



Stop Breathe Believe® & Dianne Morris Jones Present

Cultivating A Contemplative Practice

The word “cultivating” might stir up thoughts of farming, crops, and planting cycles. Up until last year, I had only a little experience with anything resembling cultivating, and that was with simple backyard landscaping and flowering pots on our front porch and back deck. However, this time last year after we got home from Jill’s wedding in Nepal and the world was in a pandemic, we found ourselves at home...by ourselves...with lots of time on our hands. We decided to try gardening. Suffice it to say, the cost per vegetable that survived our beginning cultivation experiments was much more than the cost per vegetable at the grocery store!

But we discovered we loved gardening. We will be planting more vegetables this year! There is just such joy in coming outside to discover the beauty and growth as we peek at the blossoms of the baby eggplant and eagerly watch the stages of growth for the cucumber. We loved tasting the delicious flavors from the garden. We had fun showing our two granddaughters the process of planting, and waiting, and watching and celebrating the growth together. Of course, watering was their favorite part! We are definitely beginners in the gardening scene, but grateful for the opportunity to notice nature and the magnificence of the process of the growth cycles, and eager to learn more.

There’s another sense in which we can think of cultivating, though. Cultivating life has many similarities to cultivating vegetables and flora. The planting of dreams, watering with hope and waiting for growth. The wondering in the dormancy of winter if anything is really happening, or the questioning in the dry and down cycles if there is something worth waiting for. The patience and resilience needed amidst the “try, fall down, and get back up” cycles.

Now, as we are hopefully moving out of the pandemic, how does a sense of cultivating apply to our re-entry into life? How do we cultivate care for our hearts as we grieve – not only the personal losses and struggles so many of us have experienced, but the collective and complicated grief of so many? And what about the anxieties we feel as we approach the time of going “back to normal”? What about the social anxiety? “I am not sure I know how to have a conversation.” “What will it be like to be around people again?” “I can’t picture what ‘next’ is going to look like.” “I want to be hopeful, but I feel scared.” Or what if we had a taste of something better, something richer, something deeper in the midst of the pandemic, and we’re wondering if that can be cultivated and incorporated into life going forward? “I don’t know if I even want to go back to ‘normal’ as it was.” So many hesitations as we look forward to the next season of our lives...

In cultivating a life, there are so many options of which seeds to plant. How to reflect, what to improve, how to develop by paying careful attention to specific moments, fostering the virtues and values that matter to us, devoting time and thought to even the idea of what we might want to enhance or change. Possibly it isn’t about “improving” or “bettering.” Instead, cultivating is about being mindful of the cycle or growth moment of accepting... embracing... reflecting....

May April be a beautiful month for you of cultivating your deepest desires, cultivating your biggest dreams, and especially cultivating hope amidst your most complicated and confusing struggles. May it be a time that your hurt can heal with the hope of spring – in your garden and in your heart.

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Day 1: Accompaniment – “The human soul doesn’t want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul’s healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through.” – Parker Palmer

How can we come alongside another today?

Day 2: Authenticity – “Authenticity is a daily practice. Choosing authenticity means: cultivating the courage to be emotionally honest, to set boundaries, and to allow ourselves to be vulnerable; exercising the compassion that comes from knowing that we are all made of strength and struggle and connected to each other through a loving and resilient human spirit; nurturing the connection and sense of belonging that can only happen when we let go of what we are supposed to be and embrace who we are. Authenticity demands wholehearted living and loving – even when it’s hard, even when we’re wrestling with the shame and fear of not being good enough, and especially when the joy is so intense that we’re afraid to let ourselves feel it. Mindfully practicing authenticity during our most soul-searching struggles is how we invite grace, joy and gratitude into our lives.” – Brené Brown

How can we pay attention to the daily practice of being authentic today?

Day 3: Awe – “May you hear the marvelous music singing in your soul...lauding the exquisite gift of being alive.” - Joyce Rupp

What is singing in our hearts today?

Day 4: Beauty – “Hold out your hands to feel the luxury of the sunbeams.” – Helen Keller

Where can we see and feel beauty today?

Day 5: Beginning – “Fifty-two weeks unwritten; twelve months to be lived on purpose; three hundred and sixty-five sunrises to start over....” – emmakate

Beginning can sometimes be a frustrating experience. How can we cultivate and welcome “beginning” today in our world?

