This activity creates a pause that helps us to ponder the role that the body plays in the female identity. We can learn to respect our body and make it respectable for others.

**How does it work?**

Inspired by images of sculptures or female body in paintings, featuring different types of esthetics depending on the period, we create a clay figure that represents our ideal.

**Instructions**

We are going to do an exercise called “Woman in clay”.

I invite you to be inspired by the question: What is the role the body plays in forming our female identity? We first will take a look at some different models of female body through time. (see Poster in this Handbook or bring your own images).

We will protect our working surface with paper, and use cardboard to support our figure. There is a small container with water to add to the clay when needed, and there are wooden sticks to help us shaping the material. We have a rag (or paper towel) to clean our fingers as we go.
With soft music in the background and inspired by the images we saw, we will use clay, and build an image that connects with our thoughts. This will be our personal creation. It can be an ancient figure, a goddess, a historical shape or a contemporary one. The creation is free and personal, there are no “good” or “bad” creations. What counts is not the artistic skill but the individual reflection as you create. We will have 40 minutes for this activity. After that we take 10 minutes to share the story of our personal experience of the exercise, in pairs, with 5 minutes each. Then we take a walk to see all the creations. And finally, we go to the Dialogue.

**Examples of Inspiring Questions**

1. To identify values and assumptions, myths and beliefs in connection to the body.
What does beauty mean to me?

2. To review our personal relationship with our body.
What is my relationship with my own body? What role does my body play in defining me as a woman/a man?

3. To develop consciousness.
Am I my body? What does it mean to be a woman/a man?
A story, planting a seed in the soul

Materials:
- A story (See Stories)
- Personal journal or notebook
- Pen or markers

What is it?
An inspiring reading.

What is it for?
A story opens us up to situations and people where we can see ourselves reflected. We can experience sensations and feelings, and understand others from a new perspective. Storytelling is used to reflect on personal themes, human issues, profound topics.

Why is it important?
It is a tool that takes us into reflection and develops consciousness about situations and behaviors. As we share our thoughts and reactions with others, we can observe how everyone hears a different story, focuses on different aspects, and makes personal interpretations. This expands our horizon and develops tolerance, which is key for interpersonal relationships.

How does it work?
We listen to the story, then we write or draw in our journal some words or ideas that came to us from what we’ve heard.

Criteria suggested for selecting the appropriate story:
- Length: Not too long, between 1-5 pages, which is equivalent to 5-20 min of reading
- Themes that touch the soul, deep, human, intriguing

We recommend practicing the reading a few times before reading it in front of the group, so you become acquainted with the words, rhythm, and can measure the time.

Also we suggest that one person is the story-reader, while the others listen without reading the story. But you can always make copies for all and opt for a silent reading during the meeting.

You can select other stories besides those we feature in this Handbook, i.e. from the book Women that run with wolves, by Clarisa Pínkola Estés.
Instructions

Sitting in a circle, we will listen to a story (Announce the title and author)

When we finished we will have 10 minutes for an individual silent reflection, to write down in our journal or to draw some words or ideas that came up as we listened to the story.

Then we will share the experience in pairs, 10 minutes – 5 minutes for each partner.

Finally we will go into our Dialogue.

Examples of Inspiring Questions

Develop your own questions depending on the theme of the story you selected.

Examples:

Where is my soul?

Where am I in the journey of transformation?

What do I recognize as my evolution as a human being?

If a story is a seed, we are the earth…

Inspired in Women that Run with Wolves
Clarissa Pinkola Estés
Watercolor 2003 / Mariam Tamborenea
My best version of me

Materials:

• Personal journal
• Something to write, pen or markers
• Music (optional)

What is it?

This is an exercise that connects us with a special event, where I was at my best.

What is it for?

It helps to change the energy, the self-perception and transform the energy within a group.

Why is it important?

Daily events provide a number of stimuli that we process as best we can, often having to deal with tension, unexpressed emotions, contradictory feelings, etc. Depending on the day, our energy decreases or can take on a negative tone. This exercise connects us with the best of us, and transforms the energy in ourselves and also around us.

How does it work?

We do a pause to reflect, and seek a moment in our life where we were at our best, when we gave the best we had, where we felt in our best version. We make a drawing, several drawings, and write down keywords or phrases to represent that moment.

Instructions

We will do an exercise called “My best version of me”, to connect with the best of ourselves. This exercise has three steps:

1. An individual Stop Reflect 4 where we identify a moment in our life when we felt at our very best.
2. We then make a drawing, or several drawings, and write down words to represent that memory.
3. We share these with another person in the group, following these questions:
   What was it?
   When was it?
   How was it?
   What was I doing, and why?
   Why did I select this moment as one where I was at my best?
We will take 10 minutes for our individual reflection and making notes. Then we will have 20 minutes to share, 10 minutes for each partner. After that we will go to our Dialogue.

**Examples of Inspiring Questions**

1. **To generate positive energy in yourself and in the group**
   
   What is good energy, how does it generate, and how is it transmitted? How do I feel when I’m at peace?

2. **To generate self-esteem and empowerment**
   
   **See what we don’t see:**
   What are the things we don’t see about ourselves, and about others? Why is that so?

   **Empowerment:** What do I see as my personal mission in life?

---

4 See Stop Reflect tool in this Handbook
Tools

Gestionando la nueva tierra / 2006 / Watercolor
Music plays an important role in our life as it does too in the Minervas Circles of Dialogue. Music has the power to take us across time and space, it changes our mood and reorganizes our energies.