Day 6: Courage - "Our lives are full of thresholds: moving through the rise and fall of each day, the rhythm of the week, the seasons, the veil between this world and the other, between the status quo and our own deepening and unfolding journey. Thresholds require that we be vulnerable, that we acknowledge that we simply do not know what is to come, that we surrender to something much bigger and more meaningful, even as it calls us away from familiar patterns and habits that have become much loved." - Christine Valters Painter

Where might our deepening and unfolding journey need courage today?

Day 7: Discovery – “The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.” -Marcel Proust

How can we cultivate a new way of seeing?

Day 8: Encouragement – “One of the most beautiful gifts in the world is the gift of encouragement. When someone encourages you, that person helps you over a threshold you might otherwise never have crossed on your own. There are times of great uncertainty in every life. Left alone at such a time, you feel dishevelment and confusion like gravity. When a friend comes with words of encouragement, a light and lightness visit you and you begin to find the stairs and the door out of the dark. The sense of encouragement you feel from the friend is not simply her words or gestures; it is rather her whole presence enfolding you and helping you find the concealed door. The encouraging presence manages to understand you and put herself in your shoes. There is no judgment but words of relief and release.” - John O'Donohue

How might we give a gift of encouragement to someone today? How can we be present with another?

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Day 9: Enthusiasm - "There is a real magic in enthusiasm. It spells the difference between mediocrity and accomplishment."
— Norman Vincent Peale

The word “enthusiasm” comes from the Greek word “entheos” which means God within. How might this understanding be an inspiration to be brave and trust our hearts today? How can we cultivate enthusiasm in this moment?

Day 10: Forgiveness – “There have been times when each and every one of us has needed to forgive. There have also been times when each and every one of us has needed to be forgiven. And there will be many times again. In our own ways, we are all broken. Out of that brokenness, we hurt others. Forgiveness is the journey we take toward healing the broken parts. It is how we become whole again.” – Desmond Tutu

What might the idea of cultivating the journey of forgiveness look like for us today?

Day 11: Friendship - “While the right friends are near us, we feel that all is well. Our everyday life blossoms suddenly into bright possibilities.” – Helen Keller

How can we find time today to stop and pour into a meaningful friendship?

Day 12: Gratitude - “The number-one joy indicator, the one thing that will predict whether someone feels joy in their life or not, is the practice of gratitude.” - Brené Brown

As I have visited Mom this year through a window, she has repeatedly spoken of her gratitude for Life, for Dad, for her girls, for her church, for her family. May I continue to learn wisdom from Mom’s precious heart. How can we be grateful today?

Day 13: Hope –
“Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all.

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I’ve heard it in the chilliest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.”
– Emily Dickinson

How can we cultivate hope today?

Day 14: Hospitality - The Welcoming Prayer
“Welcome, welcome, welcome,
I welcome everything that comes to me today
Because I know it’s for my healing.
I welcome all thoughts, feelings, emotions,
persons
Situations, and conditions.
I let go of my desire for power and control,
I let go of my desire for affection, esteem,
Approval and pleasure.
I let go of my desire for survival and security.
I let go of my desire to change any situation,
Condition, person or myself.

I open to the love and presence of God and
God’s action within. Amen.”
– Father Thomas Keating

How might we open the doors of our hearts
to hospitality today?

Day 15: Imagination - “Oh, my God. What if you wake up some day and you’re 65, or 75, and you never got your memoir or novel written; you didn’t go swimming in warm pools or oceans all those years because your thighs were jiggly and you had a nice big comfortable tummy; and you were just so strung out on perfectionism and people-pleasing that you forgot to have a big juicy creative life of imagination and radical silliness and staring off into space like when you were a kid? It’s going to break your heart. Don’t let this happen.”
– Anne Lamott

Day 16: Kindness - "Let no one come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the expression of God's kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile." - Mother Teresa

How do we break the big concept of kindness down to the little moments? What would expressing kindness look like for us today?

Day 17: Laughter – “To laugh often and much, to win the respect of intelligent people and the affection of children; to earn the appreciation of honest critics and endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exultation; to know even one life has breathed easier because you have lived – that is to have succeeded.”
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

How can we cultivate play and laughter today?

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Day 18: Letting Go – “We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us.” –Joseph Campbell

How might our stories read if we let go of our unrealistic expectations? One aspect of cultivating can be pruning. You are not alone if you find letting go and pruning to be challenging at times.

Day 19: Light – “Accepting the darkness but also longing for the light is an immense paradox of our soul’s journey.” – Joyce Rupp

Can we be open to our longings? What does our soul desire today?

Day 20: Love –
“Exquisite risk is the doorway that lets us experience the extraordinary in the ordinary. It is always near.
Truth opens it.
Love opens it.
Humility opens it.” - Mark Nepo

How can I be open to the exquisite risk of cultivating a deeper level of love today? For myself? For others?

Day 21: Patience – “Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience.”
– Ralph Waldo Emerson

How can I eliminate hurry?

Day 22: Peace –
“Peace Within
May today there be peace within.
May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.
May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.
May you use those gifts that you have received and pass on the love that has been given to you.
May you be confident knowing you are a child of God.
Let this presence settle into your bones and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise and love. It is there for each and every one of us.
Amen.” - St. Therese of Lisieux

We might often hear, “Peace be with you”. I love the verse of Psalm 122:8, “Peace be within you”. How can we nurture inner peace?

Day 23: Perspective - “It is a startling truth that how you see and what you see determines how and who you will be. To explore your particular style of seeing, ask yourself: what way do I behold the world? To the fearful eye, all is threatening. To the judgmental eye, everything is closed in definitive frames. To the resentful eye, everything is begrudged. To the indifferent eye, nothing calls or awakens. To the inferior eye, everyone else is greater, more beautiful, brilliant and gifted than you. To the loving eye, everything is real. Love is the light in which we see light. If we could look at the world in a loving way, then the world would rise up before us full of invitation, possibility and depth. To recognize how you see things can bring you self-knowledge and enable you to glimpse the treasures your life secretly holds.”

- John O’Donohue

Roger and I were recently spent a day at Huntington Gardens in California with the purpose of rest, inspiration, and contemplation. As we got out of the car, we saw this beautiful image of an eye in this tree and I thought of this quote by John O’Donohue. How might we see in a loving way today?

Day 24: Presence – “The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.” – Thich Nhat Hanh

In what small way might we foster growth in another today by “being there” with them or for them on their path of discovery?

Day 25: Ripening – “An understanding of ripening teaches us the wisdom of timing, love, and patience, and allows us to be wise instead of judgmental.” – Richard Rohr

How can we nurture the concept of the understanding of ripening?

Day 26: Seasons of Our Soul – “There is purpose and value in each day of your life, in each season of your life. Nurture your times of action, of creating, of doing and value your quieter times of going within. The more you study nature, the more you will learn about yourself. Nurture and trust the seasons of your soul.” – Melody Beattie

How can we embrace the season of our soul today?

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Day 27: Silence - “We need to find God, and he cannot be found in noise and restlessness. God is the friend of silence. See how nature – trees, flowers, grass – grows in silence; see the stars, the moon and the sun, how they move in silence... We need silence to be able to touch souls.” - Mother Teresa

The words SILENT and LISTEN both have the same six letters of the alphabet. What might that correlation be for us today? How can we be silent and listen? How can we listen as we are silent?

Day 28: Trust – “Deep within all of us there is an inner sanctuary of the soul.”
– Thomas Kelly

How can we dig deep into the garden of our soul today?

Day 29: Wisdom – “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

The power and the moment of “now“ is so very precious. What might it look like for us to welcome moments of wisdom today?

Day 30: You – “Whatever you do with your life – whatever you end up achieving or not achieving – the great gift you have in you to give to the world is the gift of who you alone are; your way of seeing things, and saying things, and feeling about things, that is like nobody else’s. If so much as a single one of you were missing, there would be an empty place at the great feast of life that nobody else in all creation could fill.”
– Frederick Buechner

Celebrate YOU today!
You are Be-YOU-ti-ful!

A Journey of Cultivation

Let's *accompany* each other on a cultivation journey.
Authenticity will set us on a path paved with *awe* and *beauty*.
We begin with *courage* to *discover* the journey's arc.

Along the way, we'll give others our *encouragement*—with *enthusiasm*,
forgive an old wrong, and find the gold of *friendship*. We will—

Offer abounding *gratitude* for the voyage. Never, ever give up *hope*.
Proffer *hospitality* to strangers and friends, one and all. *Imagine* things
a new way. Let *kindness* be our religion and *laughter* our practice.

We'll *let go* of grievances, new and old. Shine our *light* in the world. Let
love, *patience* and *peace* rule hearts. Sacredly hold *perspective*.
Live in the *presence* of now and *ripen* with the *seasons of our souls*.

We shall sit in *silence* and *trust wisdom* for cultivated growth—
generously unleashed in *you* and me.

- Roger Jones