Emotu, a Japanese researcher, has taken photographs of containers with water that he exposed to different types of music. He observed that classical music converted the structure of the water into harmonic shapes; noises and techno music created chaotic shapes. What might be the impact of music on us humans, given the fact that water constitutes such a high percentage of our body weight?

In the MCD we use music during the Creative Reflection exercises. Don’t use music during the check in or the dialogue, during a meditation, or when people are sharing or exchanging reflections.

Select an appropriate type of music that is calm. You can play classical music, or New Age, Chill out, also chanting. Instrumental music is more appropriate or soft music with lyrics in another language, so that people don’t get distracted by the lyrics.
**Breathing exercises**

At the beginning of the Creative Reflection section, we suggest some breathing exercises so that people can focus on the here and now, they can really connect with their body and begin to slow down.

The breathing exercises have two steps: 1) becoming aware of our body and 2) breathing.

**Becoming aware of our body**

There are several options how to do this.

**Adjusting our posture**

Sit in a relaxed way on the chair, and then notice how you are sitting. Notice where your skin is touching a surface, and become aware of where the surface touches your legs, thighs, feet, hands, and back.

Then become aware if you are sitting with a straight or bent back, or if they are leaning forward, and make the adjustments so that you feel totally comfortable.

**Observing our posture**

Without making any adjustments, just observe and notice how each part of your body is touching a surface such as their chair or the floor. Simply observe without making any changes or corrections.

**Stretching while sitting**

Another option is that while sitting, you make small movements to stretch the back and neck such as looking to one side, slowly, and then turning the head to the other side, slowly. Then stretch the arms forward, touching the palms together, then separating the arms and keeping them parallel, slowly raise them over the head. Feel free to do any stretch that is comfortable; pretend you’re a cat waking up!

**Stand up stretching**

While in a standing up position, raise one arm as if to reach a fruit up in a tree. Then repeat it with the other arm. Do it a couple of times each way.
Breathing

Also here there are several options:

**Deep breathing in four moves:**

- Inhale
- Retain the air
- Exhale
- Stay with no air for a moment

Repeat the sequence slowly, four or five times.

**Focused breathing**

Inhale and pay attention to the location of your breathing.

- Is the air in the upper chest?
- Mid chest?
- In your back?
- In your belly?

After you have noticed its location, slowly and intentionally try to breathe from your belly.

Repeat this slowly, four or five times.

**Simple breathing**

Observe how you’re breathing, without making any change to the pattern.

Maintain your rhythm softly, without stressing or making any adjustments.

Continue observing and noticing through four or five breathing cycles.
### Examples of inspiring questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Question</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 How do I feel when I’m fully present?</td>
<td>12 Who am I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 How do I feel when I’m being authentic?</td>
<td>13 What are the things that I have not yet completed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 How do I feel when I enjoy what I’m doing?</td>
<td>14 Where are other people in my priority list? Who are those others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 How do I feel when I’m at peace with myself?</td>
<td>15 When do I walk the talk and when don’t I?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 How do I feel when I’m being creative?</td>
<td>16 What do I think is a personal mission?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 How do I feel when I am being wise?</td>
<td>17 What does it mean to forgive ourselves?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 How do I feel when I feel fully alive?</td>
<td>18 What are the ambivalences in my life today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 How do I feel when I think I deserve what I wish for?</td>
<td>19 What things am I postponing and why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 What mark am I leaving in the world?</td>
<td>20 What is the message I’m sending out about my life, and to whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Where is my soul?</td>
<td>21 How can I build a powerful feeling of self?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 What do I think about the evolution of human consciousness?</td>
<td>22 What is the purpose of my life?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stop Reflect

What is it?
A process to connect with our thoughts.

What is it for?
To gain awareness of what we think, to be able to identify it and then to share it with others.

Why is it important?
In a group there are extraverts, who think as they talk, and there are introverts, who need to have silence in order to reflect. In a meeting it is the extraverts who typically do most of the talking, while introverts will talk only when there is a silence. They may be listening to what is being said, thus postponing their own reflection, or they may be trying to connect with their thoughts, and as a result are missing what is being said.

So the Stop Reflect process helps everyone to take a silent moment to connect with their own thoughts. Introverts will then be able to share their reflections, and the extraverts will have a chance to review and edit what they are about to share.

How does it work?
Whenever appropriate, take two minutes of silence and ask everyone to write down their thoughts on a theme or question that has emerged. After the silence, everyone shares what they wrote down.

We thank LIM LLC for sharing this tool, called Stop Reflect Write Report.
How to run a sustainable meeting?

The dictionary defines Sustainability as the ability to maintain yourself. It also defines it in the ecological context as the conservation of the ecological equilibrium by avoiding the extinction of natural resources.

In viewing our daily life we can observe that for 100% of our activities and materials we use require some kind of natural resource. The problem is that the rate at which we use them and the volume we need, vastly exceed the possibility of natural restoration or replacement. We are experiencing numerous consequences of this, such as pollution, climate change, premature extinction of species, new plagues, sickness and the lack of essential resources for life such as water.

Furthermore, this has a social impact, with examples such as increased poverty, hunger and warfare. We are in midst of a vicious circle that requires action from everyone. It doesn’t matter if the action is small or large. We are all responsible.

“Sustainability is connected with self-examination, with responsibility and the understanding of how everything is connected. Also it means to see how we are all parts of a whole, and that we all are responsible for the whole. This means that if we want to change the world, we need to start with ourselves”.

Cibile Salviatto

Seres en Abrazo-Mundo / Watercolor / 2006
Fortunately there are many actions we can take and changes we can make, which will at least reduce the impact of society’s behaviors, and this is good news. Many of those actions can be taken in the context of a Minervas’ Circle of Dialogue (MCD).

The first step is to increase our awareness of the issue. We cannot change anything if we are not even aware of what we should change. So in order to run a sustainable Circle of Dialogue, the first step is to become more aware, by reflecting on how we are contributing to the problems and how we can minimize our environmental footprint.

We present here a Table listing some of the possible actions. You can do your own research and add to the list.
When I travel on short trips, I always use my own car. 

$\text{CO}_2$ emissions, together with deforestation, which reduces the available number of trees absorbing $\text{CO}_2$ as their nutrient-accumulate in the atmosphere, causing pollution. The gases also retain heat from the sun and when there is an excess of gases, the average temperature can rise, altering the climate patterns. Many other consequences follow: glaciers melt and releasing water into the ocean, thus reducing the availability of non-saline drinking water; species become extinct and in the not–too distant future we might well see the disappearance of coastal land.

If the weather is hot or cold, we use air conditioners or heaters.

Domestic appliances consume energy and energy is mostly generated by using coal and oil, both creators of $\text{CO}_2$.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>What is the impact?</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
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| When I travel on short trips, I always use my own car. | $\text{CO}_2$ emissions, together with deforestation, which reduces the available number of trees absorbing $\text{CO}_2$ as their nutrient-accumulate in the atmosphere, causing pollution. The gases also retain heat from the sun and when there is an excess of gases, the average temperature can rise, altering the climate patterns. Many other consequences follow: glaciers melt and releasing water into the ocean, thus reducing the availability of non-saline drinking water; species become extinct and in the not–too distant future we might well see the disappearance of coastal land. | • Arrange carpooling.  
• Meet in a place that is near to everyone.  
• Use more environmentally-friendly vehicles if possible.  
• Use bicycles if possible, or public transportation.  
• Consider a plan to compensate for the ecological footprint of the meetings. (visit www.terrapass.org) |
| If the weather is hot or cold, we use air conditioners or heaters. | Domestic appliances consume energy and energy is mostly generated by using coal and oil, both creators of $\text{CO}_2$. | • Keep your equipment clean, in good order, and change the filters.  
• Find appliances marked with Energy Star (low consumption of energy).  
• Try to reduce consumption by turning appliances off when they are not absolutely necessary or use alternative. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities of the MCD</th>
<th>What is the impact?</th>
<th>Alternatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I serve food and use disposable plates or utensils.</td>
<td>Plastic is a byproduct of oil and takes between 10 – 20 years to decompose. Depending on the type of plastic some may never decompose.</td>
<td>Use non-disposable containers and plates that you can reuse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I serve some prepared foods and drinks, and maybe meats and dairy products.</td>
<td>Industrially processed food is packaged in containers that contribute an average of 60 lbs waste per person per year. Plastic and metals are disposable. The environmental impact of producing edible animal proteins is approximately 8 times higher than the one of producing vegetal proteins. There are many packaging forms and all have problems when it comes to decomposition. For example a tin can lasts between 50 and 100 years. An aluminum can lasts up to 200 years. Glass, 500 years. Styropor – lasts forever, since it never decomposes!</td>
<td>• Be a responsible consumer. Provide natural products, such as fruits and vegetables. They are not only better for the environment but also more healthy. • Whenever possible, serve organic products, and those that are packaged in recyclable or biodegradable materials. • If you go shopping take your tote bag so you don’t need to use plastic bags. • Buy locally produced food that has not been transported from many miles away. • Try to eat less meat and dairy products</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use paper and pen to make notes.</td>
<td>Paper is made from trees. The increased consumption not only contributes to deforestation, but also creates many social problems, because large tracts of land are required to plant eucalyptus.</td>
<td>Write or print on recycled paper—using both sides of the page, and recycle the ink cartridge of your printer whenever possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I use plastic bags for the garbage.</td>
<td>Plastic bags have been shown to kill marine life due to asphyxiation. Besides they are not biodegradable.</td>
<td>Reduce the volume of your waste by selecting products with less packaging, and by reusing or recycling whatever you can as much as possible. Try composting, and look for biodegradable garbage bags.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When it gets dark I turn on the lights.</td>
<td>Energy comes from fossil fuels and coal, both non-renewable resources.</td>
<td>Use ecological lamps, which consume 75% less energy and last 10 times more. Use candles and make it a cozy meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I may use my computer or phone.</td>
<td>Energy generates CO2 and comes from non-renewable sources.</td>
<td>Unplug your computer or phone charger when not in use. Even turned off they continue using energy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do the dishes after the meeting.</td>
<td>Water is a scarce resource and essential for life.</td>
<td>Turn off the faucet and don’t let water run or drip while you do the dishes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is just a small list of some of the things you can do to have a more sustainable Circle of Dialogue. If you are a Minerva, you may be already making a difference in the world. This is another way to help make this planet more sustainable.

Educate others, share this information, talk about this with friends and family, to expand awareness, so we will be more every day those that we work for the planet!

Other resources

Stories

Some day...

by Eduardo Gudiño Kieffer

The tall trees that almost touched the sky with their foliage spoke to the little tree that was growing amidst them

Some day, they said, some day you will be tall like us and you will be able to see the lake, down there, like a green or blue gem between the green or blue mountains. Some day, one day...

The wind, as it descended from the heights onto the small tree, also talked to him

I come from everywhere, and I know it all. I know the forests, the mountains, the fields, the cities of the men… One day, when you are as tall as the other trees, I will tell you things. Some day, one day...

Come Spring, when the birds came for warmth and food, the little tree had more news about the world that he still was not able to see.

The birds tweeted:

-There are places where it’s all sand, places where it’s all snow, places where all is water. Some day, when you are taller and more strong, we will build our nests on your branches and we will tell you all we know. Some day, one day...

And the little tree remained still, repeating with his tender leaves those exciting and promising words: Some day, one day….” But that one day was slow, so slow to come. Because trees
don't grow as fast as human beings. And what for us is a year, for them is a century. And what for us is a lifetime, for them it's just a sigh. The little tree was getting impatient. And he asked things to the rain, to hail, to the snow; he asked things to the flock of birds passing on the sky; he asked things to the clouds, to the rays of the sun, to the insects climbing on his trunk. They all knew things and things, they all knew the world, they seemed wise and adventurous, and all ended up saying “Some day, one day…”

One afternoon finally something happened. A man with a dark beard and sad eyes came by the little tree, holding the reins of a gray donkey. Riding the donkey there was a very beautiful woman, very pale and very sweet.

They stopped and the man said:
-This is what I need. I am sorry, little tree, but I have to cut you.- And the ax made the first scar into the young wood. The tree sighed and bled a little bit of sap. The pain was intense, the ax was getting deeper every moment into his vegetal flesh, he felt weak, helpless, lonely. And he was not so much regretting his physical pain, as much as the “Some day” that was getting lost forever.

The man cut the tree into chunks of small size, and placed them into the pouch. In each piece the tree was still alive. They arrived to a place where there was an ox and other animals. There, the man took the pieces, brushed them, polished them, put them together. And the tree was transformed into a rustic cradle. A cradle that as it was rocking seemed to cry “Some day, one day…”.

He still hadn't understood his destiny. But that night, precisely at midnight, the little tree felt a weak cry. A strange music and a strange light covered the place, the silky flatter of angels could be heard, and the cry of a baby that just was born seemed more a song than a cry.

The tree become crib felt that they were putting between his wood, covered with warm hay, the little body of a child. And he felt him moving softly inside. Suddenly he knew that “some day” had arrived. Not the tall trees, nor the wind, the birds not the clouds had ever experienced the bliss of this moment that he was enjoying, as he was no longer a tree but a crib, as the end of his vegetal life marked the beginning of a human life.
Fernanda hang up the phone in anger. This was the fourth call she had received from her team on her cell phone in the twenty minutes she had been driving to lunch.

“Why are they all so useless, that they cannot solve the problems on their own?” she wondered to herself.

Then she caught herself, and, and asked herself if perhaps her expectations towards others were unrealistic? She didn’t think of herself as a very special person, although she had always felt proud of her “common sense”, of her pragmatism and the speed with which she could cut to the point in a conversation. If people took offense at this, she reasoned, she couldn’t help it, she was just comfortable in making her opinions heard.

“Tell me, is it wrong to be straightforward and candid?”, she asked at lunch with her old friend Carla. Carla looked at her in silence, and didn’t respond directly. Fernanda had become aware that Carla had not been saying much, and Fernanda felt she really had so much she wanted to say to Carla. Maybe it was that the duration of their monthly lunches was getting shorter, or perhaps it was all those calls she was getting during lunch.... Those darn calls, ring ring…. It was affecting her while life, and she felt she couldn’t continue at this pace. Perhaps the answer was that she had to hire a more effective manager to take some of the burden off her. That was another thing to add to her list, but interviewing managers was actually a task that she enjoyed; she always dreamed of finding a skilled, competent, fast-thinking, effective man—someone like her. The trouble was she hadn’t found one. May be she should hire a woman? Hmmm no…. Her experience was that with women there was always something going on in their lives—and, they are pretty emotional too.... She had not found many women many like her, able to be coldly analytical and capable of making the firm decisions in the work place, to keep things running effectively. Although that was not the case at home

It had been a while since she had heard from Hernan, her husband, who had decided to take a few “sabbatical” months and travel around the world. Why hadn’t he responded to her emails? And her children were another story. Why were Gonzalo and Natalia still behaving like rebellious teenagers? Even though so-
someone had told her that the teenage years can last until the thirties these days, she resented their attitude at times.

“Did I do something wrong bringing them up?” she wondered as she impatiently waited for the red light to change. “I gave them everything, and I made sure I had a career, which helped to provide them all they needed. Even today, when they call they usually end up asking for something, and, after some bargaining, I always end up paying for their next purchase! But, after all, why not? This is why we work, so we’re able to afford certain comforts, and since I don’t take many vacations, I can enjoy spending my money as I want... Besides I have a satisfying career; it allows me to feel I am someone. I made the decision that I was not going to stay at home ironing shirts like my mother!”

If only she didn’t have the “sadness of the shoes”. She had given it that name. It had started slowly, as in a dream, a gray feeling that began in her chest and moved up to her eyes, often at the most inappropriate moments! It could happen during a meeting with a client, when waking up on a Sunday, before the weekly phone call with her mom. It was something subtle but persistent. She didn’t know where it came from nor what it was, it didn’t go away by drinking water nor by breathing deeply. One day she was walking by a shoe store and in a des- perate attempt to shut out the gray tide, she went in and bought a pair of shoes. The gray vanished and she could breathe again without that shadow on her soul. And so every time the cloud appeared, no matter where she was, she rapidly went to find a place to buy some shoes.

She had poured out her story at lunch with Carla who had listened carefully and then mentioned she had read about a psychiatrist who used hypnosis with his patients.

“Haven’t you heard about him?” Carla asked. “He is famous, and he deals with the anxiety of his patients by hypnotizing them, so they remember their past lives! That is where they discover the origin of their problem. When the person wakes up, and I don’t know what he does, they are healed!”

“Something I’m carrying from another life?” wondered Fernanda, incredulous. She had never stopped to philosophize about her current or future life, even less her past lives! But how many more shoes would she accumulate? And this recurring, oppressive feeling in her chest... Maybe
it made sense to try that doctor; what was there to lose?

So here she was on her way to the office of Dr. Shakman, a bit tense because she was not sure what to expect of this “woo woo”, as she used to refer to people who, to her, said and did things that had little logic. “Nothing I won’t be able to handle”, she said to herself, trying to boost her self confidence as she electronically locked the door of her imported convertible.

“Good afternoon. Fernanda?” A tall man with gray hair and oversized glasses welcomed her.

“Hello”, she replied, holding out her hand as if trying to maintain a distance that she feared she would not be able to keep up for long. She knew that hypnosis required her active participation, and that it involved granting a stranger the right to peer into her soul’s darkness.

Riing Riing! “I’m sorry, I’m turning it off!”, she apologized, blushing. Her sudden embarrassment of the cell phone ringing made her aware that she was no longer in the world that existed outside that door. For some strange reason, inside this room it felt like another world, and she was surprised to realize she would never have apologized for her phone ringing in the ‘world outside’.

“That’s fine. Come this way”, Shakman with the big glasses smiled, taking her into a room with yellow light, like a sunset. The room smelled of books and wood, a desk lamp threw light on scattered papers, and a lamp near a couch drew soft shadows on the wall.

“Have a seat, make yourself comfortable”, Shakman invited.

Fernanda sat down on the couch in the soft shadows. She still felt skeptical, but then decided to give this thing a try. Once she did this, she found that she felt strangely at home, which was perplexing. She should, she thought, first set about interviewing this “doctor” to understand what he could do for her. This is what she had thought and planned; this was how she conducted herself at work. However, she snuggled into the sofa as if into a very familiar place, stretched her legs and smiled. No interview question crossed her lips, just a smile. Something inside her bloodstream changed direction, something went from her capillaries to her heart causing her a nice tickle, that went up her spine up to her neck. Fernanda waited, in silence.

“So, well, Fernanda”, Big Glasses
started. “I understand that you are suffering some symptoms and are interested in exploring their origin, that may be in your past lives?”

Fernanda nodded, in silence, without losing her smile. She had lost all control, she knew it and she didn’t seem to mind.

“Well, in that case I suggest you relax more and begin to travel inside your body, maybe into your very marrow, to the special niche where the soul keeps the memories of past lives. It’s all inside you... all your past and all your future. Time is not real, you are a flow of energy that goes from the past into the infinite... Where are you Fernanda? Tell me what you see...”

“I see...I am in the countryside...” mumbled Fernanda, who had totally let go. “I am in a place with tall mountains, it’s cold....”

“And who are you? What are you doing there? Describe for me what surrounds you...”

“Who am I? I am Ventus! Mother of Kero, Clavia, Beston, Murdak, and of the poor child Ambros who died at birth... We live in a small community in the mountain. We are several families: the women- -we handle the more essential matters; the kids-- we decide what to sow and when to harvest. We heal the sick, teach the children what is right and what is wrong so they become good persons.... We organize offers to mother Earth who cares for us and gives us shelter.”

“What is it? It’s simple, and it’s real. We take care of what we need to, and what is needed is foreseeable, and what is unexpected, we solve by consulting with each other. Each of us within our capabilities, knows what he has to do and what her place is... and maintaining that place is our task, and our children learn to respect their place and maintain it...”

“Ventus, are you happy in that place? It reminds me of a community that existed several millenia ago, before Christ, on the European continent. They had no warriors; they were a culture managed by women but without a female supremacy or domination; more a collaboration of the genders. There are no warriors here!” Ven-
tus replied in a jump. “Peace is with us, because we know how to respect and be compassionate to each other. The problems are solved by talking or consulting with the forum of elders. All our life we cultivate wisdom, based on what we learn and we grow the wisdom carefully so as to share it when we are old. Here nobody is more than any other, the children are the hope and the future, the wealth of the earth. Adults are the workers, farmers and formers of the spirit. Elders are the source of wisdom and justice, who decide on the important decisions.”

“And who governs, Ventus?”

“Governs? The soul governs.”

“I see... I suggest we leave Ventus now. We greet her and thank her for what she has done for her community, for the children and the children of the children. Get back to your bone marrow now, and find another memory... move on in time.”

“Ahhh nahuanca. Ahnahuanca….The mountains are arid, and the cold is harsher. The air stings my nostrils.”

“Ahnahuanca…? Where are you? Who are you?”

“I am Ahnahuanca, and I’m chief of my tribe. We are in the high mountain, Perrugem. I have many worries.”

“What worries you Ahnahuanca?”

“I worry about my people. My people are in danger. They are getting sick, I have to get better medicines... I have prepared my special blends but they don’t seem to work... I am worried....’

“What is happening to your people?”

“I don’t know what it is. It’s something that came from outside, the white man brought a dark soul and left it here. The white man doesn’t know how to lighten his soul-- and left it here, but has taken it away at the same time. I have to lighten the dark soul that remained on our land. I am sorry, I am very worried....something is not going well.”

“I see... Well, we will say goodbye to Ahnahuanca. Go back to your marrow and find another memory. Find yourself. Where are you? What do you see?”

“Ahh, I play the cello and my hair gets tangled up with the notes…”

“Who are you?”

“I am Madelaine… Riboutroux, my lungs hurt and music soothes me.... There are birds outside, and spring. I am sad because my sister left. Sophie escaped and I know that I’m not going to see her again. She didn't want to marry Count de Lamberieux,
a real scandal, but I admire her for the courage that I don’t have. They say that she went to India, I wonder where that is! I play soft songs and my lungs hurt, maybe the heart hurts too. I won’t get out of this chamber, my days will be short. It doesn’t matter, I will recover it flying with my notes towards the sun.”

And it was then that Fernanda cried. She cried for Sophie who was not there, and she cried celebrating her courage. She cried for the whole of her purposeless life, filled with notes. She cried for the blindness of the white man, who, lost, sought in the mountains of the American highlands the light that his soul has lost, and she cried for the fallen bodies lying on the land, trying to heal with life the wounds of the white man. She cried, the sad certainty of Ahnauhuanca, of not being able to stop what was on the way. She cried for the road back into the snow-covered mountains of Ventus. She cried for her little boy Ambros, but above all, she cried for joy for her surviving children. She cried for the joy of music, of harmony, of brotherhood, of realizing that everything is enough when a little is everything.

Fernanda woke up, softly, her face wet, the smile beyond her lips, bright on the skin.??

“Fernanda”, Shakman said her name in a tentative way. “Fernanda, why did you come to see me today?”

Fernanda pulled herself up, slowly. She looked around, and saw more than books and yellow, soft shadows of familiar sunsets. She didn’t know what had happened, but something had changed inside of her, and she knew that she was no longer the same person who had come into this room, the same person who had driven, some lives ago, some hours ago, to this place.

Fernanda had met, finally, after several millennia, with Ventus, and she had a lot to do, a lot to fix.

She tried to pay but Shakman didn’t accept the money. They stretched hands, and both knew that they didn’t know much about each other, but that conductor and passenger, both had traveled in the same train.
This story happened a few years ago. I had worked several times as a team coach with a group of executives, and had helped them make their meetings more effective, productive and pleasant for the participants. On one such occasion I was hired for a meeting that would last several days, in Miami, which pleased me because we were to meet in a hotel on the ocean. I would have the opportunity to get up early to watch sunrise over the sea before we were to meet.

So I set my alarm clock and on the morning of the meeting I left at dawn for the hotel. When I arrived, I parked my car and walked towards an esplanade on the bay just as the sun was starting to rise. Suddenly, I perceived a shadow flying and a dry noise next to me. I stepped closer and saw a fish that had just landed on the walkway. A flying fish!? What an interesting start to the day.

I found a bench overlooking the ocean, and sat down.

It was wonderful to inhale the perfumed sea breeze, to just sit in the golden light as the sun gently rose above the horizon. Soon the seagulls appeared, making circles as they greeted the new day. It was too much to just look at, so, inspired by the majesty of what I was seeing, I took out my journal to write some poetry.

I remained quiet, drinking in the amazing natural energy. Suddenly, I looked down and noticed a pair of neatly placed shoes on the ground, just where I was sitting. Where are the feet belonging to these shoes? I wondered, looking around. I couldn’t see anyone. Strange. Then a few steps further, the wall made a 90-degree angle, and it was there I could see some naked feet; someone was lying on another bench largely out of my sight. I could only see his feet. Ah, I said to myself – these are his shoes!

I looked at those feet and noticed they had black and dirty toes. A homeless person, sleeping by the sea was in the process of waking up. What a great place to wake up in the morning! What is it like, I wondered, to sleep under the stars, so close to the sea?

At that moment some images of my morning so far popped up in my mind, as if in a movie. I had spent the first hour of my day preparing for the day; first a shower, then carefully choosing what to wear, what blouse matched what skirt, what shoes, belts...
and handbags would be appropriate in view of the weather, and of the client; everything must match, and I also paid special attention in choosing the bracelet and earrings. All this I did, in my excitement to see the ocean, watch the sun rise, and write some poetry. And here, in powerful contradiction was, this person, sleeping in his clothes under the stars, waking up to the cries of the sea gulls!

In a fraction of a second, my whole morning had become quite ridiculous, an urban parody, a snapshot of contemporary lifestyles assembled for a cutting-edge documentary, trying to portray what we don’t see, how we live under anesthesia. The impact of my own thoughts made me smile, and I grabbed my pen again, opening my journal, and wrote a poem. I titled it “Dirty black toes.”

The poem was just my reflections of what I just had thought and discovered. When I finished I read it again and thought, ‘I should give it to this gentleman, who inspired it!’ So I copied the poem on a new page, which I tore out of my journal and planned to roll it up and put it in his shoes.

But then a sudden movement gave me a jolt. The toes were moving!

At that moment something strange happened. It was as though everything been in a bubble — that person, me, the bench, my ridiculous morning and his starry night… and in a fraction of a second the bubble had simply burst. With the magic broken, like the clock striking midnight in the story of Cinderella, this man became the personification of everything that separated and differentiated me from him— he was male, he was homeless, he was black.

I took another look at the shoes and was scared just thinking that he could have seen me, a stranger, putting something into his shoes! Rapidly I put everything into my bag, stood up and left. As I walked by the bench where he was lying, however, I couldn’t resist the temptation of looking at him. He looked at me too, and with a sleepy tone, greeted me.

I replied to the greeting, took another step, and then stopped, hesitating. I said “I’ve been taking care of your shoes.”

Understandably he was perplexed, so I went on, “I’ve been taking care of your shoes…. aren’t those your shoes, there, under the other bench?”

“Oh, yes!” He smiled. “I left them there last night. You said you took care of them? Thank you so much! And what
were you doing here?”

“Nothing.... I wrote some poems and watched the sunrise....”

“Oh! You’re a writer?”

“Well, not really. Let’s say I just write poems.” I paused, and found I couldn’t move. I was frozen in place.

“Actually, I wrote a poem for you”, I continued, sheepishly.

“For ME?”

”Er, yes. I was planning to leave it in your shoes! Do you want me to read it for you?”

“Oh yes! I would love to hear it! A poem!”

I nervously fiddled inside my bag for my journal to find the ‘undelivered’ poem. I hoped he would not feel offended by the title, that mentioned his dirty and black toes, but what they had taught to me a few minutes ago was so beautiful… that I thought he would understand, without explanations. Even so, in a shy tone I warned:

“I hope you won’t feel offended... the title is ‘Dirty Black Toes’?”

He gave me a deep smile, and shook his head.

So then I stood up and read the brief poem.

When I finished, he said, “It is beautiful! And for me! This is the best that has happened to me…this is wonderful!

“Do you want it?” I asked, handing him the pages.

“Definitely! And you know what? I know a person in the south of the city, who has a framing shop; I will ask him to put it into a frame!”

“Well… it’s not that important”, I replied, embarrassed by the pages torn from my journal.

“Yes it is”, he responded. “Do you live here?”

“No”, I replied. I just am here this week until Friday. I am working with a team here in the hotel, across the street. What about you?”

“I am from Virginia.” He paused and continued, “I was not always like this...”

“Neither was I”, I added, looking him in the eye.

The man smiled in silence. He moved his hand and took a book from under a folded jacket that had been his pillow.

“Do you know what this is?” he asked, showing me an old book. “It’s the Bible. And you spoke to me, without
even knowing this! You saw my real being.”

I looked into his eyes, intensely, with a look that connected us, one soul to the other, and with tears in my eyes I nodded silently.

I was still standing, as if to leave but I found myself frozen in a place where time had stopped.

“If you want, I can read you other poems I have written”, I offered, although it was clear to me that the offer was in response to my need, my request.

“Of course, I’d love to hear them”, he responded.

So I sat down on the bench, put my bag by my side, opened my journal and began to read. It was not easy, I don’t know why but the emotion was overwhelming and my tears made it difficult to read my handwriting. It was as if a tide had covered my vocal chords interrupting my words. Finally I finished reading the poems, and I closed my journal. I looked up and met his calm, wise eyes.

All of a sudden I remembered that I had an assignment to work in the hotel. What time was it? I looked at my watch and stood up.

“I think I need to go....”

“Sure”, he replied. “My name is James”, he said, extending his hand.

“I am Isabel”, I added, grasping his hand, and as our palms touched the connection we had made with our eyes now was reinforced by the physical contact.

“Goodbye, James.”

“Good bye, Isabel.”

Without looking back, I walked away, crossing the street, in a state of total perplexity, as if I were driving a car in midst of a deep fog. As I entered the elegant hotel, I realized that my make-up was probably all messed up, and that I should find a restroom to fix myself up before meeting the group that was waiting for me. I washed my face, took a deep breath and walked towards the meeting.

Some minutes later I was in middle of a diverse group of Hispanic executives. I looked at the agenda we had prepared, so that I could begin doing what I had contracted to do. But I just felt as if I was on autopilot, as if I were a dissociated being. I, the automaton, greeted everybody, answered questions, and made some comments. The meeting began.

As team coach and facilitator, I didn't have to make many presentations; my task was to help them to have an
effective meeting by making small interventions when needed. As I sat and listened to the topics being discussed, I managed to extricate just enough of my mind from my moving experience, but I found myself still connected to the event that had taken place that morning. I still didn't understand the power of that connection, but somehow it felt as if my soul was still out there by the sea; I was aware though, of a sense of both drowsiness but at the same time of a bright peace a very unfamiliar feeling.

What was that feeling? What had happened to me? What was it about? I didn't understand it, but the sensation tingling inside me was so intense, and it was in such sharp contrast with what the other part of me was experiencing the professional part which was fortunately being handled by the automaton! What was I doing in that dark meeting room, in midst of this group of people discussing how to fill out a form, how to pay vacations for expats, how to measure career performance? The contrast between the brightness inside me and the room that had been darkened for the power point presentation, was more than symbolic. I could not grasp what has happening to me, but I knew that out there I had lived something special, and I wanted more of it. I don't want to do this work, I said to myself, looking around the room and witnessing people opening their mouths, but not hearing their voices at all! I wanted more of that, out there!

But this is your work! What job is that?, a voice inside me challenged. The job of writing poems looking at the sea and talking with homeless people? I had no answer for that question, but something inside me insisted: I don't want this, I want more of that. I couldn't shake the conflicted feelings. What am I doing here? What had happened out there this morning? It had been such a short human interchange. How can I get more of “that”? Suddenly I got an idea that calmed my anxiety a little. Tomorrow I would come a bit earlier so I could meet with James again. I wanted to print out the poem, maybe add some images, so he could keep a better version. What else could I give him? I know! I could fix coffee, and take him a portable coffee mug, so he would have a small breakfast! This idea helped me through the day, and I counted the hours until I could make those preparations.

That night I was anxious and didn't sleep well, and I woke up many times, in anticipation of the morning. I got up and with enthusiasm prepared one
extra coffee, chose a coffee mug for him. Should I put in cream? Would he want it with sugar? I picked up the new and neat version of the poem illustrated with some pictures that I had prepared the evening before, and left.

Nervously I arrived at the parking lot of the hotel, and walked to the esplanade facing the sea. In my mind I had anticipated several scenarios: What if James had misunderstood me, and thought I had other intentions? What if he thought I was inspired by some romantic notion? After all he was a man...how would I handle that situation? What was my real motivation, anyway? Frankly, I didn't even know! I knew that it was not a physical attraction, not a romantic connection with him. But it was an attraction...of the soul. Spiritual? What was that, spiritual? It was not a word in my vocabulary. May be this is what spiritual meant? Whatever it was, it was so intense, it brought so much light!

I walked hastily, taking care not to spill the coffee and spoil the envelope with the poem inside. From a distance I looked for the bench, and I sought out James. Was he still sleeping perhaps? I couldn't see. As I got closer, I realized he was not on the bench he had been on yesterday. He must be on the other one—the one where I had sat down yesterday, for sure!

I walked further. James was not there. No one was there.

In that moment a dark cloud descended on me. This was definitely not one of the possibilities I had anticipated! How come he is not here? He knew I would come back to the hotel every day until Friday! He had definitely experienced the same magic I had! HOW COME HE WAS NOT THERE!

Even more confused than before, I almost collapsed on the bench, all strength gone. I took a glance at the absurd coffee mug, the ridiculous clean envelope with the poem. James didn't need me. I was the one who needed him!

I stayed there in silence, trying to recover, watching the sunrise that was so different from yesterday’s. Without being able to understand, finally I took my purse, threw the coffee onto the plants, folded the envelope in my bag, and crossed the street into the hotel.

James. An angel? Who knows, but my life changed after that, my first profoundly spiritual experience.
Poster: Rules of the Dialogue

Pause

Feel free

Build upon what others have said

Suspend judgments

Listen actively

No ping-pong

Speak openly

www.minervas.org/posters/
**Minervas, a Movement**

MINERVAS is a movement of women who share the desire to do something: for people nearby, for the community or for the planet. They particularly feel the need to do something concrete to make our world a better place. They have an intuition that they have something valuable to offer to others, something that in their minds can be of service to the planet. They have known this for some time, but haven’t found the way of putting this feeling into words, of shaping it, of converting it into a project, into action. This is the reason that so many women of different ethnicities, cultures, ages, and religions feel connected with the Minervas movement, sensing it as something they knew existed in the depths of their hearts. And when they hear about it, they recognize it; they are surprised and filled with joy to see that “it exists”.

As a movement, MINERVAS allows women to feel they belong to a larger network that is not bound by geographical borders; that they are part of a social fabric of feminine souls, compassionate and focused, determined to take action. They want to become engaged in projects that can be small or large; in projects which can be relatively simple and short-term, or complex and long-term; and they are open to working in a crisis such as helping victims of an earthquake, or supporting a non-profit organization. They carry out initiatives that touch the heart of a child, or change the destiny of a whole community. The scope is not important: what matters is to raise the collective awareness that we have something to contribute, and that the world needs our contribution urgently.

The Minervas movement implies action, but is also more than action. It’s the manifestation, through actions, of an outlook that we all, women and men, have buried in the depth of our soul. It is a perspective that views the world with compassion and empathy, seeks collaboration with others, and acknowledges with humility that we are part of all Nature. It is a wisdom that manifests itself in the voice of our intuition. It uses feelings as a guide for action and underscores that we all have a mission: a peacemaking responsibility with each other.

And it all begins with yourself, giving yourself the permission to listen to your own voice, to stand up, and make your voice heard, in both words and actions.

*Isabel Rimanoczy, Ed.D. Founder*

> *“We all leave a footprint, daily, with every decision and every interaction. We have the opportunity to change the world, in this simple way.”*

*Isabel Rimanoczy, Legacy Coach*
Minervas, Women Changing the World was founded in 2009 and is registered in the USA as a 501 (c) (3) philanthropic organization.

Minervas inspires, promotes and supports self-managing groups of women that share the desire to make a difference. The groups are created and operate in an independent and autonomous way.

**Mission**

The mission of the philanthropic organization MINERVAS is to empower women so that the feminine perspective can be enacted to create a better world. The purpose of MINERVAS is to inspire, connect, support and expand consciousness.

**Vision**

We envision a world in which women help restore balance and equanimity to society and the environment, by fully integrating yin and yang.

It is a world ruled by love, compassion, peace and joy. A world, in which men and women collaborate, share, respect and recognize their human oneness with nature.

Web: http://minervas.org

Facebook Minervas. Women changing the World
www.facebook.com/lasMinervas

For information about workshops and other activities and events, contact us as:
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The Circles of Dialogue are a central piece of the MINERVAS movement since they promote self-awareness, personal development; they address deep topics that help awaken consciousness and create habits of communication that are seeds of peace.

Minervas

“Women make up half the planet, and are the mothers of the other half.”

Sonia Colombo
Co-Founder of Minervas
“Be the change you want to see in the world”

Gandhi

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